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FREEDOM FOR FAITH

**Theological Hermeneutics of
Discovery based on George F. McLean's
Philosophy of Culture**

Christian Philosophical Studies, V

By
John M. Staak

The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy

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PREFACE

This volume responds to a most urgent contemporary need as we move into this global age in terms not only of local mixtures of immigrant cultures but of interaction between nations and indeed of civilizations.

In these circumstances the response to contemporary issues must engage not only individuals but cultures. These, in turn, are essentially social, and broadly extended both in space and in time. Hence in order to be aware of the issues which effect our life and to respond in a responsible manner it is necessary to understand the nature, the developmental dynamics and the interaction of cultures.

Surprisingly, however this is not as common or as easy as one might expect. Throughout the history of philosophy thinking has been carried on intensively in objective terms. Plato, for example, in developing his theory of forms or ideas hypothesized that they were located in another realm and Aristotle's objection was that even that thinking was not objective enough.

Except for ephemeral glimmers over time, an alternate vision did not begin to catch hold till Edmund Husserl's initiation of phenomenology in the decades between the two World Wars. Etymologically "phenomenology" is a "bringing to light" of the subjective realm of human consciousness. This made it possible to begin to appreciate the inner dynamics of the development of culture, which Cicero long ago had described as the "way of cultivating the soul."

As a result not only were the external or objective factors of industry and economics able to be taken into account, but now also the deeper dynamics of a people's inner consciousness: how this developed over time and how it oriented the decisions with which peoples interact and build their future.

Nowhere could this be more significant than in the realm of faith and the personal freedom with which this must be exercised. Hence John Staak has chosen wisely to devote this study to freedom for faith.

I am, of course, deeply thankful that he has chosen to base this study on my philosophy of culture, but I would be sadly remiss to leave it at that. For that philosophy reflects a broad experience of the deep sacrifices and creative efforts of the multiple peoples of the world. These were encountered as part of an international education in the 1950s which led to work on the social role of philosophy throughout Latin America in the 1960s and post colonial Africa in the early 1970s.

It was followed in turn by the challenge of the delicate dialogues with the Academies of Science in Eastern Europe during its

transformation in the 70s and 80s; by exciting new hopes in working with philosophers of China during its opening in the late 80s and 90s; by enrichment from the great faith of Islam in the 90s; and by the opportunities of globalization since the opening of this new millennium. Perhaps never have philosophy and faith been more needed and more dramatically and promisingly engaged.

“Freedom for Faith” is then a strikingly appropriate title; I am personally honored by the subtitle; and we are all deeply indebted to its author, John M. Staak.

George F. McLean

INTRODUCTION

Jesus had to pass through Samaria. So he came to a city of Samaria, called Sychar, near the field that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and so Jesus, wearied as he was with his journey, sat down beside the well. It was about the sixth hour.

(John 4:4-6)

With great simplicity this scriptural quote begins the long encounter recorded in the Gospel of John between Jesus and the Samaritan woman. These three simple verses set the scene for one of the most intriguing interpersonal conversations with Jesus found in any of the Gospels. The encounter provides the setting for a meeting between cultures and between religions. Most importantly, it introduces Jesus as the universal Messiah who offers a covenantal inheritance to all peoples. Similarly, this brief introduction is only meant to set the scene for the dissertation that follows. The well from which I shall draw for my reflections is primarily the philosophical works of George F. McLean. In order to highlight the many theological dimensions that will come into play I shall also draw upon many documents of the Church and several theologians, especially those from the English-speaking world whose emphasis has been on fundamental theology and theological method. To introduce my argument I divide this introduction into six parts: 1) theological need; 2) objective; 3) limits and method of research; 4) originality; 5) rationale; and 6) overview of George F. McLean.

THEOLOGICAL NEED

Without a doubt, every theologian or believer would respond differently if asked to express the primary theological need for the Church today. Each would formulate the response based on one's particular context and the most urgent needs confronting the faith there. Theology always has many questions to ask, and each time and place highlight different concerns. Because McLean's observations and questions illuminate dimensions and directions for theology to consider as it evaluates the central needs of the demands of faith today, I shall take up a question similar to one he poses to his own field of philosophy. His philosophical work takes up the deliberations of twentieth century philosophy in order to adapt them anew for the global interaction of values and cultures now underway in the early twenty-first century.

The theological need to which I want to respond in this thesis involves a central question that has only recently arisen because of this evolving global interaction: *How can theology best carry out its work in an age of globalization?* This question involves revisiting theological method so that the contributions of various cultures and how they give expression to belief in God might be incorporated by fundamental theology. Fundamental theology has the mission to reflect on revelation and faith, while attending to its mandate: “Always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence” (1 Pt 3:15). The question above includes a host of related questions, such as: How does theology best apply a working philosophy for today’s context? How does theology tap into the dialogue of the Holy Spirit with a people? How can theology protect the unique expressions of faith in local contexts while applying them to the global context and universal expressions for the faith? How can theology assist the Church effectively to proclaim the Gospel today? These are some questions critical for theology to ask, but they are too broad for anyone to answer in a brief thesis. One has to narrow down to a specific objective, then, theology’s central question of method in an era of globalization.

OBJECTIVE

From the broader question one must ask of how theology might best go about its work in a global age, I would like to state an objective that, while capturing many of the elements in that broader question, confines itself to a workable domain. My intention, however, is not to reduce the question to a narrow zone that might allow for a specific answer to emerge at the cost of sacrificing the full complexity involved. Instead, my goal is more exploratory. Using McLean’s philosophical insights, especially those on culture, I want to enter the complexity to draw out some of the dimensions critical for fundamental theology’s consideration of the global context. As a guiding question for the analysis, then, I offer the following:

*What are the critical elements in the **dynamic** of conversion that ready a person or culture for the necessary freedom for faith?*

Especially with today’s global context of multiple cultures interacting almost constantly in the spheres of economics, politics and communications, this question demands answers that are critical for fundamental theology. As I pursue those answers there are a host of other questions and trajectories that could reveal themselves as well. Some of these other questions might be: How does culture serve as a

window into a people's dialogue with the Holy Spirit and their growth in freedom? What level of freedom proves to be enough for the act of faith? How does McLean use philosophies of being and consciousness to aid in assessing a person's or culture's receptivity and response to revelation? What stages occur in a dynamic of conversion? What might be the necessary elements to consider in each stage? I intend to provide provisional answers to some of these questions which will undoubtedly open up new trajectories for theology to explore.

My stated objective needs further clarification, which is essential for understanding the thesis I am undertaking. In the above guiding question, I placed in bold letters the word '*dynamic*' to illustrate the sense of growth, movement or motion. An interpersonal encounter with Christ and cooperation with the Holy Spirit change a person or culture through a dynamic of freedom, truth and love. My analysis will consist of exploring and highlighting central elements of conversion through application of McLean's insights. The objective of the thesis, then, is not specifically about an attribute of God, or the human person, or culture, or freedom, or the virtue of faith. My objective is to explore elements of the dynamic that leads to freedom for faith. To undertake this in a deliberate and measured manner, I need to set clearly the limits and method of research.

LIMITS AND METHOD OF RESEARCH

Although the more specific objective stated above already serves to confine my argument to critical elements in the dynamic of conversion to freedom for faith, I still need to impose a few more limits to narrow my research. Because George McLean has continued to hold seminars and to publish, I had to choose a specific date to limit the body of his work. The period I have chosen limits itself to his published works up to and including the year 2010. Although a couple of his works listed in the bibliography may indicate a date of 2011, I do not cite these in my dissertation, but include them for the sake of reference only. In my readings of McLean, I also discovered that the content of many of his articles could later be found in more synthetic form in books he published. For this reason the careful reader will note that most, but not all, of my citations of McLean come from these more comprehensive works. Finally, in regards to McLean's philosophy some may want to inquire why I have not compared or contrasted him to more authors on his philosophy, his hermeneutics or his understanding of culture. I have chosen to let McLean's work speak for itself in these areas, so that I could theologically apply his work to the conversion dynamic. Such comparative works, however, could prove interesting for those seeking related subjects to study in the future.

Even after setting specific limits to McLean's work, a challenge remained as to which works by other authors, especially theologians, would best be applied to his philosophy to draw out the theological insights most useful to fundamental theology. I chose to concentrate on those authors with whom I was most familiar, and whose works seemed to highlight critical insights in McLean's thought that are pertinent to a particular stage of the dynamic. The reader will notice that Bernard Lonergan's thought is referenced frequently, as are the teachings of Benedict XVI and John Paul II. My goal is to provide enough theological reference to complement or strengthen the particular theological points I am trying to make. Any critical reader may insist that I could have used other authors, to which I can only respond yes, that is true. I used, however, those authors with whom I am more familiar to illuminate some points for fundamental theology's future consideration. Therefore, if other authors already come to mind for the reader, then I have succeeded in my goal to stimulate further research on those theological points.

Finally, I need to make some initial comments on method before I give a detailed rationale. The dynamic that I explore in the thesis did not appear immediately from McLean's readings, but I do believe it is latently present in his work. By that I mean that in his philosophy McLean always tries to present the fullest notions of the human person and the most positive elements of culture to guide the reader toward values that lead to deeper freedom and to the consideration of the transcendent. Using the ontology of his metaphysics as a framework, I fill out that framework with his more phenomenological, hermeneutic insights. By so doing, I seek to illuminate the journey to freedom that a person or culture makes. This journey is internal and personal, but also very communitarian and cultural. From his insights I try to draw out sources of sensibility that serve human receptivity for the gift of God's grace manifested in an intimate love story. My interest focuses especially on reaching the necessary freedom and receptivity for making the act of faith, but not so much on the very act of faith itself. In the final chapter, however, my focus shifts more specifically to the response in faith to engender a more fruitful dialogue and creative role for fundamental theology in the global context. Methodologically, then, I seek first to establish the domain of one's active sensibility by looking at what encounter offers. I present the foundation for understanding the primary realities of God, the human person, and culture, before I explore the dynamic of conversion itself. That exploration, as shall become clearer in the rationale given below, proves to be primarily a hermeneutic work. But the hermeneutic work needs a metaphysical foundation for its effective progression towards freedom for faith.

ORIGINALITY

Before I turn to the rationale of my approach in the dissertation, a short word on the originality of the argument is in order. First, no one has yet done a comprehensive study of McLean's philosophy, so on that account alone the dissertation proves original. Generally studies are done on the more recognized authors who could be said to belong to one philosophical school or system. McLean can be classified as belonging to the Catholic philosophical tradition, but with a difference. McLean blends the philosophies of being and consciousness to highlight their mutual enrichment. He avoids allowing any one philosophical system of thought to limit his speculation. He strives to get beyond systemic constraints by returning to early philosophical developments to investigate trajectories that may have been left behind by the dominant movements. He tries to incorporate into his own thought the insights of many lesser known, lesser published philosophers in local contexts all over the world, in order to balance further his own approach. By using McLean's thought as my primary reference, then, I avail myself to a rich philosophical resource that has yet to be tapped for theological reflection.

Another aspect of the originality of the dissertation involves the manner in which I apply his philosophy to the dynamic of conversion. More commonly, comparison studies are done on authors or focused analyses of specific points. My method takes a different approach by applying his philosophy to the dynamic of growth in freedom, thus allowing me to highlight for theology some of today's more deeply rooted challenges for reawakening human sensibilities. I base the line of argument in the development of the chapters on the dynamic that unfolds between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well (cf., John 4: 4-42). When sound metaphysics and phenomenology are applied to the dynamic of conversion, reason must expand beyond any confined limits to enter into the full complexity of the dynamic. My approach, then, generates hermeneutic demands and allows me to develop from McLean's general philosophical hermeneutics three distinct theological hermeneutics for different stages in the dynamic. The result is that fundamental theology gains a new perspective into the centrality of culture for understanding sensibility. Fundamental theology also gains a new perspective into its own role of facilitating the birth of faith and how it might approach the task of dialogue in the global context. To get the most from this originality in a deliberate and measured manner, a working rationale is needed in order to yield insights for fundamental theology and to keep a clear focus during the exploration.

RATIONALE

Having addressed the broader question for theology to ask and having also focused more deliberately on a question to answer, I want to present here the reasons for the method I am choosing. By exploring the dynamics of conversion to greater freedom for faith, elements will emerge that are necessary to build an effective method for theology in an age of globalization. As a faith and culture study, the thesis does not intend to develop a theory of method, but I do hope to highlight certain critical areas for fundamental theology's consideration. To that end let me first explain my choice to study George McLean's philosophy. In addition to being rooted in Catholic philosophy, his works contain two essential elements that, I believe, fundamental theology needs for faith and culture studies in a global context: a) the mutual enhancement of a philosophy of being and a philosophy of consciousness, which I mentioned earlier, and b) a value-based assessment of culture with an accompanying critical hermeneutics. In these two broad elements fundamental theology finds the philosophical tools it needs to explore the movement to faith in the context of complex interaction between cultures.

The choice of a philosopher was an easier task than settling on an exploration of the dynamics of conversion. I repeatedly found myself drawn to what I understand to be fundamental theology's mission, with its accompanying challenges and opportunities in today's global interaction of cultures. Fundamental theology has to address the many attempts, especially in the western, more secularized cultures, to relegate issues of faith to a secondary, almost inconsequential, level of importance. I chose the analogy of midwife for fundamental theology's role and mission, one that has been used before. In his *Introduction to Fundamental Theology* Rino Fisichella uses it when he stresses the wide breadth of fundamental theology's mission: that it has to be able to give reason for its hope to whoever asks, so that no opportunity would ever be lost. "If from one direction this obliges Fundamental Theology to vigilance, from the other it stimulates it to also pose questions so that, like a midwife, it might give birth in others to a rediscovery of the desire for God and the intelligibility of his mystery."¹ Within fundamental theology's role as midwife, there are certain areas that take prominence in my thesis, so I want to give them a special place in my rationale before I present a brief overview of the outline. As I do so, I will also highlight some words or phrases that will be important in the

¹ Rino Fisichella, *Introduction to Fundamental Theology* (Casale Monferrato: Piemme, 1996), 70. McLean also uses this analogy in his own thought, borrowing it from Gadamer's insights.

discussions that follow. I divide the remainder of my rationale, then, into four sections: 1) freedom; 2) personal and cultural dynamic; 3) ongoing dialogue with God; and the 4) outline of the argument.

Freedom

As the title of the thesis indicates, the area of freedom holds a special place in my argument. Growth in freedom usually happens slowly as one's *personal history* unfolds. By its very nature its growth is a dynamic that represents a 'turning away from sin so as to believe in the Gospel.' The movement towards greater freedom brings one to the proximity of faith. It includes both objective realities from one's life situations and subjective elements of feelings and *affectivity* that influence one's *disposition*. As such, freedom brings one's world of interpretation into light and demands a *hermeneutic approach*. McLean's philosophy provides an ideal fit, since his anthropology uses hermeneutics to treat the human person in the context of freedom and of culture.

Personal and Cultural Dynamic

The dynamic of growing in freedom for faith is a very personal journey that calls one to review one's life *narrative* and reflect upon one's *identity* and relationships. The dynamic reveals *intersubjective* strengths and weaknesses which colour how one sees the world and engages reality. The context of one's personal field of interpretation is rooted in culture. So the journey which is a personal dynamic is also a cultural dynamic. The culture influences one's journey, one's eyes of interpretation, and one's self-understanding or identity. A culture represents a mixed bag of both the humanizing refinement and the dehumanizing distortion of values. The Gospel embraces a culture by claiming the good values and purifying the distorted ones. This personal and cultural dynamic has to receive and respect the wisdom of a people passed down over generations in *tradition*. The dynamic also creatively shapes tradition in the present to pass it on to the future. These complex hermeneutics present a continuous challenge for theology's consideration.

Ongoing Dialogue with God

Above all, the journey towards freedom for faith reflects an ongoing dialogue with God. The central object throughout my study consists of the graced participation in the freedom of God, a free response to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in midwifing the birth of faith

in the hearts of people and cultures. The personal and cultural dynamics, the struggles for authentic freedom, are not merely preparatory moments for encounter with God, but reveal an intimate dialogue of love that slowly comes to be recognized, accepted and embraced for full flourishing in faith to follow. In this *conversion process* one repeatedly tests correlations with personal experience and truth, as can best be understood, to find a path where one's identity can feel at home and at peace. The real breakthrough occurs when the dramatic puzzles in one's search for meaning slowly piece together as an ongoing *dialogue of love*. Reality comes to be perceived as an expression of love. Even the painful experiences of life and the perplexing paradoxes that seem to hold no meaning come to be understood more clearly through the infinite love and freedom of God. That love and freedom are expressed most eloquently through the *logic of the cross*. Once recognized and accepted, the dynamics of freedom reach a new level where authentic witness to that love and creative responsibility for sharing it redefine one's world of meaning and clarify one's identity in God.

Outline of the Argument

To highlight this ongoing dialogue with God each chapter begins with a short scriptural text taken from the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well. The dynamics of that encounter mirror many of the dynamics of waking up to various levels of reality in the journey to a greater freedom for faith. From each scriptural passage I point out certain dynamics of interest and then formulate questions to be addressed in the chapter in order to focus my reflections. As already mentioned, McLean's philosophical reflections are my primary tool for analysis.

In the first chapter I look at the opportunities offered through experiencing interpersonal encounter. To begin, I use McLean's insights to help illuminate the background landscape of the intersubjective elements of encounter. This includes a consideration of totemic experience, so that some of the more deeply rooted existential sensibilities that may have been overlooked with philosophy's systemic developments might be rediscovered. After introducing some of the philosophical impediments to encounter, I offer culture as an important key to any fruitful philosophical or theological inquiry. My next step outlines the movement within a person or a culture from the raw data of experience to intentionality and religious meaning. I close the chapter with a brief reflection on how a solid foundation of understanding encounter can lead to wider opportunities for participation and harmony. The first chapter, then, sets up the challenges and opportunities to be faced for exploring the dynamics of conversion offered through ongoing

encounters. It lays the groundwork for the operative sensibilities that will have to be awakened or further developed in the journey to faith.

The second chapter looks at reality and the drive to understand it in a context of meaning. An integral part of the search is the challenge of freedom. The chapter begins with a step back to mythic experience in order to ground the importance of narrative and symbolic communication. Similar to the examination of totemic experience, the look at myth allows for a broader lens than a defined philosophical system. After a short transition from symbolic to conceptual thinking which highlights the drama of existence, I then begin reflections on the three primary levels of reality to consider in my argument: God, the human person and culture. God is presented as deep mystery who invites us into a mystical dynamism of love. I also review God's intelligibility and primary mode of communicating for participation in this dynamism. In presenting the human person as *imago Dei* my concerns lie especially with personal identity and consciousness as part of one's full, integrated unity. Important points to consider are each person's uniqueness, freedom, imagination and openness to transcendence. Finally, I present culture as its own level of reality, using McLean's philosophy to establish the understanding of its foundations. I look at misconceptions that hinder the development of culture and at its status as an expression of a people's freedom, values, and tradition. I close with how culture acts as a foundation for hermeneutics.

While the first two chapters could be said to establish the groundwork for the growth in freedom for faith, the analysis of the dynamics of conversion begins in earnest in chapter three, where I look at recognizing reality or coming to new awareness. First I set out three classical paths to God as types of journeys that people can follow. For reestablishing sensibility, I spend time examining the sources of disposition, impediments to freedom and the challenges to theology. The central section in this chapter explores the dynamics of deliberative reflection as the process of reaching a new awareness of the depth of reality, a process that includes an inquiring hermeneutics to confirm the way forward to a new level of freedom. The desired results of the process are deeper awareness of God and of culture. The new awareness changes not only how one sees the world and interprets events, but also changes how one understands oneself and the meaning of personal relationships.

Recognition of realities brings new awareness, but the acceptance of what is recognized as personally significant and life-changing entails another stage of the dynamic which I cover in chapter four. Here I look more closely at the higher levels of freedom and how freedom, as dynamism of the heart, acts as a lens for one's imagination. For its part, the imagination is tasked to direct the focus of the lens of freedom. In

this stage the dynamics of conversion demand an investigative hermeneutics of assent, a process that has to be able to confirm the credibility of any revelations of truth or love. In the process of verification one has to draw on the full resources of personal and cultural sensibility to discover meaning. In that discovery one's relations with God and the wider human community come to be seen as significant and worthy of emotional and intellectual investment, allowing one to hear the personal invitation for assent to God in faith. One's growing freedom results in a convergence to the faith commitment as an active, living relationship of love.

Chapter five carries the dynamic to a more global context and interaction of cultures in light of new freedom in faith. For that response the imagination has to be able to retain the view of global unity, even as it applies itself to local contexts. At this level the dynamics of inquiry and investigation shift to those of engagement and creative responsibility. I develop, therefore, a relational hermeneutics of communion for freely engaging the varied horizons of different cultures while promoting their own journeys of growth in freedom. I conclude the chapter with a reflection on the growth of the Kingdom of God in the midst of eschatological tension, a growth that moves peoples and cultures towards greater unity in the global context.

In my conclusion I highlight some of the more significant theological dimensions that arise in the study. As a guide I use the concept of gift, which runs as a sort of subtext throughout the thesis. As a correlation to the chapters, the focus unfolds as follows: 1 – gift come upon; 2 – gift offered; 3 – gift recognized; 4 – gift received; and 5 – gift engaged. Here the paradigm of midwife takes central place for the reflection on fundamental theology's role. I also point out some important theological trajectories that would require more attention to respond to today's challenges.

OVERVIEW OF GEORGE F. McLEAN

Before entering into the study itself, I first want to introduce George F. McLean, my central reference for the work. George Francis McLean was born June 29, 1929, the fourth of five children in his family. He grew up in Lowell, Massachusetts. After joining the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate and completing his novitiate, he was sent to Rome in 1949 for studies: three years of philosophy and four years of theology. In Rome he had his first exposure to multiple cultures, not just at the Gregorian University (PUG) where he studied, but also in his community life at the Oblate International Scholasticate where he lived with other Oblates from a wide variety of cultures around the world. That early international and intercultural experience

formed him and would strongly influence his later reflections and professional involvements in philosophy. I want to divide my discussion of his professional philosophical development into various stages or important influential moments. By so doing I hope to clarify how he came to expertise in certain areas and to show why he is a good choice for fundamental theology to use as a point of reference in this early part of the 21st century.

Doctoral Dissertation and Early Teaching

After returning from his initial studies in philosophy and theology at the Gregorian University in Rome, McLean worked on his doctorate at the Catholic University of America (CUA), where in 1958 he completed his dissertation entitled *Man's Knowledge of God According to Paul Tillich: A Thomistic Critique*. While his years in Rome had given him a strong foundation in Thomistic metaphysics, his study of Tillich complemented the metaphysics with an existential phenomenology. McLean joined the philosophy department at CUA where his research focused on the development of an existential metaphysics of culture. In preparation for Vatican II he was asked to facilitate summer seminar workshops for philosophers to discuss the developments for the Council. In these early years at CUA, then, McLean began to blend his Thomistic philosophy of being with a philosophy of consciousness from the influence of Tillich and other phenomenologists.² He also sharpened his skills at coordinating and facilitating seminars, a practice that would prove fruitful throughout his life.

² Some general comments on McLean's professional engagements are in order. As early as 1965 McLean became the Secretary for The American Catholic Philosophical Societies (ACPA), the first of many secretarial roles that would keep him engaged internationally with different cultures and broad currents in philosophy. In addition to ACPA, 1965-80, McLean was also secretary and/or President of The International Society for Metaphysics (ISM), 1974-98, The World Union of Catholic Philosophical Societies (WUCPS), 1974-98, The Inter-university Committee on Research and Policy Studies (ICR), 1975-77, The Joint Committee of Catholic Learned Societies and Scholars (CLS), 1974-77, and The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy (RVP), 1983-present. McLean served on the Board of Directors for The International Federation of Philosophical Societies (FISP), 1977-87, and continues in the roles of President of The World Union of Catholic Philosophical Societies (WUCPS), 1998-present, and Director (and founder) of the Center for the Study of Culture and Values (CSCV), 2000-present.

Sabbaticals and the Influence of India

One of the more significant shifts in McLean's thinking came about during his first sabbatical year, 1969, in which he studied six months in India at the University of Madras and six months in Paris with Paul Ricoeur. The experience of the eastern philosophy of India opened his western philosophical mind to completely new horizons. He would return to India again in 1977 for his second sabbatical experience as the transformation of his perspectives continued. These two years of experience in India significantly enriched his philosophical outlook and deepened further his appreciation of the importance of culture as an intellectual as well as a social phenomenon. The eastern influence on McLean's hermeneutic thinking broadened his appreciation for the sharing of interpretations through constructive dialogue.

Eastern Europe

McLean began a series of colloquia with philosophers from Latin America in the early 1970's, but this proved to be only a prelude to an even more significant involvement with philosophers from Eastern Europe. After an exploratory visit to Warsaw and Krakow in 1977, McLean began in 1978 a series of meetings with philosophers from the eastern bloc countries that would continue for many years. In collaboration with the then Cardinal Archbishop of Krakow, Karol Wojtyła, he engaged the Marxist philosophers in Poland in the same thematic seminar style that allowed for shared reflections and new publishing opportunities for those who participated. Slowly, these encounters and shared reflections, the whole style of free and open discussion of critical philosophical questions, helped to transform the intellectual environment in the secular universities there. International and inter-cultural colloquia and seminars thus became McLean's primary means of philosophical dialogue and of publishing philosophical reflections from diverse authors on focused themes.

Shifting Geographical, Cultural Matrix to Global Focus

Following upon his successes with colloquia in Latin America and Eastern Europe, McLean continued this model of reflection in African nations in the early 1980's, and then to China and the Far East beginning in the late 1980's. In the early 1990's he went to Cairo, Egypt for studies in Islamic philosophy and religion, beginning a philosophical dialogue with the Islamic world that continues to this day. In the late 1990's that dialogue spread to the culturally complex nations of Central

Asia.³ Almost all of these cultural dialogues continue in some form to this day, but McLean's various contextual works feed his primary concern to work toward a new global paradigm. This envisions philosophical reflection drawing upon the wisdom of all the world's various cultures developed over the years. This concern of his was already present in 1983 when he founded the Council for Research in Values and Philosophy (RVP),⁴ for which he has also served as general editor of the 300 volume RVP publication series "Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change" – in print and on the web at www.crvp.org.

The global focus for McLean comes from the philosophy of culture he has developed over his lifetime. The influences upon his understanding of culture come from many different scholars – Gadamer, Geertz, and Ricoeur to name a few. Generally, McLean speaks of culture in its more positive, classical sense, but he understands that it is an ambiguous anthropological reality, having negative aspects that can cripple a culture if left unhealed. He sees culture as a hermeneutic work filled with many ambiguities that reflect the lived freedom and wisdom of a people through time. I would maintain that the greatest influences on his understanding of culture come not only from particular academic works, but *from the experience of his many encounters with philosophers from all over the world who have dialogued with him from their own interpretation of their culture's reality.*

McLean has focused upon catalyzing and sharing in the efforts of the many peoples of the world and their philosophers to discover a path ahead. This must be done in response to the philosophical challenges and opportunities which now emerge for their cultures as ways of life in the process of global change. The details of his thought will be revealed in the argument that follows. I want to begin that exposition with the central notion of experiencing encounter.

³ For a much more comprehensive coverage of the missionary reach of McLean's philosophical dialogues, see an article written by Hu Yeping and William Sweet on the occasion of his 75th birthday, "George Francis McLean: A Philosopher at the Service of Humanity," in *To the Mountain: Essays in Honour of Professor George F. McLean*, ed. William Sweet and Hu Yeping (Fu Jen: Fu Jen Catholic University Press, 2004), 1-20.

⁴ The objectives of the Council for Research in Values and Philosophy (also sometimes abbreviated as CRVP) as articulated on its website – Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, <http://www.crvp.org/> (accessed April 28, 2012) – are: 1) To mobilize research teams to study the nature, interpretation and development of cultures and to apply them to the challenges of contemporary change; 2) To publish and distribute the results of these efforts; 3) To organize extended seminars for deeper exploration of these issues and regional conferences for the coordination of this work.

CHAPTER I

EXPERIENCING ENCOUNTER: GIFT COME UPON

There came a woman of Samaria to draw water.

Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.

The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a Samaritan woman?"

For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.

(John 4:7-9)

In every encounter resides a mysterious terrain of factors that contribute to the full spectrum of the experience. Like this encounter from the Gospel of John, most of our own encounters appear accidental. We cross paths with people as we go about our business, but each crossing of paths, each encounter, provides a new opportunity to discover more of the depth and richness that life has to offer. The purpose of this chapter is to review what could be called the raw material of any encounter. Using McLean's philosophy I will try to set forth some of the fundamental elements that ground experience and reveal an intersubjective, personal dynamic. That personal dynamic begins the art of listening to or hearing from reality, an art which can carry the person to a new awareness and new freedom needed for the moment of believing. The goal is to be left with many considerations that would have to be addressed in much greater detail in order to respect the full dynamic in play as a person grows to a greater freedom for faith through encounter. These considerations will provide the framework for the investigations to follow and the theological focus to deepen the understanding of the dynamic of freedom for faith, so that others might be effectively encouraged in their own journey.

The scene has already been set in the above encounter from the Gospel: Jesus and the woman are at Jacob's well around mid-day at a town in Samaria near the field that Jacob gave to his youngest and most beloved son, Joseph. Scripture scholars offer various insights into the symbolic meaning of this setting and theories as to why the author of the Gospel has included these details. For the full theological significance of this passage those details would be important, but here I only want to

draw attention to the objective significance of some elements that combine to make up the full experience of any encounter. Place and time and nearby landmarks, all contribute to the impact of any encounter and the manner in which it comes to be digested by our subjective selves, consciously or not.

Like Jesus and the Samaritan woman, every person brings to each encounter a host of things. We bring the common business in which we find ourselves engaged. We bring our physical and emotional states. We bring our gender, culture, nationality and race, our dreams and hopes, our history, quest for meaning, freedom and fulfillment; we bring all that makes up our identity, the full gift of who we are. We also bring our regrets and disappointments, limitations and frustrations, our undeveloped or blind sides. To this encounter we also see that Jesus brings an imperative: "Give me a drink." This imperative is the opening that will begin to break through prejudices and misconceptions the Samaritan woman carries with her.

Each encounter, then, reflects to some degree the objective reality and the subjective perspectives we carry from the experience of the ongoing narrative of our lives. Encounter offers an opportunity to hear and experience something new, to engage accidentally or intentionally the gift of another. Conscious, reflective participation, then, involves one in humanity's full, dynamic flow. By engaging in the encounter more attentively, a new possibility of growth can be offered by hearing God's call containing an imperative that challenges us to broaden our subjective horizons.

In order to help unravel all the dynamics at play in encounter that can engage the person in a movement of freedom for faith, I offer the following questions to help maintain the focus for the pages ahead:

- What aspects contribute to the intersubjective background of encounter, and what can symbolic communication offer for engaging it?
- What sort of operative mindsets can impede the full engagement of any encounter?
- How could culture hold a key for unlocking encounter's dynamics?
- What would be the critical elements of encounter's dynamics, its foundations and opportunities?

I shall divide my reflections into five main sections. The first will frame the background landscape of encounter by introducing some of the symbolic and intersubjective communication elements to which McLean encourages us to pay attention. The not-so-hidden dark side that can block full communication will then be reviewed – those impediments or

attitudes of conflict and competition that are often unconsciously carried to encounter. Then I will introduce culture as a key to theological enquiry today, taking as my lead McLean's emphasis on culture for philosophical enquiry. The fourth section consists of an outline description of the movement from raw experience to intentionality and religious meaning. Finally, with McLean's insights, I shall lay a working foundation for experience which invites one to full participation and harmony with God and others.

FRAMING McLEAN'S BACKGROUND LANDSCAPE OF INTERSUBJECTIVE ELEMENTS OF ENCOUNTER

The dynamics of an encounter provide a rich field of experience in which we can come to know ourselves and others better, and to put to the test our belief systems, of which we may or may not be fully aware. This test of our belief systems is important for our study since this is where freedom is expressed and the road to faith is cleared. John Paul II noted that for the earliest Christians "the first and most urgent task was the proclamation of the Risen Christ by way of a personal encounter which would bring the listener to conversion of heart and request for Baptism."¹ For this task of proclamation to be most effective, one needs to grasp the full depth of the encounter landscape, the many aspects that come into play when two people meet. The dynamics of conversion and the growth in freedom for the assent in faith shall follow later. In this section I want to introduce or frame some of the elements that make up the background of any encounter, using McLean's insights as the focus. The first task requires us to grasp some of the elements of God's revealing love as it invites forth one's true identity.

It turns out that McLean's insights into the background of encounter find their origin in his early intellectual development. That early development was formed especially around his study of two key figures. Taking a short look to see how he blended them will help to understand better his background landscape of the intersubjective elements of encounter. McLean wrote his doctoral dissertation on Paul Tillich, placing his thought under a Thomistic critique. One of the elements that influenced McLean's understanding of the active dynamics in an encounter comes from Tillich's dialectical approach. Tillich's dialectics opened up a window into the importance of the subjective turn in modern thought and pushed McLean to expand his early understanding of Aquinas to incorporate the rich potential that remained embedded there. McLean found in Tillich someone who

¹ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1998), # 38.

challenged him to move beyond philosophical systems, beyond the focus on objective or subjective considerations to the deeper reality of identity.² Here the objective and subjective elements still survive but are placed in a larger complex where the value of each finds its true home. The ontological question incorporates both the philosophy of being and that of consciousness, but points to the mysterious zone of identity where the authenticity of the person must be confronted, and, if necessary, a call to conversion heeded, in order to accept that deeper identity. Many of the elements introduced here will appear in this and subsequent chapters of our study: identity, conversion, freedom, being and consciousness, and that level of reality that transcends subject and object while grounding them both.

The focus on identity shifts one away from the subject-object dilemma and moves one more towards a subject-subject encounter, a move that is critical for interpersonal relations and for an opening in the mindset to transcendence. Here we are presented with a challenge. As Cardinal Ratzinger wrote, one of today's temptations is to get lost in a mysticism of identity or authenticity that can offer all religions a place, while having the unfortunate effect of relativizing them in the process. One's true identity is found, instead, in the mysticism of love from an encounter with the living God who actively speaks to us in an encounter.³ This initial opening to the transcendent, stemming from putting our identity to the test, is critical for our grasping the full richness of an interpersonal encounter. But the manner in which this

² It proves useful to see some of the elements of Tillich's thought that had an enduring influence on McLean's own thought. Here we have the opportunity to see how the thought of Thomas and Tillich have influenced McLean and his philosophical project to blend metaphysics and phenomenology for their mutual enrichment. As McLean points out, Tillich "takes as his point of departure the polarity of subject and object, because both members are presupposed for the ontological question. But if they provide his point of departure, he leaves no doubt that he shares the modern concern to proceed to a point of identity where both subject and object are overcome.... Consequently, what is sought is a level of reality which is beyond this dichotomy of subject and object, grounding the value of both." George McLean, *Hermeneutics, Tradition and Contemporary Change: Lectures in Chennai/Madras, India*, vol. 30 of Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change, Series I: Culture and Values (Washington, DC: The Council for Research and Values in Philosophy, 2003), 53-54. I shall refer back to this influence of Tillich as the points of this particular study unfold.

³ See Ratzinger's reflections on this in *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 83-85. For his earlier writings before his elevation to the papacy I shall refer to him as Cardinal Ratzinger; for his writings after his elevation I shall refer to him as Benedict XVI.

human opening to the transcendent might lead to what could be called revelation is not so clear or easily understood. McLean builds his philosophy with Tillich's influence to uncover one's true identity through this revelation of divine love.⁴

Revelation ensues from the various elements of the dynamic at play during an encounter with the divine. Something heretofore hidden is being manifested. This manifestation has to be grasped or apprehended by the human subject for it to be effective or realized. Such a gift has to be recognized in order to be either accepted or rejected. Without apprehension it is a manifestation or gift gone unnoticed, thereby resulting in no gift at all. For McLean, the divine does speak to us in a revelatory event, but he would also agree that the objective element of revelation, the sign event, needs to be complemented by a subjective apprehension in order to be considered and received. This gives us some of the key elements that will make up the topics that follow: symbol, internal and intersubjective communication.

The background landscape of encounter, then, consists of the complicated dynamism of identity and the interplay of objectivity and subjectivity, of the philosophy of being and of consciousness. This dynamism comes to the fore in any human encounter, wherein the divine resides in the background, waiting to be brought to light. As John Paul II points out, the truth of Revelation appears "as something gratuitous, which itself stirs thought and seeks acceptance as an expression of love. This revealed truth is set within our history as an

⁴ It is important to distinguish differences in McLean's and Tillich's understanding of revelation. One of the primary concerns McLean has regarding Tillich's thought is Tillich's understanding of our knowledge of God. Unlike McLean, Tillich does not see revelation as a supernatural communication that God grants to us so that we might know and love God more. Instead, Tillich points to his understanding of revelation as a sort of epistemological moment, consisting of both cognitive and emotional elements. As McLean notes, "The term revelation is used by Tillich rather despite its supernaturalistic implications than because of them, for the divine does not speak to man. But because it transcends the situation of an object whose structures are presented to a subject for his knowledge, a cognitive encounter with the divine does imply the manifestation of something hidden and may be termed a revelation. The manifestation in turn involves both an objective element, called a sign event, and a subjective element, called ecstasy." George McLean, "Man's Knowledge of God According to Paul Tillich: A Thomistic Critique," abstract, *The Catholic University of America Philosophical Studies* 180, no. 31 (1958): 3-4. Though McLean may not have resonated fully with Tillich's description of what makes up a revelatory event, McLean did resonate with Tillich's observation of the dynamic at play during an encounter with the divine.

anticipation of that ultimate and definitive vision of God which is reserved for those who believe in him and seek him with a sincere heart.”⁵ The truth of God’s being and love, then, is not a human argument, perspective or idea, but a gratuitous reality, a real gift that engages us. It enters into our history as something very real. It stirs us and seeks acceptance, not as some sort of rational reference, but as an expression of love. In the background of encounter this gift of love lingers, as it were accidentally, waiting to be discovered as the intention of a personal God.

McLean’s philosophical background landscape of the intersubjective elements provides us with a framework for mapping the discovery of God as personal and loving. The dynamism of any divine manifestation in an encounter is more than a cognitive event, but one that involves mind and will, head and heart. It also has to appear or be perceived as gift, a very special gift set within our history as meaningful and coherent with that history, not as external, foreign or unrelated to it. The truth that stirs us and seeks acceptance in love has to be recognized as a gift in tune with our history of experience, including our culture, our systems of interpretation, and our worlds of meaning. To explore further this background landscape of the intersubjective elements of encounter, I shall examine the importance of symbols, our engagement with them and the internal communication they provide. To enrich this I shall devote a section to stepping back to review McLean’s insights regarding totems. Afterwards, a short reflection on intersubjective communication will round out the background landscape.

Symbolic Engagement and Internal Communication

Symbols and the mechanism of human engagement with them mark the first building block in McLean’s thought to help frame the background landscape of the intersubjective communication of an encounter with God. Any new horizon of Revelation has to resonate with or clarify our own horizon. This weaving of horizons often comes through the objective sign event to which I alluded above. Such a sign event occurs through symbols that engage one and draw one to participate in the deeper reality manifested in the symbol. Any loss of attentiveness to symbolic expression leads to a diminishment of engagement with the full scope of reality, especially that aspect which calls the person to transcend the self’s preoccupations and concerns.⁶

⁵ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, # 15.

⁶ See Charles Taylor’s *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), where he introduces the concept of the buffered self which, as a result of modernity’s and rationalism’s

Symbols, then, operate beyond the laws of strict logic. They operate in the world of image and feeling, tapping into an internal communication to express, as Lonergan says, “what logical discourse abhors: the existence of internal tensions, incompatibilities, conflicts, struggles, destructions.”⁷ Symbols operate on a different plane of logic, appealing to the subjective dilemmas and insights of a person. But the symbol involves more than just an isolated, subjective intending; it involves the person in a communication where the self can be transcended through an encounter with another. Our initial experiences of God usually happen through some sort of symbolic encounter before the clarity of words becomes fully effective.

One of the challenges today is that many believe that symbolic communication can no longer consist of an objective encounter with another in the symbolized reality. Instead, it is often held to be a subjective correlation or inference made on the part of the person alone, who in a sense, establishes the symbol on his or her own. But such a subjective inference precludes the possibility of the objective, uncontrolled encounter and communication to which symbols invite one. McLean had to confront this modern dilemma in his earliest studies of Tillich’s writings.⁸ The aim, then, is to understand the power of the

demystifying effects, has lost the full sense of the depth of reality, mysticism, and the ability to recognize symbolic expression.

⁷Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Minneapolis: The Seabury Press, 1972), 66.

⁸ McLean cannot agree totally with Tillich’s description of symbolic engagement, but does find himself drawn to some of Tillich’s insights. McLean is grounded in a strong Thomistic metaphysics, while Tillich, whose metaphysics is less defined, has to protect certain objective notions of God by subjective means. The questions arising range from whether a symbol draws one to participate in an objective reality to just what exactly symbolic revelation would mean from Tillich’s concept of God. McLean notes that when Tillich explains the operation of symbols, he remains consistent within his own theory of knowledge of God, which for him comes from our experience of facing meaninglessness. For Tillich, any symbol depends on both the objective and subjective elements in the encounter of a person with the symbol: “In this encounter the symbol receives its power by a sort of necessity or creation and is thus ‘born’ or established as such. When this correlation between what is symbolized and the persons who receive the symbol ceases the symbol loses its power and ‘dies.’” McLean, “Man’s Knowledge of God According to Paul Tillich: A Thomistic Critique,” abstract, 7. Such an understanding of symbol strips the symbol of its power to invite us to participate in the very reality of the thing symbolized. Instead, in Tillich’s system we create the symbol by our own imparting of significance through our active correlation, a system filled with potential pitfalls for theology. It is here that McLean sees the dangers of relativism entering, since in such a system truth and the experience of the

symbol's inherent ability to communicate, even in its earliest stages, so that such understanding could be in consonance with the sacramental engagement with the divine that believers experience. Benedict XVI expresses the profound depth of our sacramental experience quite simply: "In the bread and wine under whose appearances Christ gives himself to us in the paschal meal (cf. Lk 22:14-20; 1 Cor 11:23-26), God's whole life encounters us and is sacramentally shared with us."⁹ But nonbelievers and many others of the modern mindset are not so symbolically attuned anymore. If given a choice they may even prefer a symbol-system in which they get to project the meaning, resulting in a relativistic world of interpretation. McLean's wrestling with Tillich's symbol-system, then, offers insight into the challenges that confront theology today in trying to awaken people to symbolic communication.¹⁰

Revelation cannot be reduced to a correlated manifestation of the divine by means of a symbol dependent on a sort of subjective human projection of meaning. The manifestation of the divine by means of a symbol cannot remain more dependent on human projection, rather than the interdependent communication outlined above when we referred to John Paul II's description of revelation as 'the gift of truth that stirs our thought and seeks acceptance as an expression of love.' The symbol, especially one that opens to the reality of transcendence, has to be grounded in being, in metaphysics. It is not that McLean considers the world of meaning a secondary one, but he would like to see that the world of meaning remain firmly grounded in the real world of real beings. And, most importantly of all, the symbol's power lies in its drawing us into an encounter with the living Being of God. If not, then

reality of God would seem to be dependent on our subjective acts of correlation.

⁹ Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2007), # 8.

¹⁰ Continuing his assessment of the consequences of Tillich's symbolic system, McLean observes: "Positive symbols retain subjective truth as long as the correlation of revelation in which they arose continues." McLean, "Man's Knowledge of God According to Paul Tillich: A Thomistic Critique," abstract, 9. In Tillich's thought symbols are only temporary and fleeting, born out of an experience of our being grasped by the power of being, thus sensing an encounter with God while facing meaninglessness. The correlation that supports or gives life to a symbol in this system, then, depends on this manifestation out of meaninglessness. But truth becomes lost when the correlation ends. McLean thus laments the symbol's disassociation from being in Tillich's system: "Its function would seem to be reduced to that of favoring the subjective act and what is participated would seem to be not being but meaning, that is, not entitative but significative power." *Ibid.*, 21.

God's communication would be reduced to a meaning subjectively tossed out upon the canvas of life, rather than a word of truth given in love.

Ratzinger warns that any disassociation of our understanding of truth from metaphysics would lead to a relativism which "is ultimately based on a rationalism that holds that reason in Kant's sense is incapable of any metaphysical knowledge; religion is then given a new basis along pragmatic lines, with either a more ethical or a more political coloration."¹¹ Truth would become replaced by a functional pragmatism, essentially blocking out the possibility of God's revelation. For McLean, the symbol does not come to life because our subjective self gives it meaning. Instead, the self gets drawn in to participate in the objective reality symbolized, thereby illuminating and enriching our world of meaning, while avoiding the temptation to yield to the relativism so predominant in today's thinking. With its metaphysical framework, McLean's philosophy serves truth by its symbolic realism and provides a working tool for some of the major issues in the field of theology-and-culture today.

This dynamic of intersubjective communication forms a critical component of the background landscape of any encounter. McLean's philosophy of being keeps him grounded in reality, a reality to which the subject must relate, rather than fabricate on its own. He finds in symbolic communication a dynamism that goes beyond a correlation that operates for a specific time of intending, though he agrees that the open engagement of the subject is critical. Like McLean I want to keep this metaphysics and adherence to the truth, while also striving to understand how to break through the buffer of subjective, relativistic thinking that hinders God's revelation. Lonergan also expresses that

¹¹ Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, 126. Again, McLean encountered this distorted sense of religious knowledge in Tillich's thought. As he observes, Tillich's symbols require a sort of revelation, but not necessarily of something new. They have more to do with continuance and transmission, and depend very much upon the subjective engagement of those who encounter it. As a result, symbols contain no objective knowledge of God, but merely point to the depth of being. "Their variation implies a change not in our knowledge of the divine, but only our relation to the divine in this encounter." McLean, "Man's Knowledge of God According to Paul Tillich: A Thomistic Critique," abstract, 22. Since no real knowledge of God can be obtained from symbols, so, too, no personal God of love really be experienced through them. The symbol can, however, provide us a reminder, with encouragement and focus. Just as in Tillich's thought God is the depth dimension at the basis of all reality, so many today also reduce God to a dimension of their world of perception. But God's being, or our understanding of it, cannot be confined to our changing perceptions as we interact with symbols.

internal dynamism in a succinct manner when he says, “Organic and psychic vitality have to reveal themselves to intentional consciousness and, inversely, intentional consciousness has to secure the collaboration of organism and psyche.”¹² Symbols catalyze that dynamic of revelation and intentionality, and can offer the subject an opening to self-transcendence by way of an encounter with the divine. Ultimately, symbols express and bring more fully to light our humanity so that we can communicate more clearly. If we lose contact with the truth behind symbolic expression, our humanity suffers and diminishes, and intersubjective communication becomes more difficult.

The internal communication offered in revelation has to transcend the subjective self and refer to real truth, not just our own intending. Even while the subjective factors are taken into serious consideration, a firm foundation in being remains necessary, so that any real, substantial communication with God would not be lost and the complexity of the dynamic be respected. The free engagement of the subjective self has to be respected so that the truth, the message in the symbol, can be personally identified. To explore this symbolic communication further, to enrich the revelation of truth in the dynamic while also helping people attune themselves to the possibility of divine communication, I want to follow McLean as he takes a step back to study early cultures’ symbolic engagement in the form of a totem.

Stepping Back to Encounter in Totemic Experience

Symbolic expression has existed in every culture from the earliest times and the symbolic interaction of a people with the transcendent reality behind their totem holds a very special place. In investigating this, McLean heeds the call of Heidegger to take a philosophical step back to realities that may hold hidden insights that could have been either lost or overlooked in philosophy’s developmental path.¹³ This step back will help to clarify the rich religious relevance of symbolic communication, not just in totemic experience, but in all encounters of symbolic content. My purpose here includes bringing to light the rich depth of possibilities that any encounter offers, while also laying the ground for examining the point of view or perspective with which one begins to interpret encounters. In so doing, I also hope to clarify the immediacy of symbolic communication in any totem, especially the one

¹² Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 66-67.

¹³ McLean cites two of Heidegger’s works for taking a philosophical step back: *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1961), 32, 36-37, 130-136 and “Letter on Humanism,” in *Philosophy in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 270-302.

so important to fundamental theology, that of the dynamic wisdom flowing from the cross. People have their own personal narratives and dialectics, but the critical move towards faith stems from this dynamic communication of the crucified and risen Savior.¹⁴ Midwifing the gestation of the faith in minds and hearts demands linking those personal narratives and dialectics to the symbolic communication flowing from the cross. My premise is that the cross acts as a sort of root totem living deep within the soul of every human being. Since the journey to freedom for faith depends on such a responsible theological midwifery, it is a concept to which I shall return regularly.

McLean observes that, since the time of Descartes' emphasis to accept for consideration only what can be clearly and distinctly known, an inherent distrust of those areas that do not easily lend themselves to clear, delimiting analysis has developed and taken root in philosophy. The modern philosophical systems have developed in the shadow of this inherent distrust of the external and internal senses, resulting in a fractured separation of the intellect from them. Ratzinger made a similar observation regarding this crisis in philosophy: "There are many reasons for the current collapse, but I would say that the most important consists of the self-limitation of reason, which is paradoxically resting upon its laurels: the laws of method that brought it success have, through being generalized, become its prison."¹⁵ Following one of McLean's attempts to free his own thought from some of the consequences of this methodological prison into which philosophy has backed itself can offer a pattern for similar theological efforts.

The intellect has remained fully active, but unusually constrained to an environment of pre-established boundaries that has handicapped its ability to break free from its own conceptualizations and, thus, to be surprised by an encounter with the divine. McLean, while relishing the insights and advances of the last few hundred years of philosophy, joins Heidegger in suggesting that, in confronting the challenges presented by the interaction of cultures in the global context, philosophy needs to take a new approach.

¹⁴ I borrow this expression from Giuseppe Ruggieri's insight: "la Teologia Fondamentale è chiamata ad una 'immediatezza' della comunicazione che apparentemente appare meno 'fondata', ma che forse proprio per questo lascia meglio trasparire la *dynamis* del logos della croce." Giuseppe Ruggieri, "Il Futuro della Teologia Fondamentale," in *La Teologia Fondamentale: Convergenze per il terzo millennio*, ed. Rino Fisichella (Casale Monferrato: Piemme, 1997), 280

¹⁵ Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, 156.

Radical newness is to be found, if anywhere, not in further elaboration of what has already been conceptualized, but in a step backward (*der Schritt zurück*) into that which was in some way present at the beginning of philosophizing and has remained unspoken throughout. Far from having been thought or even been thinkable, this reality has been obscured by the objectifying effect of much of the thought which has been developed thus far.¹⁶

Here McLean recommends reaching back to the origin of the human interaction with reality and to the search for meaning that fuels philosophical reflection. Since the cognitive development is initiated by the external senses, followed by the internal senses of affective and moral development, these senses must be reconsidered in their full import, and not simply recertified by an intellect trained to distrust them from the outset. As philosophy developed, it established a rich treasure of thought from which new generations could continue to develop new reflections built upon the foundation of the insights of their predecessors. But by so doing it also may have left another treasure behind, the treasure that had been left buried and never uncovered by the first thinkers, a treasure that perhaps is even more difficult to uncover now after the long development of philosophical systems. This treasure lies in the direction not simply of the objectively clear and distinct, and not of the subjectively certain, but in the mysterious realms of possibility through the communication and interaction of the objective, subjective, and intersubjective. With the acknowledgement and recognition of the divine in these symbolic encounters, the deeper reality of identity returns to the foreground. In order to explore more fully the sense of identity experienced in totemic experience and its influence upon intersubjective communication, I will examine two of the totem's primary elements highlighted by McLean: its underlying principle of unity and its invitation to cooperative participation.

The Totem's Underlying Principle of Unity. Totemic thought has within itself the easy ability to go beyond delimited, categorical thinking to the heart of unity at the base of all things. This ability gave tribes a reference to that unity and a greater understanding of their own identity in relation to it. It offers insights to and confidence in our identity as creatures in relationship with God as Creator. McLean's discoveries

¹⁶ McLean, *Plenitude and Participation: The Life of God in Man (Lectures in Chennai / Madras, India)*, vol. 8 of Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change, Series IIIB: South Asia (Washington: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2004), 8.

here echo Rahner's notion of a pre-rational, often unacknowledged relationship with God through an inherent transcendental intending that human beings have.¹⁷ This seminal relationship acts as a catalyst to bringing that relationship to consciousness through a conversion experience, and so is a critical part of the background landscape to intersubjective encounter.

In his exploration of the thought and sense of identity of primitive peoples as given expression in their totems, McLean begins with the fruit of the research conducted by Levi-Strauss. Levi-Strauss structuralized analogous relations by reducing content to form, using at least one formal characteristic as a principle of unity between the tribe and the animal to compare them.¹⁸ Appreciating the insights of Levi-

¹⁷ In *Hearers of the Word*, trans. Michael Richards (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), Karl Rahner looked at the anthropology of how the human person has an inherent openness to the transcendent. I will not repeat those insights here, but rather seek to show that there is an existing relationship with God from the moment of creation that resides in each person's being, even if not consciously acknowledged.

¹⁸ McLean concisely summarizes his analysis of the analogy of forms in the totemic relation in *Plenitude and Participation*, 9-11, as well as in *Ways to God, Personal and Social at the Turn of Millenia: The Iqbal Lecture, Lahore*, vol. 17 of Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change, Series I: Culture and Values (Washington, DC: The Council for Research and Values in Philosophy, 1999), 82-84. Levi-Strauss outlined a formal structure for penetrating the richness of meaning contained in the totem. There are four steps of analogy of forms in the totemic relation. First, the analogy of proper proportions performs an analytic function for classifying into different groups, as well as a synthetic function for expressing continuity between humans and the animal depicted in the totem. So tribe "A" is to animal "C" and tribe "B" is to animal "D." To this analogy McLean also mentions, as a second step in the analogy of forms, the contribution of Malinowski, who added subjective utility and pragmatic value to the relation. These can address the biological significance of the totem in relation to the human as well as the "psychological importance in controlling fears." McLean, *Plenitude and Participation*, 10.

The use of specific animals in the totemic structure also requires the use of objective analogy. McLean's first concern in his study of the totemic relation is to ground it in being, beyond what could otherwise be named superstition or emotional, psychological impressions. McLean notes how Levi-Strauss "demonstrated that a biological, behaviorist or utilitarian psychological analysis of human emotions does not suffice, for these are generated in terms of circumstances beyond the self, not vice versa. Hence, he points his structuralist analysis to objective analogy. This leads to its prerequisites and thereby to the metaphysical level. Thus to explain the special use of certain types of animals anthropologists went beyond subjective utility to objective analogy." McLean, *Ways to God*, 83. This begins, then, as an external analogy or direct resemblance, so that just as tribe A is to animal C, so tribe B is to animal D, or

Strauss' contribution to the formal structure of totemic relations, McLean recognizes that it does not go far enough in its analysis to provide a common basis of unity. Its primary limitation is that it classifies the relations by the use of categorical thought, which contains the inherent limitations pointed out by Heidegger. McLean also notes the observation made by Lonergan that categorical thought was limited in its denotations and varied with cultural differences. McLean refers to Lonergan here when he writes that the basis of unity, even regarding any formal structures, "requires transcendental thought or intending which is 'comprehensive in connotation, unrestricted in denotation and invariant over cultural change.'"¹⁹ McLean's search for the principle of unity in the underlying being encountered in totemic thought leads beyond the merely categorical correlation, then, to a transcendental intending. This transcendental intending is not merely the work or product of a tribe's reflection, but a result of something which they themselves receive. This intending is a sort of knowing, intuitive recognition, even without a lot of active cognitive reflection. In terms of form alone it points to what Heidegger described as the 'unthought.' McLean reiterates the characteristics of the 'unthought' identified by Heidegger: "It must be one, unlimited and spirit; it is the principle of all transformations and the basis of the unity, form and content of all structures."²⁰

The question, then, remains as to how this pre-cognitive, underlying principle of unity, this 'unthought,' can be acknowledged and its meaning explored. The question can be applied to looking at a particular individual's faith journey, but totems were never simply personal; they were primarily tribal, giving a group of people unity and identity. McLean believes the existential process holds the key to this

A:C::B:D. To this third step, however, is added the recognition of sets of differences more than sets of similarities. As the animals might have a similar characteristic, they also embody vast differences - so, too, with the tribes, or A:B::C:D. And these differences in the animals reflect in a certain sense the differences in the tribes' understanding of themselves and the other. Levi-Strauss structuralized these relations by reducing content to form, using at least one formal characteristic as a principle of unity for comparison.

¹⁹ McLean, *Plenitude and Participation*, 11. McLean's reference to Lonergan comes from Lonergan's *Method in Theology*, 11.

²⁰ McLean, *Plenitude and Participation*, 12. This unifying principle underlying all transformations is an extension of Piaget's critique of Levi-Strauss' structuralism, in which Piaget maintains that the transformations require a personal subject that can open itself to being progressively decentered in order to go beyond any contrary or concept through the series of transformations. McLean is referring here to Jean Piaget's *Structuralism*, trans. and ed. Chaninah Maschler (New York, Harper and Row, 1971), 139-141.

exploration. That process begins with the basic, yet critical reality of the family. In the family the search for meaning and understanding has its roots through inherited wisdom, and subsequently unfolds into broader human relationships. To link the above observations with this search for an underlying principle of unity I quote McLean at some length.

For that fundamental and foundational meaning we must look to this existential process, to the life of the family in its simplest human contexts of tribe and clan. Remaining unthought, it is the principle of all beings and meanings.

Further, the search for this principle must inquire without imposing delimiting categories. Hence our questions must not concern individual realizations, for this ‘unthought’ is never adequately expressed in any individual life or any combinations thereof. Instead our questions must concern the conditions of possibility for concrete life as lived within the unity of a tribe, indeed of any and all tribes. This exceeds even the diachronous succession of generations, while being pointed to by those concrete tribal lives as the non-thematized condition of their possibility.²¹

Here we see an important element of McLean’s thought that proves useful for theology to assist guiding a person or culture to a receptive freedom capable of confidently engaging the faith dynamic. In order to avoid the limitations imposed by categorization, McLean brings his analysis to bear not on any specific individual, family or tribe, but to the conditions of possibility for such a concrete life within the unity of the tribe itself. As one looks to the conditions of possibility, the indicators reappear pointing to subsistent being, uncategorized and non-delimited, as the basis and principle of unity at the heart of all reality. The totem, then, is the symbolic expression for one tribe to ground its search for meaning in that principle of unity, which is the basis of all totemic

²¹ McLean, *Plenitude and Participation*, 13. The same quote appears in *Ways to God*, 87, but without the word, “non-thematized,” found in the final sentence as it appears here in *Plenitude and Participation*. The later addition of the word may have been made to emphasize the non-categorical, non-delimiting character of the principle of unity, but it also may be McLean’s attempt to link it to Rahner’s insights regarding “non-thematized.” When McLean speaks of the “unthought” never being adequately expressed in any individual life, he is speaking of general human existence. The exception to this, of course, would be the divine/human existence of Jesus Christ, whose universality in particularity, both mystery and scandal, makes his existence a sort of totem of all totems, a notion to which I shall return later.

expressions and which clarifies for the tribe its sense of identity in the world. McLean later applies this questioning of the conditions of possibility for concrete life to his understanding of cultures, their value-based viewpoints and mechanisms of interpretation. In its own role, theology can engage these conditions of possibility to make clarifications and distinctions, but even more importantly, to prove itself a trusted guide that honors the full range of people's identity and experience as they come to know God.

This brief look at the principle of unity behind the totem gives us some insights that will serve us well in the chapters ahead. There exists a pre-cognitive relationship with this principle of unity, which we affirm to be the personal God, though that relationship and the being of God may not always be acknowledged. Individuals, tribes, or cultures sharpen their identity in relation to this unity, something that grounds their search for meaning. This relationship makes up a critical part of the background landscape for any encounter, coloring the possibilities of intersubjective communication. It influences how one perceives reality, and thus how one hears and responds to God's revealing word in experience, leading to conversion and freedom. The undefined unity at the foundation of reality as perceived in the totem invites each person, family, tribe or culture to a fullness of participation, so that meaning may not only be accessed, but also shared.

The Totem's Invitation to Participation. Borrowing from anthropology, McLean affirms that a people's relation to their totem invites them to participate in a reality greater than themselves. My intention here is to gain some insights as to the manner in which this call to participation and transcendence remains always at work in the human heart. Through participation one's identity is affirmed and clarified, zones of meaning are expanded, and a greater sense of freedom comes to be experienced. This background landscape material for any encounter, then, taps into the inherent structure of one's relationship with God. The totem not only grounds one's identity in that relationship, but invites one to enter more deeply into it and to participate more fully in life's extended web of personal relationships.

A vision of unity and participation differs from the analytic vision and methodology received from Descartes, which tends to break things down to component parts in order to analyze and critique them.²² The

²² McLean states the challenge as follows: "On the one hand, the life of people who live together, whether in a tribe or clan, a village or city, or even on a global level, requires an attitude between persons and peoples which is not one of antipathy, for then cooperation would be impossible and murder would reign. Nor can it be one merely of indifference, for then we would starve as

analytic method points out differences, strengths and weaknesses, in order to reach clear and distinct ideas so that the parts can be reassembled with a similar clarity. In the analytic method, things are too often divided and contrasted from one another at the expense of the synthetic understanding of the whole; it has the undesired effect of leading to competition and strife. The principle of unity underlying totemic thought, however, operates from a position of synthesis and harmony, a fullness of existence and meaning offered to each and all members of the tribe for their active participation. The principle of unity allows for a tribe to clarify its own identity as an important and unique expression of a whole, without feeling that it has to be an exhaustive representation of the whole.

The totem formed and defined a tribe's sense of identity, moving the members of the tribe to a freer participation. That participation, in turn, reinforced their sense of identity. For tribal peoples their identity and participation was not understood to be on the functional level, but was considered part of one's existence, "determining both the real significance of the actions he has performed and what he should or should not do."²³ This participation means more than simple relational identification, but a full participation in all that the totem represents.

infants or languish in isolation as adults. Rather there is a need of a way to consider others in a positive manner in order to be able to establish cooperative relations and, where possible, care and concern." McLean, *Ways to God*, 87-88.

²³ McLean, *Plenitude and Participation*, 14. McLean looks to Lévy-Bruhl's studies of African thought found in *How Natives Think*, trans. Lilian A. Clare (New York: Washington Square Press, 1966), which contains this central sense of unity for the peoples of a tribe. Lévy-Bruhl's observations led to his proposal of the concept of collective representation, which provides the basis for the development of positive attitudes between people. The concept involves the whole person. McLean writes that the term "representation" is used intentionally as more general and inclusive than concepts or even cognition; it includes sense as well as intellectual knowledge, affective reactions as well as knowledge, and indeed motor responses as well as knowledge and affectivity." McLean, *Ways to God*, 90. In the totem a tribe found its identifying collective representation that could embrace its entire being, not just a particular aspect of it. McLean notes that this plenitude in the totem went beyond a focal point for meaning of any one person, but was extended to the entire tribe. And this extension was not one of static identity or meaning, but a dynamic one in which each could participate. McLean writes that Lévy-Bruhl's "investigations led him to the totem as that in terms of which these persons saw themselves to be united in accordance with what he terms the law of participation.... The members of the tribes insisted that they quite directly are the totem." McLean, *Plenitude and Participation*, 13. In other words, the members of the tribe are not simply guided by and influenced by the symbol; they are, or become, or participate in that which is symbolized by the totem.

The totem had the people referencing themselves to the unity and harmony of the whole tribe and the tribe's connection with the principle of unity. The relation was seen as dynamic, encompassing all of life, and providing a guiding light for interpretation. At this stage the tribe no longer gave meaning or symbolic representation to the totem, but received that meaning and representation from the totem, from the unthought principle of unity and meaning that stood within the totem. Here McLean sees a move beyond essence or nature to the existential uniqueness (*esse*) of experience through participation in the unthought principle of being. And this participation in the totem called the members of the tribe to express that participation in the world in which they lived. Their participation was one received, coming from their unique identity in the whole. It was a participation shared, contributing to the expression of the unity of all reality. Sharing in that participation strengthened further their sense of identity.

A focus on unity, participation and cooperation changes one's expectations or attentiveness. McLean's investigation of the principle of form and the principle of existence in totemic thought leads to the unthought principle of all beings and meanings. For theology, this reference to totemic experience as part of the background landscape gives a tested, yet fresh look for the construction of a foundation for intersubjective communication, one that would provide a different framework on which to build the narration of faith.²⁴ By referencing God as the unthought principle of all beings, the vision of cooperation and participation develops the attitude of considering others in a positive manner and bears fruit in how one understands oneself as interconnected to many others. So methodological vision built on participation serves not just the examination of an individual faith journey, but serves a people as they attempt to articulate their experience of meaning in contact with God, developing their own particular culture as they do so. Cultural identity suffers in a world dominated by an analytic, fragmented methodology, wherein empirical accuracy maintains the place of highest value.

All this conforms very well with how we understand the Church as the mystical body of Christ, as the Pilgrim People of God. The totem is Christ crucified and risen, who continues to feed us with his body and blood, transforming us into himself and uniting us with the other members of his body. Our identity in him becomes clearer the more we

²⁴ This provides a different approach from the prison of the analytic, empirical, and functional methodology which, as Benedict XVI often affirms, unnecessarily constrains reason's vision. Because this is one of the many challenges facing fundamental theology in its tasks ahead, it proves important for our study. See also Ruggieri, "Il Futuro della Teologia Fondamentale," 268.

give ourselves to participation in the paschal mystery, and how we interpret our experience becomes more related to how we see our life as a dynamic part of the community formed in him. Our meaning comes from our relationship to God through Christ in the Spirit, who creates the unity and harmonizes the whole of it. The totemic approach moves us beyond the strictly analytic, empirical approach to one of unity and synthesis in participation. It also affords us an inroad for introducing the cross of Christ as that reference point of unity, participation and interpretation.

McLean does not go into these theological points but is trying to show that people have an inherent totemic understanding of the world that can be reawakened in them. This strong sense of identity in the principle of unity opens up clear worlds of meaning and frees the symbolic self to engage reality with an immediacy of meaning.²⁵ In the totem the group finds its glue and focus as a community. The immediacy of their knowledge of the reality expressed guides and informs them, not simply in their cognitive lives, but in their total life experience: in their affective, psychological, physical, intellectual, spiritual, and moral lives. This immediacy means the totem is not something they have to think about, intend or infer; it is quite simply the reality of their existential lives. This totemic form of thinking has not been completely lost, but can be tapped to help people come to a greater awareness of a divine, personal presence at the heart of their reality.

At the foundation of the totem, then, lies the experience of the divine expressed in human religious experience. McLean maintains that the totem “expresses the unity and plenitude from which subsequently some will evolve an explicit monotheism, while others will develop theories regarding the development of the physical universe.”²⁶ The

²⁵ In reference to this root principle in which a tribe has its meaning, McLean says that “the totem is for that tribe the fullness or plenitude of reality and meaning in which all live or participate as a community. Due to this symbiosis the primitive’s knowledge of the reality expressed in the totem is immediate, rather than inferential.” McLean, *Plenitude and Participation*, 15.

²⁶ McLean, *Plenitude and Participation*, 18. Whichever way various tribes may have moved in their development, the totem remained the center point of their reality and meaning, their lens for understanding the world around them and their own existence, not simply as individuals but as community in a shared environment with other similar communities. Lived experience of the tribe in community not only referenced itself to the totem for meaning and understanding, but disclosed the hidden presence of the divine. “This presence can be further appreciated if we look, not to the individual alone but the mother-lode of human experience lived intensely in family and clan. There it is commonly found that parents, though quite inarticulate, nonetheless convey to their children a vibrant and concrete, if equally inarticulate, sense of such

totem, then, demonstrates more than simply primitive human experience. At its root is an awareness of a plenitude and unity that invites each to participate as a member of community in its life-giving, meaningful presence. By way of this easy immediacy to the portals of meaning, life-giving values and traditions can take hold, and a distinguishable culture can begin to emerge. The immediacy afforded will also serve in helping people to recognize what McLean refers to as the path home to God, something I shall revisit later. The totem's reference to a tribe's interpretation, search for meaning, and relationship to the divine presence means that it also serves as the seed-bed of a people's development of culture.

McLean concludes his reflections on totemic thought with the characteristics and the implications for a philosophy of the totemic way. It contains the characteristics of unity, religion and an *a posteriori* way.²⁷ Its implications are metaphysical content, a return to the source, and the divine as present to the community. It clarifies identity and opens worlds of meaning. Its characteristics of identity and participation, both from and in the divine unity, stabilize the sense of self to be open to the full richness that any new encounter may offer. McLean's analysis shows that it is indeed possible to take Heidegger's recommendation to take a step back to that which was present in human experience before the objectifying effects of philosophy began to define and delimit the analysis. Whether early peoples developed monotheism or theories of the development of the physical universe, "both will have their roots in the unity which is the totem, but neither will exhaust its potential meaning. More importantly, neither will be completely deprived of the unspoken totemic context of their meaning."²⁸ This

characteristics of existence as unity, truth and goodness." Ibid., 19. McLean's point is to move beyond what a tribe or clan verbally expresses or articulates to the non-verbal awareness that guides and directs at the existential level. He does not directly call this non-verbal awareness religious experience, probably so as not to enter into a semantic exercise that would only end up missing the critical point.

²⁷ See McLean's discussion of the characteristics and implications of the totemic way, where he describes it as similar to classical *a posteriori* paths to God in three ways: "(a) It began from a reality that did actually exist, namely, the successful and progressive life of peoples through the thousands of centuries which constitute almost the entirety of human experience. (b) It sought the principles of this existence, namely, the content of the understanding which made possible their successful human life. (c) It concluded in that totemic unity and fullness in which people had both their being and their unity." McLean, *Ways to God*, 94-101.

²⁸ McLean, *Ways to God*, 98. I do not have time to make detailed comparisons to other references to immediacy in relationship with God, but

unspoken, unarticulated context of meaning can offer philosophy and theology new terrain for fertile reflection. It offers a new door to move beyond the purely empirical, rationally cognitive, to a more holistic appreciation of human experience in a return to metaphysics that can search out and unveil God as the personal divine being present to our reality.

The immediacy that a people experiences in regard to their culture ultimately flows from the immediacy of their relationship with God inside their accumulated experience.²⁹ This look back to totemic thought broadens out our understanding of the background landscape of the intersubjective elements of encounter, especially in relation to the divine presence. The last element to investigate in this background landscape is the dynamic at play in intersubjective communication.

Intersubjective Communication

Having grounded ourselves in different aspects of McLean's thought it now becomes worthwhile to review where we have come from and why all those explanations about symbolic expression and totemic expression are important for the way forward. The objective when I began this section was to map out the background landscape of the intersubjective elements operative in any encounter. The whole purpose of doing this was to construct a framework for understanding the intersubjective communication going on between two or more people as they engage. This allows us to grasp more fully the communication going on beyond the words, or underneath the words, or in spite of the words. All this helps to lay a foundation for an intersubjective communication that is independent of and prior to any narration of faith or theology. Such a background of intersubjective communication proves relevant to activating a dormant relationship with God, who is to be understood not as an abstract concept, but as a personal subject with whom one can nurture a living relationship. This, too, is one of theology's challenges: helping people to recognize that God is personal, and both interested and engaged in their reality.

The depth of this intersubjective communication becomes apparent as one assesses the many dimensions at play in encounter.

Newman on the implicit, Rahner on the un-thematic, and Lonergan on the pre-conceptual, could all serve as examples.

²⁹ Later in the next chapter I shall cover the verbalization of meaning and reality through myths, but it is important to remember that whatever may be gained by way of analysis in the articulation something, something else is also lost in the immediacy, plenitude and participation that the totemic experience offers to our understanding of the dynamics of encounter.

Communication may start with a focus on the other person being encountered, but it extends much further. One ends up communicating with oneself as well, and with the unseen God, who, as we have noted, is always there in the background, if not in the very foreground, of encounter. Empirical data do not suffice for getting to the roots of intersubjective communication, but encounter demands it. One's own subjective self gets put to the test when confronted with another's values, defects, experience and worlds of meaning.³⁰ One's horizon, self-understanding, and very identity are put to the test in encounter, and that test is essential to develop and modify the way of interpreting and owning one's history. It is the intra- (communication within the self) and inter- (communication with the other person) subjective communication that occurs in encounter that offers the testing needed for growth and development. Encounter, then, provides the critical terrain for conversion so essential to faith. The real fruit of transformation comes from what I would name the Inter- (use of a capital "I" to designate the presence and communication of God) subjective communication with God. God, as the ever-present third party in any encounter, allows the other two parties to transcend their own values and horizons and systems of interpretation in order to reach a value-adjustment which otherwise would not have been possible. As we shall see in later, McLean sees such a means of ongoing value adjustment as critical for growth in freedom, development of culture, and cooperation between cultures.

It is no accident that in his later years of work McLean's primary means of philosophical reflection was by way of interactive seminars. The seminar approach provides each participant to put his or her self-understanding and horizon to the test in an encounter with other thinkers. It creates a laboratory of human intersubjectivity where meaning can be easily explored, not simply through rational discourse, but in the communication and sharing of feelings as the values of each are put to the test. McLean prefers the group seminar approach because

³⁰ Encounter tests one's horizon and identity. Lonergan confirms this as well; after he has discussed his functional specialties, he admits that restricting ourselves to these would leave theology incomplete. The functional specialties of research, interpretation and history "make the data available, they clarify what was meant, they narrate what occurred. Encounter is more. It is meeting persons, appreciating the values they represent, criticizing their defects, and allowing one's living to be challenged at its roots by their words and by their deeds. Moreover, such an encounter is not just an optional addition to interpretation and to history. Interpretation depends on one's self-understanding; the history one writes depends on one's horizon; and encounter is the one way in which self-understanding and horizon can be put to the test." Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 247.

it proves to be easier for participants to transcend their horizons of meaning and value systems as they explore these together with others. This gives space for God to move them to a place that goes beyond what any cumulative or consensual process would allow. But it also affords McLean, facilitator though he may be, to learn and to shift his values into new perspectives as the communication unfolds and new insights are revealed.

The map of the way ahead now becomes clearer. The study will be one of moving from encounter, to digesting reality and undergoing a conversion of our value systems, with a broadening of horizons for a new witness in future encounters. The dynamics of this process may look simple in such an outline sketch, but the complexity of the details as a person comes to terms with reality, themselves, and others, while attempting to grow in freedom and acknowledgement of God, is anything but simple. Benedict XVI often references encounter as the primary element in any person's faith journey: "Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction."³¹ Encounter plays an important theological role not just in coming to the faith, but in ongoing conversion and growth in freedom as well. These dynamics of communication that come into play during an encounter, combined with what we learned from our discussions of symbolic engagement and from stepping back to totemic experience, frame out a background landscape of the intersubjective elements of encounter. Unfortunately, there are some philosophical developments that have the potential of creating attitudinal blocks to an open, intersubjective encounter.

SOME PHILOSOPHICAL IMPEDIMENTS TO FULL ENCOUNTER

My objective in this section is to point out a few of today's impediments that inhibit our experiencing the full fruits available to us in encounter. The thought of our present age has been termed postmodern, commonly referring to that period after the certitude and confidence of modernity had all but spent itself after two world wars. McLean, though he does not avoid the term postmodern, would prefer to say that we are still in the end of the era of modernity, where the influence of modernity's thought still holds sway, even as its weaknesses are exposed and its systems of thought deconstructed. One thing for certain is that the human person faces a multitude of challenges

³¹ Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2006), #1.

on the philosophical and societal levels, making a healthily engaged faith life a daunting task. As John Paul II observed, within some of these postmodern currents of thought that destructively critique every certitude, “several authors have failed to make crucial distinctions and have called into question the certitudes of faith.”³² The attitude that predominates in these currents of thought is that there is no ultimate meaning to life and that life holds no certainties for us. With such an attitude it is easy to see how faith comes to be taken as a weak crutch to escape the horizon of meaninglessness, which is considered to be the true horizon, since all is fleeting and provisional. Those who hold to this point of view are often guided by a negativity that strives to deconstruct and critique other people’s worlds of meaning as naïve and without substance. These authors, however, have been captured by a form of thought that is itself truncated and myopic, lacking crucial distinctions that would otherwise save their systems from denigrating the full dignity of the human person.

McLean’s experience working in more Marxist philosophical zones of Eastern Europe and China has had him face the challenges from systems of thought that did not rely on any explicit faith-based reality. McLean’s experience with Islamic thought, along with his grounding in predominantly western philosophical developments, also gives him certain keen insights into those points that can act as impediments to the faith or could inhibit the development of an attitude of being more open to the faith. Productive communication in an encounter can be cut off by consequences from underlying systems of thought, even before it has begun. These consequences or attitudes stem from the shift in emphasis of relationship from the intersubjective to the more functional, the general sense of a loss of meaning, and a more diminished sense of human freedom. As such, I shall divide the following reflections into those three categories: a) shift from intersubjective to functional; b) loss of meaning; and c) diminished human freedom.

Shift from Intersubjective to Functional

McLean begins tracing these developments back to the early Enlightenment period, especially to the influential figure of René Descartes, whose meditations were intended to offer a balanced, unified approach to the doubts of his time regarding human knowing. The method and the process of his unified science ended up taking precedence over Descartes’ original intention of the unity of natures and

³² John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, # 91.

the complementary synthesis of the various levels of knowledge.³³ A raw sort of functionality results with a shift towards empiricism, thus stripping the person of the spiritual and imaginative components that were its distinguishing characteristics. As communication gets reduced to a functional detailing of facts rather than an exploratory sharing of imaginations, then the intersubjective elements slowly become numbed into a state of atrophy. Human horizons become more limited and the way we see ourselves gets reduced to a sort of functional organism. The subtle dynamics of intersubjective sharing colored with symbolic references become overshadowed by a functional exchange of data. Once this mode of thinking becomes predominant, one begins to view God in a more utilitarian sense. Theologically, this poses many challenges, for God comes to be understood less as a personal agent who intervenes and more as a tool to be wielded, not simply as a ‘God-of-the-gaps,’ but even more perilously as an instrument of one’s demands. If God does not respond to these selfish instrumental demands, then the temptation to consider God as either irrelevant or non-existent grows.

This cannot happen if one remains attuned to the symbolic and complex intersubjective dimension at play in encounter. Going back to the short excerpt from the Gospel of John at the beginning of the chapter, nothing looks unusual or even interesting on a functional level.

³³ Descartes divided the aspects of human knowing into the intellect, internal senses, and external senses. McLean observes that philosophy ended up focusing in on Descartes’ first meditation, thus expending the bulk of its energy on the intellect, while neglecting the recertification of knowledge from the internal and external senses. The shift in emphasis that ensued placed false limitations on human complexity and possibility. As McLean writes, “The unified science which Descartes sought to elaborate is no longer his rationally elaborate unity of natures, but the process itself of collaboration between scientists. The endeavor itself and its method supplant its object in importance. From the above it becomes manifest that the development of the Enlightenment, both in its Hobbesian content with regard to the nature of man and his social dynamics and to its Lockean epistemology, was an inversion of human outlook.” George McLean, *Peoples, Persons, and Cultures: Living Together in a Global Age*, vol. 29 of Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change, Series I: Culture and Values (Washington, DC: The Council for Research and Values in Philosophy, 2004), 15. It would be tempting at this point to go off on a tangent to examine how other thinkers, most notably Charles Taylor in his *The Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989) and *A Secular Age*, would trace these developments of thinking and attitude that have resulted in a more functional form of communicating that can block out the richness encounter has to offer. Unfortunately, we have to be satisfied with a cursory overview of McLean’s outline of contributing philosophical factors.

A man, Jesus, is sitting by a well and requests a drink from a woman who has come with her bucket to draw from the well. But with symbolic and intersubjective awareness, we realize that there are many dimensions at play in this encounter: the time of day, cultural and religious differences, gender assumptions, etc.

This theologically dangerous, functional trajectory after Descartes strengthened philosophy in empirical analysis, but left it a bit blind to intersubjective dynamics.³⁴ Once a society begins to focus exclusively on instrumental action and production the notion of the human person slowly deteriorates to just another instrument, rather than a personal, unique and free subject. Institutions begin to take on a role of suppression for the sake of the goals of efficient production. The attitude that grows from a dominant instrumentality dampens attentiveness to symbolic interaction and leads to a lessening of interpersonal engagement through subjective sharing. Opinions are still held and shared, but these are considered in light of a functional, economic instrumentality, not in terms of the flourishing of the human person in freedom.

Loss of Meaning

This focus on functional instrumentality also contributes to our second major area of impediment to full encounter: the diminishment of the horizons of the worlds of meaning, both personally and societally. This has happened to such an extent that the Magisterium has lamented the diminished role of philosophy. The rise of various forms of rationalism has had the effect of moving the universal wisdom of philosophy to the periphery of academic pursuits. “These forms of rationality are directed not towards the contemplation of truth and the search for the ultimate goal and meaning of life; but instead, as ‘instrumental reason’, they are directed – actually or potentially – towards the promotion of utilitarian ends, towards enjoyment or power.”³⁵ Once meaning, truth and the ultimate goals of life fall from

³⁴ In McLean’s analysis of Marxist philosophy he alludes to Marx’s early consideration of two primary levels of reality: production or instrumental action and social interaction. The former took over in his thought, resulting in dire consequences for intersubjective communication. See McLean’s discussion in *Hermeneutics, Faith and Relations between Cultures: Lectures in Qom, Iran*, vol. 17 of Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change, Series IIA: Islam (Washington: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2003), 69. The challenge here is not simply isolated to those communist countries that openly adopted a Marxist philosophical approach in their society, but to the consequences of reduced social interaction that spread around the globe.

³⁵ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, # 47.

the list of important items for reflection, discussion of them among people diminishes and the energy of institutions gets redirected to other zones. The intersubjective communication that traditionally revolved around the shaping and evaluation of values, value systems and cultures loses its emphasis, and the search for these more universal elements of wisdom comes to be replaced by a utilitarian mindset. Encounter, in turn, loses its mystery as a place to put our values and identity to the test, becoming, instead, a functional moment to lead us to entertainment or on a quest for power.

McLean takes the developments around this emphasis on instrumental action over communicative action yet another step further. He observes that the motive of production that Marx would have referred to as surplus value has slowly shifted. Now the motive and key to production is the system of technology. McLean calls this system of technology "...the ideology of our day. As a result the distinction between communicative action and instrumental action has been overridden and control no longer can be expected from communicative action."³⁶ If the distinction between the two has disappeared and instrumental action has become the controlling goal, then encounter comes to be relegated to the place of just another means to serve this dominant ideology.

With God so removed from the picture or reduced to an old tool of instrumental action that has now lost its usefulness, then the meaning the human person craves from interpersonal, transcendental relationships evaporates. The illusion of compassionate concern is still fostered as a goodwill gesture, but that concern is not for the human being to be free and flourishing, searching for meaning, wisdom and truth. Instead the primary concern rests in maintaining the human being as a productive, contributing unit to the system of technology and economic improvement. The subjects involved in encounter may suspect they are being shortchanged, but before they are able to recognize the slow erosion of their human value system, they usually find themselves adopting the mindset of the technological system they have been coaxed into serving. Reduced to a role of functional service the human person slowly suffers from the degradation of his or her full dignity, especially in the spiritual dimension that yearns for a meaningful, living relationship with God.

Diminished Human Freedom

All of this leads us to what I call the third major impediment to full encounter, namely, the loss or distortion of human freedom. If

³⁶ McLean, *Hermeneutics, Faith and Relations between Cultures*, 80.

communicative action loses control and finds itself subsumed into the instrumental action of utility, if meaning from a personal relationship with a loving God has been replaced with material progress for the mass of humanity, then the next question that comes to the fore is the notion of human freedom that results from such a system. Here McLean pushes the consequences of the limited mindset of utility to a frightening conclusion. The idea of freedom generally adopted in the technological value system would be the one set forth by the English philosopher John Stuart Mill, which, in McLean's mind, would belong to the lowest level of freedom pertaining to basic autonomy. In it the utilitarian ethical theory evolves into a consumerism where the dignity of the human person becomes lost.³⁷

The notion of freedom becomes another name for a sort of narcissistic black-hole. The human person, on the levels of nature and existence, is extinguished under the machine of consumerism. Encounter is reduced to serving one's selfish desires of consumption. People can assist by helping to serve these desires, but if their own pattern of consumption conflicts with one's own, then a destructive power struggle ensues. As McLean writes, "In the competition for means there can be no peace; social, commercial and political life all become fields of war 'by another name'."³⁸ The danger is exacerbated by the fact that the interpersonal skills of communicative action are no longer as readily available to help resolve the conflicts through a productive encounter of dialogue. Power and superior technology become the deciding factors in any resolution, while the human person and the horizons of meaning are slowly devoured by the violence. This distorted form of human freedom, merely doing what one desires, becomes based upon how to prevail by means of violence in what is perceived as a hostile world. The result is that God, the primary subject in the background of every human encounter, can no longer even be considered relevant, if acknowledged as existing at all.

Such a world of utilitarian means easily leads to pockets of resistance developing in reaction to the felt loss of human freedom and to the threats against long-standing cultural value systems. But these pockets of resistance often react in a destructive manner, resulting in further conflict. McLean sees these reactions occurring, and laments

³⁷ See McLean's discussion in *Persons, Peoples and Cultures*, 121. I shall look more closely at McLean's various levels of freedom later.

³⁸ McLean, *Persons, Peoples and Cultures*, 13.

them as the other side of the same coin of fundamentalism: one side secular, the other religious.³⁹

The sides have become so entrenched in their principles that they can hardly comprehend the thinking or underlying value system of the other. Even if they do attempt to grasp the value system of the other, it may not be for the end of mutual understanding and dialogue, but so that they might predict the other's next move in order to stay ahead of them in the power struggle. In the struggle of two diametrically opposed fundamentalisms all the richness of meaning and communication available in encounter becomes in danger of disappearing. With intersubjective communication gone, human freedom reduced, and a utilitarian system of power and control dominating interaction, encounter becomes reduced to another notion of conflict.

This chapter opened with a discussion of the richness of content available to participating subjects in encounter. I looked at the importance of symbolic communication, and tried to show that at the base of all symbolic communication is that intimate relation to and communication with the divine. Intersubjective communication was shown to be critical in truly accessing the treasures available in encounter. But this section has shown that the subjects of any encounter can bring mindsets so negatively influenced that ultimately they act as impediments to a true engagement, and can even transform it into conflict.

From the limited rational trajectories that followed Descartes' more unified vision, a certain utilitarian, functional understanding of the world and the human person has developed that threatens human freedom, meaning, and peaceful coexistence. To counteract this trend McLean recommends discovering new sensibilities which can be specifically related "to the new awareness of culture and its implications for the task of evangelization as that of liberation of mankind in the deepest and fullest sense."⁴⁰ A functional mindset resulting from the development of a technological system to serve our material needs cannot replace the rich sensibilities and worlds of meaning contained in our cultures without dire risk to the nature and freedom of the human person. Culture, properly understood, serves as a critical element in the background of every encounter which can break through the

³⁹ See McLean's discussion on these two predominant fundamentalisms in *Persons, Peoples, and Cultures*, 24. These two fundamentalisms can be perceived in the various wars and political conflicts active in today's world.

⁴⁰ George McLean, *Religion and Cooperation between Civilizations*, vol. 21 of *Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change*, Series I: Culture and Values (Washington, DC: The Council for Research and Values in Philosophy, 2000), 101.

impediments to intersubjective communication when properly respected.

CULTURE: KEY TO PHILOSOPHICAL AND THEOLOGICAL ENQUIRY OF ENCOUNTER

Impediments to a full understanding of the dynamics of encounter can easily creep into one's mindset by the way of attitudes or worldviews that unknowingly limit the full scope of the human person. Rather than being a preventative or check on such attitudes, philosophy can at times be the cause of their development. This does not happen intentionally, but by way of a particular systemic focus that neglects, to greater or lesser extent, elements of the whole that always need consideration. "In effect, every philosophical *system*, while it should always be respected in its wholeness, without any instrumentalization, must still recognize the primacy of philosophical *enquiry*, from which it stems and which it ought loyally to serve."⁴¹ The investigation of totemic thought provided the opportunity to step back to elements of encounter before philosophical systems had begun their delimiting process in the hope of finding untapped treasures. In this section I shall look at the importance of keeping foremost in our minds, not a particular philosophical system, but the discipline of enquiry itself. Culture serves as the key to this philosophical enquiry for McLean and can offer new possibilities for theological enquiry. Attention to enquiry keeps prominent the deeper questions of life, questions that culture endeavors to address as integral to the daily immersion in our environment. I divide this reflection into two parts: a) from system to enquiry; and b) culture as key to enquiry.

From System to Enquiry

As I begin this overview it is helpful to call to mind what we covered in the preceding section regarding the shift to a more instrumental, functional mindset, which was the result of the slow development of a philosophical system that unwittingly imposed constraints on the full application of reason. McLean's intention in his philosophical work is to recover some of what was overlooked by the Enlightenment trajectory in philosophy that led to this more instrumental mindset. Descartes was trying to move beyond any doubts to a field of certainty for the mind by clearing away the ways of knowing and reintroducing them on a clear basis. Although he affirms the positive contributions of Descartes and Kant to the understanding of

⁴¹ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, # 4.

the human person, McLean observes that through the abstractive processes adopted from the time of Descartes, “human reason omitted existence, person, freedom, culture and creativity.”⁴² McLean has devoted most of his life trying to make up for these long-standing omissions that have characterized much of modern philosophy. Descartes’ process was to accept the data from the senses that was mathematically certain, yet only to the degree that it proved useful. The rest of the data from experience was given less importance, if taken into consideration at all. Kant took this even further to insist that all real knowledge must be limited to what we can perceive through our senses. The system adopted by philosophy demanded these delimiting processes in order to be considered valuable enough to qualify as making a valid contribution to the discipline itself. Limitations were placed on enquiry according to the systemic filter of being able to be quantified and measured. The probing questions coming from human experience, regarding meaning, freedom, culture, etc., were considered secondary, rather than given their rightful place as primary.

Like McLean, Ratzinger, even while recognizing the positive contributions of philosophy’s focus on certainty, has lamented this narrowing of human reason and how it has constrained philosophical enquiry. The consequences of this self-limiting methodology, which “no longer offers any perspective on the fundamental questions of mankind,”⁴³ have extended far beyond the discipline of philosophy. The general mindsets of people, especially in the developed countries where a more secular outlook on life has taken root, have been influenced by this systemic methodology. Faith and theology have suffered in the wake of these philosophical developments. Ratzinger writes: “Faith cannot be set free unless reason itself opens up again. If the door to metaphysical knowledge remains barred, if we cannot pass beyond the limits to human perception set by Kant, then faith will necessarily

⁴² McLean, *Ways to God*, 266. For an example of McLean’s reference to the important contributions made by Descartes and Kant see his Chapter One, “The Modern Construction of the Person,” in *Beyond Modernity: The Recovery of Person and Community in Global Times – Lectures in China and Vietnam*, vol. 37 of Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change, Series I: Culture and Values (Washington, DC: The Council for Research and Values in Philosophy, 2001), 11-14, 25-34 McLean always tend to note the positive contribution of any writer so that he can build upon it. Recovering what was overlooked by the instrumental Enlightenment mindset does not belong to McLean alone. Blondel worked on this early last century; Charles Taylor and Benedict XVI are two prominent figures who continue this effort today.

⁴³ Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, 143.

atrophy, simply for lack of breathing space.”⁴⁴ This gives us a good image with which to work: faith lacks breathing space and is in danger of suffocating unless reason can open up again. McLean sees culture as the key to opening up philosophical enquiry, to giving more breathing space to faith. The deeper questions of human meaning and freedom are addressed in the wisdom carried by culture through its traditions and heritage. McLean’s combination of sound metaphysics and attention to culture, then, offer theology breathing space so that faith not atrophy.

Faith can only be set free if reason can open up to give *breathing space to the imagination*. In most of philosophy, however, the impression slowly took hold that the human mind formulates the answers to these more probing questions based on the delimited, quantifiable and measureable data. McLean would maintain that this resulted in leaving us with the illusion that we were broadening our imagination, freedom and creativity, when we had actually confined them to a certain zone. The subject’s imagination may remain autonomous, active and creative, but it is also confined to the concepts or categories that narrow or limit its work. Because of this, the imagination remains essentially constrained, the person’s thought processes confined by pre-determined categories.⁴⁵

Enquiry runs out of places to go and philosophy has to develop more elaborate and efficient systems of utopian order to obtain clear answers to the pertinent questions that can be addressed in such a system. The imagination, then, ends up having to serve the system of the defined science, rather than the science’s stimulating the imagination’s consideration of ever broader horizons.

The broader, more radical questions of existence, rather than of system, are more critical for understanding the human person when attempting to unfold the dynamics occurring in any encounter. Systems tend to limit the questions that can be raised, while encounter offers an

⁴⁴ Ibid., 135. Slowly I have been developing how McLean is attempting to make his own contribution to opening up reason by his “stepping back” to get out of the restrictions of a closed system. In the next chapter I shall take a closer look at how McLean has held fast to metaphysics, even when it was no longer very popular in philosophy to do so.

⁴⁵ McLean writes the following about the constriction of the scientific imagination in Kant’s writings: “In sum, in the first “Critique” it is the task of the reproductive imagination to bring together the multiple elements of sense intuition in some unity or order capable of being informed by a concept or category of the intellect with a view to making a judgment. On the part of the subject, the imagination here is active, authentically one’s own and creative. Ultimately, however, its work is not free, but necessitated by the categories or concepts as integral to the work of the sciences which are characterized by necessity and universality.” McLean, *Ways to God*, 111.

almost limitless storehouse of data for enquiry. Systems also tend to avoid the deeper questions that do not allow for systematized, definitive answers. John Paul II alluded to this when he remarked that modern philosophy, while it “has succeeded in coming closer to the reality of human life and its forms of expression, it has also tended to pursue issues – existential, hermeneutical or linguistic – which ignore the radical question of the truth about personal existence, about being and about God.”⁴⁶ The radical questions about existence, being and God do not lend themselves as readily to an analytic system based on clear and definitive data. The certainty desired by modern philosophical systems has helped in gaining an accuracy of understanding about the more measureable aspects of reality. The cost, however, has been reduced insight into the more mysterious, less measureable, and arguably more profound questions of reality. Establishing a renewed philosophical enquiry into these deeper questions of reality that come to the foreground in encounter has been one of McLean’s specific aims.

McLean’s philosophical enquiry offers a model that extends beyond the pre-determined boundaries of confined systems. Theology, too, can adopt enquiry into encounter as its own model in order to explore more deeply the dynamics operative in the human heart coming to faith. For that faith to be set free, human reason has to open itself beyond systemic restrictions to the zone of enquiry, where the religious dimensions of human good and meaning reside.⁴⁷ And that enquiry can only be effective if the imagination is allowed to explore the deeper, less empirical elements of reality. The intention is to open new theological trajectories, not from an elaborate philosophical system, but from a measured enquiry into encounter, into reality, and into the dynamics at play in the hearts and minds of people as they try to find their way home to God. Since effective enquiry depends on the imagination’s ability to explore freely and culture embodies the ongoing expressions of a people’s imagination, culture can be considered the key to both philosophical and theological enquiry.

⁴⁶ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, # 5.

⁴⁷ I shall refer to the transcendental method used by Lonergan to place into perspective McLean’s insights for our enquiry as we try to get to the roots of the religious dimension to examine how human good and meaning are put to the test. Lonergan himself described the need for such an enquiry when he wrote that “to advance from transcendental to theological method, it is necessary to add a consideration of religion. And before we can speak of religion, we first must say something about the human good and human meaning.” Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 25.

Culture as Key to Enquiry

The study of culture has a central role for enquiry into the dynamics of encounter and for the growth of freedom necessary for a living faith commitment. Here I want to consider culture as the carrier of learned wisdom of a people, their experience of crisis and celebration, of suffering and recovery, of meaning and freedom. As such, culture acts as the environment that develops and orients the imagination, either freeing it up or locking it down.⁴⁸ One's full context, especially the full influence of culture on personal and communal understanding and interpretation, must be considered in order to make an adequate theological enquiry to a living relationship with God. Encounter provides a glimpse at the human response to the good and the true, the earthly and the heavenly, the human and divine. A personal response to the good does not come from a theory within one's head, nor is it a tally of past choices.⁴⁹ Instead, the personal response operates

⁴⁸ The exploration of culture and the imagination will unfold throughout the thesis. Here my focus is on culture as a key to enquiry; good enquiry needs an active imagination and freedom from undue constrictions, systemic or otherwise. Though McLean does not state it explicitly, from his insights I do want to make an explicit link between culture, freedom and the imagination. One can see characteristics of this link in Ricoeur's hermeneutics. See Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, trans. and ed. John B. Thompson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981) and Paul Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*, ed. Don Ihde (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1974), especially in his culminating reflections in Part V: "Religion and Faith." See also: Taylor's discussions of modernity's cultural influences on freedom and the imagination in *The Sources of the Self, A Secular Age*, and *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991); William Lynch's many reflections on the importance of the imagination for faith in *Images of Faith: An Exploration of the Ironic Imagination* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1973), *Images of Hope: Imagination as Healer of the Hopeless* (Baltimore, MD: Helicon Press, 1965), *Christ and Apollo: The Dimensions of the Literary Imagination* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), and *Christ and Prometheus: A New Image of the Secular* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1972); and finally, Gerald Bednar's *Faith as Imagination: The Contribution of William F. Lynch, SJ* (Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1996). Culture, freedom and imagination, along with a solid metaphysics, are the key elements in reason's widening its scope to give breathing space so that faith can flourish.

⁴⁹ Here I want to stress what could be called the wisdom of experience, rather than the simple data of experience. As McLean writes: "What is important here is to protect the concrete and unique reality of human life – its novelty and hence the historicity of one's encounter with others. As our

on many levels, some conscious, some not so conscious. By referencing culture, McLean tries to protect these various levels and the many dimensions of the human person's history of encountering reality. The full experience of the person remains active in his or her ongoing encounters, even if no specific description of a particular experience by the person remains possible. This has led McLean to consider culture as the key to the philosophical enquiry of encounter, and why I want to embrace culture as a theological key in this study. One's experience of any encounter always happens from one's cultural perspective and mindset, even when it finds itself dislocated in another cultural setting.

Culture entails many ingredients and has been defined in various ways. I shall not go into various definitions here, but instead will build on the various dimensions of culture to which McLean refers as the study unfolds. Culture carries with it the experience and wisdom of a tribe or group of people. Every person carries his or her culture and worldview to daily encounter, building the treasure chest of personal experience. That experience of the person includes all of one's life history, even from before one's birth. Personal growth and discovery can happen when one is at peace in an environment that is familiar and one is able to share life experiences with others. From before birth we are attuned to the rhythms, emotional and physical, of our mothers.⁵⁰ From them we learn the first modes of interpretation and understanding, of sharing and responding, of searching and participating. The manner in which we view and interpret the world has its origin in the *collective character of our family* initially, and later broadens out to the wider community and culture. But since family is immersed in culture, our first experience of culture begins there. Peacefulness to grow and discover begins with family and moves into a shared sense of belonging that lays the foundation of our human freedom. Our own personal experience gets measured against the wisdom collected from the

response to the good is made only in concrete circumstances, the general principles of ethics as a philosophic science must be neither pure theoretical knowledge nor a simple historical accounting from the past." McLean, *Hermeneutics, Tradition and Contemporary Change*, 10.

⁵⁰ In his discussions on the origins of culture in community, McLean begins with Clifford Geertz's understanding of culture as consisting of a people's world of meaning and how their intentional actions worked to shape their world. McLean then cites John Caputo's references to phenomenological experiences beginning in the womb of one's mother and developing first within the family unit. That early family experience sets the initial context for being at peace, and the conditions for growth and discovery later in life. See McLean's discussions in: *Hermeneutics, Faith and Relations between Cultures*, 43; *Persons, Peoples and Cultures*, 153; and *Hermeneutics, Tradition and Contemporary Change*, 4-5.

experience of our family and culture as we engage in life. This is not always a conscious reflection, but it is always there in the background of our encounters contributing to the sense and meaning of our world.

Our family grows and lives within the wider culture that shapes us and helps us to understand what it means to be human. McLean believes that the growth in freedom of a person demands attention to its culture with its traditions. The grounds upon which a tribe or nation develops its public identity have to be examined, along with the manner in which it engages another people as it moves into the future, in order to understand the liberation of the human person. This liberation or freedom of the person and the dynamics of its growth are critical, since it is only in a state of freedom that the person can make the act of faith and become a believer. With respect to this freedom, McLean specifically calls attention to three issues: “1) the nature of values, culture and tradition; 2) the moral authority of this cultural tradition and its values for guiding our life; and 3) the active role of every generation in creatively shaping and developing tradition in response to the challenges of its times.”⁵¹ In laying the groundwork for the challenges ahead I will not be developing the above three areas one at a time, as a sort of checklist to reach a level of adequate freedom. Instead, my focus will be to examine the *dynamics that are influenced by culture* and come into play as a person engages another in encounter, deals with that reality, reflects upon it and makes any necessary adjustments to change one’s response by recognizing a truer, freer, more fulfilling path. McLean’s three issues will be examined in the context of this personal dynamic. One’s culture and its tradition are prerequisites for growth in freedom, just as they also depend on free subjects to shape them creatively in each new age.

Philosophy provides the natural platform for examining culture since the two have a reciprocal or symbiotic relationship with one another. That relationship allows philosophy to look at any culture with the critical eyes of its science, not from just within the culture itself. As John Paul II observed, “Every people has its own native and seminal wisdom which, as a true cultural treasure, tends to find voice and develop in forms which are genuinely philosophical.”⁵² The two mesh easily with one another because they both probe the depths of human existence: philosophy as an analytic science, and culture as a living body of traditions and values that express a people’s learned wisdom. McLean uses that science to discover certain dynamisms alive in culture that have yet to be fully respected for their richness and their importance for a peaceful and productive encounter with others. Truly respecting

⁵¹ McLean, *Religion and Cooperation between Civilizations*, 105.

⁵² John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, # 3.

the culture and values of others is essential for any dialogue to be fruitful, for not doing so would be akin to failing to respect their very identity. Learning from McLean's discoveries can give theology the insights to better understand how God both respects and uses our culture to communicate effectively his Word to us. For McLean, culture cannot be understood as some sort of external adornment, but must be seen as the very life of the people.⁵³ Denying or not respecting that culture would be the same as denying the very life and existence of the people whose it is. It would be to deny that people their identity. Any such denial or shortchanging of a people's existence and identity in an encounter would understandably end fruitful dialogue before it could even begin.

This insight that culture is life itself and the *identity of a people* reminds us of what we learned from our brief look at totemic experience and changes the way of approach we might use to penetrate the richness of a culture. Generally culture has been seen as an identifying trait or characteristic, which always meant that it was studied as a sort of object. But McLean's insight necessarily changes the mode of approach that must be adopted. It must be studied, not as an object, but as one would another subject, another person whose identity, uniqueness and freedom need to be respected. He calls cultural tradition "a rich and flowing river from which multiple themes can be drawn according to the motivation and interest of the inquirer. It needs to be accepted and embraced, affirmed and cultivated. Here the emphasis is neither upon the past or the present, but upon a people living through time."⁵⁴ In this study, then,

⁵³ In order to get a glimpse at how McLean uses philosophy to better understand culture it is worth looking at a short passage of his where he discusses Husserl's early phenomenological contribution. Husserl was probing human relations to get to the root of true consciousness. I pick up the passage after McLean has observed that Husserl is in danger of entering a hall of mirrors and becoming trapped in a sort of idealism: "The integral complex of these conscious relations is what constitutes the pattern of a culture, in terms of which in turn life is encountered, interpreted and responded to. In the past culture was not seen as life, but rather as an outer garment by which life was adorned. It was as it were an afterthought, of varying degrees of value perhaps, but more an adornment than life itself. Husserl enables us to see that cultures are the forms of the life world of which we are part. Yet they remain for him additions, as it were, forming and structuring life, but not being life itself." McLean, *Hermeneutics, Faith and Relations between Cultures*, 30-31. This passage is important because it shows the dramatic manner in which McLean views culture and its importance to any human experience. Husserl's position grants to culture the form of a people's life together but does not go far enough for McLean.

⁵⁴ McLean, *Religion and Cooperation between Civilizations*, 147.

I shall not treat culture as if it were an object to be studied or a type of clothing that a people puts on or wears. Culture cannot be analyzed and classified, then labeled, categorized and put on a shelf like a specimen, once unknown but now known and understood. My approach will be to take McLean's insight that *culture is a subject, a people living through time, and therefore it must be engaged like any other subject*. Encounter, dialogue and intersubjective communication are involved with any culture, just as they are with any person, so McLean's hermeneutics shall prove an indispensable tool for the task ahead. For in any encounter with another, we also find ourselves encountering internally the subject of our own culture and, as we have mentioned previously, God is also there waiting to be brought into the foreground of the encounter.

The manner in which culture is understood proves important for establishing the right conditions for a fruitful dialogue between cultures, where the ultimate aim is not simply to understand or tolerate the other, but to grow in knowledge of the truth and in human freedom. *Freedom* is essential for an acknowledgement and engagement with the living God. This freedom is not just for the individual person but for the wider community and its culture, and it is tested through encounters with other people and other cultures. The following passage regarding the encounter of cultures demonstrates McLean's understanding of the being or ontology of culture and reflects his emphasis on culture as a vehicle of human freedom and as a subject to be engaged, rather than an object to be studied. Since both the understanding of freedom and culture are so central to this thesis, I quote him at some length.

This is important for cultures as the products and bearers of human freedom in all of its uniqueness. One is simply not the same as the other in any part. Yet in the midst of the differences the two are somewhat the same in that each is a relation of its unique existence to its proper essence or an actuation of essence by its own proportionate existence. They are differentiated from their deepest principles, yet both are somewhat the same as realizations of existence, each in its own way.

When applied to culture as works of human freedom it can be seen that each culture is differentiated from its deepest origin, that is, in the very nature of its arising from human freedom. Their degree of sameness lies in each

culture being a unique way of striving after its own perfection.⁵⁵

Here we see that McLean affords to culture a philosophy of being similar to that of a human person, where each has a unique *esse* or existence and is of a certain nature or essence. Each culture arises from human freedom in its own unique manner, but shares with other cultures that common trait of seeking its own perfection. For now, our primary interest lies in culture's being a storehouse and measure for human freedom. Cultures, then, may have their own specific founding principles and value systems. Their common element is that they always reflect a people's existence and unique expression of freedom as they pursue meaning and perfection according to their respective value systems and principles. Since human freedom is critical to an encounter's productive yield for dialogue and mutual growth, due attention to culture is key to any philosophical or theological enquiry. The connection of human freedom to the experience of transcendence, along with culture's role of acting as a storehouse of meaning stemming from a people's reflection on their relationship with God, ensures that culture also provides a key to new theological insights.

This study, then, will not be an empirical, analytic one designed to yield certain understandings and definite outcomes. It will, however, seek to explore the attitudes and stances of peoples and cultures as they engage the dynamics of encounter and strive to grow creatively in freedom. Avery Dulles recognizes the indefinite, yet critical role of culture in shaping ideas and forms of faith and speaks of how any intellectual stance, religious or secular, "rests upon a multitude of unspecifiable and unverifiable assumptions, and in that sense may be called a 'faith.' Agnosticism is itself a faith, insofar as it implies the assertion that we lack the capacity to attain sure knowledge about the transcendent."⁵⁶ Today's secular or religious mindset, then, may be considered a form of faith or an aspect of culture. Culture itself contains a multitude of unverifiable assumptions developed over time from a people's expression of freedom as they strive after perfection. Culture holds the key to unlocking the dynamics of the pursuit of perfection in

⁵⁵ McLean, *Persons, Peoples and Cultures*, 175. I shall look at McLean's philosophy of being more closely in the next chapter. The phenomenological aspects of culture will be more prominent in chapters III and IV. Encounter between cultures will be examined especially in chapter five of our study, where I shall look more closely at the importance of intercultural cooperation in a global age.

⁵⁶ Avery Dulles, *The Craft of Theology: From Symbol to System* (New York: Crossroad, 1995), 58.

human freedom, a pursuit that, when properly revered for what it is, would ultimately lead to an acknowledgement of and a living faith in God.

In closing this section on the importance of culture to our theological enquiry, I want to focus again on enquiry into the narrative of experience obtained by way of encounter. It takes place in the midst of cultural values and understanding, while also contributing to their development. To truly grasp the richness of any valid faith encounter one needs to understand the cultural dynamics at play as an expression of human freedom and be tooled with the necessary components of philosophical enquiry. John Paul II expressed the same concerns when he spoke of the Church's renewed interest in the inculturation of the faith, highlighting the fact that "the study of traditional ways must go hand in hand with philosophical enquiry, an enquiry which will allow the positive traits of popular wisdom to emerge and forge the necessary link with the proclamation of the Gospel."⁵⁷ McLean offers the tools needed to listen actively to the popular wisdom of culture and to conduct a thorough philosophical enquiry, all so that our theological tools might be enhanced for the Gospel to be more effectively proclaimed, heard, believed and taken to heart. These tools can be used for any encounter so a more general approach will be followed, but the dramatic encounter of a person or a culture with the Gospel demands the closest attention. Any proclamation of the Gospel has to allow people to preserve their own personal and cultural identity, even when the truth of the Gospel calls for personal and cultural transformations. The Gospel is not opposed to any culture, yet it brings a message of liberation that is able to tie into a culture's striving for perfection. Cultures are not diminished by the Gospel, but prompted to open to a deeper awareness of truth and freedom. They are moved to identify and turn away from any disorders that might be impeding their growth in freedom. The importance of culture and the dynamics it brings to any encounter make it a key element of both philosophical and theological enquiry. The faith encounter ultimately presents the most demanding dynamic, since it taps a person's, and therefore a culture's, freedom and world of meaning, calling them to an intentional and conscious relationship with God.

FROM EXPERIENCE TO INTENTIONALITY AND RELIGIOUS MEANING

We have looked at the rich depths of experience at play in any encounter, and have seen how a strong world view shaped either by

⁵⁷ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, # 61. He references here *Gaudium et Spes*, # 44.

philosophical views or culture can influence our openness to encounter and our ability to probe its depths. In a sense we have taken a snapshot of the dynamics of people engaged in encounter, the complexity of the elements, both objective and subjective, that come to bear at the moment. The goal in this section will be to introduce the historical and dynamically intentional elements to the overall experience of encounter so as to realize that any snapshot in time is actually more than just a still snapshot. A conscious, intentional subject searches for meaning and blends the new data of fresh experience with the already-held world view that guides him or her. This search forms the basis of the religious outlook of the human person which, in turn, helps to shape an attitude of cooperation or resistance to the movements of grace. My reflection here will briefly introduce in progression a) the dynamic of experience, b) the journey to meaning and interpretation, c) the pre-conceptual work of reason, d) growth in consciousness, e) awareness of the act of intending, f) shift in outlook and structures, and g) religious roots and grace.

Dynamic of Experience

Every encounter is packed with potential that needs to be unlocked in order to lead to greater freedom, new meaning, and hopefully, a relationship with God. The potential is contained in historical experience unfolding the subjective self's interacting with objective reality and other subjects. McLean presents what he calls the "double helix of experience" to describe the dynamic element of becoming experienced. Experience is more than just a list of objective events. It also includes the deeply personal, subjective, emotional response to the events in their total context. Experience, then, is more a living through events that continues to shape one's outlook on life. McLean describes this dynamic as follows: "these two processes of experience and understanding are not so much separated as interactive in a spiral manner: understanding is shaped by developing experience, which in turn is shaped by progress in understanding."⁵⁸ The encounter events one experiences add to the cumulative storehouse of lived experience, but not as a sequence of fixed events or experiences. As we grow, change and shift our world view, those past experiences change by the manner of how we understand them.

The manner in which we emotionally engage those experiences can change as well, not in the sense that the historical emotion of the moment changes, but that we need not be tied to that original emotional response. Being able to engage this dynamic of shifting emotional response and interpretation proves critical for the faith. I would liken it

⁵⁸ McLean, *Hermeneutics, Faith and Relations between Cultures*, 29.

to a seed dynamic for the paschal mystery. Outlook and disposition go through shifts and developments while we go on living. The object or experience is not historically different, but the way we understand it might very well be radically different. This double helix of experience is a window that opens us to the possibility of conversion and transformational change. It is not a window that can be forced open, but must be freely lifted by the subject so that he or she can breathe in the fresh air of a receptive disposition. One's disposition has much to do with one's ability to allow truth and charity to change our understanding, shift our perspectives, and convert our hearts. Theologically, the dynamic has to be recognized and cultivated as the change of heart that allows one to understand, reinterpret, and perhaps even rewrite one's personal narrative. This important hermeneutic movement towards faith in the Christ event and McLean's contribution to it will occupy much of our attention in the chapters that follow.

Journey to Interpretation and Meaning

Peering into this window of opportunity gives a glimpse of the richness and complexity of what resides inside. Ultimately, this is a journey into a person's mysterious world of meaning and interpretation. Lonergan mentioned that in that setting the mental acts as experienced are the raw data for reflection, the first ingredient for a logical analysis. "From them one can proceed to epistemology and metaphysics. From all three one can proceed ...to give a systematic account of meaning in its carriers, its elements, its functions, its realms and its stages."⁵⁹ My approach will not be to move through these in this strict systematic sense, but for the enquiry I will look at McLean's metaphysics and theory of knowing and how he applies them in his hermeneutics to open up the world of experience to new possibilities. The movement towards freedom and freely embracing the faith sustains itself by an ever more accountable hermeneutic approach that constantly unveils new knowledge of oneself and new consideration of others. Ultimately, growth in freedom is a journey of interpretation and meaning as one discovers the narrative of love guiding one's life.

Pre-conceptual Dynamics of Reason

McLean does not stay with a strictly epistemological approach which, after the influence of empiricism and the drive to consider only what is certain and clear, would limit too substantially the complex dynamic at play in a subject's mind and heart. He is not looking for a

⁵⁹ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 261.

universal systemic application that would clearly delimit reason's regions of applications. McLean also wants to explore what could be called reason's responsibility prior to a clearly formed knowledge. He describes the dynamics of reason as part of the human developmental process that is the fruit of encounter and interaction. He goes on to relate that the pre-conceptual dynamics of reason manifested in one's willing are rooted in one's value system as follows: "while will depends on knowledge, we have a perception of values which precedes clear concepts and deductions, takes us out of indifference and situates our reasoning processes within an ongoing process of taking interest, evaluating and, at its highest point, *being in love*."⁶⁰ Such an approach shall serve us well as we seek to probe the dynamics underlying every encounter. Concrete actuality has to be the terrain for true growth in freedom, not an idealized or utopian vision. And his broader view of reason's application allows just that sort of descriptive investigation that does not require a clear and concise concept before it can lay claim to understanding. Our perception of values precedes such deductions. It stimulates or deadens our dispositions and focuses the application of our reasoning to any search. In a similar manner, McLean sees this situating of our reasoning in the ongoing process of being in love. The context of relationship with the loving God is the critical transformative step, and the engine behind reasoning's work proceeds from that less than clear world of the perception of values. The study of values and their perception, where they come from and how they are shaped and molded, will make up later a background discussion of the origin of culture.

Coming to Consciousness

The data of concrete reality are not confined to what could be termed strictly objective, empirical reality. The interior world of the subject is just as concrete a reality, though it may not be as easily measured or ascertained. The perceived values that focus our reasoning process may at first be mostly unconscious or pre-conceptual, but at some point every subject is challenged to name and articulate those values in order to share and test one's own positions of understanding. This is the movement toward conscious intentionality. Intentionality grows through reflecting on encounters and is, therefore, always

⁶⁰ McLean, *Persons, Peoples and Cultures*, 16. The italics of '*being in love*' are my own addition. It is rare for us to think of the reasoning process reaching its highest point at being in love. I consider this insight critical for this thesis and for theology effectively to engage in its mission.

characterized by relationality.⁶¹ As we follow McLean's insights of taking into account the full reality of encounter and the subjective dynamics at play, this area of coming to a greater awareness, of focusing conscious intentionality, will prove critical to understanding one's growth in freedom and openness to reorienting one's worldview.⁶² Every encounter offers the opportunity to awaken and review that intentional relationality.

Awareness of One's Intending

Once one becomes awake, not only to one's surroundings but especially to one's interior movements of conscious intentionality, the experience allows for a clearer assessment of the perceived values we carry. The significance of one's operative disposition of relating to others becomes clearer. As we become more aware of ourselves as intending, conscious subjects, we are opened to a horizon that allows us to transcend ourselves, to transcend our emotions and values that guide our pre-conceptual self, so as to relate more openly to the world around us. This discovery of ourselves as consciously intending subjects cannot be likened to a sort of analytical self-assessment. The discovery is, rather, what Lonergan calls "...an awareness, not of what is intended, but of the intending. It is finding in oneself the conscious occurrence, seeing, whenever an object is seen, the conscious occurrence, hearing, whenever an object is heard, and so forth."⁶³ The awareness of what we are intending is one level that allows for assessing and evaluating our value-based positions and horizons, but the awareness of the intending itself opens us to the world of transcendence and the need to take

⁶¹ Lonergan likens this movement as one's becoming awake, and thereby becoming more intentional through communication and language. He writes: "Prizing names is the prizing human achievement of bringing conscious intentionality into sharp focus and, thereby, setting about the double task of both ordering one's world and orientating oneself within it. Just as the dream at daybreak may be said to be the beginning of the process from an impersonal existence to the presence of a person in his world, so listening and speaking are a major part in the achievement of that presence." Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 70.

⁶² McLean does not follow the idealized form of Kantian consciousness, but adopts Husserl's phenomenological approach of bracketing off the empirical to get to what is essential. McLean writes that Husserl's "conclusion is that whereas other things are always what they are, what is proper or essential to consciousness is that it is always of, or about, something else, that is, it is relational, transcending itself and tending toward another; in a word, it is intentional." McLean, *Persons, Peoples and Cultures*, 98.

⁶³ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 15.

seriously our development as free, conscious subjects.⁶⁴ Awareness of the intending opens the window in our consciousness to the world of conversion, not just of our values, but of the horizons of meaning. It also seeks a relation with a transcendent being in order to contain and make sense of the wide, transcendent scope of our intending.

Structural Shift in Outlook

New awareness of conscious intentionality has more than just personal consequences for growth. It moves us into what McLean calls the highest level of freedom, that of self-determination and self-constitution. The shift in personal consciousness and the growth in freedom lead to a communal consideration of structures. McLean believes that today's global interaction is calling societies and cultures to rethink their own structures in relation to this growing subjective awareness.

When the contemporary mind proceeds beyond objective and formal natures to become more deeply conscious of human subjectivity, and of existence precisely as emerging from and through human self-awareness, then the most profound changes must take place. The old order built on objective structures and norms would no longer be adequate; structures would crumble and a new era would dawn. This is indeed the juncture at which we now stand.⁶⁵

Here we see McLean's understanding of how growth in freedom and awareness on the personal level slowly effects the larger communal society. Structures and the values from which the structures were established have to be reassessed. This is not always a fast process, though it can cause rather abrupt political or institutional shifts. It generally follows upon a long gestation of this subjective awareness of responsibility for self-determination. McLean was able to witness this in Eastern Europe while holding seminars there in the decades leading up to the fall of the Iron Curtain and the tearing down of the Berlin Wall. He also has seen the dynamic at work in China as it struggled to leave the effects of its Cultural Revolution behind. The Islamic cultures wrestle with the pressures associated with the influence of modernity from the western civilizations and the growing desire for democracy and self-rule. In another place, McLean relates that the problem of human

⁶⁴ This new awareness and the acceptance of the full reality it reveals will occupy most of the third and fourth chapters.

⁶⁵ McLean, *Ways to God*, 331.

subjectivity and its relation to the wider human community “imposes itself today as one of the central questions concerning the world outlook (*Weltanschauung*). This is at the basis of the human ‘praxis’ and morality (and consequently ethics) and at the basis of culture, civilization and politics.”⁶⁶ The structural changes that ensue are both external to each culture or nation, as well as internal. The increased interaction and cooperation between cultures and nations need new structures and norms to support them.

Religious Roots and Grace

The dynamic awareness of experience shaping us leads naturally to a consideration of the ground of our being and the basis of all meaning, our relation with the divine. The subjectivity and growth in freedom of the human person in a broader community reflect the engagement of the values and worlds of meaning of that community; these make up the terrain for encountering God. Responding to the divine transcendent in faith clarifies subjectivity and stimulates further growth in freedom. My primary concern, and it is arguably also McLean’s primary concern, is to understand how best to lead the human person to an encounter with God, as well as how best to lead a culture or civilization to a greater appreciation and expression of the values of the Gospel. McLean believes that one of the primary challenges today is to influence cultures or nations, to acknowledge the importance of religion in human relations, and to help people get back in touch with their own religious heritage and roots. Any such acknowledgement would be a natural consequence from growth in their communal, conscious intentionality. For McLean, this all hinges on understanding subjective intentionality as critical to the flourishing of human life. “This would enable us to rediscover in a new way how religion is the heart of life, why it now returns to the center of the conflicts and promises of life in our day, and how addressing its challenges is the key to moving into the future.”⁶⁷ At a time when secular governments and secular ideologies are attempting to disallow any public reference to religion or religious meaning, McLean affirms that the opposite approach is what is needed

⁶⁶ McLean, “Karol Wojtyła’s Mutual Enrichment of the Philosophies of Being and Consciousness,” in *Karol Wojtyła’s Philosophical Legacy*, ed. Nancy Mardas Billias, Agnes B. Curry, and George F. McLean, vol. 35 of *Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change, Series I: Culture and Values* (Washington, DC: The Council for Research and Values in Philosophy, 2008), 23. McLean’s global paradigm for the cultural dialogue needed in response to new awareness and freedom will occupy some of my reflection in chapter five.

⁶⁷ McLean, *Persons, Peoples and Cultures*, 99.

in order to solve many societal ills and to contribute to the dialogue among nations and cultures. His approach is to review all the ramifications of conscious intentionality in terms of being. For him, both the philosophy of being and the philosophy of consciousness are critical to a balanced understanding of the human person in the world and the relation to the transcendent. Similarly, theology's task is to examine and promote this search for religious meaning. By reviewing and adopting McLean's Thomistic metaphysics with the enhancement of the turn to the subject and the awareness of conscious intentionality, this thesis aims to make a small contribution to that task.

There is one last thing to mention as I close up this section on intentionality and religious meaning, and it is not a notion that McLean is able to bring into his science of philosophy. The consideration of which I speak is our understanding of God's grace at work in our encounters and in our hearts. It is not a measureable commodity, nor does it fit well into a strictly philosophical reflection. Grace is a gift of God and attracts our reason to salvation. Much of my effort will focus on how, through reflection on encounters and a growing awareness of intentionality, one reaches a point of freedom and disposition of heart to embrace the reality and presence of God in life. In writing on the role and mission of fundamental theology, Avery Dulles asserts that "if it is to consider what human reason actually does in reflecting on religious questions, (it) must investigate the dynamics of a power that is open to the attraction and illumination of grace."⁶⁸ That power resides within the human person as a characteristic of its being. Like grace, that potentiality or power is a God-given gift, but it has to be engaged, tapped or cooperated with in order to be realized fully. That grace-tuned, antenna-like gift is part of the religious makeup of the human person.

FROM ENCOUNTER'S FOUNDATION TO ITS OPPORTUNITY FOR PARTICIPATION AND HARMONY

We have looked at encounter's background landscape to intersubjective communication and the impediments or internal objections to what it offers. We have seen that culture provides us with a key to unlock the philosophical enquiry needed to understand the dynamic of our conscious intentionality and search for religious meaning. My final effort in this chapter is to introduce how encounter

⁶⁸ Dulles, *The Craft of Theology*, 55. Near the end of the discussions on conversion, I shall need to return to how this gift of power within the human person engages the gift of grace from God.

offers responsible outlets for our newly discovered zones of freedom by way of participation, by way of living in harmony with our world and with other people. The first step, however, demands establishing a firm foundation in metaphysics. Although the focus will be primarily on McLean's blend of the philosophies of being and consciousness in any encounter, the reality of culture remains in the background as the key to unlocking the dynamics.

Foundations of Experience

Much of what we have covered thus far deals with the intersubjective planes of reality and how critical they are to understanding a person's perspectives and range of possibilities for growth in any encounter. Though I have made reference to objective realities, they have not been the primary focus. But objective reality must be reviewed again now as I introduce the notion of participation, so that the philosophy of consciousness not be left without a firm grounding in the philosophy of being. This balancing act will have to be repeated at different points in the study to ensure that McLean's own assertion that the mutual enrichment of the two philosophies not be lost. John Paul II named the movement to go beyond the appearances of experience to its foundation as one of the critical challenges facing us today.

We face a great challenge at the end of this millennium to move from *phenomenon* to *foundation*, a step as necessary as it is urgent. We cannot stop short at experience alone; even if experience does reveal the human being's interiority and spirituality, speculative thinking must penetrate to the spiritual core and the ground from which it rises. Therefore, a philosophy which shuns metaphysics would be radically unsuited to the task of mediation in the understanding of Revelation.⁶⁹

At the base of McLean's philosophy of culture lies his firm grounding in metaphysics that guides and frames his explorations. This gives his thinking the anchor he needs and it also gives the reference needed to penetrate more fully the dynamics of Revelation opened up in encounter. These dynamics have to go beyond appearances to refer to the foundations of relationship each person has with God, a relationship that exists even if not fully grasped in one's conscious awareness. Because so much of the study of the dynamic of freedom may appear to

⁶⁹ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, # 83.

be set in subjective phenomena, it is critical to establish a firm grounding in McLean's metaphysics. That reference will prevent us from seemingly stopping short at experience alone. My goal, then, is to open up the possibilities available in encounter in order to get to where we can penetrate to the foundation of reality that underlies conscious experience. From that point the theological horizon will become more explicit.

At the beginning of the discussion of the background landscape for encounter I introduced the notion of identity, which would move us beyond any subject-object dichotomies to a richer domain. In that domain where identity finds its origin resides our relationship with God as the divine transcendent. In the journey to faith the emphasis centers on the critical need to discover God in order to discover one's own identity. From looking into the rich potentialities to be discovered in encounter, I turn now to an extended excerpt of McLean as he concludes his own investigation into experience by establishing its foundation.

This conclusion of the analysis of experience has definite implications for an analysis of being, because the identity is not merely an external similarity of two things to a third without a basis in the things themselves. The point of identification of subject and object is the divine, which is found within beings.... God is within beings as their power of being – as an analytic dimension in the structure of reality. As such, he is the “substance,” appearing in every rational structure; the creative “ground” in every rational creation; the “abyss,” unable to be exhausted by any creation or totality of creations; the “infinite potentiality of being and meaning,” pouring himself into the rational structures of mind and reality to actualize and transform them. God is, then, the ground not only of truth, but of being as well; indeed, the divine is able to be the ground of truth precisely inasmuch as it is the ground of being.⁷⁰

Ultimately, then, one does not come to know one's true identity except through the point of identification with God, a point that is given at

⁷⁰ McLean, *Knowledge of God and the Discovery of Man: Crisis of Man and the Response of God, Classical and Contemporary Approaches*, vol. 19 of *Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change, Series III: Asia* (Washington, DC: The Council for Research and Values in Philosophy, 2003), 72. Though he does not specifically cite him here, McLean's own quotes appear to derive from the influence of Paul Tillich.

creation. One's sustenance and power of creative being has its source in God and, as I mentioned in the closing remarks of our previous section, that dynamic power within one's being makes one able to cooperate with God's grace when it is made available. Culture can provide an entry point as the context, the place of one's identity in creation, while the fullest essence of who we are rests upon the foundation of our relationship with God. This is not separated from culture, nor does culture act as a limiting factor. As one grows through encounters, one has the responsibility to shape culture creatively, while integrating the new depth of experience with God. The power of being that God gives at the moment of creation is unique. Though we share our common humanity with other human beings, our identity uniquely belongs to us alone; it is an intimate relationship of love formed with us by the Creator. The truth that stirs us and seeks acceptance in love in a moment of revelation operates not solely on the cognitive level, but especially on the level of being. Part of one's being resonates in this dynamism of love flowing from God's being even before the dynamism is consciously engaged.

A fuller understanding of this will require further investigation of McLean's philosophical understanding of the human person in relation to God and transcendence, and in relation to culture. Here I only want to introduce the scope of the background to help us to understand what could be called the critical metaphysics that McLean employs. In that metaphysics he validates terms and relations through the intentions from which they are derived, while also eliminating misleading terms and relations.⁷¹ McLean's operative philosophy of being provides an adequate framework to hold together the dynamics at play in encounter. His system gives a working structure, a determinate horizon for exploring some of the questions and theories. His metaphysics keeps one fully grounded in objective reality and establishes on the level of being our link with God. Perhaps even more critical for theology today, his system also honors the God-given autonomy each person enjoys as

⁷¹ Bernard Lonergan once asserted that the importance of such a critical control in metaphysics would "be evident to anyone familiar with the vast arid wastes of theological controversy." Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 343. Our study of McLean's philosophy of being hopefully will contribute to equipping theology to move out of any arid wastelands and into more fertile fields of grounded, disciplined enquiry and reflection. Lonergan went on to describe the two main functions of metaphysics: "On the one hand it provides a basic heuristic structure, a determinate horizon, within which questions arise. On the other hand, it provides a criterion for settling the difference between literal and metaphorical meaning and, again, between notional and real distinctions." Ibid. McLean's metaphysical system of thought will occupy much of our energy in the next chapter.

he or she grows in freedom, thus respecting the subjective worlds of meaning that mark every person's journey through life.

Participation and Harmony

A strong grounding in being establishes that foundation which provides the necessary framework suited to the task of mediating our understanding of revelation. Exploring that core identity link one has to God allows the sometimes mysterious and hidden elements of encounter to be more fully probed. As we become aware of and accept the depth of reality in which we find ourselves, we are moved not only to a greater freedom through conversion, but are also called to a greater engagement or participation in what is happening around us. In a sense, this is a calling back of our entire being to the participation for which we were created. McLean describes being primarily as "subsistent knowledge and truth; by extension it is our limited participations thereof. Also, as the word is to our tongue, being declares, expresses and proclaims itself; it is Word or Logos and participations thereof."⁷² Our being, then, yearns for a meaningful participation in the wider movement of life, and only then do we feel a sense of fulfillment and completion. Our limited participation in the broader mystery of life helps us to realize who we are and why our existence makes a difference in the unveiling of the Word or Logos in creation. And as that unveiling of the mystery of God becomes ever more apparent to us, so our identity and role in the unveiling become clearer. Initially, the philosophical description of us as "limited participations" of subsistent knowledge and truth, or of Word or Logos, may not sound attractive or flattering. But once the uniqueness of our being as created in love by God and the reality that our own participation contributes to God's expression of love have been comprehended, our inclination to respond freely to this love strengthens.

Understanding the value of this participation and the manner in which participation clarifies our own identity does not confine itself strictly to a conceptual, analytic act of the intellect. As a matter of the heart this understanding ranges to the realms of mystery and beauty. Lonergan likens this sense of participation to an appreciation of a work of art.⁷³ As the mystery of our life unfolds in all the richness of its history and experience, one must be careful to withhold judgment and analytic dissection in order to be able to grasp the fuller mystery of identity and participation in something greater than ourselves. Part of the reason for my focusing more expressly on encounter than experience is a response to the need to be able to move beyond the data and

⁷² McLean, *Ways to God*, 221.

⁷³ See Lonergan's discussion in *Method in Theology*, 64.

phenomena of experience to the level of being, identity and participation. The foundation of encounter demands an appreciation of being itself, as if it were a unique piece of art beckoning us to a greater participation in life. God's being does this preeminently, but our own being does it also, not just to others but even to our conscious self as we slowly penetrate more deeply into a discovery and appreciation of our identity. Encounter offers not only the evidence and implications of experience, but also the meeting point of two beings of unique identity who are being invited to various levels of participation in life. As McLean puts it, "the effect of participation as creation is the very being or existence which constitutes the human person indissociably as unique in oneself and related to all others."⁷⁴ This participation demands more than a strictly epistemological or strictly metaphysical account. It calls for an examination of the depths or levels of reality, the growth in human awareness, the critical moment of human acceptance of reality, and the response to participate in life with a new sense of meaning and urgency.

Giving proper respect to the many dimensions of the human person and how those dimensions engage the created world and one's relationship with the uncreated God will demand the full resources of McLean's philosophy for the analysis of the dynamic of growing in freedom for faith. The Holy Spirit at work in culture invites each person to participate fully in one's cultural context so as to make his or her own unique contribution. McLean sees participation as critical to a person's creativity and freedom, elements which nurture communion. As seen in the earlier reflections on totemic thought, participation reflects not simply a human communion with others, but an invitation to union with God. Full participation seeks to give expression to that human-divine relationship.⁷⁵ McLean always references human relationality and participation to God, affirming the religious dimension as an essential characteristic of the human being. And culture provides the dynamic context of each person's call to participate in the creative and transformative work of God.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ McLean, *Ways to God*, 217.

⁷⁵ McLean describes a two-fold task of participation: achieving "the perfect form of communion" and providing "the real basis for unity with God by expressing the divine." McLean, *Ways to God*, 389. Without a strong notion of participation linking the human person with the divine religion would be reduced to a sort of sophisticated secular activism.

⁷⁶ McLean's philosophy of culture and the hermeneutics that hold it together will thus be a recurrent theme as we move through these chapters on growth in awareness and freedom.

As a matter of the heart, then, the participation in transforming one's own culture in response to the grace received from that relationship with God best unfolds in the harmony of charity. The free response to accept the divine dimension, to believe and respond with a new sense of participation, leads us to an appreciation of the harmony of a life well-lived. This harmony comes from all of our human dimensions being engaged and balanced so that our participation may be a full and free response to the gift of our unique identity given by God. That response reflects a web of interrelated relationships developed in charity through one's many encounters.⁷⁷ Harmony, or the lack thereof, either expresses or fails to express a deep freedom and humanity lived in faith. True harmony comes from a life of generous participation that has grasped what human life is about, a life flowing from a living relationship with God, and has taken hold of one's own God-given, special identity in making a contribution to that life with others through faith, culture and society. Harmony is not just about reaching a level of peace with the values that one has chosen while living, but of adjusting those values as the encounters of life educate us. The response we make, then, in shaping our own culture and dialoguing with others on their journey in our multi-cultural, global context acts as both measure and stabilizer of this harmony.⁷⁸

CONCLUSION

The scriptural passage with which this chapter began revealed how any encounter is packed with both a rich set of resources carried by each participant, as well as a multitude of possibilities for discovery and growth. Little did the Samaritan woman know that her trip to the well that day would result in an encounter that would change her life. Just so, little can anyone realize when a chance encounter might change one's life or the life of another.

We saw that many things come into play in any encounter, more than what the parties themselves bring, consciously or unconsciously. In the brief exploration I tried to frame out the background landscape of the intersubjective elements of encounter. Using McLean's insights we delved into the importance of symbol and how symbols contribute to

⁷⁷ McLean likens the Christian message of charity to the Chinese value of harmony, demonstrating that each is crucial to full participation in life. See his discussion in *Knowledge of God and the Discovery of Man*, 17.

⁷⁸ Chapters three and four on conversion will look at the personal journey to reaching a level of harmonious freedom, while chapter five will look at the response made in freedom and the crucial nature of contributing to the global harmony of societies.

our overall experience. We are symbolic creatures and much of our intersubjective communication resides in the symbolic reality around us. To deepen the sense of this reality we reviewed with McLean the totemic system of thought, how people identified with the totemic symbol of their tribe, and how that informed their relationship with the Creator and with other peoples they encountered. That exploration revealed that a totemic link reflects a pre-conceptual relationship with God; it includes the use of both the external senses and the internal senses of affectivity and morality. Our identity in God has a natural transcendental intending, and the totem offers a synthesized vision of unity and participation. The intersubjective communication that unfolds in the background landscape of encounter is one that calls for a participation flowing from the symbolic immediacy available in the totem. I introduced the cross of Christ as the preeminent totem available to all.

The Samaritan woman brought to the well her own expectations from her experience and from the social mores in which she was immersed. From this we looked at possible impediments to fully embracing the possibilities in any encounter. Blocks or negative elements can cause a shift from intersubjective to merely functional engagement that impoverishes human interactions. If these negative elements and dispositions are allowed to predominate, then respect of human dignity and freedom would be diminished and a loss of meaning experienced.

Theology's task is to move beyond the system of expectations that may surround us into a zone of enquiry. Through renewed enquiry questions of identity pose themselves and the way forward becomes clearer. Taking McLean's insights I introduced culture as a key, the roots of which begin in the family, as a means to move beyond systems and assumptions to a stance of enquiry, where identity rooted in being can help to guide us. This focuses intentionality and opens up a new world of religious meaning as the foundation of our searching and enquiry. To assist this theology can facilitate the probing of personal identity in relation to culture; awareness of relationship with God has to be deepened and claimed again. In the encounter with the Samaritan woman, Jesus calls out her identity through an imperative that broke through her impediments, referenced her culture, and shifted her into the mode of enquiry.

In the study of the dynamics of the personal journey to reach an adequate freedom to receive the gift of faith, one's personal and cultural identity, along with the imperative that calls these forth, prove to be crucial. Rooted in the reflection of deep faith, theology can help attune the listening ear of people and trust that each person will hear an imperative from God in one or more encounters in life. And this

imperative will move that person to enquire, to become more intentionally engaged, and to search for meaning, to review creatively one's cultural and personal values, so that new levels of freedom can be obtained. Claiming one's true identity as a gift of God becomes a journey of listening, of conversion and of faith and grace. When undertaken well, the journey leads to a renewed participation in life that would contribute to a broader harmony of cooperation between peoples.

Theology, or anyone who chooses to accompany others on that journey, has to be willing to become a midwife to the birth of faith as people freely engage their lives. The role of midwife requires understanding and patience, as well as a broad competency of the many dynamics at play in the journey. This chapter has given a survey of different things to keep in mind when experiencing encounter, but stopped short at referencing the full reality of our environment. That reality goes beyond the phenomena we consciously experience. That reality contains the foundation of who we are, of who God is, and of how we come to relate to God, others, creation and ourselves. The next chapter will attempt to ground us in that foundation of reality.

CHAPTER II

REALITY AND THE SEARCH: GIFT OFFERED

Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.”

The woman said to him, “Sir, you have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep; where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, and his sons, and his cattle?”

Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water I shall give him will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

(John 4:10-14)

While the last chapter had to do with looking at the dynamics of interpersonal encounter, this chapter shall consist of probing the primary levels of reality in which we live our lives. Once people have engaged in an encounter and come to terms with the initial boundaries of the experience, the opportunity arises to move more fully into the reality of what is happening. Reality might first seem to be something that would be totally obvious to any conscious human person, but reality has many layers, some of which might be totally obvious to our senses, others of which might be completely foreign and unrecognized in our history of sense experience. We saw how experiencing encounter offers many challenges and opportunities for discovery. Here my aim will be to present some questions to probe the depths of reality using McLean’s philosophy, especially his metaphysics, to establish the firm foundation needed for exploring the dynamic of freedom for faith.

The initial boundaries of the above Gospel encounter have already been drawn. Jesus and the woman had accidentally met at the well and Jesus had greeted her with the imperative to give him something to drink. She had questioned his intentions, struggling with the cultural and religious mores that were broken by such a request.

Having thus gotten her attention, Jesus now tries to push her to engage the deeper realities available to her in this encounter. Jesus offers the woman two related items: insight into his own identity and the gift of living water. By so doing he appeals to her instincts to seek knowledge and understanding, not on the practical level, but on the level of religious meaning and identity, both his identity and hers. This appeal causes her to face and explore four elements in her life: her search for meaning, her identity, her culture and heritage, and her relationship with God. Translating this text into McLean-like terms, one's identity and consciousness are tied to the culture and history of one's people, as is one's relationship with and understanding of God. The woman's imagination and powers of thinking are put to the test; she is challenged to see beyond everyday realities to deeper, hidden realities.

This passage, then, gives us a guide or framework for investigating some of the levels of reality in this chapter. All of the elements touched on above need to receive some attention as we explore the primary realities of God, person and culture. Again I want to present a few questions to assist in the focus for the discussions ahead.

- How can early thought, prior to systematic philosophy, help to activate symbolic attentiveness for the imagination and for understanding one's personal narrative?
- What are some foundations for grasping the reality of God? How intelligible does God appear and what is the primary characteristic of God's communication?
- What are some important considerations for understanding the identity of the human person?
- What are the foundations for understanding culture as an expression of freedom and a foundation for hermeneutics?

I shall begin by introducing the challenge of freedom, followed by another step back with McLean to retrieve insights from the pre-philosophical reflection on people's experience of reality through myth to see what it might have to offer. The three main divisions of the chapter will address God, the human person and culture as the critical levels of reality to keep in mind for exploring the details of the dynamic in later chapters.

Through the grounding of McLean's metaphysics, I shall seek to establish the foundations of the human awareness of the reality of God, hidden as it may seem from much of human sense experience. The primary reality behind all life and experience is God's presence as Creator of all, and as the foundation and basis of culture. The foundation of identity and the person's role as receptor of culture will be built upon this reference to God. Similar to the previous chapter where the person

was seen as ‘one who experiences,’ here the emphasis will be on the person as ‘one who receives his or her being from God.’ Human life consists in searching for union with God, finding a way back to the God who created and sustains us. Since culture provides the key to enquiry, and human freedom and identity are linked to culture as well, I shall explore culture as its own particular level of reality, establishing its foundations, how it acts as a reference, and the importance of synchronic tradition. Included in this will be a discussion of how culture provides the foundation or operative framework for one’s theory of interpretation; the cross and the paschal mystery fill out the framework needed to clarify and deepen that cultural foundation. Culture reflects a people’s experience of their learned wisdom. Using McLean’s insights I shall examine how it also is a sign of the presence and accompaniment of the Holy Spirit with a people, and thus a critical component for full human flourishing in freedom.

ADDRESSING REALITY AND THE CHALLENGE OF FREEDOM

Theology needs to understand how the growth in freedom of all those on the road to faith today unfolds and to identify the challenges that might inhibit that growth. McLean approaches this challenge through the eyes of an offspring of the Enlightenment. Once everything had to be reduced to what was clear and certain, the concept of freedom came under new constraints, even though it would be set forth as one of the primary political values by the new republics taking shape in the wake of the Enlightenment. The dilemma that McLean points out remains today and it presents a challenge as to how people come to view a journey towards belief in God. He asks whether freedom can be truly free, maintaining both meaning and autonomy. “One without the other – meaning without freedom, or freedom without meaning – would be a contradiction. This kind of question takes us to the intimate nature of reality and makes possible new discovery.”¹ Here we see how the restrictions of order and certainty place constraints on the exercise of freedom that leaves one begging the question about the term itself. But this observation also makes it understandable why freedom has so often been confused with or limited to the notion of autonomy. All of this boils down to the question of meaning and the search for meaning, which must necessarily be free in order to bear fruit. Values spring from and support a people’s world of meaning. But if values, such as order and certainty, are allowed to supersede the search for meaning, then that search can no longer be undertaken freely. The meaning discovered

¹ McLean, *Persons, Peoples and Cultures*, 122.

would already be restricted to the fields determined by those limiting values of order and certainty. McLean's solution out of the dilemma is to return to what he calls "the intimate nature of reality." And so with McLean, I will seek to probe the depths of reality after already having set the stage for a free journey to faith from the experience of encounter.

In probing reality one has to be aware of another potential pitfall that we inherit from the age of Modernity born of the Enlightenment, namely, the anthropocentric turn. This focus on the human person brings to fore the question of truth and reality, and therefore the question of human freedom as well. As Ratzinger writes, "The question, 'What is freedom?' is ultimately no less complicated than the question, 'What is truth?' The dilemma of the Enlightenment, into which we have undeniably fallen, obliges us to put these two questions anew and also to renew our search for the relation between the two."² When what looks like a considerate stance on the person steps outside of the full truth of reality, then human freedom suffers. Modernity has kept its focus primarily on the person, but with an almost neglectful, sometimes contemptuous, stance before God. This focus on the spirit of the person as somehow isolated has influenced one's stance towards God and towards all of reality. Philosophy has gone so far as to reflect on whether reality is actually something we engage and from which we learn, or something that ultimately must subordinate itself to what we make of it as we engage it. This anthropocentric turn has been interpreted as both fruit and effect of Christianity, as well as the rebellion of the modern person against the Christian religion.³ In this anthropocentric turn, then, objective truth can get lost in a correlation that depends more on the subject's capabilities to grasp and understand than on objective reality itself. If the objective nature of the truth were to erode, then the understanding of human freedom would also erode in turn.

As McLean puts it, human freedom slowly disappears when a narrow or empirical clarity becomes the overriding value. McLean highlights three important points for philosophical and theological consideration: the focus on clarity that has resulted in a reductivist mechanism, the dynamism of love considered as intellectually blind,

² Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, 235-236.

³ Ruggieri writes: "Per i moderni la subordinazione della realtà alle esigenze dello spirito è un fenomeno più complesso e oppostamente interpretato: come risultato di una svolta antropocentrica che è essa stessa un effetto del cristianesimo, oppure all'opposto, come 'ribellione' dell'uomo moderno all'universo religioso cristiano." Ruggieri, "Il futuro della Teologia Fondamentale," 275.

and an arbitrary sense of freedom that reduces us to animal level.⁴ Together these three indicators impoverish the sense of what it is to be human, essentially equating us to functional cogs in a machine. If left untended they lead to a crisis of culture and development. To reach solutions and new development in such a crisis Benedict XVI calls for “new efforts of holistic understanding and a *new humanistic synthesis*.”⁵ Survival instincts are the basest of all human drives, while meaning, creativity and communion push the human spirit to its highest levels. If the dynamism of the human person as a reflection of God’s love reflects a notion that has come to be seen by many as cognitively blind, then theology has to recognize the priority of shifting the perceptions of values back towards love and creative engagement in freedom. One’s reflection of God’s creative love and open and generous response to that love are the fruits of a relationship lived in faith.

If such a reflection of love is no longer considered a value, but rather as a fanciful notion empty of rational thought, then the task is a daunting one. One’s journey of freedom for faith has to be freed of centuries of inherited reductivist thinking that has led to a creeping atheism, the slow functionalization of the human person, and the relegation of belief in God to an unnecessary crutch to satisfy the superstitiously simple-minded. Lamenting the divisions of truth that have led to a reductivist view of the human person and freedom, Ratzinger makes the following observation: “Only the truth makes us free. Whenever usefulness is set above truth, as happens in the case of the division of truth we were talking about earlier, then man becomes a slave to practical purposes and to those who make the decisions about what is useful and practical.”⁶ Once truth is equated with functionality and usefulness, the human person falls into the danger of losing its inherent dignity; enslavement, rather than freedom, results. In addition, the exclusivist mindset generated by an over-emphasis on clarity has

⁴ The value placed on order and clarity in human thought, coupled with an understanding of the human person as separated from God, and therefore no longer dependent on God, has the unfortunate effect of slowly eroding the social framework of communities. An over-emphasis on clear and distinct knowledge, and the subsequent loss of mystery from disciplined, reflective thought, slowly results in a sterile, horizon-less world where the human person comes to be regarded in the basest sense. For a fuller discussion see McLean’s *Ways to God*, 346.

⁵ Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate* (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2009), # 21. Part of why I have chosen to study McLean is that I believe he provides the philosophy and emphasis on culture needed for theology to work towards more holistic thinking and renewed humanistic synthesis.

⁶ Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, 228.

slowly been adopted into the cultures of the western world with the concomitant loss of religious mystery.⁷ Theology's task is to equip itself with the necessary tools to assist people in overcoming this aberration in order to reclaim their freedom, their relationship with God, and their full identities as human beings created in love.

That task, as we have said, begins with a return to an exploration of reality. McLean sees that limits have been imposed by philosophy on how to approach an examination of reality, just as it has reduced the dynamism of love and the notion of freedom to a more negative light. This, again, is due to the over-emphasis on the pursuit of clear and certain knowledge in the systemic developments of philosophy. "Unfortunately, the progress made in the conceptual clarification of the variety of nature was accompanied by a corresponding loss of sensitivity to the power and activity of nature, that is, to its existential reality."⁸ McLean then goes on to cite Heidegger's remedy of returning to the vision of the pre-Socratics to develop new insight, something we noted in the last chapter as we reviewed totemic experience. The retrieval of insights from totemic and mythic experience can help theology to deepen its sensitivity to the power and activity of nature, as well as to get beyond the limitations imposed by methodological systems of thought that may constrict its reflections.

Before we step back into mythic experience I want to remind ourselves of some of the things related to our theme which we learned from totemic experience. Peoples whose lives were guided by their totem gave us insight into their immersion in reality. The totem became the basis of their interpretation, their guiding hermeneutic, of the reality of their relationships to everything. Their participation in the totem surpassed external, functional considerations; it was not simply a way of thinking but a way of being. McLean makes clear that participation in the totem demonstrates a useful religious insight for helping to probe the metaphysical and phenomenological aspects of reality: "religion functions as the root of human meaning and community."⁹ Public discourse today, however, struggles to see religion as essential to human meaning and community. Humankind has an inherent, natural religious orientation that expresses one's free response to God as Creator.

⁷ Others have written extensively on this phenomenon. Charles Taylor has introduced the notion of the buffered self in his exhaustive work, *A Secular Age*. Louis Dupré examines the modern difficulties of reentering the world of mystery in presenting a justification of religious symbolism in his *Religious Mystery and Rational Reflection* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998).

⁸ McLean, *Ways to God*, 79.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 101.

Attempts to cast the universe or the person in a stripped down, secular sense fail to take account of the full context of our environment and the yearnings of freedom. As societies have become more complex, technological and historically minded, emphasis on clear, functional knowledge has clouded over this natural religious affinity. Reawakening this religious affinity in human consciousness will occupy much of the study ahead. Becoming conscious of and free to express this religious reality of human existence does not require one to move to a new identity, but enables one to own and freely embrace the identity and religious reality that one's life has always had. Helping others to acknowledge the religious character of human presence and action involves getting them back in touch with the truth of that reality, so that their perspective on human freedom can grow and their hearts can become more attuned to encounter with God.

My intention in this section has been to focus attention on the challenge to human freedom as one begins to address the layers of our reality. Freedom has to do with more than autonomy; it flows from a broad value system founded in truth as one searches for meaning. In the dynamism of that search, theology can ask itself whether people understand themselves as reflections of God's love. In its values and through its symbols, how does a culture reflect its relationship with God and its free search for meaning? The human person has an inherent religious character flowing from a dependent relationship with God.¹⁰ As I did with totemic thought in the previous chapter, my next step is to look back with McLean at how people tried to reflect on their experience through myth in order to provide us with more insights related to religion as the root of human meaning and community.

STEPPING BACK TO MYTHIC EXPERIENCE

Retrieval of insights from the pre-Socratic mythic experience helps to get back in touch with the fullness of existential reality, as well as those elements that may have begun to move human consciousness and imagination away from its unified religious vision. In his analysis of the mythic mind, McLean wants to use mythic text as a means to return to the lived experience from which it came in order to more fully "recapture the content of the vision it expressed."¹¹ In order to inform

¹⁰ Grasping the reality of the human person as a reflection of God's love will be one of our major considerations in this chapter, while the conversion of heart necessary to acknowledge, accept and engage fully that reality will follow in subsequent chapters.

¹¹ McLean, *Plenitude and Participation*, 27. McLean offers three reasons for why he wants to review mythic thinking: "(a) to avoid the *petitio principii*

better his hermeneutics and his approach to global challenges, McLean seeks to go beyond analytic systems that may cloud part of the reality to be found in the lived experience. The imagination has to be unlocked from systemic restraints and set free to explore the full range of experience with a renewed vision. McLean states explicitly that the goal of his reflections is “to articulate ... the Unity and interrelation of all.”¹² This unity and interrelation of all is an aspect of reality that cannot be let go. If it were to be lost, as it often is today through the multi-differentiated understandings of various levels of reality, then the religious sense, which is so much a part of who the human being is, would become clouded over. In the move from totemic to mythic experience, the developing literary-theological imagination worked through its increasing differentiation of the realities engaged in order to articulate its understanding in the language of myth. In the move to myth the primary challenge to the imagination was to differentiate for the sake of better analysis of the components of experience. The imagination can also be applied to synthesize multiple components or aspects as parts of a unified whole. Both applications of the imagination, differentiation and synthesis, are needed for a full and balanced understanding of reality. Myth, then, can illumine a characteristic of transcendent reality in the form of a god who personifies a particular trait.

and *circulus vitiosus* of justifying a later system on the basis of texts read in terms of that system, (b) to renew awareness of the vital meaning of the scientific terminology of the schools by rediscovering the ground from which they have developed, and (c) to retrieve the vision needed in order to resolve problems of life which characterize the world which has been developed in terms of the scientific systems.” Ibid. One can see here that McLean’s intention is not to ignore the systems that have developed, but to go beyond what we normally use from them, to deepen the sense of their origins, so as to be more fully equipped to address modern problems which may have stemmed from these very systems.

¹² Ibid., 28. McLean compares his goal of articulating unity and the interrelation of all to Hesiod’s undertaking in the *Theogony* to state the relationships between the gods who represented various parts of nature. Hesiod’s various gods may have stated the reality of various parts of nature that had come to be understood by his culture in their differentiated universe, but none of them represented the simplicity and unity of being underlying all creation. The underlying unity depends on the imagination. As McLean puts it, “The original reality itself is not differentiated; it is an undivided unity. As such it is without name, for the names we give reflect our sense perceptions which concern not what is constant and homogeneous, but the differentiated stimuli. What is undifferentiated is not only unspoken in fact, but unspeakable in principle by the language of myth, which is characterized essentially by dependence upon the imagination.” Ibid., 30.

The transcendent, undifferentiated unity, the God of gods as it were, though at the foundation of the mythic experience, only comes to be expressed through a multiplicity of gods reflecting the differentiated traits that humans encounter in their lives. Over time the differentiated stimuli can have the effect of slowly eroding awareness of the original reality, which is an undivided unity. But the revelation of one God, what Ratzinger calls the monotheistic revolution, slowly diminished the importance of this perception of many gods. When this truth of the one God became more evident, the many gods were eventually stripped of their divine status.¹³

In this step back to myth, then, I am not trying to focus on multiple gods, but on what theology can learn from the imagination's journey through mythic experience. This retrieval helps to shift thinking from the differentiation so common to deductive reasoning to a more unifying and holistic approach of inductive reasoning. Once the inductive zone of the imagination becomes freed up, new possibilities emerge for one's operative interpretation theory, so that seeing things in terms of a unified whole, or in relation to God, becomes easier. The revelation of the one God returned the imagination back full circle to the original reality from which myth was born: the transcendent, undivided unity which needed to be understood in an increasingly complex world of experience. Without that unity the entire foundational religious character of human life could be forgotten. I shall divide my reflections into two main sections: 1) the elements of interest in this shift to mythic experience, and 2) the notion of participation in mythic unity.

Elements of Interest in the Shift to Mythic Experience

My goal here is to uncover some of the elements in the shift to mythic conceptualization so that theology might gain insight as to how to break free of any systemic restrictions that may inhibit its reflections. For McLean the differentiation of the original unity into multiple gods points to an important development in the human understanding of life and creation. Myth represented a sort of early narrative theology of a people's lived experience of the divine. The transition to myth from the totem stemmed not just from the differentiation and specialization of roles within the life of the community, but also from the community's

¹³ Ratzinger notes that the traits assigned to the gods in mythic thought were so designated by the imagination to assist in understanding a people's relation to God. In regard to their losing divine status, he writes: "Yet at the same time their truth has emerged: that they were a reflection of divinity, a presentiment of figures in which their hidden significance was purified and fulfilled." Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, 230.

experience of the transcendent unity at work in its midst. Communities needed to articulate in words and stories their interaction with this immanent, transcendent reality that, as noted earlier, usually got expressed in a multiplicity of gods. McLean describes changes in the shift to mythic thought in the following passage.

As a transformation of the earlier totemic structure, mythic understanding continues the basic totemic insight regarding the related character of all things predicated upon a unity and fullness of meaning. Thinking in terms of the gods, however, myth adds a number of important factors. First, quantitatively the myth can integrate, not only a certain tribe or number of tribes, but the entire universe. Second, qualitatively it can take account of such intentional realities as purpose and fidelity. Third, while implying the unitive principle expressed with crude directness in totemic thought, it adds the connotation of its unspeakable, undifferentiated, and fruitful character.¹⁴

McLean first stresses the unity of meaning that myth maintains before he goes into what it contributes beyond that of totemic thought: integration of divine realities, incorporation of intentionality, and a deeper sense of the mystery of the divine presence. Previously, the reality of the totem was the universe, and the tribe did not need integration into it. Other tribes lived, so to speak, in their own respective universes. With the increased interaction between the tribes, one's universe needed to be expanded to take account of others and to integrate all somehow into each one's respective world view. The shift to mythic experience, then, set forth a dynamic in thought to integrate diversity and yet maintain reference to unity. That dynamic in the shift contained elements that will reappear in later discussions when I shall examine more closely the dynamics of growing in freedom for faith. For our purposes here, I would like to take McLean's factors in the shift but restate them to highlight the intentionality of relationship with God in the following elements: a) personal characteristics; b) integrating unity; c) transcendence and ritual; d) narrative mystery; and e) meaning and imagination.

Personal Characteristics. In myth the objective, unitive reality found in the totem comes to be understood as personal and active in the differentiated zones of the community's life. Still immanent in its presence, it is also transcendent, operating beyond the experience of any

¹⁴ McLean, *Plenitude and Participation*, 31-32.

individual or any community. “As the imagination was essentially involved in this thought, the personal divine was pictured in the anthropomorphic forms of gods and their interaction was the material of which myths were woven. Where the totem had been proto-religious, the myth was religious.”¹⁵ In simpler language, one might say that myth took the totem’s mystery and relationship with the divine and tried to express them in narratives. Specific characteristics of the divine relationship took on the persona of the various gods. So the first myths reflected the dramatic religious character of human life that was inherent in totemic experience, but applied the imagination to reflect personally on one’s experience. Further, the anthropomorphic forms revealed the understanding of a personal interaction or an interpersonal relation with the various gods. The imagination’s work to understand the transcendent reality present in the various movements of life discovered that this was a personal reality and, thus, a reality that could be engaged or disengaged, pleased or displeased, assuaged or angered. Though myths maintained the religious character of life and also the divine activity in a personal way, they still represented an initial move away from that undivided unity by using many gods to represent the divine interaction with humans. The concept of interpersonal interaction with the divine traits personified in many gods, good as it was in personalizing encounter with the transcendent, had the adverse effect of multiple gods in place of the one, true God. It also led to an understandably more anthropomorphic view of the divine. Only those cultures that held to a strict monotheism were able to carry on the totemic notion of an undifferentiated unity of the divine with personal characteristics, while also avoiding anthropomorphizing the divine. So, though much was gained for enriching the understanding of God as personal, a consequence was also a general shift away from the indivisible unity of the godhead.

Integrating Unity. But the shift from totemic to mythic thought came about naturally through the growing complexity of human experience in the world. The new complexity of experience challenged the imagination to hold fast to the unity offered in the totem. As McLean puts it, the unity was continued, “but by employing the work of the imagination one engages the developing diversity in order to form a more integrated and stable union.”¹⁶ The unity that is continued must

¹⁵Ibid., 25.

¹⁶ McLean, *Ways to God*, 115-116. In his examination of the transition from totemic to mythic experience McLean returns to the insights of Jean Piaget’s theory of cognitive development. McLean does not see myth as a new way to God, but a particular evolution of the way already expressed in the

necessarily be a more integrated one due to the increased differentiation. As human awareness of the diversity of reality demanded new systems of thought, something of the original immediacy and unity of the totemic experience may have lessened a bit, but the increased ability to hold a wider variety of experiences together had the overall effect of providing more stability to the unity. The challenge in the movement from totem to myth was to integrate a wider scope of experience into the original unity, without loss of the notion of undivided unity that links all things. By being able to balance a more diverse specialization of roles, however, the understanding of the inherent unity of all things gradually received less conscious attention.

Transcendence and Ritual. While something of the original immediacy and unity may have been lost in the shift to myth, with the shift came a growing awareness of the transcendence of the unity behind the totem. The dramatic immanence available in the totem came to be balanced with a greater sense of transcendence of the divine unity.

What previously had been grasped simply in direct symbiotic unity, now with more distinctive self-awareness came to be appreciated not only to be immanent to each and all, but to transcend them as well. Whereas the totem was considered to be so simply one with the primitive, now symbol and ritual appear.¹⁷

As discussed in the last chapter, the totem had an inherent symbolic immediacy that needed no symbolic mediation. But in myth symbol and ritual are needed to engage in active relationship with the transcendent unity, so that its presence might be incorporated into the increasing diversity of experience and interaction of the tribes as they grow. Symbol and ritual helped to bridge the experience of a widening gap to transcendent being. God's immanence and transcendence go hand in hand, and myths are attempts to put into story form a people's

totem. The evolution came about through a series of shifts in equilibrium as the imagination strove to incorporate the new, more complex experiences of reality.

¹⁷ Ibid., 117. McLean references here again Lévy-Bruhl's *How Natives Think*. McLean goes on to explain that "these two characteristics of transcendence and immanence are not opposed one to the other, but correlative. This is true throughout our experience: the more transcendent a reality the more present it is." Ibid. Modernity has had some strands that would try to embrace one while ignoring the other, but McLean's acknowledgement of this aspect of human experience rings true.

experience of this immanent, transcendent God. They are indeed correlative. As time passed, however, the gods of myths slowly lost their emphasis of either transcendence or immanence, splitting up the correlation. Philosophical movements such as Deism claimed recognition of a transcendent god, although it was a god that had lost its immanence in creation, or at least had become functionally impotent when it came to influencing or intervening in human affairs. The humanism of early modernism that led to the deistic movement stripped God of interested interactive ability, while it simultaneously tried to acknowledge God's existence and transcendence. The need for ritual was lost, since God was no longer considered personal or engaged with humanity. Ultimately, either atheistic or agnostic secularism easily evolved from that philosophical stance, leaving us with neither an immanent, nor a transcendent god. A balanced awareness of God's transcendent immanence in the world of experience remains a significant challenge for theology today. Symbolic ritual remains a critical element in a people's striving to a greater freedom for faith.

Narrative Mystery. The rituals that respect God's transcendence develop from reflection on a people's life experience. The narrative mystery of a people's journey has to reflect their attempt to integrate the complexities of life while also referencing those more intentional realities of purpose and fidelity. The qualitative intentional realities develop as people try to balance their value systems with increasingly complex sets of relationships. The directness of the unitive principle available in the totem became more mysterious in myth. Driven by the increased awareness of the transcendence, the mystery of the unitive principle was spoken of less directly but given the credit for the rich fruitfulness of life. The narrative theology inherent in mythic experience, then, can aid theology in highlighting to others certain truths of relationship, of transcendence, and of God as the unitive principle in the narrative of their own lives. All these elements also reflect the early manifestations of culture. We shall return to them when I address culture to see how a more deliberate awareness can help in theology's attempt to guide people to a fuller freedom through their cultural stewardship of the narrative mystery of their lives.

Meaning and Imagination. This brings us to the significance of the shift to myth on meaning and imagination, subjects that I shall revisit throughout the thesis. As seen in mythic experience, then, unity is still implied, but not as casually understood as in totemic experience, because of the difficulty of speaking of it as a simple whole in the midst of such increasing diversity, transcendence and mystery. But the unity

still remained, while taking on, as we have noted, a more mysterious, transcendent connotation. As McLean describes it, in myth

...the peoples were able to articulate with vastly greater complexity the unity which had been expressed as simple and direct identity in the totem. That unity could now be textured or woven, as it were, with the many rich threads of meaning available by the work of the imagination expressed in myths.¹⁸

This textured or woven unity allowed the expression and development of the many layers of meaning that unfold from life experience. The imagination was given free rein to explore that experience through myth, while weaving the fruits of the exploration back to the grounding principle of unity. Similarly, in our age of easy access to information and facts, the challenge when guiding people to the path of faith consists in helping them sift through the information and bind it back to the grounding principle of unity – back to God. That task involves opening up the imagination beyond the merely functional, immense enough in itself, but today there is the added challenge to get people to recognize that God exists and is active as the divine unity that grounds everything. For theology there is no need specifically to invite people to retrieve mythic thought, only to persuade them to think more inductively, to relate things back to God as the central reality in their lives. People still seek meaning, but they do not always seek it in God as the creator and sustainer of life. As already noted, culture provides a key to unlock the imagination with the foundational material to confront this challenge of meaning.

This brings me to an important point in McLean's thought for this study. Early in myth the intellect and imagination began a deductive process of trying to understand specific things and experiences, while maintaining the link or binding back to God as the grounding principle of life. Deductive reasoning has been the primary tool of the sciences to gain knowledge of our surroundings. In an age when deductive reasoning is so prevalent, the challenge today is to try to engage a more inductive reasoning, to see things in terms of their meaning and relation to God and to the whole of reality. This task belongs first to the imagination so that the intellect may be set to the challenge.

The nature of mythic experience, then, contains all the elements discussed: the increasing diversification of life experience, an active aesthetic imagination, a growing nature of the transcendence of the unitive principle without loss of its immanence, the incorporation of

¹⁸ McLean, *Ways to God*, 117.

symbol and ritual, and layered levels of meaning from the incorporation of more intentional realities. Mythic experience rationally retains both the objective reality of the “Other” expressed in the multiple gods and the subjective intentionality and insights born from daily experience. In today’s heavily empirical, scientifically critical age myth is often denigrated as just having carried the superstitions of an underdeveloped people. As McLean notes, mythic thought was both rational and coordinated.¹⁹ The imaginative mindset of myth spontaneously searched out meaning and symbolically expressed it in a manner that may have allowed for a deeper sense of mystery than the predominant consciousness so often found in the scientifically focused, empirical mind. Once again, this is part of the reason why the manner in which one understands and applies imagination and intellection is so important for broadening the boundaries of consciousness, and so important for the task of becoming more aware of the totality of reality. As people begin to engage consciously their own life narrative, they need an active imagination to aid their intellect in moving towards faith. I shall return to theology’s role for cultivating a disciplined intellection and imagination later. All these elements of mythic experience invited the person to enter more personally into a deeper participation in the world of transcendent mystery occupied by the gods. Just as I covered the concept of participation in totemic experience, I now turn to it in mythic experience.

Participation in Mythic Thought

Before I go into the details of participation in mythic experience, this proves to be a good moment to introduce one of the primary challenges of trying to get the modern mind to grasp a fuller picture of reality. To do this well, theology has to reclaim a sound ontology

¹⁹ As McLean maintains, “Myths constitute a rational, though not a critical inquiry. It is not critical because they do not state things by their proper names, but rather by the names of the gods: e.g. the sea by Poseidon. Consequently, there can be no strict critical control over the conclusions to be drawn from the evidence. Nevertheless, their thought content is rational and coordinated.” McLean, *Ways to God*, 119. McLean summarizes the elements of the nature of myth in slightly different terms. His terms are: an imaginative consciousness, spontaneous conceptions, persons, events, and symbol. He summarizes myth as “the operation of an imaginative consciousness which spontaneously conceives the world and man in the form of persons and events having a symbolic meaning.” George McLean and Patrick Aspell, *Ancient Western Philosophy: The Hellenic Emergence*, vol. 8 of Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change, Series I: Culture and Values (Washington, DC: The Council for Research and Values in Philosophy, 1997), 8.

without losing the critical, analytic insights of a rigorous epistemology. ‘Stepping back’ with McLean to the pre-Socratic understandings of totem and myth reveals links to an underlying ontology, which, I believe, can prove useful in one of the key journeys that people must ultimately make as they try to discover the living God as the source of their world of meaning and freedom. Much of the work of the sciences, including philosophy, has been done primarily via the deductive method of reasoning. But the journey back to faith and the acceptance of the divine unity at the heart of creation involves certain inductive movements that take time to apprehend and accept. These more intuitive, inductive movements are mirrored in mythic participation, a participation needed for freedom and faith today.

McLean looks to the early myths in order to help the imagination and intellect turn to a more inductive method of reasoning, through understanding how myth maintained the link to the original unity while incorporating a wider diversity. The diversity of reality and one’s experience was seen as a participation in the unity; not only was this true for created realities, but also for the many gods found in myths. The gods themselves were seen as essential links to that unity, originally by way of love. As McLean observes, the generative union of the gods all came from the original One, “the identity of each is had not by holding to what it is, but in proclaiming through sharing, what it has from the Divine.”²⁰ The flourishing of each person, like that of the gods in myths, depends on this proclamation or sharing of its being as gift from the Divine as original unity. This theme will recur throughout the study and proves an essential point in one’s coming to full freedom.

McLean explores further how the mythic mind epistemologically came to understand this diversity and its link to the original unity. He finds what could be understood as an early epistemology linked to an early metaphysics, though one must be careful here since these sciences did not properly exist in the mythic mind. From McLean’s study of the early poetic hymn, *Theogony*, he relates the following:

²⁰ McLean, *Ways to God*, 128. McLean speaks of this unity proceeding “from the union of an earlier pair of gods, while all such pairs are descendants of the one original pair, Earth and Heaven. Further, the procreation of the gods proceeds from each of these pairs precisely as united in love.” *Ibid.*, 123. All the gods in myth, then, stem from the original unity, even the original pair of heaven and earth. Each procession, original and afterwards, comes from a union in love. The diversity of character and attributes found in the many gods are the fruit of the original unity that carried over from the totemic experience. Each of the gods participated in that unity leading to new, diverse offspring related still to the unity to which all could trace their origin.

the fact that desire is the first seed of mind would appear to imply that the striving of one person to grasp (*kamas*) the other is predicated upon the mind. In turn, this is predicated ontologically upon the fact that the mind and its object originally were undifferentiated unity as noted in the first part of the hymn and inherited from totemic thought.²¹

From this early poem, then, McLean discovers something which could be quite important for our epistemological age. As the first seed of the mind, desire moves the affective side, impelling the will to reach out in understanding. This striving, or desire to “grasp” the other, originates from the ontological foundation. That unity of the ontological foundation is something that myth inherited and maintained from totemic experience. The undifferentiated unity of origin influences all differentiated beings in their quest for understanding and desire for union. One’s manner of knowing, even the very drive to know, remains predicated upon a unified ontological reality. As McLean notes, awareness of that connection to unified reality moves the person, not towards self-seeking, “but of aiding, of serving the other, so that it might share or participate more fully in Plenitude.”²²

Guidance of the will to its proper end of shared participation with other differentiated beings, however, depends on the recognition and acknowledgement of the undifferentiated unity and one’s connection to it. When the unity is recognized and embraced as the loving Creator, a person can construct a personal narrative of participation. Poor dispositions of the will tainted by self-seeking, however, actually prevent or block the very desire at the heart of every person, a desire of sharing and participation in the being and mystery of Plenitude, or the God of gods. This is a concept to which McLean returns, since basic human relations in peace and understanding depend upon it. These Kingdom values of Christianity – selfless service, aid, sharing, and participation – are more than Christian values; they are universal human values crucial to the full flourishing of the person. Even with myth’s reference to participation, its central emphasis on the transcendence of the undifferentiated unity still dominated the mythic mindset. Motivation for participation and service, one’s primal desire, stemmed from the common link to the original unity in which all beings share, the

²¹ McLean, *Plenitude and Participation*, 42. McLean studied the western classic, *Theogony*, an old Greek classic written by Hesiod around 776 BC, while from the eastern perspective he looks at the *Rg Veda*. Both of these, McLean maintains, “will ever remain inexhaustible and essential storehouses or treasuries.” *Ibid.*, 43.

²² *Ibid.*, 42.

vast mystery of God as transcendent Plenitude. This is the underlying guiding narrative of our lives from which fundamental theology learns, even as it tries to awaken people to their own personal narrative with God.

The narrative mystery of life is too easily overlooked in a world focused primarily on information and functionality. A task-oriented, economically driven world does not reflect on mystery and creative participation in a greater unity of all beings, but occupies itself with a functional efficiency that can generate a greater profit. Knowledge has expanded as we have grasped more differentiated entities and filled many information bins, especially through the detailed analysis offered by strict deductive methods. What seems to have been more and more overlooked, however, is the need to bind all this information and knowledge back to God, the original, undifferentiated unity of which we creatures are but partial expressions. Today's imagination, so accustomed to deductive analysis, must now be challenged to apply a more inductive reasoning in order to understand things as intimately related to the mystery of the one, the true, the good and the beautiful, and to understand the essence of life as participation in that mystery.

Once human experience proceeds beyond the limitations of an operative view or understanding of reality, a new tool or system is needed to integrate the new dimensions of experience. Breaks in equilibrium become apparent in the older world view, since it can no longer contain the breadth of experience newly encountered. This drove early totemic peoples to develop myth as a means of incorporating the increasing diversity and complexity of their world. The shifts in equilibrium due to a broader experience of reality engaged the imagination to respond in order to make sense of the new complexities. The imagination strove to keep the link to the underlying unity of all things while also taking account of the diversification. Unity is maintained in myth, but takes on a more transcendent feel than the dramatic immanence experienced in the totem. Through myth peoples were able to integrate more of their experience and clarify their life narratives. Myth, for the first time, was able to give expression to certain intentional realities, such as purpose and fidelity. These intentional realities, all linked to how relationship with the divine unity is perceived, are the early seeds of values being born into a growing cultural mindset.

Reflection on lived experience focused these intentions through the imagination's capacity to maintain equilibrium on the vertical plane with the divine unity, and on the horizontal plane with the growing diversity of peoples encountered. How theology applies the imagination, then, remains critical in order to form creative solutions to today's fractured equilibriums and also to lead people back to open their eyes

again to God.²³ Theology must help the imagination re-equip itself, as it were, to put it back in touch with the root desire to participate fully in reality and to serve others, because all are partial manifestations of the greater mystery to which we are all connected. That mystery provides the energy to one's motivation for seeking knowledge, love and understanding. Fundamental theology, then, by learning from the example of the dynamic shift from totem to myth, can aid the imagination to refocus itself with a more inductive reasoning. Such reasoning, the seed of the mind which can move the rational side of the person to reach out to understand others in their differentiated existence, must now move the affective side to remember again the unity of the whole. And that mysterious reality of the whole needs to be recognized anew for what, or better yet, who it is: the God of love.

FROM SYMBOLIC TO CONCEPTUAL THINKING: DRAMA OF EXISTENCE

Before I move to reflection on the reality of God, a few words are needed to bridge the gap from the symbolic thinking at work in totemic and mythic experience to the conceptual thinking of philosophy.²⁴ As we saw in the shift from totemic to mythic thought, McLean's first reflections in his brief overview of classical western philosophy began with the pre-Socratics facing up to the challenge of a disequilibrium that had entered into mythic experience. The gods had taken on so many human traits that they had become distorted in character, no longer passing as gods at all. This disequilibrium needed to be resolved, not by previously existing competencies, but by the development of a new competency of critical reasoning. To describe the way the Greek culture handled this shift to the new competency of philosophy, McLean cites Xenophanes, who "showed how the imaginative element in myth had enticed men to envisage the gods in an inauthentic manner. Rather than principles of unity, truth and goodness, some gods had come to be exemplars of strife, deceit and all manner of evil."²⁵ The inauthentic

²³ Today's buffered secular self struggles to identify any signs of the presence of God as Charles Taylor has so adequately described in his work, *A Secular Age*. Frank Fletcher maintains that the weakened sacral imagination of the modern person has to be grounded again in interiority through two steps: 1) the appropriation of the human spirit as grounded in transcendent mystery, and 2) tapping the imagination's search for "direction and momentum in the flux of life." Frank Fletcher, "Towards a Contemporary Australian Retrieval of Sacral Imagination and Sacramentality," *Pacifica* 13, no. 1 (February 2000): 7.

²⁴ For our purposes here I will look only at the origins of western philosophy, not of the eastern philosophies.

²⁵ McLean, *Ways to God*, 169.

conception was driven by an imagination that felt the need to search desperately for explanations beyond its power. So pressured, the imagination assigned characteristics to beings that no longer matched their original identity. When Xenophanes took away imaginative factors and replaced them with intellectual terms, McLean asserts he found a way “to state these crucial realities in terms which were susceptible to clear and controlled reasoning. Philosophy was born.”²⁶ The symbolic representations of the gods thus gave way to conceptual thought.

Early explorations of conceptual thought had to do with the topic of why there is a reality at all, rather than no reality – something rather than nothing. In his study of the early western philosophers, McLean gives significant attention to the figure of Parmenides and his contribution to the development of philosophy with the principle of non-contradiction. That principle is a logical construct of the mind that affirms that being cannot be the same as non-being. So being has neither negation nor differentiation. Without retelling the entirety of Parmenides’ logic, I do want to point out what McLean stresses regarding the principle, namely, “the separation of being from non-being.”²⁷ McLean’s concern is that in all the attention given to the differentiated analysis of multiple beings, the dramatic nature of being as existent, rather than not existing, loses its rightful emphasis. The reality and basis of differentiation among beings would continue and take a while to work out, while the drama of the reality of existent being in contrast to non-being shifted to the background. By taking reality as a given, without any consideration as to why it is there at all, that drama became mostly lost from view.

Following that drama back to its logical beginning leads to the acknowledgement of the source of being. In his review of Plato, McLean focuses on how Plato used the understanding of non-being as “not-that-being” to distinguish between different beings. The beings are alike, however, in that they have being from a source, which itself is one. This sharing in the source of being led to what is known as one of the classical insights of Plato: “participating in the divine is not something beings do; it is what they are. The self-sufficient and infinite One or Good is that in which all things share or participate for their

²⁶ Ibid., 170. It may seem odd that, as soon as I had tried to impress upon the reader the need to develop more the aesthetic imagination, I would then follow with the birth of philosophy’s development from a disequilibrium caused by an overactive imagination. The key, as shall be seen later, is to strike a balance between the discipline of critical intellectual reasoning enriched, and even catalyzed, by the aesthetic imagination.

²⁷ Ibid., 174.

being and identity, truth and goodness.”²⁸ Pre-modern symbolic awareness grasped this participation in being more easily than modernity’s emphasis on efficiency and clarity. The participation in or reflective imaging of the One is not a functional activity, but an ontological reality in the sense of beings simply existing, rather than having to do any specific activity that might qualify as functionally participating. Who humans are, and that they are, are more important than what they do. This ontological insight need not be reduced to a functional schematic. Plato’s ‘remembering of ideas’ is not a literal rendering of prior states of the soul, but a growing awareness of this ontological reality and its significance for one’s life and one’s attitude towards life. It reflects the inherent religious nature of the human person, a nature one may wish to deny or ignore, but one which can never be ontologically removed.²⁹ Renewing the awareness of this connectedness to God is not so much a conceptual work, but one which flows from human experience, often through symbolic engagements. McLean sees Aristotle as taking Plato’s dialogical presentation of the concept of participation to a more formalized systemic level.³⁰ The deep philosophical insights of Plato and Aristotle did much for the formalization of thought, but still could not adequately account for the human person’s world of freedom, creativity and search for meaning. Being understood as form alone informing matter could not address the

²⁸ McLean, *Religion and Cooperation between Civilizations*, 137.

²⁹ See also McLean’s discussions in *Ways to God*, 176-177, and *Plenitude and Participation*, 49-50. I am using the word ontology and its various forms to reference something’s very being, rather than one of its characteristics or some functional capability. Here, the religious nature of the human person is understood as part of the person’s very being, and therefore not dependent on a particular perspective, attitude or action of the person.

³⁰ Plato’s stress on the images or reflections of reality caused Aristotle concern that the real things themselves may no longer be understood in their active character of forms and being. In Aristotle’s system, being was primarily substance, but appeared under different composites of form and matter. The change in being was the change in the form/matter composite. Though this formalization of Aristotle safeguarded the full potential of beings, it had its shortcomings, specifically regarding human beings. McLean points out that “the physical universe could be understood only as an endless cycle of formation and dissolution, of which the individual was but a function. Therefore, the freedom and significance of the individual were not adequately accounted for.” McLean, *Ways to God*, 179.

key issues of the meaning of the human person that later ages would be pushed to explore.³¹

This brief reference to early philosophy demonstrates the great jump in reflection that came with the shift to conceptual thinking. It also reveals how certain dramas of reality, such as the question of why there is being at all, rather than nothing, can be so taken for granted that they can lose their impact and emphasis in later ages. Fundamental theology can neither overlook nor forget the relevance of some of these early great discoveries, nor can it take them for granted. Doing so would result in missing the full significance of existence and the impact of limit experiences based on it that can lead to awareness of the God of love. The real drama of life is waking up to and actively engaging the narrative of one's personal existence in relationship with God. To fully grasp the dynamics of that life narrative I will look more closely at the realities of God, the human person, and culture. The exploration now turns to God, the most significant reality there is, the source of why there are existent beings in dynamic relationship.

GOD AS IMMANENT, TRANSCENDENT BEING

My intention in this section is to present the reality of God as totally accessible, totally intelligible and communicative, so that the dynamic of human response to the mystery of God's being can be understood as something more than just a subjective interpretation of one's search for meaning. McLean's metaphysics will help to ground the reality of the mystery in objective being, so that the notion of God cannot be reduced to a mere satisfaction of human need. Though what follows shall not be an exhaustive study of God, I do want to highlight a point that proves crucial for an element of the thesis: trusting in the full environment of reality, so that others may find their way back to the mystery of God, connaturally, as it were. As John Paul II wrote, "A theology without a metaphysical horizon could not move beyond an analysis of religious experience, nor would it allow the *intellectus fidei* to give a coherent account of the universal and transcendent value of revealed truth."³² McLean's Thomistic metaphysics will provide the framework, while his phenomenology of consciousness will provide the mortar for the walls and the glass for the windows. In the chapter on encounter we saw how the person initially focuses on sense experience and the rudimentary functional elements at play in encounter. The

³¹ When I look at the human person and freedom later in this chapter we shall see how philosophy got the insight it needed to address adequately this reality of the human search for meaning.

³² John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, # 83.

metaphysics will help to unveil the mystery in the background landscape of one's experience. That mystery may appear to be in the background, but it actually provides the major element to reality: where one lives and moves and has one's being. Discovery and acknowledgement of God is essential for the dynamic we will explore later: growing in freedom, searching for meaning, and fully engaging the mystery of life we have received. I divide my reflections into two main parts: 1) God as the eminent, inexpressible, uncreated Creator and 2) intelligibility and communication of God as transcendent being.

God as the Eminent, Inexpressible, Uncreated Creator

Probing the mystery of God's being is no easy task because it exceeds all sense experience in the created world that surrounds us. Taking his cue from Thomistic metaphysics, McLean uses the distinctive elements of *esse* and *essence* to differentiate being as existence and being of a distinct type, of a particular nature. In humans and all other created beings, these are distinct and designate a particular existence of a certain nature. Each unique existence, or *esse*, attempts to express the full potential of its being according to its nature, or *essence*. In God, however, these two are the same, for God has no potentiality. God's being is fully actualized in eternity, so God's *esse* and *essence* are one and the same. But, though one and the same, keeping the distinction between the two philosophically allows us to understand how we can grapple and learn from the intelligibility of being without fully understanding or grasping existence. To understand God as Creator for the dynamic ahead I shall review a) the negative way and b) creation and the mystical dynamism of love.

The Negative Way. McLean looks at St. Thomas Aquinas' negative way in detail so that the radical reality of God's being might lose none of its glory in human discussions that seek to understand it. In reflections about God, theology uses analogy as *via affirmativa* to express what one understands of God. The existence of created reality is considered in relation to its nature or essence, that which limits and defines its capacity for being. God or the Absolute, however, is incomposite and unlimited being. Because the manner of speaking of God is always hampered by our composite understanding of things, the *via negativa*, or negative way, is employed to put a check on expressions and to provide a reference for the complete otherness of God as compared to other objects of understanding. For McLean the negative way is not a defense of the existence of God at all, but more like a check on how we understand and speak about God.

What is denied in the negative way is simply that the absolute exists according to the composite mode which inevitably characterizes all human expressions of the Absolute. Hence, the negative way does not mean that the Absolute does not exist, or even that it is not non-existent for that could reduce God to the minimal realization of existence. The negative way is not about the Absolute at all, but about the human mode of expressing it.³³

Here McLean touches on a critical aspect of the negative way that fundamental theology must keep in consideration. Rational expressions of God always fall short of God's reality and someone's personal experience of relationship with God. The incomposite mode of existence is so foreign to us that we do not even have the means to speak about it accurately. Human language and grammar are suited to the composite mode of being and existence experienced in the created world. As a recent document of the International Theological Commission affirms, "Theology rightly intends to speak truly of the Mystery of God, but at the same time it knows that its knowledge though true is inadequate in relation to the reality of God, whom it can never 'comprehend'."³⁴ Theology, then, must continually apply the imagination to correct distorted understandings of God constructed on composite models. At first glance, one would think that the negative way acts as a sort of instrumental check on existence, but McLean is quick to avoid such a consideration, seeing in it the pitfall of reducing God to the most minimal form of existent reality. Instead, the negative way ensures that, before the mysterious presence of God, we must remain humble in our attempts to give it expression or explanation. The negative way aids theology as it tries to help those who may have boxed God in to a confined state of indifference or impotence, as the deists essentially did. Far from God's having a minimal realization of existence, people today need to have their idea of the being and presence of God explode into all possible dimensions, into an expansive existence impossible to comprehend fully.

In a secular age where the presence of God seems to have disappeared for many, the negative way opens up the false restrictions

³³ McLean, *Knowledge of God and the Discovery of Man*, 21.

³⁴ International Theological Commission, *Theology Today: Perspectives, Principles and Criteria*, # 97, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_doc_20111129_teologia-oggi_en.html#CHAPTER_3 (accessed 24 April 2012). In this portion of the document the *via negativa* is specifically addressed and its use explained in reference to theology's use of the *via affirmativa* and the *via eminentiae*.

many have placed on reality. The reductions of materialism and idealism and other rationalisms resulted in confining God to certain controllable domains, though the domains remained accessible for those who really felt it necessary to have a link with God. Confined in a controlled space, the words and expressions to describe God came easily to mind. But such a method does not take account of the full reality. When discussing the *via eminentiae*, McLean relates that the Absolute's eminent reality surpasses any of our attempts of expressing it. This check on expressions of the Absolute has important ramifications that prove critical to McLean's emphasis to keep the vision of being open. "This must be kept open for the eminent affirmation of Being Itself so that incomposite Being can manifest itself to the human mind despite the mind's restrictions. In turn, it enables humans to respond in positive terms which similarly are open and unfettered."³⁵ The mind's restrictions include rational, theological discourse that unfortunately holds the potential for boxing God into limited human perceptions. Theology must take great care not to allow its systems or discourse to restrict people's imaginations; they need to be able to respond in freedom. The intellect needs the aid of the symbolic imagination to remain open to the reality of God's being and the myriad of human responses to God's invitations of love. Bringing people to the normal edge or limit of their common experience provides them an opportunity for making a radical judgment, for seeing existence as an affirmation that in turn expands their understanding of reality. In the scriptural quote at the beginning of this chapter, Jesus leads the Samaritan woman to just such an experience. The conversation moves from the mundane, about the well and needing a bucket to draw out the water, to the profound in Jesus' affirmation that he is in possession of limitless water which can take away thirst for good. Dimensions shifted and horizons expanded.

The challenge for theology, then, is to help people move beyond their self-imposed or culturally imposed restrictions on being and reality. The negative way serves to keep us humble in our expressions of the limitless, transcendent and eminent nature of God, while also offering an expanded vision of being open so that the eminence of Being Itself may be affirmed. By the negative way theology ensures that the dynamism of love and communication between God and the human person is safeguarded.

³⁵ McLean, *Ways to God*, 211. McLean cites St. Thomas here, I-13 of the *Summa Theologica*. Unlike Aristotle who employed abstraction, Thomas employed judgment, concerned not with form, but with existence as affirmation. See McLean's discussion of these details in *Ways to God*, 188-189.

Creation and the Mystical Dynamism of Love. Having established that God's being is beyond what we could ever fully express or understand, the next step is to see that creation remains continually in a dynamism of God's love which sustains and enriches it. God's first love, which hearkens back to the moment of the creation of every human soul, can never be extinguished; it exists as a prior word deep in the person's being. The safeguarding of that dynamism in a philosophy of being ensures that it can be enriched further by a philosophy of consciousness, rather than supplanted or overwhelmed by it. Theology generally considers God's manifestation of love in its more mediated sense, neglecting too often the unmediated, mysterious presence and communication of God in a more direct, but less expressible sense. My aim here is to acknowledge this unmediated presence of love and offer it as a possible way home to faith, if it can be recognized for what it is.

McLean wants to preserve this free and open dynamism between God and creation on the level of both being and consciousness. It is on the level of being that religion ultimately has its foundation. Without this foundation the dynamism could be considered just another horizon choice among a multitude, as many unfortunately consider it today. Lonergan called this ontological link a "prior word", which establishes the very core of religion within the Absolute's dynamic relationship with humanity.³⁶ This fits well with McLean's insistence that each person has an intuitive awareness of the divine, that the human person's religious quality comes from deep within one's being based on relationship with the Creator, in whose generosity of being as truth, goodness and love, it has a share. The intuitive relationship with God in the heart of each person reflects the direct, unmediated love of God. The challenge is to return this relationship to the field of awareness, even if its domain is the inexpressible field of contemplation. McLean would liken it to being brought back in touch with the first love that we experienced at the moment of creation. Although he doesn't use the term "prior word," he would maintain that this unmediated presence of

³⁶ Lonergan distinguishes between a mediated, spoken word of God that is contextually conditioned and an unmediated, prior word that can be likened more to an effusion of love. As he writes, "But the prior word in its immediacy, though it differs in intensity, though it resonates differently in different temperaments and in different stages of religious development, withdraws man from the diversity of history by moving out of the world mediated by meaning and towards a world of immediacy in which image and symbol, thought and word, lose their relevance and even disappear." Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 112. This prior word, this flooding of our hearts with love, is something akin to the rest and intimacy one experiences in contemplation. Unmediated in character, Lonergan expresses here that the experience has the felt effect of withdrawing one from our everyday life of the senses.

God always remains within one's being, even if not fully a part of consciousness. His emphasis throughout *Ways to God* is not so much about finding a new place or new experience as it is about a coming home to a place and an experience that has been within the person from the moment of creation. The immediacy of this first love or prior word is critical to the confident proclamation of the Gospel. Each person is called to journey home to an active awareness and participation with God, who is the source of his or her being. Any outwardly spoken word may, indeed, be historically conditioned, as is each person's personal journey. But McLean recognizes that at the core of each person's being lies a world of immediacy in being and relationship with God that surpasses conscious reflection and experience. It could be considered as a sort of resting place which one knows intuitively from one's very existence, a serene and secure place in both identity and being. It is a state or world prior to mediation by meaning, but from which all meaning derives, whether mediated through experience and symbols, or unmediated in the direct touch of love in contemplation.

This love is not foreign but home to us, because by this love we have been created to share and participate actively in it. Freedom and fulfillment come to fruition by participating in and sharing this love with others. Such a love and participation in freedom could only come from a love freely given in the very act of creation *ex nihilo*, from nothing. McLean describes this as the gift of Subsistent Love, whose "causality is predicated, not upon a need, a lack, or a desire in the All-perfect, but upon 'the gracious will to share, chosen in perfect freedom'."³⁷ Any other reason beyond the overflowing abundance of love shared freely would not respect God's own being, freedom and goodness. The *via negativa* ensures that we not place our human limitations on God's generosity, so that creation itself can contentedly find rest, assured that its full existence is safe, that its ontological foundation is sound. The dynamism of love between Creator and created, then, is the very backbone of the universe itself, the prior word forever present in the framework of being. This ontological reality, which exists as prior word before God's expressed revelation, gives McLean assurance and confidence in his philosophical project. So, too, it provides theology with confidence and the solid foundation for its endeavors to help others journey toward faith. Linking up with the earlier discussions of mythic experience, we could say it provides the anchor for the imagination's inductive reasoning. Humanity's very existence, then, is based on the foundation of a mystical dynamism of

³⁷ McLean, *Knowledge of God and the Discovery of Man*, 43-44. In this passage McLean cites John Wright's article "Divine Knowledge and Human Freedom: The God Who Dialogues," *Theological Studies* 38 (1977): 455.

love and freedom, which invites a response of love given in full freedom.

As I close this broader review on God as the eminent, inexpressible, uncreated Creator, I want to take a moment to review the important points discovered. First, by use of the negative way, theology keeps open the broad expanse of being for its affirmation as existing, regardless of the limitations the intellect may have in giving expression to that reality. Existence itself is an affirmation that opens one to the manifestation of God's loving presence. The dynamism of love that existence affirms resides within created being as a prior word of love, a word that cannot be extinguished as long as one exists. In order to reach a moment of faith, that word of love needs to be brought to awareness, awareness made possible through contemplation of and attentiveness to life. God, however, wishing to do even more than create us freely in love and then hope we stumble upon this awareness, chooses to express his truth and his love so that we might more easily come to an awareness of our loved condition and freely find our way home. Before any explicit verbal expression, God as Subsistent Love communicates that love and invites us to participate in it through the very intelligibility of being. Our attention now turns to God's inherent intelligibility and kenotic form of communication.

Intelligibility and Communication of God as Transcendent Being

As I begin this section it proves beneficial to take a moment to look at a roadmap to keep the overall perspective. We are in the midst of looking at the levels of reality that unveil themselves during encounter, specifically looking at the reality of God. I have taken some cues from a short review of myth to gain insights about the struggle to understand God and the diverse world around us. We have seen that one of the biggest challenges today may be to expand the imagination from a normally deductive manner of reasoning to a more inductive one. After transitioning from symbolic thought to a more conceptual, philosophic approach, I reviewed God's immanence and transcendence as Creator, using the negative way to affirm the infinite expanse of God's being and the human inability to give expression to it. The dynamism of love that flows from God's being abides in us as a prior word that acts as a sort of birthright, even if we have failed to acknowledge this gift of God's love. I intend to try to blend McLean's metaphysics and phenomenology as we continue to look at the reality of God, the human person and culture for the remainder of this chapter. Again, the reason for an in-depth look at these levels of reality is to establish a firm grounding in being, in metaphysics, in order to prepare to unfold and analyze the dynamic of the spiritual birth of Christ in the hearts of people.

As described above, the reality that exists at the heart of creation on the level of being reflects the dynamism of love which is the very essence of the relationship between God and creation. This dynamism of love, which has God as its source, flows from Being Itself and is radically intelligible to creatures because their very being is a participation in it. To reach a fuller understanding of the mystery of God one has to probe the reflection of God's love in creation. This is both a philosophical and a theological enterprise, but too often the two are separated. Through philosophical reflection on being and the insights obtained, we can come to understand that our being results from the generous sharing of the overabundance from the subsistent Source of Being. But to grasp the reality of one's being as a generous choice of a personal God to have creatures share in that internal dynamism of love, some theological reference proves helpful. John Paul II wrote that "the prime commitment of theology is seen to be the understanding of God's *kenosis*, a grand and mysterious truth for the human mind, which finds it inconceivable that suffering and death can express a love which gives itself and seeks nothing in return."³⁸ The Word becoming flesh in the Incarnation remains the definitive event for understanding God's *kenosis*; the self-emptying of God in love is part of the dynamism of God's very being. That dynamism of God's being contains within it the dynamism of the paschal mystery. This wisdom of the Cross, which indeed can be a truth difficult for the human mind to grasp, exists within the reality of our lives. In order better to tool ourselves for understanding the unveiling of this truth in human hearts, I want to look at how McLean describes the luminous intelligibility of being as preceding structures of thought and how intelligibility calls for participation. I will then examine how, through God's kenotic communication, God enables us to participate consciously in the dynamism of love. So the reflections are divided into three parts: 1) intelligibility precedes structures of thought, 2) intelligibility calls for participation, and 3) God's kenotic communication.

Intelligibility Precedes Structures of Thought. My aim in this section is to present the radical intelligibility of being which precedes any structures of thought and has the effect of establishing God within the horizon of experience, even before any conscious recognition of that divine presence. In this age of so much focus on epistemology it is refreshing to find in McLean someone who holds to the idea that a good epistemology can only follow upon a good ontology, and that without a sound ontology no epistemology could suffice to make up for what would be lacking. Though one may be intuitively aware of God's

³⁸ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, #93.

presence, by ontology I mean a strong metaphysics that gives the foundation needed to grasp the reality of God's being, as well as the foundation to understand the human being's relation to God. From his ontology McLean realizes that the human person does not have to go searching for God by way of thinking, rationalizations or systems of logic and knowing.

The issue then is not how the notion of the divine entered human thought; it has always been there, for without that which is One and Absolute in the sense of infinite and self-sufficient man and nature would be at odds; humankind would lack social cohesion; indeed, thinking would be the same as not thinking, just as being would be the same as nonbeing.³⁹

For McLean, the idea that the divine would not have been a part of human thought would itself be a violation of the law of non-contradiction. The notion of the divine presence never had to enter human thought because it has always been there, linked to one's being and, thus, connatural to who one is and one's surrounding environment. The connection to God, as we have seen, is part of the very structure of one's being and precedes thought processes. But McLean goes even further by asserting that attempts to expunge God from human thought are ultimately doomed to failure. In writing on Anselm's interior way, McLean observes the following: "As God is Being Itself it is impossible not only to have finite beings without him (the *a posteriori* reasoning), but for him not to be. This is inconceivable because impossible; it is the center of both thought and being."⁴⁰ Since God precedes structures of thought and those structures develop from the intelligibility of God's being, God always remains a horizon in human experience, whether acknowledged, recognized, believed in or not. Non-believers simply have not given the time or energy to probe into the full logic of the reality of their own existence. Failure to recognize God as Creator ultimately stems from a fallacy regarding the interior logic of one's own being, a sort of denial of the full reality of who one is as a human being.⁴¹

³⁹ McLean, *Ways to God*, 24. For purposes of comparison, McLean's ontology of the human person's openness to the transcendent is very similar to Karl Rahner's description of the person as "*potentia oboedientialis*" for revelation. See Rahner's *Hearers of the Word*, 3-16.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 292.

⁴¹ My intention here is to stress the reality of God directly to being and the gift of human existence. Atheism and the failure to recognize God can take

Part of the root problem in recognizing the reality of God has to do with what I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter: one's vision of being needs to be expanded, or brought to a level beyond the empirical or visible, beyond composite and limited existence. The difficulty is that one normally uses categories of thought based on our limited experience and limited horizon, while the transcendent horizon demands new modes of comprehension of the incomposite Absolute. McLean tries to explain this epistemological dilemma by asserting that one "must leave behind the rational categories of technical reason, for such categories limit the infinite. (God) precedes the structures of reason and gives them their inexhaustible quality precisely because he never can be adequately contained in them."⁴² McLean does not say that all reason must be left behind, only 'the rational categories of technical reason.' These need to be left behind because they focus in on objectifying things from a limited and functional perspective. As Ratzinger noted, when technical reason dominates there results a dramatic shrinking of the application of reason that endangers the human person: "science becomes pathological and a threat to life when it takes leave of the moral order of human life, becomes autonomous, and no longer recognizes any standard but its own capabilities."⁴³ The result of a shrunken reason is that it relegates God to that of an object, an idea among many others. But God is forever the Subject, never to be reduced to another of humanity's objects. God gives to human structures of reason an inexhaustible quality, so that we can reach toward and grapple with the mystery of his incomposite, infinite being.⁴⁴ Infinite as

many other forms; see *Gaudium et Spes* #'s 19 and 20 for some roots of atheism and forms of its expression. One's existence logically points to the intelligibility of God's existence.

⁴² McLean, *Ways to God*, 394-395. McLean also mentions an intuitive, personal awareness of the divine that precedes the categories of thought on being. The divine, as the deepest level of being, must be known and expressed differently from ordinary knowledge and discourse. An intuitive awareness, McLean maintains, would have to be subjective and individual. We'll attend to this subjective and individual awareness later, especially in our next chapter, but the intuition has its source in the objective horizon of reality.

⁴³ Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, 158.

⁴⁴ From his early studies with Tillich, McLean recognized the importance this awareness of God's reality has for one's understanding of humanity and culture. The intelligibility of Absolute Being that precedes structures of thought has ramifications for one's outlook on the rest of reality. In his doctoral dissertation McLean uses a quote from Tillich to make his point on one's awareness of God's being. "The principle under which this general and corrected approach to God would operate is: 'The Unconditioned of which we have immediate awareness, without inference, can be recognized in the cultural

God's being is, God can never be contained in thought, but remains ever accessible through his intelligibility of being and the structures of reason God has given us.

Taking account of God in this manner changes one's understanding of reality. It opens up an infinite, transcendent horizon, shifting the focus of perspective off of oneself, while illuminating culture as a reservoir of wisdom that references the divine presence. For theology's purposes, the critical aspect of McLean's ontological approach places the immanent transcendence of God at the center of reality. The presence and action of the Spirit in culture gives it a theonomous character, even in the midst of its own purification. McLean's ontology of the human person and culture will follow shortly. Here we have established that being, in itself, is intelligible, and that human reality has God's being ever in its horizon. Even if not yet recognized, that presence of God retains an intelligibility that calls out to be acknowledged; it calls for one's participation.

Intelligibility Calls for Participation. The intelligibility of being calls out to be recognized, taken account of and engaged. All being has what could be termed a natural intelligibility that presents itself to its surrounding reality, and subsistent Being, which stands behind all reality as its origin and source, gives to each thing its own particular intelligibility. The intelligibility that shines forth from being calls for participation. It is not confined simply to knowledge of created things, but contains and extends God's love. This metaphysical infrastructure of intelligibility and love provides theology with the effective framework for exploring encounter with Christ. This framework for divine revelation is a critical subject for fundamental theology as it manages the relationship between philosophy and theology.

McLean explores well this point of encounter that stems from the innate intelligibility of Being, whose participative character beckons to created beings. The simple presence of intelligibility actively makes itself known, regardless of the use of words. McLean describes this as

and natural universe.' If this were applied realism would become self-transcending and culture would become theonomous." McLean, "Man's Knowledge of God According to Paul Tillich: A Thomistic Critique," abstract, 12. His citation of Paul Tillich is from Tillich's essay, "The Two Types of Philosophy of Religion," found in *Theology of Culture*, ed. Robert C. Kimball (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959). In addition to his participational emphasis, then, McLean's disciplined ontology opens up the realms of awareness of the divine so that epistemological pitfalls do not have the opportunity to cloud the ramifications of this divine presence in the rest of our experience.

the “explicitation of the unparticipated... Note that what is sought is intelligibility, not necessity.... What should be sought is not a necessitating reason for the Absolute’s creativity, but only intelligibility for actively participating or sharing its perfection.”⁴⁵ Before the direct communication of what is generally understood as divine revelation, McLean describes a communication of being’s intelligibility that invites participation. And this inviting presence of the Absolute, though unparticipated and without parts in its own being, possesses a character marked by creativity and participation. The Absolute’s creative and participative character stems not from necessity, but from God’s being, and is shared with us through the overabundant generosity of love flowing from God. This invitation to share and participate in the character of Absolute Being is recognizable and available because of the radical intelligibility of Being. Therefore, even though the Absolute may not be recognized as a relational, personal being, the creativity and participation that characterize visible creatures are readily recognized and easily shared. The inherent intelligibility of being has a certain metaphysical infrastructure that does more than just offer us knowledge and clarity about created realities. It serves as an expression of God who is truth and love. Even by participating in the abundance and details of created reality, however, one may not recognize God, the source of intelligibility, as truth and love.

On the level of metaphysics or the philosophy of being, Mclean notes the importance of adhering to the details of the distinctions in the structure of being. One might think that since, in God, *esse* and essence, or existence and nature, are the same, the distinction between the two for God could be dissolved. As I described earlier, however, keeping the distinction allows one more easily to understand how created beings might recognize the radical intelligibility of being, while simultaneously failing to acknowledge its source in the existence of God. “It is the retention of this positive element of essence which provides the radical foundation for participation by limited beings in the divine and their capacity of pointing to the infinite power of being and depth of reason.”⁴⁶ Essence marks the nature of God and gives that nature intelligibility. Normally, essence would also mark the limits of that being, defining its potentiality, but for God there is no limit; all remains pure act. Thus, any and all are able to recognize limitless possibilities of participation in this intelligibility, as long as each takes account of his or her own limitations. So God remains ever intelligible or recognizable, but without the marked limits by which we normally identify beings. This is why, as I noted earlier in the discussion of the negative way,

⁴⁵ McLean, *Ways to God*, 223.

⁴⁶ McLean, *Hermeneutics, Tradition and Cultural Change*, 58-59.

human expressions of God always fall short. It also explains how people can enjoy the fruits of God's intelligibility in and through creation without acknowledging God's existence, though in the end there can be no excuse for this failure of the natural light of human reason.⁴⁷

One of the challenges for theology as it probes the dynamism of faith, then, is to move people to use their full faculty of the natural light of human reason to acknowledge the existence of a being who cannot be defined like any other being. Human reason has to heed the call to seek the source behind this infrastructure of intelligibility, which acts not just as a playground for knowledge and exploration, but discloses the personal God of truth and love who invites each person to participate personally in that truth and love. McLean goes on to say that "such participation in the absolute and some awareness of it is a necessary prerequisite for any religion."⁴⁸ With participation in totemic and mythic thought, awareness of God was there. Today, however, many think that they operate as independent entities, lacking any sense of participation in a transcendent reality. For that reason, the consciously religious character which has always marked the human person can no longer be taken for granted; it has to be awakened. Until one moves beyond mere exploration of the knowledge about things, one cannot recognize truth and love behind the intelligibility of created realities. Unaware of the full depths of participation, one cannot acknowledge the existence of the personal God. Religion becomes possible once awareness of participation in God as the Absolute dawns. Without such awareness people may not know the true source of the creative intelligibility in which they are constantly invited to participate. Theology stimulates people's awareness of God by effectively giving expression to the depth of this participation. Though creation provides sufficient intelligibility for human reason to recognize the existence of the creator, God chooses to reveal his truth more directly for extra clarity. The sort of natural revelation that follows from the intelligibility of Being serves to prepare all created beings for a more explicit encounter, through which one moves from merely sharing in the perfection of a character of the Absolute to an understanding of a real relation with the personal God of love. But there is something more than just the intelligibility of being here; love lingers in being and makes being's intelligibility inviting. As

⁴⁷ *Dei Filius*, in *Enchiridion Symbolorum: definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum*, edizione bilingue, ed. Heinrich Denzinger, a cura di Peter Hünermann. (Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane, 1996), # 3004.

⁴⁸ McLean, *Hermeneutics, Tradition and Cultural Change*, 59. All of this is a prelude to linking McLean's insights to how *logos* communicates itself more explicitly. Benedict XVI's reflections on this will come up in the next section on God's kenotic communication.

Ratzinger writes, “The last word about being is, no longer the unnamable absolute, but love, which then makes itself visible in the God who himself becomes a creature and thus unites the creature with the Creator.”⁴⁹ Once a person comes to know God in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, the backgrounds and horizons that may have previously gone unnoticed come to light and become clarified in encounter with him.

Being’s intelligibility, then, provides a framework for love to be communicated, a love that extends an invitation for participation. The intelligibility of each being beckons other beings to take account of it, to seek to understand it, to engage it for mutual flourishing. Depending on the levels of being involved, that engagement has more or less ramifications. These ramifications reach their highpoint in the encounter of the human person with the intelligibility of divinity, an encounter in which the philosophical intelligibility of being takes on theological significance. This returns us again to John Paul II’s description of the relationship between philosophy and theology best construed as a circle.

By virtue of the splendor emanating from subsistent Being itself, revealed truth offers the fullness of light and will therefore illumine the path of philosophical enquiry. In short, Christian Revelation becomes the true point of encounter and engagement between philosophical and theological thinking in their reciprocal relationship.⁵⁰

Subsistent Being has its own emanating splendor, its own intelligibility that beckons intelligent beings to take account and seek understanding. But Christian Revelation clarifies the personal nature of this God of truth and love. Revelation opens the ears of the heart to give sense and meaning to the intelligibility that has always been there as a given in our experience. Revelation ‘becomes the true point of encounter and engagement,’ for it marks the communication of God with created humanity, as humanity seeks to understand and reflect on meaning in its created environment. Here philosophy and theology meet in a very natural, unforced manner so that, though their languages may be different, they share this reflection point of the divine-human encounter. McLean’s language enriches theology’s own for the purpose of examining how this revelation of God’s love comes to be heard, recognized, accepted and engaged. The intelligibility and participative character of God’s being frames human reality and slowly seeks to be accepted for what it is: a communication of love that desires our

⁴⁹ Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, 84.

⁵⁰ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, # 79.

freedom and full flourishing. In Jesus of Nazareth God offers the mode of a kenotic, self-emptying communication of love.

God's Kenotic Communication. The intelligibility of Absolute Being calls us to participate in its available richness and abundance, and that intelligibility emanates from the presence of God's being. But God also wishes to make that presence felt more explicitly through word, as an active, communicative presence of a personal being. In God there is no potentiality, only act, so the very presence of God and the communication of that presence by Word or *Logos* are, in a sense, one and the same, or of the same substance. This Word or *Logos* flows from or acts as the effective expression of God's being. Word expresses the full intelligibility and love of God. By Word, God's truth and love unfold from God's being and empty out into created reality. Since the Word, as fully active expression of God and therefore one in substance with God, empties itself into creation, what initially looks like and is a self-emptying or kenosis of God, also effectively becomes for created reality the inviting embrace of God.

All this precedes the reception of formal, divine Revelation, but is not estranged from it. I call it a natural revelation because it flows from the gift of life we have received and the gift of creation which makes up our environment. Absolute Being makes its presence felt even before it might be consciously recognized. In the light of Dulles' models of revelation, it could be considered a symbolically mediated form between his models of inner experience, dialectical presence, and awareness. Only after consciousness grows do dialogue and full understanding come to be apprehended.⁵¹ For McLean this unfolding of God's communication in the *Logos* acts as a point of identity. In the identity of God, the self and the world discover their respective identities. In the kenosis of God's self-communication, created realities acquire and fill out their being.⁵²

⁵¹ See Avery Dulles, *Models of Revelation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), especially his chapter, "Symbolic Mediation," 131-154. Though Dulles offers various models, he describes them as simple versions of the reality. His main emphasis remains with the symbolic mediation that can blend various models in a unified, coherent understanding.

⁵² McLean endeavors to explain this communication in relation to one of Tillich's concepts in the following manner: "Logos becomes the point of identity between God, self, and world. Of these three, the word of the Absolute is central and is participated in by self and world as they acquire their being. Thus the logos of reason gives us a first introduction to the concept Tillich has of the Absolute overcoming the separation of subject and object to provide a deeper synthesis of the reality of both." McLean, *Hermeneutics, Tradition and Cultural Change*, 55.

The fullness of this outpouring of God's being happens preeminently in the Incarnation of the Son, an outpouring of love with a human face that takes a full share in the realities of created humanity. From this emptying of God's being into reality we come to know that our notion of reason must be expanded to the wide embrace of love. As Benedict XVI describes it, "God is the absolute and ultimate source of our being; but this universal principle of creation – the *Logos*, primordial reason – is at the same time a lover with all the passion of true love."⁵³ The metaphysical image of God is important to keep as a reference framework for reality and for understanding the underpinning it provides for all religions. As primordial reason, it anchors the intellect for understanding the fullness of reality. As personal lover, the *Logos* reveals God as fully engaged in our wellbeing and existence. But this personal lover is really only recognized in the revelation of the human face of God in Jesus of Nazareth. As John Paul II pointed out, this gives theology its point of reference in created reality: "The mystery of the Incarnation will always remain the central point of reference for an understanding of the enigma of human existence, the created world and God himself."⁵⁴ The Incarnation is a point of communication, a point of reference, a point of identity, and an expression of the union of created reality's participation in the Absolute. As the Word became flesh, so now the flesh of created humanity is subsumed into the Word. Jesus is the kenosis of God, the self-emptying of God's being and love with a personal face.

Although McLean names it a point of identity and would agree with John Paul II that it is a reference for our understanding, this kenosis ought by no means to be understood as a static or fixed idea. The kenotic communication of the Absolute continues, enriching understanding and deepening our identity, because it is of the very essence of God's being in actuality. In one of McLean's rarer passages that link philosophy and theology he describes this ongoing, personal communication of God:

In the image of the Son who as Word expresses all that the Father is, and like *Logos* as the first principle through whom all is created, being is open, expressive and creative. Just as a musician or poet unfolds the many potential meanings of a single theme, so being as truth unfolds its meaning and communicates itself to others.⁵⁵

⁵³ Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, # 10.

⁵⁴ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, # 80.

⁵⁵ McLean, *Knowledge of God and the Discovery of Man*, 42. Though not the specific focus here, this excerpt also demonstrates how McLean subtly goes

McLean frames his philosophical point regarding being with two analogies: one which uses the theologically relational reality between the Father and the Son, known from the mystery of the Incarnation, and another, which uses that of the work of an artist, here a musician or poet. Both examples help to describe his point about the quality of being as open, expressive, and creative. Since being contains truth about reality and is itself enduring, it is always unfolding meaning and communicating to all who can receive or apprehend its presence or message. McLean's effective ontology reveals a dynamic interchange that never ceases between God's uncreated Being and created reality. The dynamism flows from that unfolding of meaning in truth: the kenotic communication of Absolute Being informing created reality. Theologically, the Father expressing the Word (who is Jesus the Son) in the dynamism of love (who is the Holy Spirit) is an eternal act that continues without ceasing. That one may not have recognized this act for what it is does not imply that gifts of being, truth and meaning which flow from the act have not been communicated, shared and participated in by the created beings whose very existence is a gift flowing from this unceasing expression of love.

In service to the upcoming exploration of the dynamic of freedom for faith, then, we looked at God as Creator and used the negative way to open up our vision of God's being so that our limited language would not inhibit our reason. We showed that creation shares in a mystical dynamism of God's love, which is part of God's being. That being, and all created being as well, has an inherent intelligibility that precedes structures of thought and reaches out, inviting others to participate actively in that intelligibility. The fullness of the communication of God's being is offered to us in the incarnation, through which the human face of love in Jesus of Nazareth expresses all that God has to say and offer. And it is Jesus of Nazareth who teaches us who the human person is as created in the image and likeness of God.

THE HUMAN PERSON AS *IMAGO DEI*: IDENTITY AND CONSCIOUSNESS

We have looked at the reality of God after having stepped back to learn a bit from mythic experience so that we could ground ourselves in the knowledge of that critical level of reality. Now I want to explore and

about his mission through philosophy. In the two examples given, McLean appeals to the aesthetic sense in two ways, one from a Christian, religious context, the other from the artistic context, to communicate his philosophical point. But he links the reader to the religious point for reflection, from which a Christian may draw while the non-Christian may also gain insight.

establish the foundations of another level of reality: the human being made in the image and likeness of God. Later I shall look at the third level of reality important for our study, culture, where human freedom in its search for meaning seeks to give expression to its learned wisdom and experience of God. Political and technological developments have altered the manner in which freedom is understood, shifting the dynamic of its development in the human heart. Having noted these shifts Benedict XVI calls fundamental theology to a new task: “moving beyond the fascination that technology exerts, we must reappropriate the true meaning of freedom, which is not an intoxication with total autonomy, but a response to the call of being, beginning with our own personal being.”⁵⁶ McLean offers a philosophical anthropology that can highlight freedom as a personal call of being, providing the ontology and phenomenology for a sound theological anthropology.

As we look at the human level of reality I want to focus especially on those specific elements of anthropology important for the dynamic of freedom’s growth. One of the important aspects I want to keep in mind is the unity of the human person in the plurality of its dimensions. Too often the mistake is made of separating the dimensions of the human person into separate, almost opposing parts, such as body and soul, spirit and matter, psychological and physical, etc. It remains clear that the human person is made up of many dimensions, psychic, bodily, emotive, etc., but it also remains true that none of these can be understood apart from the unity of the whole person.⁵⁷ So my focus will not so much be on the nature or common traits of the human essence, but on the radical reality of a personal human existence and identity. I divide these discussions into three main sections, the last of which will receive primary emphasis: 1) creation and the motivation of God; 2) beyond the subject-object dichotomy: unique human existence; and 3) *imago Dei*.

Creation and the Motivation of God

In the previous section on the reality of God as immanent, transcendent Being, I spoke about God and being in general from what we might call an objective perspective. Here I want to consider the motivation of God in creating the human person, along with a brief look at the consequences that motivation will have for the discussions that

⁵⁶ Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, # 70.

⁵⁷ A good theological anthropology in the Catholic tradition can be found in Luis F. Ladaria, *Antropologia Teologica* (Rome: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1998). See especially 137-145, his section on the unity of the human being in the plurality of its dimensions.

follow. Before I enter into the more important details of the human person as *imago Dei*, it is worth revisiting the notion of God from the more subjective perspective of the human person.⁵⁸

From the perspective of the human person one might first address the reality of God with the question of where this notion of the divine originated. Was it simply made up as a crutch, as some maintain, or is there a sufficient foundation to say that the religious rites developed by peoples express a real relationship with God? Taking the reality of God as established, now the intention is to wrestle with how that reality can be confidently embraced by the human mind and heart. To this end McLean recalls an insight of Parmenides to emphasize the radical reality of existence. He observes that the notion of God has always been in human thought. "This is true not only as fact, as seen in totemic and mythic thought, but in principle as shown by Greek philosophy. For without that which is One, humanity would be at odds with nature, and humankind would lack social cohesion."⁵⁹ The notion of the divine, then, is not something we humans had to go searching for or dream up in order to satisfy some insecurity need. The notion has always been there since the dawn of *homo sapiens*. Reality would make no sense, would be inherently contradictive, without God. Built into this truth are the consequences that flow from the denial of the reality: humanity at odds with nature and without social cohesion. Though such consequences may be pointed out, skeptics or nonbelievers would insist the cause lay elsewhere. The notion of God has always been within the human mind and heart because it is part of who we are.

Seeing that the notion of God is not some abstraction of the human person's thought process but built into our existence, those traits that human consciousness relies upon from its own limited perspective must be crucial for cultivating a real relationship with God. These characteristics must necessarily be there for one's experience of the relationship to make any sense. In his metaphysics McLean usually refers to God as the One, the Absolute, the Good or the True. In this

⁵⁸ Throughout these sections I shall be endeavoring to probe McLean's metaphysics of the human person while also considering the philosophy of consciousness as well. By so doing, I hope to keep a balanced view of the two, allowing for the mutual enrichment of the philosophies of being and consciousness regarding the human person.

⁵⁹ McLean, *Ways to God*, 174. McLean uses Parmenides' insight that examined being from the negation of differentiation, thereby affirming the radical reality of existent beings. In the same passage McLean goes on to say, "Without that which is Absolute, in the sense of infinite and self-sufficient, thinking would be the same as not thinking, and being would be the same as nonbeing." Ibid.

area more related to the philosophy of consciousness, he uses especially the notion of beauty as he refers to relationship with God.

The source of the beauty imaged, progressively revealed and resoundingly reaffirmed by humans at their deepest levels of heart and mind, must be actual as are the struggles of human life. It must also be infinite as the basis for human freedom and creativity. As such these are ever open to new affirmation, rather than exhausted, closed, delimited or predetermined. Finally, it must be personal as the principle of life lived in knowledge of truth rather than in falsehood and deception, in love and goodness rather than in hate and evil.⁶⁰

These three necessary traits for God from the human perspective give a picture of McLean's phenomenology of God and the demands that the modern person makes in his or her assessment of the possibility of believing in God. These traits might be considered checkpoints in the list of skeptical reason either to engage the possibility of believing or leave it for others. All three must reach to the deepest levels of the human mind and heart. If the beauty encountered is not as real, as actual, as are the struggles of life, then it would not be considered sufficiently authentic. There can be no limits or systemic constraints on human freedom or creativity, so the beauty must be infinite. Lastly, if the beauty were not personal it could never satisfy the relational longing of the human heart on the person-to-person, subject-to-subject level of engagement. These three phenomenological traits or expectations flowing from the metaphysics of reality inform each person's perspective of God. To persuade the modern mindset seriously to consider belief in the unseen God, theology needs to consider the full reality of creation, including these characteristics of beauty, as it applies the critical inquiry of reason.

To enable authentic relationship God has established these high parameters by giving the human person such an immense inherent dignity. This dignity is not just limited to the human being considered in isolation, but especially connected to the human person's ability to share, communicate and relate to the infinite God who has created him or her. The question remains as to how one might go about explaining to the modern person what the motivation could be for an infinite God of love to create the universe and the human person. Doubting this motivation is part of what drives people to think that the universe is simply the result of a random cosmic event that led to the accidental

⁶⁰ Mclean, *Persons, Peoples and Cultures*, 137.

evolution of intelligent life in our little corner of the galaxy. McLean offers another explanation very much in tune with faith tradition, based on God's sharing of perfection. "In this, being comes to be seen in a dramatically new light, namely, not simply as self-seeking, but as self-sharing and self-communicating. The dynamism of being, then, is much more than a mean struggle for survival; it is rather a search for creative realization and sharing."⁶¹ This may not seem ground-breaking to us who are believers, but for many today it offers an alternative view to how they image or consider God. If they regard God existing at all it is often as some sort of deistic clockmaker, which leaves them with a self-understanding as a sort of accidental biological unit. But God's motivation in creating was to share perfection, to communicate in love. This flows from God's being and resides within one's own being. Anytime we are not freely sharing or communicating, we are failing to live fully. The essence of who we are as human beings has not to do with survival struggles, the basest of occupations, but with creativity and sharing, noble pursuits that increase one's likeness to God. Grasping God's motivation for creating us offers the opportunity to discover our identity; we are not created for selfish preservation, but for sharing, self-giving, and self-emptying.

The modern person need not be coerced or convinced through special efforts of argumentation. The shift in consciousness that can lead people to the freedom they need for reaching a position of faith lies within being itself. This is why McLean spends so much energy demonstrating how the philosophies of consciousness and being complement one another. For theology, this mutual enhancement of being and consciousness is critical to the manner in which it tries to accompany people on their faith journey. As McLean puts it, we cannot "abstract from existing being and remain in the ideal order: abstract, conceptual and distant. Rather, looking into not only mind but our hearts, we discover the most basic reality in terms of our concerns.... Like a giant communication dish or a tuning fork, our hearts resonate to being."⁶² Here McLean echoes Newman's emphasis on how the

⁶¹ Ibid., 184-185. Here again one can see evidence of the influence of Cornelio Fabro's Thomistic emphasis of participation on the thought of McLean.

⁶² McLean, *Knowledge of God and the Discovery of Man*, 99. As a parallel to McLean here I would make reference to John Henry Newman's idea of real assent. He describes that the imagination's role is primarily to stimulate the zones of the heart: the affections and appetites, hopes and fears. See Newman's discussion of real assents and their contrast with notional assents in his *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 76-92, especially 82.

affective dispositions of the person need to be tuned properly for the heart to become fertile ground for believing in God. This resonance of a person's heart to being and to God may require tweaking or tuning for a clearer reception. Investigating God's dynamism of love requires looking into hearts as well as minds and thought processes. And because that demands an array of considerations, the theological hermeneutics I shall try to adopt from McLean's own hermeneutics will be very important. In the resonance of being, the creativity and sharing that bring the human person to full flourishing begin with receptivity, just as does the effectiveness of a communication dish or tuning fork.

The heart's receptivity is made for love, made for God. Until that receptivity can be activated, the whole idea of God, especially of a God who created us in love and desires to communicate intimately with us, may remain dormant. But built into the very being of the human person resides this window to dynamic and free relationship with God.⁶³ This reality provides the confidence needed for finding the key to open the human heart to the full receptivity for which it was created. When I more fully consider the human person's openness to transcendent being later, we shall examine more closely this characteristic of the heart. The act of receptivity of the human heart resonates with being, which offers an understanding of the human person as more than body and consciousness. Consciousness grows with time and experience, opening up the latent potentials of one's being. And the motive behind God's having created us this way is so that we can freely share in and communicate with God's love.

Beyond the Subject-Object Dichotomy: Unique Human Existence

Having looked at God's motivation in creating the human person and the general receptivity of the human heart that flows from its resonance to being, the next step I want to make is to address the Christian insight into the metaphysics of the human being that

⁶³ Lonergan referred to this when he wrote of the question of God always remaining within each person's horizon. As he puts it, "There lies within his horizon a region for the divine, a shrine for ultimate holiness. It cannot be ignored. The atheist may pronounce it empty. The agnostic may argue that he finds his investigation has been inconclusive. The contemporary humanist will refuse to allow the question to arise. But their negations presuppose the spark in our clod, our native orientation to the divine." Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 103. What Lonergan describes as our native orientation to the divine, McLean would say is built into our very being. McLean's focus on the consequence of love emanating from being can be interpreted as the philosophical equivalent of Lonergan's, von Balthasar's, and Benedict XVI's theological emphases on love.

overcomes the subject-object dichotomy. The modern tendencies to both objectivism and subjectivism remain, so theology must be always careful to present a fully balanced notion of the human person.

It is common to speak of humankind in a general manner and of human dignity as a shared set of values by every human person. To do so is important, but it can also lead to a discussion that shortchanges the full drama of each person's existence in relation to God. Neither subjective idealism nor objective realism can capture this full drama of created human existence. Theology would do well to follow the example of McLean who moves to a point of identity in the human reality of existence, where any alienation of subject and object can be superseded.

Reality must not be simply identified with objective being; one must participate in some deeper principle or lose one's value and individuality. To identify reality with subjective consciousness, however, would be equally insufficient, for the subject is determined by its contrast with object. Consequently, what is sought is a level of reality which is beyond the dichotomy of subject and object, grounding and unifying the value of both.⁶⁴

Here McLean establishes as foundation in reality the identity of participation in God. It includes both his philosophies of being and consciousness without the tension of subject-object dichotomies. This step to a level of reality where the unique individuality for every human person can be respected is essential for theology. Without this step to a grounding level of reality of unique personal identity, any hermeneutics of conversion would not be able to stand up to today's skeptical deconstructionism. Theology cannot lose the needed objective view of reality or the critical element of the person's subjective engagement with reality. The intention must be, as McLean says, to ground and to unify the value of both so that the truest understanding of human dynamics might be explored. One's unique identity, then, is grounded

⁶⁴ McLean, *Ways to God*, 391. Related to this subject are texts in which he explores the writings of Tillich and Schelling, where the Absolute moves from being called "Ego" to the "Unconditional" and "Identity". McLean likens it to the Hindu Brahman as consciousness, between Fichte's subjective idealism and Hobbes' objective realism. See McLean's *Knowledge of God and the Discovery of Man*, 56. I only have time to point to these discussions in passing, but they demonstrate the complexity of addressing this subject well in order to overcome some of the pitfalls in today's thinking.

not in utopian isolation, but in the immersion with others in the dynamic love of God.

The early Christians never considered objective and subjective aspects of reality separately because these grounded and unified naturally for them in the person of Jesus, whom they knew as their Lord and God. Their relational experience with him gave them a sense that they were not just another face in the sea of humanity struggling for survival. In Jesus they found their uniqueness was recognized and respected in a personal manner. In his light their life's journey took on a dramatically new significance. Their relationship with Jesus uncovered for them the incredible drama of their personal existence. Rather than understanding one's life as just another member of humanity, McLean describes this effect on one's consciousness as follows. "This life is mine and unique; it has never existed before and will never be lived by another now or ever; it is my precious responsibility but even more it is my opportunity to live and to love, to create and to transform, to serve and to communicate."⁶⁵ In their relationship with Jesus as only Son of God, the early Christians' awareness of reality shifted significantly. The primary shift was in the awareness that their unique life was a personal gift from God – a gift offered that could not be ignored, but called out to be embraced in all its fullness. The responsibility to receive the fullness of this precious gift grew and became identified more with an obligation to participate in life to the fullest, but with full awareness of why and for whom they would participate: life in Christ lived in freedom and love.

The full philosophical effect of this took centuries to be integrated as new questions led to new perspectives and trajectories of thought. Not until St. Thomas did philosophy take fully into account this new awareness of the complexity of existence. I review it here because it is so essential for understanding the metaphysics that underlies the philosophy of consciousness in the dynamic I shall be investigating. Because existent reality is so often taken for granted today as the setting of the general data of experience, the precious nature of existence itself tends to be overlooked. But it is exactly the dawning awareness of life as a precious gift that opens the world of new significance and meaning in people's lives. St. Thomas' fusion of Aristotle's system of act and potency, form and matter, along with the participation demands of the Christian Gospel built on the insights of Plato and the reflections of St. Augustine, opened up a new world for metaphysics that allowed for a fuller understanding of the human person and of being in general.

McLean builds his whole philosophy of being around these insights of St. Thomas, and uses it also as the framework upon which he rests his enrichment of being by the philosophy of consciousness. "The

⁶⁵ McLean, *Persons, Peoples and Cultures*, 58-59.

significance of the work of Aquinas lies in the step he took toward resolving this central tension of being. To do so he developed the notion of subsistence in a philosophy of being as existence, rather than as essence, situating therein all required for the spiritual activity of human persons.”⁶⁶ From the form and matter of the Aristotelian system, the notion of essence worked well to define what sort or kind of being existed. Traits for the various types of being, along with their respective capacities, could be identified. The notion of subsistence, however, highlighted the drama and uniqueness of an actual existence of a being, rather than its non-existence. Existence is the act, or that by which a being is, and essence the potency or capacity that defines its nature.⁶⁷ McLean accentuates this notion of subsistence in being as existence in order to expand the framework of being so that the full subjectivity and spirituality of each unique person may receive its due respect. I want to maintain emphasis on the unique reality of each person’s existence throughout this study, so that theology’s role of midwifing the birth of faith may be understood in its unique particularity for each person. Plugging a person’s unique experience into a generalized system would minimize and lose the full richness in the dynamic for that person’s unique relationship and journey. The uniqueness of one’s existence also ensures, then, the unique consciousness one embodies.

All this returns us again to the question of overcoming the subject-object dichotomy. The level of reality needed to ground and unify the two is found in the unique existence of each person’s being,

⁶⁶ McLean, *Ways to God*, 280. See also page 276 for McLean’s explanation of the shift from Aristotle’s act and potency from form and matter to existence as act and essence as potency.

⁶⁷ In another place McLean stresses the critical insight for philosophy: “This step was as crucial for metaphysics as was the discovery of atoms for physics. Neither existence nor essence is itself a being, nor even intelligible by itself alone. Rather, beings are composed of existence and essence, not as beings, but as intrinsic principles or constituents of beings. Existence is the act by which essence is made to be, and essence is the limiting and defining capacity or potency by which the existence is distinct from all other existents and is of a particular kind.” McLean, *Ways to God*, 190. The critical element in this passage regards the non-intelligibility of either essence or existence without the other. Each is constituent of being in general. So often today, one of these will be confused with visibility or measurability, empirically speaking. Unfortunately, the challenge often faced is that, if a being or part of a being is not somehow evident to the senses in its essence, then a common assumption would be that it cannot exist. But this is simply a narrow understanding of being as existence, for different beings that exist have different potentialities or capacities with associated qualities, which may or may not be apparent to empirical measurements.

which provides for both objective identification and subjective allowance in freedom for that person's world of experience. "It is not that consciousness alone is now central, but rather, it is the founding of consciousness in being precisely as participation in the absolute *Esse* that gives consciousness the uniqueness, freedom and transcendence which characterize the person."⁶⁸ A person's being is not defined by one's experience, but one's consciousness does come to be dramatically affected by experience, coloring one's world views, attitudes and interpretations. Founding consciousness in being, a being that participates in God, assures that every person's unique identity cannot be destroyed by negative experiences. The relationship with God always remains in the background landscape, ready to be reawakened in the person's consciousness.⁶⁹ The mystery opened up by one's identity of unique existence in the dynamic love of God calls for a brief exploration of the elements of the human being as *imago Dei*.

Imago Dei

Their experience of personal relationship with Jesus as Son of God and Savior gave early Christians a new appreciation of existence as a great gift that brought a renewed sense of meaning to their lives. From understanding God's motivation of love to create us for knowing and loving, sharing and communicating, we learned that resonance with love is integral to one's being. And, one's being is formed for freedom and receptivity. Because being and consciousness are grounded in the divine existence, unique identity as personal gift from God equips one to overcome any subject-object dichotomies. As I begin these reflections of the human person as *imago Dei*, a brief review of the biblical view of participation will help to focus how to unfold the vision of being made

⁶⁸ McLean, "Karol Wojtyla's Mutual Enrichment of the Philosophies of Being and Consciousness," 22.

⁶⁹ Getting this understanding right is important for us because much philosophical thought has influenced the modern mindset to accentuate one element or another, resulting in a diminished sense of the human being's unique existence and consciousness. In another place McLean discusses different philosophical approaches: "Whereas Locke had developed the notion of the person in terms of consciousness predicated upon experience, Kant developed it on the requirements of an ethics based on will alone. Both the strengths and the weaknesses of this approach to the person lie in his effort to lay for ethics a foundation that is independent of experience. He did so because he considered human knowledge to be essentially limited to the spatial and temporal orders and unable to explain its own presuppositions." McLean, *Persons, Peoples and Cultures*, 71. Consciousness from experience and ethics from freedom of will are both necessary for full understanding.

in the image and likeness of God for full and free flourishing. Afterwards, I shall cover some of the elements of a theological anthropology which are critical for exploring the dynamic ahead. I divide the reflections, then, into four parts: a) biblical vision; b) personal uniqueness of *imago Dei*; c) freedom, imagination and *imago Dei*; and d) *imago Dei* as open to the transcendent.

Biblical Vision. The experience of the early Christians challenged philosophical thinkers to give full account to the drama of existence itself, not just the toils and joys encountered in life. As we saw above, it took philosophy a while to equip itself with the tools to take human existence into full account. The drama of existence must be consciously considered as primary in any reflection on the human being, so as to provide the search for meaning with an accurate compass. In his encyclical *Fides et Ratio* John Paul II referred to the philosophical density in the vision of the human person as *imago Dei* found in sacred scripture.

This vision offers indications regarding man's life, his freedom and the immortality of the human spirit. Since the created world is not self-sufficient, every illusion of autonomy which would deny the essential dependence on God of every creature – the human being included – leads to dramatic situations which subvert the rational search for the harmony and the meaning of human life.⁷⁰

As he prepares to discuss the vision of the human person as *imago Dei*, John Paul II stresses how this vision colors our view of life, of freedom and of immortality. He then immediately qualifies it with what he calls the essential dependence on God of any creature. Denial of this dependence creates illusions of autonomy that impede the search for harmony and disrupt the authentic meaning offered to us in life's journey. Too often these illusions of autonomy displace the quest for true freedom which is linked to this acknowledgement of dependence on God. Rather than trying to convince people of various philosophical or theological points, energies might be better spent helping people come to a deeper awareness of this reality. That deeper awareness involves acknowledging the mystery of one's being as a precious gift, which,

⁷⁰ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, # 80. I shall not be going through the many scriptural references to being made in God's image and likeness, beginning with Gen 1:26-27 and continuing through the New Testament writings. For a theological discussion of some of those passages see Ladaria, *Antropologia Teologica*, 146 ff.

though blessed with certain autonomy for acting, remains dependent upon God for life sustenance and full flourishing in freedom.

As McLean builds his metaphysical framework of the human person, he adopts the biblical vision from the Gospel that ensures this dependent relation to God as Creator in his ontology of participation. The Christian Fathers traced both form and matter to God the Creator, and had, from their perspective of faith, an experience in their understanding of reality that led to two particularly important insights that McLean points out. The first he describes as a deepening awareness of being that went “beyond form and matter.”⁷¹ In their attention to God as Trinity of persons in a unity of nature, the Fathers understood that the Father and the Son were of the same divine nature, meaning, by contrast, that human beings were in a position of radical dependence in their created nature. Moving beyond the kind of being, or the nature of particular created beings, they were confronted with reality itself: form and matter, but also, as we pointed out above, why and how they exist at all. This deepened awareness of being, which confronts one with the affirmation of existence and prepares one to hear God’s revelation, leads McLean to his second insight, which he calls radical freedom derived from the philosophical impact of redemption.⁷² One discovers and claims this radical freedom as one comes to know God through the act of faith. It is a freedom for which we were created and which God has always intended we enjoy.

The fullest reality of the person cannot really be grasped without the wisdom flowing from the Gospel. Thus, trying to convince people of certain points on a purely academic level may not have the desired effect. Something deeper is needed. The vision of the human person as

⁷¹ McLean, *Ways to God*, 182-183. Regarding the insights of the early Fathers McLean cites Maurizio Flick and Zoltan Alszegehy, *Il Creatore, l’inizio della salvezza* (Firenze: Libreria Editrice Fiorentina, 1961).

⁷² McLean cites Cornelio Fabro’s reflection that, not only did the above metaphysical sense of being lead to a deeper sense of freedom, but the deeper sense of freedom was catalyzed by the proclamation of the Gospel message itself. McLean makes the link here between the *kerygma* and culture as a creative work of freedom. See McLean, *Ways to God*, 183. We do not have time to go into culture here but will do so later in this chapter and the following chapters. McLean goes on to explain Fabro’s view that the free response to the divine invitation to redemption “was key to the development of the awareness of being as existence,” which Fabro called an intensive notion of being. *Ibid.*, 184. Two of Fabro’s works had significant influence on McLean’s philosophical development: *La Nozione Metafisica di Partecipazione Secondo S. Tommaso D’Aquino* (Torino: Società Editrice Internazionale, 1950) and *Participation et Causalité selon S. Thomas D’Aquin* (Louvain: Publications Universitaires de Louvain, 1961).

imago Dei accompanies the proclamation and reception of the Gospel. The biblical vision of the human person, then, goes hand in hand with the truth of reality and a relationship, grounded in faith, of radical dependence on God who created us in love. This vision is what led John Paul II to define the human person through two complementary statements: “*the one who seeks the truth*” and “*the one who lives by belief*”.⁷³ Both of these are needed to give a vision of the person as *imago Dei*, created in the image and likeness of God. As I described earlier in reference to one’s existence, so, too, each one’s search for truth and life of faith are specifically unique to one’s reflection of *imago Dei*.

Personal Uniqueness of Imago Dei. To open up the spiritual dimension of the human being as *imago Dei*, I want to stress a specific stance of McLean, namely, that we must be very careful not to generalize the notion of the human person, unless the designation “*imago Dei*” itself fall into the category of a generalization. This has important consequences for my argument about growth in freedom for faith and the dynamics of conversion. The dynamic might initially look like a generalized process, but each person’s being and journey are dramatically unique and personal. As McLean emphasizes, “the notion of the human person – rather than being only formal, specific and abstracted from the uniqueness of the human person – is precisely that of a unique, irreplaceable and hence consciously free being.”⁷⁴ Not only are the spiritual and corporeal characteristics to be considered conjointly as a unified whole, but they are uniquely personal for each. Applying processes or generalized methods to theories of interpretation or modes of revelation cannot cover the full spectrum of diverse human sentiments that flow from each person’s unique being. Even Avery Dulles, after presenting his models of revelation, stressed that the real

⁷³ See John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, # 28 and #31. For a broader discussion of *imago Dei* and its theological developments since Vatican II, see the International Theological Commission’s document *Communion and Stewardship: Human Persons Created in the Image of God* (Vatican City: Libreria Vaticana Editrice, 2004).

⁷⁴ McLean, “Karol Wojtyła’s Mutual Enrichment of the Philosophies of Being and Consciousness,” 21. McLean continues his thoughts as follows: “Moreover, this is not true only of a spirit which is somehow added to a body; rather it is the one person which is, or exists in a bodily manner. Conversely, all the physical characteristics of the body – whether DNA, sexual differentiation, or physical action – are personal and carry the dignity of a unique, free and responsible being. Both physical and spiritual dimensions point to the unique character of a human person.” Ibid. The full person in the unity of one’s many dimensions, then, is marked by this special uniqueness.

point he was trying to make was that the various models needed to pass through a symbolic mediation to be applied properly.⁷⁵ Any person's particular relationship with God will not be repeated. We are embodied spirits, each dramatically unique, having a unity in the plurality of our dimensions, and to whom God communicates in a uniquely personal way.

All of this can be stated in a simple, objectified manner to communicate the reality of who God has created one to be. In order to continue developing the balance between objective being and subjective consciousness, I also want to review what unique, personal existence as created in the image and likeness of God portends for the *development of one's consciousness and, thus, attitude towards life*. It is not easy to probe the inner consciousness of humanity in a generalized sense, much less in any specific person. But I do want us to grasp something of how and why each person sees his or her existence and life journey as unlike that of any other. McLean sets this uniquely subjective consciousness in the domain of mystery, for which each person must take responsibility. "This implies for the person an element of mystery which can never be fully explicated or exhausted. Much can be proposed to me by other persons and things; much can even be imposed upon me. But my self-consciousness is finally my act and no one else's."⁷⁶ Therefore, just as each person's being is unique, so too is the mystery of one's conscious existence, and each person has to take responsibility for flourishing as a conscious subject. Although each person reflects the image of God, no one can be defined by others or classified in a generalized way; each time that happens there accompanies it a certain injury against the full dignity of the human person.

The dramatic dignity implied means that at some point in one's life each person must step up and claim one's own unique act of consciousness and life. This consciousness cannot be determined by others, but remains the sacred responsibility of each person. Others do, however, help reveal our personal identity to us. As Benedict XVI relates, "the unity of the human family does not submerge the identities of individuals, peoples and cultures, but makes them more transparent to each other and links them more closely in their legitimate diversity."⁷⁷ The unfolding of the mystery of this unique, conscious existence as *imago Dei*, and the responsible ownership and participation in freedom of that unique relationship with God and others, makes up the bulk of the rest of the study. But while studying this mystery in a sort of

⁷⁵ See again Dulles' *Models of Revelation*, especially his chapter on "Symbolic Mediation," 131-154.

⁷⁶ McLean, *Persons, Peoples and Cultures*, 107.

⁷⁷ Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, # 53.

generalized form, we must always remember that the specifically unique existence and consciousness which forms each person's identity can never be generalized, underestimated, or trivialized. Theology serves its mission best while honoring and cultivating respect for the identity and freedom flowing from each person's dignity as *imago Dei*.

Freedom, Imagination and Imago Dei. Human freedom forms the centerpiece of the dynamic journey this thesis is examining. Freedom is integral to one's identity and self-understanding as made in the image and likeness of God. In addition to highlighting its importance, I want to introduce the challenge of the modern understanding to human freedom, while also placing it in the context of the wider experience of reality. Like other critical human characteristics, freedom is not something added on to the person as way of a philosophical accident, but part of one's being. Laying the foundation for freedom, then, proves critical to understanding the movement in reaching a faith decision.

The discussion of freedom in the political sphere during the last few centuries has influenced the way the person on the street understands it, so it is worth taking a bit of time to place freedom in the Christian perspective in the hopes that the popular political sense of the term not be allowed to dominate fully. At the close of the Second Vatican Council the fathers alluded to how freedom is linked to each person's being as *imago Dei*. At the same time they noted that freedom is not fully understood by people, declaring that "they often cherish it improperly, as if it gave them leave to do anything they like, even when it is evil. But that which is truly freedom is an exceptional sign of the image of God in man."⁷⁸ As an exceptional sign of the image of God, freedom must reflect not just an aspect or characteristic of a person, but be integral to one's very being - critical to how God has created us to be. This is not as easily understood as one might expect. When McLean refers to how abstract and idealist characteristics emphasizing clarity robbed Cartesian knowledge of real content, he notes that one of the effects was "a lack of ability to provide room for human freedom."⁷⁹ This came from the emphasis of philosophical systems on *essences* and the need for certain knowledge. Freedom, however, had a murkier, less definable sense that did not fit well into the strict categories of much of modern philosophy.

As freedom fell from the forefront of deep philosophical reflection while blocks of countries fell under autocratic control in the political sphere, democratic forms of government tried to claim almost exclusive rights of how to define and interpret it. World events led to

⁷⁸ *Gaudium et Spes*, # 17.

⁷⁹ McLean, *Hermeneutics, Tradition and Contemporary Change*, 23.

distortions in the understanding of freedom that remain in the modern mindset today. McLean would say that freedom has to be deeper than political systems, reaching to the inner core of the human being. His identification of the task is formidable.

Freedom is the greatest human burden and taking it up, especially after a period of suppression and dormancy, is not unambiguously inviting. This disorder in the expression of interests must be identified, brought to light and properly ordered in relation to new and evolving human situations. This is a precondition in order that the search for freedom itself be internally or intrapersonally responsible and free.⁸⁰

Here McLean shows how daunting the task is of engaging responsible freedom, and how the invitation to do so challenges one on a number of levels. With the response to the invitation comes awareness that the journey will entail a deep soul searching or, as McLean puts it, a process of identifying and bringing to light the disordered nature of one's previous understanding of freedom. Personal and communal interests have to be more properly ordered by the freed-up imagination, and then reapplied to new encounters. Though he doesn't mention it here, culture also plays a pivotal role in the search. Though personal and unique for each person, the search ultimately proves to be shared in communion with others, especially family and the immediate community.

One's perspective of freedom, then, is related to and grows within the social reality and our experience as relational beings. One's relational freedom does not form instantaneously in our consciousness, but has to endure many trials and setbacks, advances and insights. We are spirits living through time and searching for meaning as our history unfolds.⁸¹ As *imago Dei*, one's creative freedom and active set of

⁸⁰ McLean, *Hermeneutics, Faith and Relations between Cultures*, 73. This section begins to revisit that link between freedom, imagination and culture that I first introduced in the last chapter when I spoke of culture as the key to enquiry. Oppressive political systems that limit freedom have the effect of narrowing the imagination and eroding the culture, all a consequence of failing to respect the inherent dignity of the person as *imago Dei*.

⁸¹ Heidegger may call this *dasein*, being emerging in time, or it could be called being discovering its fullest expression as it more and more consciously embraces its creative dependence on God and its deepest relational meaning with others. As McLean puts it, "Being is not merely what was, but what blossoms ever fresh in the human heart..., a creative unfolding of being in time. This creative freedom is the essential characteristic of the human person." McLean, *Religion and Cooperation between Civilizations*, 35-36.

relationships in social immersion with others take their shape from and are ever referenced to the primary relationship with God. Far from this being a sort of binding of energies that would inhibit freedom, conscious relationship with God offers new light that both stimulates and supports creative engagement and freedom. Theologically, social relationships are ultimately intended to reflect our common participation as members of the body of Christ. And the union found in the Church as the mystical body of Christ is a reflection of the inner communion of the Holy Trinity. Anything less than our participation's mirroring these communions as an expression of the image of God would ultimately leave freedom shortchanged and frustrated. The task, then, is to look at what it means to be truly free, so that one's highest identity may be realized.

The setting of McLean's understanding of the human person in the context of freedom is similar to that of Hans Urs von Balthasar, who places his discussion of the human being made in the image and likeness of God in the context of his reflections on infinite and finite freedom. The finite freedom of the human person shares to an extent in the infinite freedom of God. That finite freedom is meant to grow as one's capacity for participation in the infinite freedom of God grows. In his excursus, von Balthasar attempts to clarify what is meant by the use of the terms "image" and "likeness." After many historical references and nuances, he summarizes the concept of both: *image* as "protological and ideal, on the one hand, and eschatological and Christological on the other. And as for the *likeness* – man's assimilation to this image through the grace of the Spirit and through human moral effort – it is a dynamic element, part of the image."⁸² The notion of image is the more static reality, referring to the body-soul reality of our being. This *image* we cannot and do not lose. Von Balthasar's *image* can be likened to McLean's metaphysics or philosophy of being for the person. *Likeness* is the more dynamic concept that has to do with our growth in freedom and in the life of grace, the action of the Spirit perfecting us through participation in God's infinite freedom. *Likeness* can be likened to McLean's philosophy of consciousness, which contains the necessary notion of dynamism for the subject's growing in freedom. This freedom flowing from our redemption in Christ forms us into his likeness. Christ, of course, is preeminently "the perfect Image" of the Father.

⁸² Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo Drama – Theological Dramatic Theory*, Vol. II: *The Dramatis Personae: Man in God*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 333. Balthasar is citing Stuedenmaier here, as he references him to being almost identical with Gregory of Nyssa's reflections on the topic.

As part of the dynamic growth in the likeness of Christ, the search for freedom takes place not only in communion with others, but in communion with the rest of creation as well. We could almost say that it is part of the groaning of all creation as it awaits its total renewal in Christ. Creation cannot be healed and fully set free until humanity is healed and finds its true freedom. This redemption in Christ results from the grace given by God, but it is in consonance with nature, not somehow foreign to it. Here McLean sees that science, understood in its wider sense, rather than in the more confined Cartesian emphasis on idealism and clarity, can be used as an integral part of the search for full freedom.⁸³ When its conclusions do not fully coincide with what we know to be true from faith, or its methodology becomes myopically constricted to a limited rationality as Benedict XVI has sometimes observed, then science has to be prodded not to cease its efforts, but to redouble them. It has to be pushed to expand its realms of rational analysis beyond the strictly empirical observations intended to produce clear results from a methodology based on idealism. Human freedom fits into all that nature has to offer and is part of creation's eschatological goal. This is why human freedom does not stand outside creation and its movements, but is part of it. It cries out to be integrated into nature and the sciences which study nature. Our attitudes and approach need, therefore, to incorporate free consciousness as part of the heart of creation, the heart of reality. As McLean states in another place, "if the subject or *supposit* is the substance as exercising its proper act of existence, then the very being of the person is most properly its self-conscious, and hence free and responsible, life."⁸⁴ Freedom is integral to who one is as made in God's image and likeness, and the

⁸³ As McLean puts it, "If there is to be room for human freedom in a cosmos in which one can make use of necessary laws, indeed if science is to contribute to the exercise of human freedom, then nature too must be understood as directed toward a goal and must manifest throughout a teleology within which free human purpose can be integrated. In these terms, even in its necessary and universal laws, nature is no longer alien to freedom; rather it expresses divine freedom and is conciliable with human freedom." McLean, *Ways to God*, 332. Recognizing science's role, strengths, and possible pitfalls are all necessary for our study; science and the contributions it makes cannot be ignored.

⁸⁴ McLean, "Karol Wojtyla's Mutual Enrichment of the Philosophies of Being and Consciousness," 21. Here McLean describes that the conscious life or action of any person "is not an accident adjoined to the substance, but is the very *esse* of that substance." Ibid. This extended effort to protect and fully respect the freedom of every person marks McLean's effort to express God's incredible trust in his creatures to work out their freedom and thus nurture an authentically free and responsible relationship with God and creation.

ability to respect that freedom in others as they discover the depths of their own freedom in relation to God will be the measure of the quality of theology's spiritual midwifery of accompaniment with them.

Imagination marks another insight regarding freedom which I shall use as a building block and reference in this study. McLean affords to freedom the central position for measuring and interpreting reality and the depth of human experience. McLean calls human freedom both the spectroscopy and kaleidoscope of being: it "serves through the imagination as a lens or means for presenting the richness of reality in varied and intensified ways."⁸⁵ By this he means that freedom establishes the range of possibilities for action. One's level of personal freedom, then, acts as a lens to aim and focus our attention by way of engaging the imagination. The lens of freedom focuses the imagination as it explores various combinations and patterns of reality. The imagination, creatively working in freedom, considers and reconsiders various relations in reality, thereby allowing reality to come to its fullest manifestation. In this respect, McLean's treatment of freedom and the imagination is similar to Ricoeur's, who considers the eschatological sense the highest form of freedom.⁸⁶ And that engagement with reality evokes a free response of love or disgust, or any spectrum in between. The centrality of freedom for this thesis warrants quoting McLean at some length here.

In this manner freedom becomes at once the goal, the creative source, the manifestation, the criterion and the arbiter of all that imaginatively we can propose. It is *goal*, namely to realize life as rational and free in this world; and it is *creative source*, for with the imagination it unfolds the endless possibilities for such human expression. It is also *manifestation*, because it presents these to our consciousness in ways appropriate to our capabilities for knowledge of limited realities and in the circumstances of our life. Moreover, it is *criterion*, because its response

⁸⁵ McLean, *Ways to God*, 113.

⁸⁶ See Ricoeur's reflection, "Freedom in the Light of Hope," in *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*, 402-424. In that essay Ricoeur contrasts the static, Greek existential sense with the more dynamic, eschatological sense of freedom in the light of hope. The promise of God in the resurrection of Christ changes everything, providing a super-abundance of grace that guides one's understanding and disposition. He calls the kerygma of the resurrection a journey of the adventure of freedom. Ricoeur's philosophical point is that the systems of both Kant and Hegel have to be left behind for a proper understanding of freedom, though he does accept the Kantian dialectic, which he believes triumphs over the Hegelian critique.

manifests a possible mode of action to be variously desirable or not in terms of a total personal response of pleasure or displeasure, enjoyment or revulsion; and finally it is *arbiter*, because it chooses to affirm or reject, to realize or avoid this mode of self-realization. In this way freedom emerges as the dynamic center of our human existence. It can really be expected then that this power of creative freedom, when sparked by a new level of activity on the part of the imagination, will open up a new way for the person to God.⁸⁷

This passage demonstrates how deeply McLean understands that freedom acts as the dynamic center of human existence. I shall not go into the various details of the five roles of freedom set forth above. But the many roles McLean gives to it show how freedom marks one's reality and existence, and reveals itself in the rest of reality. Freedom establishes how we consciously consider ourselves, how we express ourselves, how we give of ourselves to others in faith working through love. The imagination plays a central role here, since its higher level of activity sparks or encourages freedom to focus on reality in new ways. The imagination works hand in hand with the fullest power of creative freedom in order that a new way can be opened for that person to find God. Moving the imagination to a new level so that freedom can be revived usually calls for some type of a boundary experience that brings people to the edge of their operative horizons and beckons them to go further. The imagination needs a new encounter with the dynamic reality of love, so that freedom can better find itself and thus help to lead the person closer to home through relationship with God.

Freedom for faith needs to be motivated, encouraged, and convinced by love. Any coercion or stifling of freedom disrupts the dynamic center of our life and only serves to close off the way to God.⁸⁸ The freedom that emerges from the dynamic center of *imago Dei* must be engaged for the full flourishing of the human person. That freedom must extend beyond selfish pursuits so that the person can be free for something or for someone other. The highest reality for which it could be open is relationship with the divine transcendent. Freedom's

⁸⁷ McLean, *Ways to God*, 114.

⁸⁸ To fully understand this dynamic we will need to look more closely at the various levels or grades of freedom. We also need further discussion of the role played by the intellect and imagination in serving freedom. Those discussions would move us too far from our task here, but I shall return to them in the chapters to come.

transcendent openness, then, is fostered by the imagination and is part of our being as *imago Dei*.

Imago Dei as Open to the Transcendent. Openness to transcendence, that level of reality in the human being that allows for intimate union with God, also calls forth the highest expression of human freedom. This necessarily means a potential for going beyond created nature to communion with God. McLean's philosophy provides a working framework of metaphysics and phenomenology for *imago Dei*, but I want to fill out that framework with a more theological emphasis here. My goal is to identify points of stimulus for the imagination so that it can effectively use the focal lens of freedom to engage in relationship with God. As others have noted when they have addressed the question of the supernatural, human nature has been created or built for this supernatural union, and thus it is difficult to speak of human nature as not open to the supernatural, since we live our entire lives in this state of openness to the divine.⁸⁹ In relationship with God, one receives communications of God's truth, wisdom and love freely. The person's creaturely horizon always has this open, transcendent extension that beckons human freedom to engage it. The transcendent extension of the creaturely horizon does not overwhelm human freedom, but invites one to enjoy all the dimensions of freedom intended by God. As Benedict XVI observes, one's true identity becomes more appreciated in transcendent openness: "In particular, *in the light of the revealed mystery of the Trinity*, we understand that true openness does not mean loss of individual identity but profound interpenetration. This also emerges from the common human

⁸⁹ Here I could mention Karl Rahner's essays on the supernatural existential and obediential potency, as well as Henri de Lubac's writings on the supernatural. Alfaro and Ladaria have also made contributions. I do not have time to go into the details of all their insights, but they do blend with what I shall say to set the context of the human person's being at this highest level of possible union with God. Because I want to keep the concept of human freedom prominent, I shall use Hans Urs von Balthasar's reflections more specifically than the others. Regarding the reality of the manifestation of God to humanity, von Balthasar poses a question that I shall use as a guide: "...if man is the recipient of an essentially super-natural, divine self-revelation (that is, it is not a human postulate), must we not go on to say that God must have anticipated this communication by endowing man, through grace, with a 'supernatural *existentiale*' that transcends his creaturely horizon? Otherwise how could man 'match up' to this self-disclosure on the part of the Absolute? That being so, how wide would be the scope of human freedom as such? Or how narrow?" Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theological Dramatic Theory Vol. IV: The Action*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), 138.

experiences of love and truth.”⁹⁰ The full notion of the human person, then, is radically dependent on this potentially unlimited horizon, this free, open relationship with God. Any consideration that does not take this free and open relation to God into account would diminish the understanding of *imago Dei*, stripping away essential characteristics of human dignity.

The person’s transcendent openness acts as a receptive link to revelation from and communion with the Holy Trinity, the Triune God of love: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This communion has been made possible because the Word, the Son, became flesh in the incarnation, thus confirming and healing the human being as made in the image and likeness of God. I quote here a significant passage from *Gaudium et Spes* to help illuminate this point.

He who is the “image of the invisible God” (Col 1:15), is himself the perfect man who has restored in the children of Adam that likeness to God which had been disfigured ever since the first sin. Human nature, by the very fact that it was assumed, not absorbed, in him, has been raised in us also to a dignity beyond compare. For, by his incarnation, he, the Son of God, has in a certain way united himself with each man. He worked with human hands, he thought with a human mind. He acted with a human will, and with a human heart he loved.⁹¹

Created in the image and likeness of God, the incarnation has not only reestablished and healed that likeness, but has raised our dignity to a completely new level of reality. What I want to emphasize is that for McLean the transcendent dimension incorporates being and consciousness, metaphysics and phenomenology. This echoes his concern to blend these two philosophies for their mutual enrichment. The transcendent openness within the human person relates to both. The incarnation in Jesus demonstrates the blend of the two preeminently. This elevated dignity pertains to all, Christian as well as non-Christian. The openness to the supernatural, to a transcendent, living relationship with God, is, in a sense, made real in the Son’s incarnation for all people. The objective reality of this is built into the human person’s being; it is part of one’s existence. It is also part of one’s subjective self, since Christ thought with a human mind, acted with human will and loved with a human heart. The transcendent openness of the human

⁹⁰ Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, # 54. The italics are his own.

⁹¹ *Gaudium et Spes*, # 22.

person to God reaches to the level of unique identity in one's union with God, assimilating in it all the objective and subjective components.

As a philosopher, McLean avoids the theological discussions of and allusions to the incarnation, but he does use the Triune God as the paradigm for his explanations of the human person's openness to the transcendent. He maintains that people, though always dependent on God as creatures, "are open as is the meaning of existence itself, which each of these affirms in a progressively more explicit manner. Consequently, 'person' is not a closed or contrary notion, but is open as is truth and love."⁹² The more perfect the person has grown in freedom and love, the more open and transparent he or she is, and the more easily any self-disclosure on the part of God can be received. This is one of those critical places where philosophy needs theology in order to develop a full comprehension of the human being. People are naturally created for a supernatural relationship with God. We are, then, left in a sort of double dependency on God for both creaturely existence and for hearing the divine communication.

Every person, as *imago Dei*, is gifted with the inherent potential for union with God, though God remains outside of any constraints to offer the divine manifestation or union. Since human freedom reaches its highest form by realizing this potential in union with the infinite freedom of God, the imagination must necessarily adapt to what I would call this *gift-dependency*. Though McLean repeatedly refers to all reality – God, oneself, others – as gift, he does not directly speak of the imagination's gift-dependency. So to help illustrate my point I want to refer to what von Balthasar calls a "paradox of nature," which has its explanation only in the supernatural realm. "The paradox is an integral part of the primal fact of self-consciousness insofar as the latter recognizes itself to be a gift, and hence an 'image'."⁹³ This paradox remains within us moving us to yearn and search for the relationship of meaning that could satiate our love, while also acting as a sort of humble reminder that we are creatures, dependent on the one who

⁹² McLean, *Knowledge of God and the Discovery of Man*, 49-50.

⁹³ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theological Dramatic Theory Vol. IV: The Action*, 142. McLean refers to "gift" throughout his writings, which is part of the reason why I have subtitled each chapter in relation to gift. For McLean's thoughts on gift in reference to Heidegger, see McLean's *Hermeneutics for a Global Age: Lectures in Shanghai and Hanoi*, vol. 2 of Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change, Series IIID: Southeast Asia (Washington, DC: The Council for Research and Values in Philosophy, 2003), 36, 102; for his understanding of gift as a phenomenological way to God, see his "Chapter VIII: Human Subjectivity and Personal Ways to God," in *Ways to God*, 289-325; see also his "Chapter VIII: Person as Gift: From Love to Global Peace," in *Person's, Peoples and Cultures*, 181-199.

created us. Embracing the paradox of gift-dependency, then, frees the imagination to explore horizons that would otherwise be closed off to it.

The quest for freedom cannot be equated to a push for complete autonomy, but must be likened to a sort of courtship of love with God. In that courtship one finds oneself by accepting creaturely dependency and limitations, as well as realizing one's potential for divine union. Only then can the fullest person God created emerge. God shines through our growing transparency as grace raises our status from creatures to adopted children and transforms us into the likeness of Christ. As we have seen in McLean's reflections, the dynamic journey of growth in freedom does not end throughout life. This can be likened to von Balthasar's thought, where he warns: "this requires man to acknowledge that he himself is a synthesis that lacks fulfillment, an oscillation that can never come to rest except in God and in the divine self-disclosure."⁹⁴ Whenever one denies this paradox of human existence, denies that we are a synthesis without fulfillment, one turns in on oneself and tries to grasp or clutch freedom, rather than receive it as a gift. One's self-consciousness must surrender to this paradox of gift-dependency, so that the imagination may work with the truth that the soul's rest resides in God and the divine self-disclosure. By remaining open and transparent, one allows God's manifestation to move imagination and consciousness to a place of greater freedom in transcendence.

The mystery of how the human person was created to be remains caught up with who God is and the communion to which God calls us. This communion becomes truly possible as part of the fruit of the incarnation: the gift of the Holy Spirit flowing from the passion, death and resurrection of the Son. Examining grace in a theological anthropology moves beyond McLean's discipline, so I shall refer here instead to a theologian, Luis Ladaria, to close out these reflections on *imago Dei*. When Ladaria summarizes his thoughts on the supernatural, he speaks of a double gratuity: our existence as created beings and our being in Christ.⁹⁵ The gratuity of creation and the gratuity of the

⁹⁴ Balthasar, *Theological Dramatic Theory Vol. IV: The Action*, 147. There are other rich points in this section of von Balthasar's work, namely that the human person is "constructed along dia-logical lines: any mono-logical interpretation is bound to destroy him." *Ibid.*, 145. He also observes that whenever the self tries to deny its rootedness in God to establish its own autonomy, "it is attempting to consolidate its freedom; it is attempting to seize power." *Ibid.*, 147.

⁹⁵ See Ladaria's summary in *Antropologia Teologica*, 194-202. In these pages Ladaria offers his own synthesis on the question of the supernatural after having just presented short summaries of the thoughts of Rahner, de Lubac, and Alfaro. Some of his insights are included in this concluding paragraph.

incarnation cannot be reduced to one another, but are two aspects of God's abiding love. As *imago Dei*, one has been created for and oriented to participation with the Triune God, which implies a state of formal dependence on God. The self-manifestation of God is pure gift; it cannot be demanded or controlled, though God does give to each the freedom to ignore or deny it. God gives us this immense freedom because God wants to have a real relationship of reciprocal love with us, not one of forced coercion hardwired, as it were, into our being. God wants our full objective and subjective selves relating to him in faith, hope and love. By denying the gift, one would essentially self-limit one's freedom. It would mean denying the call to become all that God intends one to be.⁹⁶ Failing to own one's vocation ultimately means failing to live up to the full potential of who God has created us to be: sons and daughters of God made in the image and likeness of God.

The person as *imago Dei* is a reality that bridges the material and the spiritual, not as separate entities, but in the plurality of dimensions that make up the unity of the human being. I have tried to show that, in the objective and subjective dimensions of the human person made in the image and likeness of God, each has a unique identity, founded for relationships of love lived in full freedom. Open to the transcendent, one's relationship with God expands one's horizons and worlds of meaning beyond all imagining; the imagination breaks free of old constraints and opens to new possibilities. The balance of the study will be to look into how the human person can come to the awareness of being created for this vocation of communion with the Triune God, can recognize that call for what it is, embrace it in freedom, and then generously participate in planting and cultivating the values of the Kingdom of God. A critical signpost for the interaction between God and humanity in all stages of development is the reality of culture.

REALITY OF CULTURE AND ITS FOUNDATIONS

The understanding of God's reality helped to deepen the grasp of our own human reality as made in the image and likeness of God. Those discussions were intended to act as reference points for the main study of the dynamic ahead, which involves the interaction of the human and divine levels, finite and infinite freedom. This interaction includes God's love and self-manifestation, along with human listening, acceptance and response in love. Human conversion to the love of God

⁹⁶ As Ladaria would put it, we were not first created and then called, but we were created for this call: communion with God through Christ by the active grace of the Holy Spirit. Vocation is intrinsic to our creation, not an attribute added later.

is not limited to a single moment in time, but involves a sort of unchoreographed dance throughout life that leads to deeper faith and greater human freedom.

All of those reflections bring us to culture, which I want to present as another level of reality. One could argue that it is not really a distinct level of reality in itself, but operates as a sort of plane of interaction or boundary of interplay between the divine – human levels. Culture, however, acts almost as another organism or being, reflecting the relationship and wisdom of a people’s journey through time with God, so we shall assign it its own level of reality.⁹⁷ My aim here is to establish its foundations for the human person’s worldview and horizons of interpretation.

Faith enhances the role of culture in the life of a people, rather than superseding or diminishing it. The insight of the early Church regarding the radical gift of existence and its link to Jesus of Nazareth plays a role in our consideration of culture here just as it did in our earlier discussions of the human person. The Christian message, far from burdening or hindering existing cultures, assisted their creative growth and development by calling them forth to a deeper sense of freedom. While pointing out St. Thomas’ creative work to heal the discrepancies between Greek philosophy and a vision of life and meaning based on faith, McLean notes that he did this “by appreciating the deepened sense of being unveiled in a cultural context marked by faith.”⁹⁸ The radical gift of existence and the gift of culture take on their fullest sense in the light of faith, so we shall try to ground the reality of culture in our faith context. The faith stance will keep our ‘passion for ultimate truth’ in focus and will help us in our search for it by using culture, allowing us to broaden reason’s limits beyond those imposed by modernity.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Just as I presented culture as the key to philosophical and theological enquiry in the last chapter, so shall I continue to consider various aspects of culture that are relevant to each chapter’s theme. The reason I choose to present it in this manner is that the primary subject I am considering is not culture itself, but the growth in one’s freedom for the faith through the various dynamics that affect the human heart. Culture is a critical element, a living subject, in this growth, as well as a central theme of focus for McLean. So throughout the study I shall refer to it repeatedly.

⁹⁸ McLean, *Ways to God*, 262-263.

⁹⁹ Culture is informed by faith and faith pushes reason to new horizons. As John Paul II asserted, “It is faith which stirs reason to move beyond all isolation and willingly to run risks so that it may attain whatever is beautiful, good and true. Faith thus becomes the convinced and convincing advocate of reason.” John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, # 56.

Since Vatican II, the Church has reflected extensively on culture, most especially during the pontificate of John Paul II. Culture's importance to expressions of faith and human development has been acknowledged, while debates over inculturation's meaning and limitations have ensued. There is not sufficient time to review all these recent developments.¹⁰⁰ My focus, instead, will be to explore McLean's philosophical insights on culture for understanding the dynamics of the growth of faith. I will divide these reflections on the reality of culture and its foundations into five main parts: 1) errors or misconceptions inhibiting culture; 2) culture as an expression of human freedom; 3) values and culture; 4) tradition and culture; and 5) culture as foundation for hermeneutics.

Errors or Misconceptions Inhibiting Culture

To begin, I first want to return again to the notion of gift and its influence on some misconceptions that hurt or impede our ability to appreciate the full richness of culture. The whole character of life as gift is central to the exploration of culture and to our growing in freedom to make a faith commitment. *Gift* refers to one's own life, culture, surrounding environment of creation and relationship with God. In response to the Samaritan woman's cultural challenge, Jesus answers by introducing the need for gift-awareness: "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water" (Jn 4:10). Such gift-awareness allows the paradox of gift-dependency discussed earlier to be creatively engaged for building culture. Here I want to highlight three modern misconceptions that inhibit or block the positive influence of culture: a) reductionist humanism; b) excessive individualism; and c) distorted truth and relativism.¹⁰¹

Reductionist Humanism. Life and culture, when viewed as gifts, open up the human heart and imagination to the mystery of reality and to God as the provident lover who creates and sustains all things in their being. But certain philosophical and scientific developments, which began with the laudable development of human capabilities, soon

¹⁰⁰ For a good reference to and overview of the more recent developments and discussions on culture, see Michael Paul Gallagher's revised edition of *Clashing Symbols: An Introduction to Faith and Culture* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2003).

¹⁰¹ These have been noted by various authors, such as Charles Taylor, John Paul II and Benedict XVI as common dilemmas today. My point is that they also inhibit healthy cultural growth and expression.

overreached their boundaries. Things came to be defined by human experience rather than as elements of the environment to be explored and cherished as gifts of God. McLean sees this tendency most visibly in reductive humanism's attempts to express itself. Humanity came to be seen as the builder of reality, who could also remake it as needed. McLean maintains that "this turned aside a radical search into the character of life as gift. Attention remained only upon the future, understood simply in terms of the human and especially of what humans could do by their own, either individual or social, praxis."¹⁰² If the facts of reality are simply the product of humanity, then the sense of gift and wonder becomes lost. Working horizons can lead us to understand or misunderstand the conception of culture. Culture loses its value when the sense of gift is lost and attention focused only on the future, rather than the dignity of human nature. As Benedict XVI observes, when cultures become separated from the full dignity of human nature, they "can no longer define themselves within a nature that transcends them, and man ends up being reduced to a mere cultural statistic. When this happens, humanity runs new risks of enslavement and manipulation."¹⁰³ In reductivist humanism, then, culture suffers as human dignity becomes replaced by human functionalism. The power to make and remake reality comes to be thought of as the exclusive domain and responsibility of humanity to its own detriment. The mystery of God recedes into the background and reality becomes something to be made, rather than a gift to be engaged in gratitude.

¹⁰² McLean, *Ways to God*, 295-296. This quote comes from one of McLean's discussions on human subjectivity and the phenomenology of gift. Culture could be understood as a people's storehouse of wisdom from their "radical search into the character of life as gift." Ibid. I am not trying to offer a specific definition for culture, though it would not be a poor working definition useful for analysis. In its synchronic sense, culture is indeed a storehouse of wisdom, while diachronically it can be viewed as the ongoing creative and radical search into the character of life as gift.

¹⁰³ Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, # 26. Here we see clearly the distinction between the understanding of culture in its general, humanizing sense and its more historically and ethnically conditioned sociological sense. See *Gaudium et Spes*, # 53. In its general sense, culture can be understood as more of an ideal complex of humanizing factors. In its more specific, historically conditioned sense, culture reveals its weaknesses and distortions from the misapplication or poor development of virtues. This is partly why I choose to view a specific culture as a living subject, similar to a person. In the general sense, the person reflects being made in the image and likeness of God (*imago Dei*), while in the more specific sense reveals that the journey towards reflecting that likeness well is far from complete.

Excessive Individualism. Another characteristic of modern secular culture, especially present in Western Europe and North America, is an excessive individualism that can sometimes lead to social isolation. This can, in turn, lead to an understanding of the human person dislocated from community or society. The diminished human dignity opens the door for culture to be corrupted in many ways. Culture makes no sense if the human person can be understood as an isolated unit apart from society; it changes into the antithesis of culture with the blessing of a majority. Here I want to cite McLean at length in one of his passages which help to see that the working conception of culture can be distorted with an over-emphasis of the person as an individual, independent from society.

Hence, liberalism bears three main errors regarding the individual. First, the individual is seen as prior to the society, whereas in fact the person emerges from society. Second, by so stressing the action of simply parallel autonomous individuals as constituting the community all subjectivity is denied to others and to the community, and in the end to the individual him- or herself. Finally, individualism itself becomes unworkable for it is in the community that one discovers oneself. To be isolated is in the end to lose real individuality and personhood and to be reduced to an abstraction.¹⁰⁴

In a culture where people are caught up in individualism, then, bombarding people with sociological or philosophical facts would be mostly ineffective, as would be trying to convince them of tenets of the faith from catechism or theology. True subjectivity, community and personhood are essentially lost with seemingly no means to free the culture from the quagmire. The first step to move towards greater freedom for faith is to address the third error of isolationism referred to above, so that the people can gain new insight into themselves. *Listening to them* on the interpersonal level ends their isolation and slowly gives them a greater feel for community. By finding a listening ear and slowly coming to feel comfortable in a new community, the walls of isolation are broken down and one's identity comes into sharper focus. As this occurs, true subjectivity gets refreshed and, with it, the ability to extend the sense of subjectivity to others. This broadens the boundaries of community so that all come to be seen as interdependent

¹⁰⁴ McLean, *Persons, Peoples and Cultures*, 18. Like many others (e.g., Lonergan, Taylor), McLean maintains that community comes first and the relations within the community form the person as a subject of culture.

subjects rather than autonomous, disconnected individuals. In time the worldview also shifts from a functional one, which sees the individual as prior to society, to one of culture, where people are viewed as gifts to be received and embraced. Subjects are formed by and emerge from the society and culture into which they were born. People cannot really reclaim their cultural heritage until having rediscovered their world of subjectivity and interrelatedness to others.

Distorted Truth and Relativism. There is one final aspect that inhibits the sense of culture and leads it to be misconceived. The challenge here comes from many different sides: from individualism, from reductivist humanism, from simplistic notions of democracy, from a scientific method that confines the boundaries of truth to empirical phenomena, from a growing secularism willing to allow a reference standard to almost anything except God. As John Paul II put it in his encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, “there are signs of widespread distrust of universal and absolute statements, especially among those who think that truth is born of consensus and not of a consonance between intellect and objective reality.”¹⁰⁵ With the diminishing emphasis on the metaphysics of being and the influence of reductive, functional humanism, there is a tendency to think that truth and reality are fabricated by humanity, and thus are true only as long as they remain useful. Consensus can prove a useful value as long as its focus remains the truth of objective reality, and not simply an ephemeral product of a group’s prevailing opinion. Ratzinger warns about the danger of this relativism entering into theories of salvation, where “the question of truth is excised from the question concerning religions and the matter of salvation. Truth is replaced by good intentions; religion remains in the subjective realm, because we cannot know what is objectively good and true.”¹⁰⁶ The focus, then, has to go beyond forming a convenient consensus with people. Engaging culture as both an example and a medium, theology can help people reestablish a consonance between their intellectual understanding and objective reality. This consonance with objective reality that a healthy culture provides is no threat to personal freedom, but the very incarnation of that freedom for which people long.

¹⁰⁵ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, # 56. This is part of the reason I have gone to great lengths to ground ourselves in McLean’s philosophy of being, so that our philosophy of consciousness can remain grounded in the truth of reality, rather than wander as it might without firm roots in metaphysics.

¹⁰⁶ Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, 203.

Culture as Expression of Freedom

Culture serves as a creative byproduct of the experience and wisdom of a people over time, so the manner in which we understand the human person influences greatly the way we think of and talk about culture. As we begin this section on culture as an expression of human freedom, I want to review a few critical points of the human person that will enable us to keep proper focus as we address culture. The understanding of the human person must take into account the diverse cultural situations that express truths about the person, not just sociologically but also theologically, as expressions of the *meaning* God wishes to communicate to us. Creation in Christ must always be the eyeglass to examine theologically the perspective of culture. McLean takes this vantage point philosophically, both with the person's living consciously and freely, and with a culture's reference to God. "Therefore to consider the human reality and realization we should follow not just the physical artifacts as would an archeologist or anthropologist, but the challenges human freedom encounters in its search for perfection through time. Here the archetype will be not matter, but rather the living God."¹⁰⁷ The focus on God as the archetype cannot be lost or else the manner in which we reflect upon culture would shift to analysis and quick assessment, rather than an exploration of the mystery of wisdom developed over a history of encounters and interpretation of a people with God. McLean's growth in freedom in the search for perfection can be likened to discovering an enlivened sense of meaning through transcendence. The view of culture must coincide, then, with the quest of the human person's search for meaning and self-transcendence as expressions of human freedom in relation to God.

To focus on God for the exploration of culture may be considered a bit premature or naïve by some who have chosen the more anthropological and secular means of analysis, but it highlights for us the importance of the reality of *religion*. In many of his essays McLean refers to Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* and the observation Huntington makes about each great civilization having one of the great

¹⁰⁷ McLean, *Religion and Cooperation between Civilizations*, 66. One of the ways McLean describes culture is the freedom of a people seeking perfection or trying to find meaning in the events of their history. To complement McLean I want to adopt the disposition of what Lonergan called the critical realist, one who "can acknowledge the facts of human knowing and pronounce the world mediated by meaning to be the real world; and he can do so only inasmuch as he shows that the process of experiencing, understanding, and judging is a process of self-transcendence." Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 239.

religions at its heart in order to make his own case for dialogue and cooperation. Here I cite McLean's own logic of this inherent connection between human freedom, religion and cultures.

If cultures are understood as concrete community modes of realizing human life, and if this desire for perfection is ultimately a reflection of the life of divine love in enjoyment of its own goodness, then religion should not be alien to the search of communities for fulfillment, or what can be called liberation. As reminding mankind of its source and hence of the dignity and rights of all, religion is thus a transforming force in the progress of peoples.¹⁰⁸

Cultures reflect this divine love from their constitution of people pursuing fulfillment in freedom, so religion is integral to culture just as the religious nature of the human person is part of its being. Religion serves to remind the community that the real subject behind one's freedom and dignity is God. Religion, then, is inherently part of culture, built into a culture's being and identity as an expression of the heart of a people. Faith acts as a sort of culture of its own, but it can also be seen as a purifying catalyst for the religious sense already rooted in the heart of a culture. This is why faith authentically embraced and lived, which promotes the understanding of human freedom and dignity, does no violence to culture, but purifies and deepens its search for meaning while highlighting its connection with God.

Finally, the *activity of the Holy Spirit* is important for how we view the faith in relation to any culture, as well as how we assess the revelation of God in our midst from cultural expressions. McLean offers three characteristics of culture. He asserts that, first, culture is a creative work of freedom of a people, and, secondly, that people will rightly defend it as their only real possibility for living a life of meaning and dignity. He then gets to the third characteristic which opens up the reason of why any culture must be approached with respect and reverence, even if the intention is to deepen its own identity by leading it to faith through the proclamation of the Gospel.

As a culture is the effect of human freedom exercised consciously at the level of spirit, it can be said rightly that culture is the place where the Spirit of a people dwells. The cultural heritage of a people is the proper effect of the work

¹⁰⁸ McLean, *Religion and Cooperation between Civilizations*, 125. I shall discuss the influence of faith on culture in more detail later during the exploration of conversion dynamics.

of the Spirit with and through them; it is the cumulative result of divine providence leading the people through history.¹⁰⁹

This work of the Spirit, the final characteristic of culture I want to mention as an expression of human freedom lived by a community through time, grounds a people in their world of meaning. The expression of the Holy Spirit's freedom, God's infinite freedom, revealing itself in and through culture, acts as an encouragement and consolation as a people faces various challenges and crises in their history. Elements of the culture may still need purifying through a specific engagement with the faith, but one cannot overlook that every culture does manifest the action of the Spirit with a people. Just as every person's identity and freedom is enhanced by embracing the faith, the same is also true for culture. Similarly, just as every person is created in the image and likeness of God and reflects that image, so, too, does every culture reflect a manifestation of the Spirit's presence and action with a people over time.

This brings us full circle so that we can now connect these insights on culture with the earlier reflections on myth as expressing the divine unity, while moving the imagination to a more inductive reasoning. The Spirit is both subject and object of culture, just as the Spirit is both subject and object of mission, preparing a people for full participation in the Kingdom of God. Like McLean, John Paul II recognized that this activity of the Spirit in cultures "serves as a preparation for the Gospel and can only be understood in reference to Christ, the Word who took flesh by the power of the Spirit 'so that as perfectly human he would save all human beings and sum up all things'."¹¹⁰ By preparing a people for freedom in Christ, the activity of the Spirit in a culture works to focus a people's imagination and search for meaning. But the quality of a culture's expression of freedom depends on its rootedness in Gospel values.

Values and Culture

We have seen how culture in its humanist sense acts as a cumulative expression of the freedom of a people, and now I want to

¹⁰⁹ McLean, *Persons, Peoples and Cultures*, 170.

¹¹⁰ John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1990), # 29. In this short quote John Paul II makes reference to *Lumen Gentium* # 16, *Gaudium et Spes* # 45, and *Dominum et Vivificantem* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1986), # 54. In *Redemptoris Missio* he also acknowledges the Spirit as both subject and object of mission.

examine more closely the dynamic that begins with human freedom, then develops values and patterns of action that lead to a culture with a distinct character. People tend to hold fast to proven values, while thoroughly testing new possibilities for action before they give them the status of value and incorporate them into their culture. Through the proclamation of the Gospel one hopes for a two-tiered dynamic: first, that their own cultural values be reassessed and purified, and secondly, that values of the Kingdom of God missing from their culture might be embraced and assimilated.

The first task here, then, is to understand just how values develop within a group of people and how they are in fact linked to the exercise of freedom. As McLean understands the dynamic, people seek the good to promote their life. "Thus a basic exercise of human freedom is to set an order of preferences among the many things that are possible. These are values in the sense that they 'weigh more heavily' in making our decisions than do other possibilities. Cumulatively, they set the pattern of our actions."¹¹¹ In the merging of faith with the values of any culture, one of the challenges is to refrain from trying to push too forcefully the adoption of Gospel values. Gospel values have to be embraced in freedom. People cannot be coerced to take them on, but have to weigh them to see whether or not they really do perfect and promote life. Only then would they adopt and integrate the Gospel values into the pattern of actions of the culture. In the more secularized regions of the world, even in those cultures that developed under the influence of Christian values, many no longer see them as perfecting or promoting their life as they formerly did. Theology's task while accompanying them has to include patient strategies of getting them to reconsider Gospel values in their free search for the good.

The establishment of a pattern of values that reflects the generally accepted free choices of a people forms what Mclean calls the "basic topology of culture; as repeatedly reaffirmed through time, it builds a tradition or heritage.... In time it encourages and reinforces certain patterns of action which, in turn, reinforce the pattern of values."¹¹² The dynamism described takes place over a long period of time, but it is worth considering the development Mclean sets forth, so that understanding theology's task of engaging a culture with Gospel values

¹¹¹ McLean, *Religion and Cooperation between Civilizations*, 105-106.

¹¹² McLean, *Ways to God*, 336. In another place McLean ties all the elements we have mentioned thus far into a working definition of culture: "Together, the values, artifacts and modes of human interaction constitute an integrated pattern of human life in which the creative freedom of a people is expressed and implemented." McLean, *Religion and Cooperation between Civilizations*, 106.

not be underestimated or rushed. A working flow chart of this topology of culture, then, might look something like the following:

Human freedom in pursuit of good + human interaction → values + time
 →
 Tradition / heritage → patterns of action → reinforced pattern of values

From this topology of culture flow elements often used to identify the specific characteristics of culture in the elaboration of ritual, music, dance, literature, etc. These various characteristics are a reflection of meaning and a celebration of the values and patterns of action that exist in a culture's tradition. McLean gives us a valuable working image for the effect of these elements when he observes, "All conspire to constitute a culture which, like a giant telecommunications dish, shapes, intensifies and extends the range of our personal sensitivity, free decisions and mutual concerns."¹¹³ This image of a telecommunications dish serves to remind us that any proclamation of the Gospel, and any assimilation of its values, must pass through a person's or a people's cultural matrix. Rather than trying to present the faith as an alternative culture, the presentation of the Gospel can best be applied to sharpen the exercise of freedom and shift in values from within the culture itself.

This topology of culture illustrates a couple of insights to remember when considering a person's movement to the faith. First, the person's human freedom must always be respected; otherwise he or she will have nothing but resistance to any movement towards a new way of looking at reality. Secondly, the pattern of values expressed in a culture remains the most elastic point of contact, the point at which the Gospel begins its transformation. The more identifiable characteristics of ritual, dance, song, etc., have to be cherished for what they already contain. Once Gospel values begin to supplant or purify the values already present in a culture's tradition, adjustment of the more identifiable characteristics would follow naturally. One last observation to make regarding the topology of culture shows the similarity of McLean's emphasis on values with John Paul II's own insight that "cultures show forth the human being's characteristic openness to the universal and transcendent. Therefore they offer different paths to the truth, which assuredly serve men and women well in revealing values which can make their life ever more human."¹¹⁴ Like McLean, John Paul II expressed confidence in the values of a culture offering a path to truth that has to be respected. This confidence is not confined simply to the

¹¹³ McLean, *Hermeneutics, Faith and Relations between Cultures*, 45.

¹¹⁴ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, # 70. He cites as a reference here *Gaudium et Spes*, #s 53-59.

values, but reflects the inherent trust that cultures do express the human person's openness to God, something we already considered at some length earlier. In accompanying a culture's listening to God, then, theology might most effectively begin with the people's strongest values to lead them to embrace the Gospel values.

We have already seen how McLean used the image of a giant telecommunications dish to describe the way culture intensifies and extends the range of concerns and freedom. In another place he uses the image of eyeglasses to describe how culture, like one's upbringing in a family, orients one's vision and forms one's values.

Hence, one born into a particular family and a particular culture receives a way of observing and interpreting, and a language which shapes their consciousness. In this way their values also are shaped. Consequently, we can say that values are the basic orienting factor for emotional and affective lives. We defend and act upon these values because they express our freedom and are keys to the exercise of freedom by subsequent generations.¹¹⁵

With this reference to language and consciousness, McLean situates values in the daily life and tradition of a community. And since these values reflect a people's freedom, while also framing their affective life, any attempt to transform a culture's values must necessarily be a hermeneutic work that proves capable of changing the focus of the eyeglasses. How theology respects a culture's traditions and the type of hermeneutic theology adopts as it engages people in their own dynamic of conversion truly matter. Because our emotional lives are tied up with the values we carry, values that our culture expresses, the way someone or something engages those values either puts one at ease or moves one to become more defensive. The language and consciousness of a people reflect a way of being in the world, a stance on life and, therefore, they mirror the communal disposition. These are most easily observed in the culture's tradition.

Tradition and Culture

Human freedom and values play a role in making up the topology of a culture by establishing patterns of actions that get refined over time. These develop and become part of the heritage or tradition of a people and that heritage proves to be a critical component for human development within the culture. The definition McLean ascribes to

¹¹⁵ McLean, *Religion and Cooperation between Civilizations*, 67-68.

tradition follows logically upon what we have discussed so far: “the cumulative process of transmitting, adjusting and applying the values of a culture through time. It is at once both heritage, or what is inherited or received, and new creation as we pass this on in new ways.”¹¹⁶ Because tradition has this dual role of serving as both heritage and new creation, it must be treated as gift to be cherished and as responsibility to be developed. But here theology’s task can prove formidable, since many often view tradition as an outmoded expression or perspective of generations that had no inkling of the challenges faced today.

Many speak almost scornfully of tradition as an inhibitor to their personal freedom and development, while the opposite is actually the case: fully embracing one’s tradition gives one a more solid character foundation and offers the security to inquire more freely and openly into other world views. As John Paul II asserted, “Precisely by being rooted in the tradition will we be able today to develop for the future an original, new and constructive mode of thinking.”¹¹⁷ Theology’s attention to cultural tradition and the extent to which people have embraced or ignored it proves crucial to helping them nurture a fruitful way of thinking as they grow in freedom to accept the Gospel. Towards that end, I shall explore McLean’s material by dividing these preliminary discussions on tradition into three parts, to which I give the names: a) tradition as substrata of development, b) tradition as timeless part of history, and c) tradition as intimate link with God.

Tradition as Substrata of Development. As a culture grows in its sense of identity as demonstrated in its customs there forms within the culture a framework for future development and growth. Patterned on human development through the various stages of life, McLean maintains that this living substrata of a people reflect the “the crucial need of protecting cultural traditions and attending to their proper transposition and adaptation.”¹¹⁸ New insights and expressions do not form out of thin air, but evolve from wisdom and understanding of the

¹¹⁶ McLean, *Religion and Cooperation between Civilizations*, 107. Here I want to look primarily at tradition’s role as heritage in its synchronic sense through time. In later chapters, I shall examine more closely its diachronic sense as new creation. Even as one looks at tradition in its more static, synchronic sense, it remains important to keep in mind its dynamic character for incorporating human creativity.

¹¹⁷ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, # 85.

¹¹⁸ McLean, *Ways to God*, 65-66. Here McLean is referring to Piaget’s developmental theory again, noting that, as people develop new levels of capability, the earlier stages are not dispensed but remain as the substrata for the realization of all that follows; this highlights for McLean the importance of cultural heritage.

free decisions of earlier generations. Tradition reflects the values and commitment of a people over time. For McLean, the various forms of cultural expression in tradition point to a living reality “upon which personal character and society can be built. It constitutes a rich source from which multiple themes can be drawn, provided it be accepted and embraced, affirmed and cultivated.”¹¹⁹ This observation rounds out McLean’s definition of tradition referred to above. As a living body of experience and wisdom that has developed within a culture, it forms the foundation or substrata for its ongoing development. Containing the values of the culture that developed from the expressions of the freedom from many diverse experiences, the store of cultural wealth in tradition serves as a building block for character development.

But the full depth of this character can be forfeited if one rejects outright the tradition inherited, or if one is not able to embrace some of its aspects. We could say that any failure to cultivate one’s tradition acts as a deterrent fully to take on the wisdom of one’s cultural inheritance, thus weakening the foundation for full character development. No one grows up or lives in a vacuum, a world devoid of values or of neutral values. Any attempt to deny this or to cast off all the values of one’s heritage may at first sight look like a sophisticated choice to be freed from the baggage of past generations, but it more accurately signifies a denial of one’s identity, a rebellion and running away from the truth of oneself. We need new horizons, new vistas, new ways of appreciating and incorporating values, but not at the expense of denying who we are, the values and wisdom and free acts of the accumulated experience of generations. To contribute fruitfully to the creative growth of tradition, we must first recognize and embrace what we have inherited as our own. Without a rootedness in tradition one remains in danger of pursuing paths of action unreflectively, abandoning critical values unknowingly. Such careless action would separate a people from a tried and tested wisdom that otherwise could help them avoid a multitude of errors. Like one’s own personal identity and relationship with God, this wisdom came about through attentive reflection on the experience of free decisions accumulated over time.

Tradition as Timeless Part of History. Tradition plays a role in shaping a people’s vision and directing their freedom, as well as interpreting past historical moments and present experience within the

¹¹⁹ McLean, *Persons, Peoples and Cultures*, 155. As McLean observes in the same place, tradition “contains the values to which our forebears first freely gave their passionate commitment in specific historical circumstances and then constantly reviewed, rectified and progressively passed on, generation after generation.” *Ibid.*

flow of history. The learning of a people found in the storehouse of tradition concerns more than just past experience and a record of historical response, but also the meaning they are able to envision for life. As McLean observes, “The result of this extended process of learning and commitment constitutes our awareness of the bases of the decisions of which history is constituted.”¹²⁰ I would liken this to the memory of a people in the biblical sense. That memory contains the people’s living sense of identity and how they view their relationship with God. To go a step further than McLean does here, the lack of awareness of the bases of historical decisions also results in a lack of awareness of one’s own place in history and a lack in the foundations of the art of personal discernment. For this reason an impoverished sense of tradition translates into an impoverished ability to envision meaning for life.

Waking up to tradition as a world of meaning that is meant to provide easier access to relationship with God remains a crucial part of the spiritual journey. Part of that awakening is to understand that tradition is more than something to possess; a people belongs to tradition as much as tradition belongs to them. Tradition is not just a gift for those who come from that culture, but a gift to be cherished by all peoples. As John Paul II notes, “The appeal to tradition is not a mere remembrance of the past; it involves rather the recognition of a cultural heritage which belongs to all of humanity. Indeed it may be said that it is we who belong to the tradition and that it is not ours to dispose of at will.”¹²¹ Being rooted in it provides the foundation for a freer, more secure sense of exploring other world views so that creative developments can be pursued more easily. McLean’s thought coincides closely with this statement, while rooting tradition in being and perfection, thus emphasizing its timeless character.

One’s cultural heritage or tradition constitutes a specification of the general sense of being or perfection, but not as if this were chronologically distant in the past and therefore, in need of being drawn forward by some artificial contrivance. Rather, being and its values live and

¹²⁰ McLean, *Ways to God*, 343. McLean does not mention the biblical sense of memory as such, but he does see culture and tradition reflecting a people’s free acts of commitment and sacrifice through history. Underlying that history is a people’s living relationship with God, the source of transcendence in their history. This insight will serve us well in our next chapter, which has to do with recognition or awareness, a critical moment in a person’s journey to God in faith.

¹²¹ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, # 85.

act in the lives of all whom they inspire and judge. In its synchronic form, through time, tradition is the timeless dimension of history. Rather than reconstructing it, we belong to it – just as it belongs to us.¹²²

This passage provides us with what I would call a *metaphysical foundation of culture*, though McLean does not name it as such. What he says here refers especially to tradition in its synchronic form. It establishes the foundation for the trajectories of tradition in its diachronic form. One way to envision tradition in its being could be to liken its synchronic sense with its realized potential, or its essence. The more existential *esse* of its being, then, could be likened to its more diachronic sense. Tradition and culture have a being and perfection of their own: distinct from any one person, but not completely separate from any one person. Chronologically distancing oneself from cultural heritage may prove useful in terms of analysis, but the fullest understanding comes from living it, being a part of it. By living it, both the affective self and the cognitive self remain fully engaged. By helping others to become aware of this belonging, and to claim it, theology allows them to tap into that timeless world of meaning, the soil in which their relationship with God gets its nourishment.

Once awakened to its value, tradition offers a reference point of wisdom for all of one's relationships. As McLean notes in another place, "All of these – the role of community in learning, the contribution of extended historical experience regarding the horizontal and vertical axes of life and meaning, and the grounding of dependence in competency – combine to endow tradition with authority for subsequent ages."¹²³ Claiming that authority of tradition is not something external to oneself, something that has to be put on like a piece of clothing, but is part of the heritage of lived wisdom. Without engaging and tapping one's heritage, relationship with God would either look like a superfluous contrivance or a daunting effort requiring incalculable sacrifice.

In service to a constructive mode of thinking based on truth, staying rooted in tradition allows one to avoid pitfalls of both relativism and idealism, problems which regularly plague the modern mindset. Tradition offers a working vision to keep one's feet fully in touch with reality, while also offering a guide for virtuous action. It is at once connected to human historical experience while also transcending that experience. McLean describes how tradition serves prudence as law or reference point, thus avoiding relativism. Rooted in experience, it avoids

¹²² McLean, *Ways to God*, 358.

¹²³ McLean, *Persons, Peoples and Cultures*, 157.

the abstractions that can result in idealism.¹²⁴ As a normative referent, cultural tradition keeps a people in touch with deep truths that have been tested over time. Because of this it transcends any one time, while remaining always relevant. It is the skeletal framework for how to go about living life and finding meaning. Tradition, then, acts as a sort of guide to the expression of our freedom, keeping freedom from being too disconnected from the truth of reality as a result of either selfishness or idealism. This assessment by McLean also coincides well with Ratzinger's observation that the false freedom lived in the absence of truth is uncovered "as a life of nothingness, as absolute emptiness, as the definition of damnation."¹²⁵ Tradition tames and focuses the exercise of our freedom by keeping it in touch with the deeper truths of reality that have been learned over time. At the heart of those deeper truths resides the intimate, personal link that tradition gives to the living God.

Tradition as Intimate Link to God. Tradition contains the wisdom drawn from a vast experience of free acts, of the commitments and sacrifices of a people lived over time. Within this experience resides the tangible relationship of a people with God, usually expressed through religious rites, literature and music. From all this McLean points out how tradition gives a people "both the way back to their origin in the *arché* as the personal, free and responsible exercise of existence and even of its divine source, and the way forward to their goal; it is the way to both the *Alpha* and *Omega*."¹²⁶ Tradition, then, links us to our original identity as created in love by God, as well as to our final destination or full development of our identity in God. Just as it does on the individual level, this tangible contact that tradition provides to God proves essential for cultures and nations as they seek to exercise their freedom and creativity in a global community of many other diverse cultures. As such, tradition proves very important for how one interprets

¹²⁴ See McLean, *Hermeneutics, Tradition and Contemporary Change*, 8.

¹²⁵ Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, 244. Though Ratzinger was not writing specifically of tradition, but truth in general, we are able to see how he and McLean agree on the destructive relativism that no longer uses the truth which tradition can provide as a guiding directive. As McLean writes in another place, without the authentic content of wisdom that tradition provides, "life would be merely a matter of compromise and accommodation on any terms, with no sense of the value either of what was being compromised or of that for which it was compromised." McLean, *Ways to God*, 358. In other words, it would be living life like a ship that moves without a rudder, tossed about by the winds of accommodation and political correctness, rather than moving safely and with precision, guided by values in a sea of truth.

¹²⁶ McLean, *Persons, Peoples and Cultures*, 156.

current affairs or the viewpoint one chooses to adopt for creatively engaging challenges.

This contact with the divine that tradition provides signifies also that it serves as a means of the sort of revelation that discloses the interaction of a people with God through time. Cultures and the traditions that make up their heritage form their people as social agents with perceptions that go beyond simple rational reflection; they tap into the pre-rational responses that we saw were so much a part of totemic and mythic thought, as well as offering transcendent opportunities that may exceed the initial rational possibilities of reflection. Here again, we see how Ratzinger's thought mirrors closely the insights of McLean. With regard to the pre- and supra-rational perceptions, Ratzinger maintains that cultures refer "to traditions from the beginnings, which have the character of revelation, that is, they are the result, not simply of human questioning and reflection, but of original contact with the ground of all things; to communications from the Divinity."¹²⁷ Part of theology's task is to reawaken these communications from the Divinity in a person's particular tradition, while relating it to the manifestations that God is making in his or her life in the present. The point here is that these two manifestations of God, in tradition and in one's personal life, do coincide. The proclamation of the Gospel and the journey to faith need not, and, indeed, should not, try to separate these communications from God. Instead, theology seeks to awaken their common origin and link with a culture's or a person's identity and freedom.

The common thread for tradition in either its synchronic or diachronic sense has to do with this intimate link to God, a link that gives to tradition and to culture a living ontology, a grounding in being that affords culture status as an essential reality to be considered in its own right for reflections on faith and freedom. McLean's operative metaphysics affords theology the opportunity to consider *culture as a personal subject*. Tradition serves as an intimate link to God on the level of being, not just in the past tense, but for active engagement in the present. The synchronic sense of tradition one receives in a culture calls one to creative participation in the new possibilities of its diachronic sense. As McLean relates, in the intimate link with God the sense of the transcendent "makes possible radical newness in a cultural tradition. Tradition then is not a matter of the past, but an invitation to our creativity to develop new applications; it is not retrospective but prospective."¹²⁸ Though McLean does not mention it specifically here, the sense of the transcendent in tradition affords theology the opportunity to activate anew the imagination of a culture, pointing out

¹²⁷ Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, 61-62.

¹²⁸ McLean, *Religion and Cooperation between Civilizations*, 59.

possibilities of the resurrection being expressed in the life of the people. The dynamics of conversion and the manner of engaging the paschal mystery on the individual and communal level can draw upon this insight into tradition and culture both giving expression to that mystery of the resurrection. Theology, then, can use culture and tradition to invite one further into the dynamic of that mystery. True freedom for faith does not signify a renunciation of one's culture and traditions, but an embrace of them in their proper light. Freedom calls us to a deeper understanding of being, of reality, and of the presence of God in our midst. Culture and tradition provide the context for a people's freedom and ongoing dialogue with God. They reflect the depth or extent to which people have responded, positively or negatively, to Gospel values when facing challenges to their freedom and creativity in the events of their history. By calling them to ever deeper participation in the paschal mystery so that their fullest freedom may be realized, theology can learn from their personal dialogue and come to understand their culture as a living basis of their world of interpretation.

Culture as Foundation for Hermeneutics

A culture's influence on the hermeneutic lenses that frame one's operative theory of interpretation establishes a certain mindset or a certain set of eyeglasses. That influence occurs on both the institutional and the personal level. In the previous discussions of culture and its relation to freedom, values and tradition I laid much of the groundwork for establishing how culture provides the contextual foundation for one's search for meaning. Initial theories of interpretation are culturally based; they find their origin and forms of expression in the culture. Only love, not justice or some other lesser value, can guide a culture to full authenticity and freedom, to full clarity of vision and faith. And only the logic of the cross and the mystery of the resurrection are able to present love as the dominant value that can truly convince a culture in its search for meaning. My aim here, then, is to see how culture acts as a foundation for hermeneutics and to introduce the manner in which the paschal mystery makes up a natural part of that foundation. I divide the reflections into three parts: a) origins and meaning; b) communication of meaning; and c) the cross and paschal mystery.

Origins and Meaning. The world of meaning and how one extracts a sense of meaning from understanding one's origins, while also looking towards one's future or end, guide the whole hermeneutic focus. Culture provides the context of the world of meaning, where freedom ultimately flourishes or languishes and where faith either finds life and expression, or is blocked and stifled. McLean discusses the need

to overcome the inversion of the general hermeneutic directive, in which attending to the words in a tradition has received overwhelming emphasis. Stepping back to the roots of hermeneutic theory, however, resets the priorities. He names three hermeneutic principles that are important for interpreting one's origins: "(a) the manner of acting will be more significant than what is said; (b) the manner of thinking and feeling will not be separable from the manner of acting; and (c) the preconditions or conditions of possibility of this manner of thought, feeling and acting will be the most significant of all."¹²⁹ Rather than an initial emphasis on words and language, the most fruitful approach, especially as relates to culture, rests with examining the conditions or preconditions of the manner of thought, feeling and acting. The imagination and the affective side are stimulated or dulled according to the engagement of these preconditions that lay embedded in a person as a fruit of cultural upbringing and influence. Another way of looking at it would be to say that one's antenna for meaning operates best at certain frequencies and wavelengths. The degree to which one tunes into these resonant frequencies determines the quality of free response for one's imagination and affectivity. These understandably influence the manner of thinking, feeling and acting. Cultural influence, then, tunes one's conditions of possibility to certain frequencies and wavelengths, thus resulting in a more positive or negative pre-programming of one's receptivity for meaning.

Communication of Meaning. As background to this brief section on communication of meaning I want to link my reflections to what we previously discussed regarding symbolic communication and the insights gained from the examination of totemic and mythic thought. The affective patterns that shape a person's consciousness stem from those patterns of actions and reinforced values that a culture develops. Sensibility to meaning and its communication are more than linguistically based; they occur especially in the symbolic zones of affectivity. This is not to say that language has no role for hermeneutics, only that it is more or less the end product, the attempt to articulate and communicate the meaning already present. Shared cultural meaning comes about only after widespread communication over time.¹³⁰ But the

¹²⁹ McLean, *Ways to God*, 81.

¹³⁰ Lonergan describes the four functions of meaning as cognitive, efficient, constitutive and communicative. And regarding this last function, he writes, "What one man means is communicated to another intersubjectively, artistically, symbolically, linguistically, incarnately. So individual meaning becomes common meaning. But a rich store of common meaning is not the work of isolated individuals or even of single generations. They become

linguistic form of communication is only one among many, an articulated attempt to convey the meaning through words. Communication of meaning happens on many levels, all of which need their proper attention, especially for leading others to faith.¹³¹ Cultures use all those forms of communication to continue their own dance with meaning, giving expression to the meaning they grasp while testing horizons of meaning from their stable storehouse of wisdom.

Within this dance of meaning lie opportunities to reach people in their preconditions, for it is there that God can most easily break into their world. But people and their cultures need help in translating the experience of God informing or breaking into their worlds of meaning. Here, theology can act as midwife to meaning, helping in its translation by pointing out forms of communication that may precede, or supersede, the linguistic form. Ratzinger noted that cultures “have the inherent capacity for progression and metamorphosis, though also of course the risk of decadence. They are concerned with encounter and mutual fertilization.... Revelation is not something alien to them; rather, it corresponds to an inner expectation in the cultures themselves.”¹³² By taking advantage of this inherent capacity to search for meaning, by understanding a culture’s inner expectations, theology can discover new opportunities to sharpen a people’s ear to God’s call. God’s revelation will operate from the inner expectation that marks the human dynamics of each particular culture. One of the primary challenges to remember, then, is that the development of cultures and civilizations exists on both the cognitive and affective orders of meaning. The cognitive order generally receives the most attention as we develop sciences and

common only through successful and widespread communication.” Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 78.

¹³¹ I am by no means trying to minimize the importance of language but, instead, am trying to emphasize that communication happens in many areas in addition to language. McLean even calls languages the “repositories of the cultures” within which prophetic messages are composed and received. Translation, especially into the language of faith, has to bridge two senses of the world of meaning. McLean goes on to write that “We exist in our language as the sedimented cultural experiences of our people and its way of being in the world. Hence we need a translation of any message from outside this people, and especially for a message from a divine source.” McLean, *Hermeneutics, Faith and Relations between Cultures*, 100-101.

¹³² Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, 195. Cultural instincts and the initial responses they promote often appear to be pre-conceptual. Though pre-conceptual they are still rational. To promote faith, then, theology has to tap these pre-conceptual, yet still rational, reservoirs of meaning. A culture’s affective patterns shape its world of understanding and influence how its people apply reason.

philosophic systems to analyze observations and check them against our cognitive theories. But the journey of faith, cognitive though it may be on many levels, has a deep affective side that also requires attention as a substantial, critical reality. Any faith journey is ultimately a love story, much more than a mere adherence to a truth about God. This love story occurs within the setting of a particular culture that beats with its own life pulse and must be respected. When speaking of the life, meaning and wisdom of a culture, McLean notes that...

...this affective pattern of extended and sophisticated hopes and fears is not an object of observation that can be properly thematized. Rather, as a system of correlations of the experience of anguish and desire, it is our life-world which, writ large, is not simply our experience of being as if of an object, but is the life of being as received, lived passionately, and transmitted to others.¹³³

Attention to this affective level does not imply that theology overlook the objective realities of existence, but that it fully take into account the subjective element always at work in reality. Part of what makes cultures so difficult to analyze or categorize is that they carry within themselves the living affectivity of their people. The aim is to learn the dynamics of how people, within their culture, can receive, live passionately and transmit to others a life-world that is faith-filled, one that is imbued with the mystery of a love story with God.

The Cross and the Paschal Mystery: At the heart of this love story stand the cross and the paschal mystery, the clearest expression of the Father's love revealed by the Son. Each culture's world of meaning is touched implicitly by this mystery of love. An active hermeneutic sense of the mystery, however, proves a challenging task for theology, even in those cultures where Christianity formed the foundation for their development and civilization. Helping people to reach an acceptance of their life and culture as a faith-filled love story requires that one take into consideration the religious context of a culture and its impact on reason. The cross and paschal mystery are inherently part of every culture's affective patterns and values systems, of its pre-conceptual or pre-cognitive symbolic networks. Theology has to trust that the paschal mystery resides at the heart of a culture's hermeneutic structure, even as it works to bring that culture to full consciousness of the mystery.

Different cultures require different approaches of presenting the Gospel, just as do people of differing temperaments. In order to reach

¹³³ McLean, *Persons, Peoples and Cultures*, 188.

people and cultures so that they move away from a focus on selfishness and individualism back towards love as the form of all their virtues, theology needs to understand the full framework of their world of meaning. Distressed cultures, ones that have had a deterioration of values to the point of near antithesis to Gospel values, need particular care.¹³⁴ Culture, however, remains the entry point. The mystery of the cross carries enough irony and paradox to uncover the blockages to freedom and virtue in a culture, so that the way to love might be rediscovered. Only the clear dialogue of love can effectively break down barriers to faith set up by mass media and universal education, but love itself has to risk not being recognized while it seeks to make known its truth, even as worlds of meaning may be disintegrating.¹³⁵

In just such a state of affairs the scandal of the cross, long taken for granted in post-Christian cultures as a symbol of quaint memory but lacking usefulness, returns to offer love a vehicle of communication that can overcome all barriers. But this victory of love has to take place in that free zone of the human heart struggling for meaning in a world that no longer offers any real answers. Here theology needs all the grounding of metaphysics and all the light of phenomenology in order to comprehend the power of being finding hope and love in a culture of despair and broken values. Then, even a radically distressed culture can

¹³⁴ As an example, when commenting on John Paul II's discussion on the drama of the separation of faith and reason in *Fides et Ratio*, # 46, McLean stresses that culture needs to be given greater attention. He notes that "in a humanist and individualist culture justice is the supreme value and social ethics and personal moral growth are interpreted in its terms." McLean, *Ways to God*, 214. Having justice as a dominant value and the self as the primary focus, especially when not tempered by mercy, can indeed lead to a harsh notion of life that may spiral into a nihilistic mindset. These cultures require a more dedicated commitment to proclaim the Gospel than those with a strong religious identity, where family and community are stressed, and where "the virtue of love comes forward and becomes the form of all the virtues." *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ Here I recall Lonergan's stages of meaning to help tool us for the effort, as well as to remind us of the difficulty of trying to reach people caught in a cultural downward spiral. After the stages of common sense and theory become fully operative, there follows a third stage of meaning where theory is left to science and philosophies focus mostly on interiority. In this third stage of meaning occurs a dumbing down of common sense, where theory blends with nonsense, and meaning and value are reduced until, as Lonergan puts it, "the culture has become a slum." Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 99. The pursuit of power and wealth take over, and media and education are used as tools of manipulation rather than tools for exploring truth. In a culture which has reached this final stage of meaning, only the radical love of the cross and resurrection can reach the minds and hearts of people in order to call them home to their true identity and to full freedom in Christ.

still provide the foundation for an effective hermeneutics.¹³⁶ The logic of the cross has ever been an absurdity and a stumbling block because it appears as the worst injustice and the most meaningless of all acts. Beyond the overused rhetoric on love, the cross reaches into a zone without words to break down old theories and old logic in order to restore the sense of love to a culture's common sense. Unfortunately, too often this love of God cannot be recognized or accepted until the devastation of life leads one to face meaninglessness. But the meaningful act of accepting the "meaninglessness" of the cross turns all things on their head and opens up a clear view of the deepest reality of all: God loving us in spite of everything and calling us into a communion of love.

The hermeneutic which theology must ever employ, the theory of interpretation that has to guide theology so that others can recognize and accept it as well, has to be the one of seeing the world and all reality through the eyes of the crucified Savior. Every culture has elements of this hermeneutic of love in varying degrees, so there will always be opportunities to correlate the paths of interpretation and the worlds of meaning. But the power, scandal and grace of the cross, with all its paradoxes and ironies, have to be communicated ever anew within a cultural setting. Culture provides the foundation for the hermeneutics, while theology instills it with the hermeneutics of love flowing from the paschal mystery. As culture acts as the foundation for any person's operative hermeneutics, so the mystery of the cross and resurrection, in the victory of kenotic love it announces, heals that world of meaning and brings it to closer union with God.

CONCLUSION

Since having looked at Jesus' offer of living water to the Samaritan woman we have explored three primary levels of reality important to our study: God, the human person, and culture. Just as Jesus entered the narrative of her story, so he tries to meet each person

¹³⁶ As an example, by using the synthesis reflections of Tillich to make sense of the utter desperation left in areas of the world in the wake of the Second World War, McLean finds a form in which the mystery of the cross leads to the resurrection and the manifestation of God even in the worst of circumstances. "Face to face with meaninglessness and despair which one must recognize if one is serious about anything at all, one is grasped by mystery. For in the act of despair, one accepted meaninglessness and that acceptance itself was a meaningful act. It could be done only on the power of the being it negates. In this way the reality of a transcending power is manifested within oneself." McLean, *Hermeneutics, Tradition and Contemporary Change*, 65.

in his or her own narrative, at his or her well, to offer the gift of living water that will become a spring welling up to eternal life from within the person. Early on I spoke of the need to shift our thinking from a deductive to an inductive reasoning. In our discussion of mythic experience we saw how the world of symbol and narrative mystery help the imagination integrate realities for greater meaning and a view to the transcendent. Grasping God as the background landscape of all reality, the human person as an integrated unity in the plurality of its dimensions, and love as the guiding value for the cumulative experience of freedom in the culture of a people, gives to theology the tools needed to reflect on reality inductively, drawing all things together into an interconnected unity. Freedom, love and truth are all interwoven realities that need to be considered together for the human person's search for meaning to be truly fruitful. As we saw, love is not cognitively blind, and freedom is not affectively arbitrary.

God is the central reality, the creator and sustainer of humanity, and the basis of culture. As the background landscape of reality and experience, God's presence has a certain immediacy by which people remain ever influenced, even if only subconsciously. As the inexpressible creator, God is often best understood by who God is not, or, by how we cannot speak of God. But God's intelligibility communicates a dynamism of love that precedes any systems of thought, inviting each person to active participation in that love. The incarnation provides a reference point for this presence, gives a personal name and a face to God, and acts as a sure guide for making the reality of God a recognizable invitation to participation in an intelligibility that may have not been previously perceived.

Only in relationship with God, especially in Jesus who is the human face of God, does the human person begin to perceive personal identity, who one is as made in God's image and likeness. Only the drama of our unique existence can help us perceive the great love that formed and sustained us. Our identity becomes clearer in understanding the unity of our personhood in the plurality of its dimensions. As *imago Dei* we are personal, social, relational, free, and radically open to the transcendent God of love who created us. And because God wants a real relationship with us, God gives us radical freedom which, as we saw, acts as the dynamic center of human experience. The paradox in which we have to live this freedom defines our search for meaning and fulfillment: we are built for union with God, but totally dependent on God for the consummation of our identity and being.

As we try to grasp the paradox of existence and test the boundaries of freedom, we learn from the history of our forebears and from the family and wider community in which we live. Assisting one another in our common search, we receive a tradition, a heritage, and a

culture which impart to us the learned experience of wisdom and ground us in certain values that help to shape our worldview. In its highest form, culture expresses the freedom of countless people in their journey with the mystery of God and reflects the active accompaniment of the Holy Spirit with that people. But cultures whose values are stifled or deteriorating reflect a distance from and strained relationship with God. The tradition of a culture, then, is a timeless part of a long history and offers theology an intimate link to a people's journey with God. So culture provides a foundation for hermeneutics, the operative lens through which one tries initially to interpret experience and one's search for meaning. But just as it is true for every individual, so too for culture, there remains the need for reality to be clarified, deepened, and enriched to the fullest sense. As freedom, truth, and love seem to fail us in the most challenging moments in our search for meaning, only the logic of the cross can reunify the three again, making sense of nonsense and revealing again the face of God who calls us into an ever deeper participation of love. These are the important realities that identify the gift offered to us; they serve as foundational realities for the study of the conversion dynamics ahead: recognition, acceptance and engagement.

CHAPTER III

REACHING NEW AWARENESS: GIFT RECOGNIZED

The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw water.”

Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come here.”

The woman answered him, “I have no husband.”

Jesus said to her, “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband;’ for you have had five husbands, and he whom you now have is not your husband; this you said truly.”

The woman said to him, “Sir I perceive that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshipped on this mountain; and you say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.”

(John 4:15-20)

This passage of the continuing conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman reveals some profound aspects to consider as one seeks to respond to the desire to quench the thirst for meaning and freedom. She reveals her openness to the transcendent with her desire to have living water. In so doing she demonstrates an awareness of God and an attitude of willing openness to Jesus on the deeper level of meaning. But then she has to face her history of broken relationships that have left her morally uncertain and adrift in her own identity. By facing the truth of her own personal journey, she enters into a deliberative reflection regarding her culture and religion, her world of meaning and relationship with God. All this reflects a growth in awareness, a new recognition, even before she has come to decide for a new direction in life or a new commitment in faith.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore that same dynamic of new awareness and self-discovery, using this scriptural pattern as a guide. To do so I will engage McLean’s philosophy of consciousness rooted in a philosophy of being, that mutual enhancement of the two he always tries to seek. I shall adapt his thoughts on the classical ways to God to demonstrate that, although there are general types of journeying,

each person follows his or her own personal path of discovery and relationship. The subject's internal dialectic reviews one's relationship with God, one's place in the world and one's horizon of meaning, all of which are commonly influenced by the reality of culture. As focus questions I offer the following:

- Regarding the call to new awareness, how can theology establish mechanisms to take account of each person's particular, unique journey?
- In relation to reestablishing a renewed sensibility to God's presence and revelation, what are the elements that influence one's personal disposition or attitude? What general impediments to freedom have to be addressed? What challenges must theology address to face these impediments?
- What are the various aspects that make up the dynamics of deliberative reflection for new awareness? What sort of hermeneutics is required for the process of deliberation and what are its main elements?
- How does culture foster a sense of awareness and gratitude? How can a deeper awareness of culture lead to a deeper awareness of God?

None of these questions can be satisfied with quick answers. The growth in recognition of the full depth of realities comes from each person's personal journey and encounters with Christ.

This chapter confines itself to the level of recognition: "I am in God; my culture has deep references to God."¹ In reawakening a sensibility for God's presence and word, I want to stress the importance of attention to the affective dimension of our lives as I examine the sources of our attitudes and the origin of our motivations. Some general impediments to the path of new recognition, those internal impediments to our growth in freedom and awareness, will be presented, thus providing an idea of the challenges to be overcome. Once a person is able to let go of attachment to the self-interests that may have dominated his or her life and to open to an attentive listening to past experiences and new movements of the heart, the dynamics of reflection begin to occur. Central to those dynamics is an engagement in what I call an inquiring hermeneutics of deliberation, by which the subject makes a critical step towards greater freedom and authenticity while discovering the transcendent dimension. The insights gained through the process change one's appreciation for the gift of life and call one to a new

¹ The level of acceptance and coming to peace with "being in God" will be explored in the next chapter.

awareness of, and responsibility for culture as the locus of personal identity and religious engagement. All of this leads to a deeper awareness of God who seeks a personal relationship with us. I divide the chapter, then, into five main sections: 1) classical paths to God; 2) towards reestablishing sensibility; 3) dynamics of deliberative reflection; 4) deeper awareness of culture; and 5) deeper awareness of God.

CLASSICAL PATHS TO GOD: SETTING THE STAGE

Having presented the realities of God, the human person, and culture in the last chapter, and seeing how one's horizon remains always transcendently open to real relationship with God, I want to begin this chapter by highlighting the various paths or ways that we journey to God. Finding a way to God is not so much one's own task or effort, but always the activity of God leading us to divine union. This discussion will introduce the more personal process of conversion, because it establishes a working ontological framework for the journey home to God. In the many subjective movements of consciousness, sometimes this framework can be forgotten or overlooked completely, but I highlight its importance to demonstrate that no one's journey to God happens as the result of merely accidental experiences. All are built for this journey home to God, created in such a way that the journey is designed to unfold naturally. The objective experiences which influence one's subjective consciousness slowly help to find the way to God. The route or roadmap latently resides within the reality of our being. Though created by God for this journey, we remain dependent upon God for its fulfillment.

McLean uses the classical five ways of St. Thomas to shed light on how limited beings are related to or participate in God, the absolute, unlimited being. Although often referred to as Thomas' five proofs for the existence of God, McLean disagrees with such a reference, because the ways have nothing to do with the question of whether God exists or not. Instead, they designate ways for limited beings to be understood as participating in God. McLean insists that

...the classical "five ways" to God have been largely misunderstood. They are not proofs for the existence of God, much less ways of constructing the reality of God. Instead they are ways in which all things are bound back to God (*re-ligio* as one of the etymologies for 'religion'),

whether they be considered in terms of their origin, of their level of being, or their goal, purpose or meaning.²

The ways represent how the human person is bound back to transcendent being, providing the foundation for the essential religious character of the human person. One's religious identity is not an add-on or a choice, but part of one's being, one's ontology. I already tried to establish this religious identity of the human being in previous discussions in order to set the background for the upcoming exploration of conversion. McLean first follows Thomas' insights to examine the philosophy of being, but much of his hermeneutics and cultural reflections probe further the manner in which the philosophy of consciousness enhances this ontological vision. As we shall see, the philosophy of consciousness enhances the ontological framework by means of cultural references of interpretation and by examining one's growing conscious relationship with God and others. Though I shall follow McLean's grouping and analysis of Thomas' five ways, I want to simplify them to three general paths based on their causality: the first three regarding efficient causality, which I call paths of participation; the fourth regarding formal causality, which I name the path of manifestation; and the fifth regarding final causality, to which I give the name the path of purpose.³ These various paths will provide an operative ontological framework for the more subjective, phenomenological journey of recognition and conversion to faith.

Paths of Participation

This path is based on the efficient causality of human beings in terms of their origin and encompasses St. Thomas' first three ways. These first three ways home to God are related in that they all refer to

² McLean, *Ways to God*, 32. These classical ways are based upon systematic Christian philosophy. As the title suggests, in this primary reference work McLean introduces other ways to God. We have already looked at the totemic and mythic ways. He also discusses the ritual Hindu way, Islamic mystical and existential ways, human subjectivity and personal ways, cultural traditions and civil society as social ways, and ultimate concern in history as another. I shall not be considering all of these, but the dynamic of conversion will embrace aspects of all the ways. These classical philosophical paths give a foundational framework on which any way can build its unique structure.

³ McLean reviews these ways first in the classical a posteriori manner (from effect to cause) from our perspective, and then looks at the ways again a priori, in light of the transcendent origin (from cause to effect), to gain deeper implications for understanding how we find our own personal way to God. I shall highlight his main insights from each perspective.

change in some way. The change recognized may initially seem to be independent of any reference to God, but if taken to its logical conclusion it brings to light the dependent nature of the person on God for existence and well-being. As the Creator, God is the beginning and ground to life and reality. As McLean puts it, created beings 1) undergo change, 2) cause change, and 3) begin and cease to be. Each of these observations, or realizations, of reality has the potential of opening up a way to relationship with God as the source, not just of change, but of our existential participation as created beings. Led to their logical end the three observations convince us that, though we may have creative powers, we cannot control all the change we undergo. And because we do not control our coming into or out of being, we are not the ultimate source of the creative powers we possess. As creative beings we remain radically dependent on subsistent, absolute being for our existence.

St. Thomas applied to Aristotle's structure the Christian understanding of being as existence in order to comprehend created beings as causes of and participations in the one, subsistent Being. In summarizing how the first three ways reveal created beings' dependency upon creative power, even while manifesting a creative power themselves, McLean remains brief: "First, as caused they emerge into being; second, as causes they reflect in their power the creative force of the creator; third, as contingent they manifest in every facet of their existence the triumph of being over nothingness."⁴ Human dependency on God, then, goes hand in hand with autonomous creative powers and a radical affirmation of existence. God's own being is not somehow drawn down or reduced through creating us and sharing with us his creative powers. Human existence does not detract from or diminish God's own being. So life and participation are not about competition with God or others, but about becoming the full person God created one to be. God gives us the ability to seek God's own glory and our own perfection.⁵

In his discussion on composite beings participating in the incomposite One, McLean notes that, far from their being competitors, they "are cooperators and together all are able better to manifest the divine in this world. Human society is then not a distraction from God, but a means of His presence."⁶ *This observation of McLean, that society is to be embraced as a means of God's presence, is crucial to understanding his cultural hermeneutic.* In the Holy Spirit, God is present in a culture through the ongoing dialogue with people as they

⁴ McLean, *Ways to God*, 199.

⁵ See McLean's more detailed discussion of this point in *Ways to God*, 203.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 202.

live and experience change. Understanding culture is a hermeneutic work; so, too, is anyone's personal path to God. Much of my attention, then, will be given over to exploring this hermeneutic. This presents a challenge since the scientific methodology which dominates popular thinking today influences the consideration of various causal effects in our lives. God's role, and thus the meaning and motivation in our own creative participation, become diminished. God respects our autonomy, freedom and identity, even while inviting us to the fullest participation possible. Any roadblock to gaining the proper sense of one's origin as freely created in God's love effectively impedes the ability to recognize these paths of participation leading home to God. Neither God nor created beings, then, can be considered in a functional, utilitarian sense, but must be regarded in an ontological, personal sense that respects their unique existence and flourishing in freedom.

Path of Manifestation

The path of manifestation is based on the formal causality of human beings in terms of the level of being. This path relates to St. Thomas' fourth way or fourth proof, and refers to how we, "to greater or lesser degrees,"⁷ realize our being or goodness. For our purposes, this way is related to one's developed capacity to reflect the image of God or to give credible witness to relationship with or participation in God. McLean calls this the 'most mystical of the ways' because, in addition to showing that all things stem from the divine, this path also reflects that each thing, to some degree, is a manifestation of the divine. As he puts it in another place, this path "is manifest in everything inasmuch as each realizes truth and goodness in its own degree and according to its own nature."⁸ In this path God is the unity, the animator, the means that interconnects all and enables full realization. McLean sees this as more than just the formal, mystical connection of binding one back to God (*re-ligatio*). It reflects the interconnectedness of all beings in the broader unity in which all participate according to their proper nature or capacity.

Once this path is discovered, one gains a fresh insight into religious nature and identity. As noted earlier, religious nature is not something added onto who we are, or something we choose to have or not have; it is how we are built, how we were created to be. The human

⁷ Ibid., 198.

⁸ McLean, *Knowledge of God and the Discovery of Man*, 57-58. This mystical aspect, the mark of God in each individual, influences the notion of intellection I shall discuss later in chapter five; it has consequences for the hermeneutic employed for the relation of cultures in a global context.

capacity for relationship with God holds unlimited openness to transcendent growth.⁹ So the mystical sense one gains in this path based on the level of being concerns not just one's own relationship with God, but every other person's relationship with God as well. From this flows naturally the mystical interconnectedness we have with one another. The Holy Spirit binds the Church together as the mystical body of Christ and establishes this unity, not just for the Church, but for all humanity. In an age where differences of race, culture, religion, or nationality cause such divisive hostilities, this path of manifestation promotes an alternative vision of unity and cooperation.

Path of Purpose

The path of purpose is based on the final causality of human beings in terms of their goal, purpose, or meaning. Related to St. Thomas' fifth way, this path leads the person into the open terrain of transcendent relationship with God where meaning and purpose are realized; it fills or satisfies that openness to transcendence that is part of our being. Here God is the goal or end who harmonizes and orchestrates relationships, orienting us to a reality beyond ourselves to seek fulfillment in union. God is not to be employed as a means or a tool or a functional instrument. God also cannot simply be considered the source that established all the boundaries of things and then stepped back to see what would unfold. God is both Creator and end, the goal of human life and flourishing, the one to whom we are tending for the fullness and unity of our being. This tending or movement is a reality for every person, thus signifying a dynamic harmony of many members who discover their purpose and unity in God.

McLean uses this insight to discuss how the demands of love move one beyond traditional commitment to family out into the surrounding community in which one lives, and on further to the wider global reach of humanity. Once people are able to conceive the purpose of their life in relation to God, McLean asserts, they "are united, enlivened and cohesive in the exercise of their freedom."¹⁰ This exercise of freedom does not stem from the type of governing structure or model operative in society, or from a people's consciousness, but from the right ordering of who the human person is in relation to the loving God. As relationship and union with God are understood as ultimate goal or

⁹ This path based on formal causality brings the person to embrace his or her full capacity, as well as bringing one up to a limit or boundary experience of that open transcendence. It leads one out beyond natural capacities into a transforming relationship with God.

¹⁰ McLean, *Ways to God*, 208.

purpose, this path carries the eschatological implications of changing one's life in the present even before having fully actualized one's fulfillment.

Beginning the Journey: The Call to Conversion

These paths, then, offer general frameworks by which subjects explore or find their way home to God. Recognition of one's own condition or state is the first step along this journey of conversion. My main emphasis here consists in trying to equip theology with the wherewithal to midwife others as they journey in freedom towards faith. The ability to serve this role well depends on all members of the Church. It demands that theologians and theology itself remain involved in life-long conversion. As Avery Dulles wrote, "conversion is a continuous process demanded at every stage of the Christian life, and ...fundamental theology is therefore of existential import to all believers. Being a Christian is not a static condition, for no believer has faith fully and securely in hand."¹¹ Part of theology's creativity and effectiveness as midwife to faith begins with the awareness that each remains on the journey of conversion, a dynamic condition that necessarily implies never having a fully secure grip on faith.

All conversion depends on the recognition of transcendence and acknowledgement of God, but it has to extend to one's own affective and rational world of meaning and understanding. As McLean describes it, what is needed is "a mode of human awareness which transcends the rational but does not abandon it. This must open to a full and transcendent meaning in which the modern person with all its cares can be truly liberated and rehumanized in a new birth or renaissance of the spirit."¹² Freedom, as noted earlier in regard to the overall dynamic movement of faith, is a critical component of the study of recognition and awareness. Freedom is a precondition for starting, but also serves as the goal of a deepened awareness. With new awareness one also grasps a new possibility for being human, a rehumanization of one's mind and heart. This new birth or renewal of the spirit offers to theology the role

¹¹ Dulles, *The Craft of Theology*, 54-55. Dulles views the analysis of the dynamics of conversion as one of fundamental theology's primary roles.

¹² McLean, *Persons, Peoples and Cultures*, 66. This poses big challenges today because of the increased rationalization of life since Descartes, and especially since Kant. McLean does not regret what has been gained through this new emphasis on rationality, but he would say it has to be expanded. He would also maintain that the seeds of this expanded rationality were actually present in Kant's third critique of aesthetic judgment, which moved beyond rational reflection to awareness.

of midwife to deeper awareness. Just as a midwife assists in bringing new human life to birth, so theological midwifery assists in bringing new spiritual life to birth. The new life is a gift from God, one that has objective reality in the order of grace, but one that must also be recognized and embraced by a living subject.

My intention is to use McLean's insights to go a step further than he does as a philosopher in order to examine the dynamic of a subject's reaching a certain level of clarity and freedom in his or her view of God, self and world, so as to be ready to embrace a new life of faith and the reception of transforming grace. Since the freedom of the subject must be fully respected, the journey to accepting the objective reality of the truth of the Gospel and God's grace necessarily passes through the subject. The recognition and acceptance in faith takes time and careful accompaniment, since the subject has to attend to things which transcend his or her previous experience of reality. For self-transcendence to take place, the subject has to move through an experience that appeals to more than just the cold logic of the rational intellect;¹³ it must move into the murky world of affectivity and emotions, personal significance and symbolic meaning. There one's attitude or disposition influences the ability to hear, perceive and recognize the movements of God's grace at work.

The disposition or attitude of the subject has to do with another dimension of interpretation theory. The movement towards greater freedom is a precarious one that has to move through zones of competing interests, some of which may be conscious, others unconscious. The world of symbols becomes ever more important to allow unconscious items, which may still be blocking some movements toward greater freedom, to be overcome. McLean likens these unconscious blockages to "internal foreign powers" which exist within each of us. "This is the disorder in the expression of interests which must be identified, brought to light and properly ordered in relation to new and evolving human situations if the search for freedom itself is ever to be internally (i.e., intrapersonally) responsible and free."¹⁴ McLean expresses the need to identify, bring to consciousness and reorder our disordered interests for applying a fuller freedom in new situations, a process to which he applies hermeneutics. Needless to say, identifying and bringing to light such disorders in the expression of

¹³ As J. H. Newman wrote: "Logic makes but a sorry rhetoric with the multitude; first shoot round corners and you may not despair of converting by a syllogism." *An Essay in Aid of A Grammar of Assent*, 66.

¹⁴ McLean, *Hermeneutics, Tradition and Contemporary Change*, 34. In his reflections on this, McLean cites Habermas who likened those zones to internal foreign territories; McLean changes it to "internal foreign power".

interests is no small task. The further step of properly ordering one's interests for the new realities and for the newly evolving situations demands even more attentive accompaniment. Facing the task alone can prove overwhelming. Through encountering the Gospel message, however, the bringing to light and reordering almost happen simultaneously to the Gospel's being heard and set before one's reach. Once the offer or gift is perceived and recognized for what it is, then the difficult task of assimilation and of making it one's own in freedom begins. In the rest of this chapter, then, I shall focus more specifically on the dynamic of recognition and the dialectics of the awareness aspect of interpretation theory: awareness of one's sinfulness, of one's lack of authenticity, of one's identity in God. As a fruit of this awareness of God and of the opportunities in self-transcendence, the transcendent reference to culture shifts the understanding of the application of one's own inherited tradition.

The movement of freedom into new awareness of reality, both external and internal, serves as the first dynamic of conversion. The challenge of later accepting the gift offered demands that the movement of freedom at this stage be fully respected. As noted above, coming to grips with the awareness of these new realities may demand a dislodging of long-embedded internal foreign powers that could otherwise disrupt one's movement toward greater freedom and authenticity. The interior dialectic of the person has to be allowed to explore fully the estrangements experienced in life and the possible resolutions on one's journey to authenticity. The gift cannot be forced; the attitude or disposition can be changed only gradually. A renewed sensibility to God's presence and love grows slowly as the fruit of trust and freedom.

TOWARDS REESTABLISHING SENSIBILITY

Recognizing God's many gifts and reaching a new awareness of all surrounding realities demands a sensibility to the personal affective zones that reflect both past relational experiences and future relational expectations. One's sensibility serves as a sort of measure as to how awake or how attuned to reality one is. I want to present it as a practical art, and ability to discern, a listening of the heart that can be used to evaluate freedom and its impediments. Once acquired as a skill, it readies one to enter the discipline of deliberation for moving to new horizons. Critical to this affective awareness is the attitude or disposition one carries, which often stems from the root origin of what motivates us. I divide these reflections for reestablishing sensibility into three main parts: a) understanding sources of attitude or disposition, b) impediments to freedom, and c) challenges to theology.

Understanding Sources of Attitude or Disposition

Coming to a clear recognition about reality involves many steps regarding oneself, one's visible surroundings and the great invisible reality of God. Although God may be invisible to the senses, this does not make God unrecognizable. The first step in understanding new awareness through this recognition is to explore the sources of disposition and to see how attitude or disposition influences the discovery of new realities and new truths. As we do so I want to keep in mind again the idea of reaching back to retrieve paths of discovery that may have been left mostly unexplored. As was the case in the earlier discussions of both totemic and mythic thought, my intention here is not to return to a previous age, but to adopt McLean's advice to retrieve our religious and cultural heritage "in order to find the radically new resources needed for emancipation in an increasingly technologically dominated world."¹⁵ Note that the focus remains on emancipation, coming to full freedom in human flourishing. Theology must seek to awaken people's consciousness to what motivates them, rather than leave them numbed by the demands of and fascination with technology.

My aim is to follow McLean's philosophical path of "a gradual process of discovery, of entering more deeply into the values which we have in order to comprehend them more clearly in themselves and in their source."¹⁶ Like philosophy and religion in general, theology draws its discoveries from the life process of human growth in freedom and relationship with God. I shall divide the exploration of the sources of disposition into two parts, one on the origin of what motivates us and the other on affective awareness.

Origin of Motivations. Since we generally have difficulty understanding our own motivations, and even more difficulty trying to ascertain what motivates others, this discussion on the origin of motivations may seem insurmountable. So I shall focus on reviewing some of the critical elements to be considered when looking at what

¹⁵McLean, *Hermeneutics, Faith and Relations between Cultures*, 80. In another place, McLean maintains that cultures, when faced with specific decisions, choose one path among many, leaving the other paths mostly unexplored. He cites the example of Plato who chose the path of clarity, a path on which the philosophy of the western world has mostly stayed, which left the more "dynamic elements of the pre-Socratics undeveloped." Retrieving the undeveloped paths can "open whole new dimensions of meaning" and re-engage dynamic elements for a greater degree of forward movement in our understanding. McLean, *Religion and Cooperation between Civilizations*, 65.

¹⁶ McLean, *Ways to God*, 177. My primary theological source to complement McLean's thought in these sections will be Lonergan.

motivates us. This recognition or new awareness of personal motivations may be better understood in its theological sense of the first step of conversion. My discussion here shall be limited to brief overviews of three aspects of McLean's thought related to motivations: the pursuit of the good, one's intentionality in that pursuit, and finally, one's consciousness of the intentionality.

In the earlier discussions on values we saw that they develop over time as a community reflects on its life experience in relation to its search for meaning. Normally the values develop in reference to the true good and the surrounding reality as it is best understood. In consistently choosing the good a community or culture demonstrates awareness in consonance with reality, keeping open the door to self-transcendence.¹⁷ Sometimes circumstances, especially in periods of dramatic crisis involving survival, can lead to choices based more on an apparent good than a true good. The excessive pursuit of pleasure and entertainment, along with the avoidance of any pain, can also distort one's perception of the good. If these choices based on apparent goods add up over a period of time, then the values can be skewed or misdirected from the true to the apparent good. Operative values have to be recognized as departing from the true good, however, before conversion can begin.

The mix of motivations impacts a community on many levels, ultimately revealing its conscious awareness and freedom. As described earlier, patterns of behavior develop based on the free value responses of a community made over time. Value based operations can take a while to purify from innate inclinations to mere satisfaction, since they normally have their roots in family or cultural upbringing. The motives behind behavior may stem from blind intentions or skewed values systems. The slow recognition and purification of these motivations begin with first gaining a sense of the intentionality involved and then bringing that intentionality to conscious awareness.

Regarding intentionality, I want to recall all that was discussed earlier about the human person as *imago Dei*. Healthy intentionality has to do with the virtuous pursuit of the true good by a subject who understands oneself as made in the image and likeness of God. For McLean there are two main challenges when considering the nature of the person: the full understanding of *imago Dei* as a personal subject, and the way the person goes about attaining the goal of awareness and freedom. McLean offers a corollary to the first challenge that affects how we understand the accompanying dialectic to one's growth in awareness and freedom: "it is necessary to understand the basis of the private, as well as the public life of the person, for one is more than a

¹⁷ See Lonergan's discussion of pursuing values based on the true good as an act of moral self-transcendence in *Method in Theology*, 50.

role, a citizen or a function of the state.”¹⁸ Overcoming an over-identification with a job, role, or status presents one of the foremost obstacles to freedom if it goes unrecognized. Splitting or compartmentalizing public life from private faith confuses not only one’s operative value system, but weakens one’s identity and makes a life of virtue nearly impossible. From the dialectic of a person’s journey to faith, then, intentionality reaches to origins both in the general understanding of life as *imago Dei* and also in the more specifically personal self-understanding.

Reassessing the origins of one’s motivations cannot base itself on mere intentionality, but has to reach the level of conscious awareness in one’s intentionality, or the level of conscious intending. Intentionality heightens one’s knowledge of surrounding realities, but consciousness of the intending itself makes one aware of one’s inner inclinations, motivations and modes of judgment.¹⁹ These need to be critically assessed for true growth in freedom to occur. We judge things based on how they conform to or fall away from what they should be, which McLean would call their essence or “the norm of their perfection. Our response to essence is the heart of our efforts to protect and promote life; it is in this that we are basically and passionately engaged.”²⁰ As

¹⁸ McLean, *Persons, Peoples and Cultures*, 73. The notion of person as subject in McLean stems from his considerations of both Locke and Kant, who chose different paths to distinguish the person from other beings. As McLean observes, Locke focused on knowledge and described the person as a “continuing consciousness which is self-aware.” Ibid. Kant focused more on the will and freedom. McLean takes both and relates that the person is even more: “a conscious and free subject or person.” Ibid.

¹⁹ The idea of conscious intending was made popular by Lonergan. I use it here to complement McLean’s own insights, but especially to highlight the need to recognize the source of one’s motivations for growth in freedom. As Lonergan maintains, there is a twofold effect when we perform actions as subjects who are consciously engaged: “Just as operations by their intentionality make objects present to the subject, so also by consciousness they make the operating subject present to himself.” Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 8. When Lonergan discusses the psychological dimension of our actions, he uses the term “operations” and groups them into “logical” and “non-logical” categories. Lonergan’s attention to the psychological dimension in our actions merges well with McLean’s consideration of the human being in both its metaphysical and phenomenological categories.

²⁰ McLean, *Ways to God*, 396. Here McLean is discussing a part of Tillich’s phenomenological approach, which he made his own. In maintaining how we are never indifferent to things, McLean relates in the same place that “we judge the situation and react according as it reflects or falls away from what it should be. This fact makes manifest essence or logos in its normative sense. It is the way things should be, the norm of their perfection.” Ibid. Our

McLean does here, so, too, theology needs to keep its feet firmly rooted in reality. One's perceptions have to conform first to reality (as manifested in its essence) before the true quality of one's response, those motivations and passions that drive us, can be accurately assessed. The movement towards freedom for faith, then, begins with the new consciousness of the origins of one's motivations, which, in turn, sheds light on the source of one's disposition through the emotional responses to reality.

Affective Awareness. An important zone within us that often resides as an undiscovered source of our disposition or attitude is the emotional realm of affectivity. Having introduced affectivity as an important source of one's attitude, I also want to build on the above discussion and highlight it as a measure of conscious intentionality and as an opportunity to grow in open dependence on God and in freedom for self-reflection. Affectivity is a qualitative dimension that either leads to alienation or conversion to greater communion. A feeling of anxiety can be either moral, based on not acting in accord with conscience, or existential, as from original sin. Whether existential or moral, anxiety may always be part of one's condition, but this anxiety need not be taken only as a negative factor. When handled in a healthy manner, anxiety can be used as a tool for growth and a beacon towards the revelation of God's love.

Affectivity provides an opportunity to grow in freedom and maturity by guiding us to transcend the limitations of physical environment and to explore the subjective world of meaning. McLean maintains that attention to the affective realm is needed now more than ever, a task "not of dismissing but of sublimating the quantitative reductionism that is the effect of the scientific fascination of the modern mind."²¹ Affectivity belongs to the qualitative dimension of our lives rather than the quantitative. In a world focused more on technological advances and economic profit, the qualitative dimension suffers from less attention and the possibilities for meaning shrink. As a qualitative element, then, I would say that affectivity can serve as a sort of measure

response to essence, then, discloses the quality of our motivations as based on either the true or apparent good. Motivations color the disposition which, in turn, feeds back to how we perceive essence.

²¹ McLean, *Persons, Peoples and Cultures*, 186. This provides another example of the complementarity of McLean's thought with Lonergan's. As Lonergan explains, "not to take cognizance of them (our feelings) is to leave them in the twilight of what is conscious but not objectified. In the long run there results a conflict between the self as conscious and, on the other hand, the self as objectified." Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 33-34.

of one's conscious intentionality. The challenge consists in giving reflective attention to the feelings within us. This allows the latent emotions of the subjective self to become objectified. The goal in this attentiveness is to keep a harmonic consonance between the conscious self and the objective self. Taking cognizance of the feelings allows one to grow in self-awareness, to expose the source of one's operative disposition, and to receive at least the opportunity to correct the attitude. Attentiveness to feelings opens the door to move out from the unconscious world where meaning remains indiscernible.

There is, however, an often unwanted feeling that arises not simply from one's actions, but from the human condition as finite, sinful and incomplete. The existential anxiety that underlies the human condition acts as an indicator of our inherent fragility. As McLean puts it, "The emotional element is but an indication of the totality with which finite being is penetrated by the threat of absolute separation from its positive element of infinity, that is, by the threat of annihilating nothingness."²² This resonates with our discussion in the last chapter of the finite freedom of the person facing the infinite freedom of God. This underlying anxiety that resides within one's being need not be seen only in the negative sense of leading to despair. The tension of anxiety also opens one to boundary situations or limit experiences that can lead to taking stock of one's true self and to becoming aware of this opening to the infinite transcendent. By God's mercy, in Christ that infinite transcendent is transformed to a personalized face, with whom one is invited into relationship.

These boundary situations or limit experiences, which are related to one's finitude and stem from internal levels of anxiety, are the doorways to active relationship with God. Theology speaks of God's always being there in ongoing revelation. These limit experiences can also be understood as an unfolding of consciousness or awakening to the reality of God. Though McLean does not describe it as ongoing revelation, he says this "is not a representation of the divine, but an opening of levels of the mind and of reality which were always there but previously had been hidden."²³ The anxieties that might signify the threat of death, meaninglessness or guilt can, through attention to the affective side, also reveal the God of love in an offer of life, meaning and salvation. Far from being an internal crutch developed to placate

²² McLean, *Hermeneutics, Tradition and Contemporary Change*, 61. McLean goes on to mention that "the nonbeing of finitude and estrangement is present on each level of being and in three ways: ontic, spiritual and moral." Ibid. To each of these types of anxiety he relates three corresponding sources: death, meaninglessness, guilt. See also his discussion in *Ways to God*, 400-401.

²³ McLean, *Knowledge of God and the Discovery of Man*, 101-102.

one's desperately threatened psychological self, God appears as completely Other, offering the gift of new life and meaning that would not be available without the presence and love of this mysterious Other.

Working to develop a conscious intentionality in our engagements can illuminate the origin of those things that motivate us. Affective attentiveness moves us to leave the murky fog of a merely quantitative absorption in our world and to enter the qualitative dimension of meaning that can lead to relationship with God. There are, however, obstacles or blocks to freedom that can impede the discovery or development of a new sensibility for God.

Impediments to Freedom

For theology to help reestablish an open sensibility for God, human affectivity and the origin of human motivation have to be central. In addition to the quality of disposition that reaches to the origin of motives and the depth of affectivity, recognition of the full extent of reality and of the opportunities of growth offered there also depends on one's ability to overcome certain impediments. McLean does not specifically name these impediments, but for ease of discussion I shall summarize some of his points specifically *related to freedom and the exercise of reason*. Most of my responses to these elements I shall hold in reserve until the next section, in which I shall try to summarize some challenges for theology to respond to these impediments to freedom. The impediments I want to highlight fall under four related categories: 1) estrangement; 2) private versus social; 3) corruption of authority; and 4) fragmentation of knowledge.

Estrangement. Estrangement that results from sin tends to cloud the spiritual senses and to act as a barrier to recognizing God and coming to a new awareness about oneself. The existential estrangement that results from the human condition as a result of original sin from the Fall has two characteristics that can affect the clarity of awareness. McLean makes the distinction of a tragic effect that extends from what he calls destiny, a condition over which we have no control, and a moral effect that results from our freedom, or lack thereof.²⁴ The moral characteristic of estrangement associated with freedom, like the moral anxiety discussed above, leaves one with a feeling of guilt. Since destiny is universal to all, all share equally in the tragic estrangement resulting from the Fall. And though all sin morally, the extent of the

²⁴ See McLean's discussion of this in *Hermeneutics, Tradition and Contemporary Change*, 60.

estrangement varies in the amount and severity of personal sin, resulting in varying states of personal guilt and freedom.

The result of this estrangement or separation is that subjectivity turns in on itself and truth becomes distorted. Knowledge is affected by the estrangement that accompanies sin and the ability to reason clearly suffers as a result. This diminishment of reason, in turn, limits the extent of actualized freedom. Thought and being no longer coincide, but can actually be held apart from one another to support a particular prejudice, agenda or viewpoint. In other words, one's reason can mistakenly perceive a thing's essence, so one's perception does not conform to reality. In such a situation the pursuit of a merely apparent good becomes more likely, whether motivations are pure or not. As McLean puts it, this results in "a special kind of truth, one which is attained, not in absolute standpoint at the end of history, but in the situation of the knower: subjectivity becomes the hallmark of truth. Its contemporary tragic character is due to the fact that it results from separation and despair."²⁵ The subjective relativism, which is the fruit of one's personal estrangement, has at its foundation the separation of thought or knowledge from reality. The subject can no longer recognize reality for what it really is, but builds his or her own world based on a deficient idea of the truth of reality. Since true reality does not conform to this subjectively fabricated world, frustration, despair and defensive tactics devised to hold the fragile perceptions together all conspire to lead the subject down a path where freedom ultimately becomes lost. The private domain of the subject becomes pitted against social realities.

Private versus Social. The distorted truth that results from the separation and despair of estrangement has an understandably detrimental effect on the exercise of reason. As private isolation grows, the subject's affective awareness diminishes almost without notice in the midst of the isolation. The lack of conscious intentionality forms a split between the private and public spheres of life, as mentioned above in the discussion on the origin of motivations. This split has an especially detrimental effect on faith. The slow erosion of societal cohesion begins with an impoverishment of values that supported

²⁵ McLean, *Ways to God*, 401. In a similar vein, Lonergan speaks of the effects of sin and lovelessness that estrange one from oneself and others. Because estrangement diminishes freedom and deprives the subject of a love for which it was created to share, the wounded or unfilled dimension of love seeks to hide itself. See Lonergan's discussion in *Method in Theology*, 242. See also Lonergan's essay, "The Subject," in *A Second Collection*, ed. William F. J. Ryan, SJ and Bernard J. Tyrrell, SJ (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), 69-86.

common societal development. This value-diminishment originates from a decreased attention to the affective side and a misunderstanding of the person as *imago Dei*. The danger comes from an over-zealous reason attempting to throw out or destroy anything that no longer appears useful or significant, resulting in intolerance and oppression. McLean maintains that “this has been the bitter experience in our times with the so-called scientific view of history. Further, rationalists, captivated as they are by reason, have often forgotten the additional human dimensions of affectivity, mutual concern and love.”²⁶ The forgetfulness of or inattentiveness to affectivity, then, leads first to the skewed value system, which in turn leads on further to intolerance and oppression. Once the values of an oppressive rationality have taken hold, societal concerns of affectivity and love are even further weakened.

This unexamined affectivity has all sorts of ways of showing its head, but especially in distorted reasoning. McLean notes that during the increased rationalization of life a certain set of values were abandoned and in their place more anti-social values were substituted, which had the effect of “pitting the private against the social. As the mechanisms of social stabilization react to suppress these anti-social elements all inexorably develops in the direction of increasing domination and suppression rather than emancipation and freedom.”²⁷ The over-emphasis on private rights results in a loss of social values and cohesion. The freedom for which one may think he or she is fighting in the private sphere stems from a value distortion, and ultimately ends up

²⁶ McLean, *Persons, Peoples and Cultures*, 89. Here again we can see an insight of Lonergan complementing McLean’s own analysis. Lonergan traces the dissolution of values back to what I would name unexamined affectivity, to negative feelings of resentment (*ressentiment*) that linger in the hearts of individuals. His premise is that the negative feeling of hostility or anger ends up attacking the “value-quality” of the other person, a value that the resentful person does not possess. The value in question is repeatedly mocked or belittled, and may even lead to forms of violence against those who reflect that value. Lonergan goes on to say that “perhaps its worst feature is that its rejection of one value involves a distortion of the whole scale of values and that this distortion can spread through a whole social class, a whole people, a whole epoch.” Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 33. See also his discussion of the distortions brought about by bias: *Method in Theology*, 231.

²⁷ McLean, *Hermeneutics, Tradition and Contemporary Change*, 42. Here McLean is discussing Paul Ricoeur and the relation of continuity and critique. McLean is also referencing Niklas Luhmann’s argument for non-participatory social planning in *Theorie der Gesellschaft oder Sozialtechnologie: Was leistet die Systemforschung?* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1971), a work Luhmann co-authored with Jürgen Habermas.

limiting freedoms. The social engagement that once supported and taught shared values to build the community ultimately breaks down, the values are slowly eroded, and new barriers to freedom result, as more domination and suppression are required to maintain a sort of negotiated peace in the public domain. In such a suppression of freedom, affectivity and charity, faith has no footing upon which to build or rely. The result is that societal exercise of authority becomes corrupted.

Corruption of Authority. When the private individual remains isolated from and at odds with the social good, freedom and reason, as we have seen, suffer under the weight. The erosion of commonly held values demands that more rights have to be sacrificed to protect individuals from one another. As more control becomes necessary, those in authority or leadership of the society or culture begin to abuse their positions, protecting their powers of control and breaking down the value-based foundations even further. This corruption presents an almost insurmountable barrier to freedom and to the ability to recognize and live a Christ-centered value system. McLean notes that authority in the rationally based Enlightenment horizon “came to be seen as an entitlement of some to decide issues by an application of their will rather than according to an authentic understanding of the truth or justice of an issue.”²⁸ Eventually, such a sense of entitlement leads to an unjust system of government and law, since “as one decision constitutes a precedent for those to follow, the administration of authority becomes fundamentally bankrupt and then corruptive.”²⁹ Here we see clearly the enormous barrier to our ability to grow in freedom and awareness. By trying to turn to the tested values of one’s tradition, one finds only corrupted practices from the abuse of power. The result is that people become even more entrenched in skewed values which impede growth and block recognition. In such a culture or society, only an encounter

²⁸ McLean, *Hermeneutics, Faith and Relations between Cultures*, 12. McLean is speaking here of the dominance of technical reason and the need for hermeneutics to integrate scientific knowledge into the full picture of human discovery. He offers no specific historical example for this corruption of authority, but the 20th century examples of Stalinism and Nazism might fit.

²⁹ Ibid. Lonergan cites the same phenomenon as the corruption and distortions of a few individuals spreads to the culture and tradition of a people over time. “So the unauthenticity of individuals becomes the unauthenticity of a tradition. Then, in the measure a subject takes the tradition, as it exists, for his own standard, in that measure he can do no more than authentically realize unauthenticity.” Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 80. Lonergan goes on to add accompanying examples of an ill culture, driven by corrupt leadership, works to change language and operative values.

with Christ can remove the veil of corruption and lead the way back to transcendent personal and cultural norms.

The effects of such continuing corruption cloud the use of reason, while proving devastating for relations on both personal and communal levels. The majority (with corrupted or skewed values) come to believe that those in the minority no longer think straight, that they have somehow left reason behind for an outdated, superstitious path of so-called virtue in order to calm their unsophisticated consciences. When an institutional or societal collapse is finally recognized to be happening, the ruling groups misapply reason to use the tools of power and control, which have become the social norm, in a vain attempt to stop the dissolution. This has the effect, not of creatively stemming the tide of collapse by way of healing and reconstruction, but of destroying further what might be left of reason's strengths. It is worth quoting McLean at length on this phenomenon.

Knowing that it must arrest its inherently destructive urges reason destroys its own speculative foundations. All notions of structures and stages and, of course, all ethical norms, everything must be trashed because the *hubris* of modern rationalism closes off access to any sense that it itself is the real root of its problem. In a paroxysm of despair, like a scorpion trapped in a circle of fire, modernity commits its own *auto de fe*.³⁰

This passage demonstrates well McLean's serious concern for how reason, closed in on its own methods, continues to perpetuate problems it helped to create, rather than accepting its own responsibility for the state of affairs and changing its focus to help solve the new challenges. What theology needs to take away from this assessment of McLean is that reason, trapped in a myopically focused methodology of rationalism, can act as a significant barrier to one's awareness and recognition of full religious truth. It can actually be used to hide or cover over truth. Theology's concern, then, is for the application of a renewed broader sense of reason both personally, so that the journey towards faith may be more recognizable, and also communally, so that a culture of reflective reasoning may focus again on the pursuit of truth in freedom.

With an extensive corruption of authority, then, recognition and reflective reasoning are severely handicapped. Many alternate solutions,

³⁰ McLean, *Persons, Peoples and Cultures*, 94. For a comparable breakdown of reason in Lonergan, see his discussion of the result on a culture of the growth of ideologies in *Method in Theology*, 55.

viewpoints and ideas become stifled to protect a culture of power and control that has developed over time to protect the interests of fewer and fewer people. One would think that in such a state of affairs things would spiral towards revolution or anarchy rather swiftly, but ideologies are constructed to hold the corrupt systems together. And reason gets reduced to separated systems of fragmented knowledge.

Fragmentation of Knowledge. Related to the alienation that ensues from estrangement and corruption is what has often been called the present state of fragmentation in which we find ourselves. Earlier I spoke of the estrangement of subjectivity turning in on itself in such a manner that truth became distorted to a subjective reality lacking consonance with reality. Here I want to highlight the alienation that results from fragmentation, the pitting of the private against the public, and the corruption of authority. All these conspire to lead to interpersonal isolation and a disruption of one's inner unity with the true self. The fragmentation of society is accompanied by a fragmentation of knowledge, which has consequences to self-understanding and human dignity. As McLean puts it,

It has been commonplace for a whole series of philosophers and artists to describe the world as one of fragments, as a disrupted unity. As a result individualization has become excessive and led to a loneliness of man before his fellow men and before God. This, in turn, drives man toward his inner experience so that he becomes still further isolated from his world.³¹

The danger highlighted here is that the isolation that ensues from fragmentation and individualization has the effect of removing a person even more from his or her surrounding reality. When, as a result of the isolation, the person becomes so engrossed in personal inner experience, references to reality diminish to the extent that the person starts to lose touch, and isolation only increases. Though isolated individuals may look for refuge in inner experience, their own interior unity becomes more fragmented and out of harmony. Pope John Paul II made a similar observation of this phenomenon in reference to knowledge in general in his encyclical *Faith and Reason*, where he wrote that "The segmentation of knowledge, with its splintered approach to truth and consequent fragmentation of meaning, keeps people today from coming to an

³¹ McLean, *Hermeneutics, Tradition and Contemporary Change*, 59-60. McLean goes on to note in the same place that "the presupposition of this tragic nature of man is his transcendent Fall." Ibid.

interior unity.”³² What emerges from this is the insight that theology cannot hope to correct the fragmentation of meaning and segmentation of knowledge without also recognizing the loneliness and isolation of the person. One’s interior unity has to be given attention and healed, even as knowledge and meaning are being reconstructed in the mind and heart of a culture.

Challenges to Theology

Theology, then, has to be able to dismantle these four impediments to freedom and to the exercise of reason in order to heighten people’s sensibility to recognize and be aware of God’s revelation. My focus here will be to outline some response for theology to address the conversion needed slowly to dismantle these impediments. Outside of religious or theological circles (and sometimes inside those circles) the concept of conversion seems to have taken on a negative connotation. Abandoning the dynamics of conversion, however, would leave theology in a condition that would render it just another field to support the popular ideology of the moment, a phenomenon which the prophets and Christ had to face continually in their own days.³³ To outline the response I will address theology’s challenges in reverse order of how I presented the respective impediments above under the following headings: unified science; authority through listening; renegotiating peace; and deliberative reflection to overcome estrangement.

Unifying Science. In contrast to a splintered approach to truth, theology has to respond continually to the challenge to hold together all the various disciplines within its own internal context. It also has to help people overcome the fragmented world, segmented knowledge and the alienated self by acting as a unifying science for other disciplines, so that they might be understood in the totality of the mystery of God’s love. Related to this would be what I would call the merging of theological methods so that the full picture of truth might be better grasped (e.g., employing both the philosophies of being and of consciousness, rather than just one of them). The other arts and sciences do not look to theology to provide this service, but by consistently engaging their insights theology would learn much for its own reflection

³² John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, # 85.

³³ As Lonergan wrote, theology loses its soul and becomes irreligious “when its main emphasis is, not conversion, but proof, or when positions are taken and maintained out of individual or corporate pride.” Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 350.

and be more able to point out unifying models that would approach truth in a more holistic sense. As I mentioned in an earlier chapter, reshaping theology and its manner of reflection to a more inductive style, rather than continuing to engage the prevailing deductive methods, may, in the end, assist greatly in returning unity to people's worlds of meaning. By so doing, it would also help them to overcome alienation and operative cultural ideologies, while reestablishing an internal harmony to their being.

Theology would then be well established to point a road to faith that goes far beyond mere moral idealism. It would help people to recognize their deficient, fragmented knowledge so that their own internal unity might be restored. The self-reflection theology wants to promote so that people get more in touch with the origin of their motivations and their affective side cannot be equated with an alienating turn to inner experience which can leave one further isolated. Self-reflection has to be referenced against the truth of reality and one's true self, in all its transcendence or lack thereof. One's own inner, personal identity has to be comprehended in the totality of its context, in the wider truth and mystery of God, an art which demands attentive listening.

Authority through Listening. As a unifying science at the crossroads of cultures, then, theology retains as part of its mission the task of rebuilding reason through attentive listening. Theology's authority comes not from trying to enforce values and truths from the outside. Instead, it has to act as a willing listener who can point out truths and directions, but then wait on a person or culture to claim its connection to God and the values that flow from that connection. As the 20th century began, the dominant humanism of the period proclaimed that there was no longer a need for espousing dependence on God or for referencing human activity to God. The human community had grown up and felt capable of solving on its own the problems and challenges which arose. But the two World Wars, economic chaos and societal unrest broke the arrogance of what are now understood as those naïve boasts of modernity, thus landing us in the fragmentation and sometimes disillusioned state of late modernity or postmodernity, depending on one's labeling perspective. In the disillusionment and fragmentation there are opportunities to mend reason's shortcomings by listening carefully to the frustrations and disillusionment, and then by clarifying how missing elements might be restored.

The key elements for the effective listening are related to respecting human dignity and freedom in each people's unique search. McLean finds in this historical movement a sign of hope when he writes that "people search for foundations for their freedom and dignity which

transcend anything that mankind, whether as individuals or as party, can create – and therefore take away.”³⁴ Freedom and dignity in their fullest sense are linked to transcendent relationship with God, the source of all authority. Any dulling of the search for deeper foundations, or any loss of zeal for our fullest freedom and dignity, often stems from either negligence or refusal of the transcendent dimension in life. Any growth in awareness essential for the road to faith brings a sense of peace and depends on acknowledging and engaging this openness to transcendence which is built into our very being.

Renegotiating Peace. In order to establish itself as a trusted listener, then, theology has to be able to help renegotiate peace between the private rights of individuals and the values of social cohesion that support a culture’s health and growth. By not trying to dominate the sphere of morality or to suppress expressions of human freedom, theology can shift reason’s more functional emphasis of arbitrating rights in the public discourse to focus the attention more on human affectivity, mutual concern and love. As mentioned earlier, the absence of those elements tends to pit the private against the social, and thus lead to a deterioration of reason’s wider scope. Only by reengaging the affective side will people feel the freedom to pursue the true good and develop values in consonance with social cohesion and cooperation. Theology’s role as peacemaker begins with helping people enter into the experience of others around them, so they can identify with them and make the concerns of others their own.

Through its own example of affective attentiveness, theology can help people to open up to the realities and dynamics that surround them. The emphasis of open listening, though it may include finding answers to certain things, is less about finding answers and more about opening new fields of questions. As McLean puts it, the openness is directed “to ourselves by opening our horizons, extending our ability to listen to others, and assimilating the implications of their answer for changes in our own position. In other words, it is an acknowledgement that tradition has something new to say to me.”³⁵ Theology’s own openness

³⁴ McLean, *Religion and Cooperation between Civilizations*, 98. Newman spent much of his time defending and insisting we give attention to the transcendent dimension, while pointing out the dangers of failing to do so. For a thorough discussion of Newman’s many points see Stanley Jaki, *Newman’s Challenge* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2000).

³⁵ McLean, *Hermeneutics, Tradition and Contemporary Change*, 16. In another place McLean extends the discussion on attitude from the personal to the hermeneutic: “The characteristic hermeneutic attitude of effective historical consciousness is then not methodological sureness, but a devout listening, a

to conversion, then, offers to people and cultures an example of negotiating peace that can inspire them to enter into their own reflection on truth and reality.

Deliberative Reflection to Overcome Estrangement. Through the service of renegotiating peace by breaking down the walls of separation and isolation, new opportunities open for people to check their own understanding of reality and interpretation of meaning. The driving force for undertaking the journey to overcome estrangement is freedom's search for truth and love. In offering a unified vision of reality and an authority based on the example of listening, theology can then be appreciated as a viable source for guiding one's deliberative reflection. The goal is to lead people out of estrangement, separation and despair into the promise of transcendent relationship with God and others. So reason has to be expanded from its functional, analytic focus to the broader zones informed by the imagination: affectivity, values, freedom, creativity, and faith. McLean maintains that reason needs to reevaluate itself for a healthy openness to the fullness of transcendent reality. Reason can only do so "by critically dissolving the objective self-understanding of the sciences and entering into self-reflection. Such self-reflection is liberative for it enables us to break beyond the set structures we find about us in order to look at the interests from which these derive."³⁶ Once again we see McLean pushing to move beyond the cold objectivity of the sciences into the more personal world of affectivity and meaning. Though freedom is built into who the person is, personally setting forth on its discovery remains contingent upon the ability for self-reflection. The journey towards greater freedom needs self-reflection, waking up to the interior world, in order to embrace the transcendent dimension. Failure to do so would leave one blocked from self-transcendence, confined to limited freedom, and prevented from recognizing God's presence. When freedom is self-centered it fails to be freedom at all, but only an exercise of raw autonomy that ends up using

readiness for experience. Seen in these terms our heritage is not closed, but the basis for a life that is ever new, more inclusive and more rich." McLean, *Hermeneutics, Faith and Relations between Cultures*, 59.

³⁶ McLean, *Hermeneutics, Tradition and Contemporary Change*, 24. In a similar manner, Lonergan states that overcoming the barrier means getting "beyond the worlds of common sense and of theory" in order to enter into the world of interiority. Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 262. These worlds are dependent on how one applies reason, including the language used and the reawakening of a more symbolic sense. The worlds of common sense and theory can exercise certain zones of rationality, but they cannot reflect well upon what motivates us and influences our emotional responses.

others, resulting in the diminishment of their freedom and one's own as well.

The main barriers to reestablishing sensibility, to discovering freedom and recognition, and to developing the ability to listen, exist within one's dispositions and attitudes, which is why we spent the time exploring their sources. The attitude for open listening has to go beyond the functional goal of attaining more knowledge to serve one's self-aggrandizement so as to get ahead of others in a success-driven manner. As McLean puts it, such selfishness blocks reflection through prejudice and closes off horizons. "In this way powerful new insights can become with time deadening ideologies, prejudgments which suppress freedom and cooperation."³⁷ That kind of an attitude would only entrench impediments more deeply to block the affective sensibilities for new recognition. All impediments to freedom, awareness and recognition, then, slowly crumble in the shift to nurture a listening heart.

Generosity and gratitude heighten sensibilities to learn from and explore the horizons of others. The renewed desire to listen can be stimulated or triggered by any limit experience or by a simple acknowledgement of the gift of life one has received. But people cannot easily listen to themselves unless they experience someone taking the time to listen to them. Having repeatedly experienced the fruits of such listening gave McLean the passion for cross-cultural exchange. The positive dynamics flowing from the sharing of horizons gave him confidence and trust in the seminar approach to philosophical themes. Theology's highest vocation, and its role as theological midwife accompanying others on the road to faith, is to listen to people as they begin to review their narratives and question their horizons. It is the unexpected and undefined experience of love that progressively reestablishes sensibility; it shakes one into a new consciousness and an awareness of new possibilities for life and meaning. Gratitude for the gift of love further awakens freedom and opens up the search for truth, love and authenticity through deliberate reflection. That search ultimately leads to faith.

DYNAMICS OF DELIBERATIVE REFLECTION

A new awareness or recognition of deeper realities of meaning and personal significance does not normally happen instantaneously as some insight falling out of the sky, but is the fruit of a free and conscious search. During that search each person engages in an internal dynamic that moves the mind and heart through a deliberative reflection. My goal in this section will be to explore that dynamic. I

³⁷ McLean, *Hermeneutics, Faith and Relations between Cultures*, 87.

shall limit my discussion to looking at the deliberation that happens as a person's internal dialectic tries to look honestly at the narrative of one's life, sifting through the light and darkness, identifying the barriers and the openings for growth. That exploration expresses the freedom of the person in search for meaning and identity. The new recognition of realities and truth marks the conversion to higher personal freedom. The reality which acts as the true source of one's attention that has brought on this new attitude of listening is the mystery of love flowing from God through the person's experience, from that assimilation of encounters to which I referred earlier.

A measure of the level of freedom and its growth is often reflected in the reality of one's operative horizon, in how that horizon guides the way one sees reality, and in how that horizon expands to embrace wider realities. Sometimes people speak of one's horizon as a limiting factor. In no sense do I intend to do so; I want to view one's horizon as a gift that has been received and developed to varying degrees. How one sees the world, one's theory of interpretation or applied hermeneutic, is always best embraced as a gift to be developed rather than an obstacle or barrier to be overcome. Embracing one's horizon, then, is a first step on our journey to further recognition. I quote McLean's own observation at length here.

The fact that we have been born and raised in this family, neighborhood, culture and religion, and that this shapes our vision and gives us our horizon needs to be recognized and accepted. However, an horizon is not a barrier or separation, for it consists of what has been discovered in the past about the goals and meaning of human life and action, as well as a sense of the time in which I stand and of the life project in which I am engaged. It is a fertile ground, filled with experience, custom and tradition, as this comes into the present and, through the present, passes into the future. It is then more bridge than barrier, more opportunity than interdiction. It might be compared to a telescopic lens ground by the assembled experience of all who have preceded us in the faith from our father Abraham. Through this, the person is enabled to see far and interpret with refined sensibility.³⁸

I want to adopt McLean's perspective that one's horizon, no matter how limited or extensive, is always a friend and a bridge, never a foe, when it

³⁸ McLean, *Hermeneutics, Faith and Relations between Cultures*, 85. McLean cites Gadamer here, just after "... passes into the future."

comes to recognition and conversion. Though a horizon may be limited because of one's experience, it is never a barrier. Instead, it serves as a trusted starting point for growth. One's horizon is a bridge to the wisdom and experience of others, a rich soil of opportunity for understanding and growth in freedom. The ability to "see far" and interpret rightly depends on how well one's horizon has been polished as a lens of freedom. But horizon always serves as an opening to or a clarifying tool for the journey to faith. As spiritual midwife towards deeper mutual communication, theology is called to work with people starting from their horizon, without criticism or condescension, helping them to expand and develop their own horizon as they draw on the rich experience, tradition and culture of their people.³⁹ Their own horizon has to be their primary reference tool as they enter a deliberative reflection that will lead them to conversion to truth, freedom and faith.

The dynamics of deliberative reflection, then, involve all those factors of freedom that influence how one engages and expands one's horizon of reality and meaning. Though the main interest and central section here concern the presentation of a basic outline for an inquiring hermeneutics of deliberation, I also want to give an overview of the process of deliberation and the outcome intended. To that end I divide these discussions into four main parts: a) the process of deliberation; b) the moral participant; c) inquiring hermeneutics of deliberation; d) recognition as conversion's first step.

The Process of Deliberation

My purpose here is only to introduce a general overview of the process of deliberation, since the sections that follow will go into the specifics in more detail. But the overview will allow us to keep some of the more prominent aspects in clear view so that they do not become lost. I shall begin with a short review of affectivity, which acts as the center for gauging subjectivity and as a measure of one's receptivity. From there I shall look at what the journey towards freedom in authenticity implies. Finally, I shall describe the outline I will follow for the process, highlighting especially the need for the deliberation to have an astutely aware critical hermeneutics, something which shall receive further development in the following sections and in subsequent chapters.

³⁹ Having been a participant in one of McLean's many philosophical seminars, I have witnessed firsthand how McLean respects the various horizons of participants as they engage in their discussions. The effectiveness of this deep respect in his methodology is one of the main elements that drew me to the whole theme of midwife.

When I referred to a guiding horizon above I spoke of it mostly in the objective sense that helps us to interpret our experience in the present from the past wisdom that makes up the infrastructure of that horizon. Without letting go of all that we know from such a horizon, I want to revisit affectivity with another of McLean's insights that will aid us in understanding the dynamics of deliberation. Earlier in our discussions on affective awareness, I described affectivity as a measure of one's conscious intentionality from McLean's various insights. The subject is not simply an objective observer, nor simply involved in self-reflection or self-determination. Attention to affectivity, then, is a deep element vital to the experience of engaging one's horizon. As McLean puts it,

...the point of reflection is that of affectivity as the originary mode of finite being, that is precisely its capacity for reception. Just as a painful impression is not something distinct from its perception but is the presentation of the pain itself, so affectivity is itself a presentation in subjectivity of the reception of being.⁴⁰

For McLean the affective dimension of the person acts as a window into or reflection of one's subjectivity. The perceptions of the feelings mirror the experienced reality of the person as an engaged subject. And key to McLean's thinking, as we have seen previously, is that the person's subjectivity is always linked to ontology, in this case to one's receptivity of being. Affectivity shapes that firm link of the subject to objective reality, to one's receptivity of being as reflected in the emotional responses evoked in experience. The process of deliberation must include both the external horizon as it extends our understanding of reality as well as this internal horizon of perception. This affective horizon of perception provides a check to or balance for how authentically one is engaging reality. Because of its ontological link to the receptivity of being, it also reflects one's openness and freedom of engagement.

This offers the opportunity to see how the desire for freedom acts as a sort of motivation to pursue this internal dialectic or deliberative reflection. The deliberation has us face up to the quality of how we have authentically participated in experience as an expression of our full being and freedom. McLean likens it to coming to grips with the human condition, in which we live with a certain absence or lack of fullness of being. Deliberation has to deal with this void as it moves towards freedom. "To deny it (nonbeing) is to be subject to it; whereas to

⁴⁰ McLean, *Persons, Peoples and Cultures*, 186.

recognize it first and then reconcile it is the path of liberation.”⁴¹ In the end one discovers that alone one cannot totally reconcile this absence of being and freedom. By cooperating with God’s grace, the reconciliation comes to be seen less as something to do and more as something to receive. As such, this recognition and reconciliation of our nonbeing remains a critical part of deliberation in all its stages and an opening to experiencing God’s grace. The movement towards freedom, towards greater authenticity, is a life-long project that never ends.⁴² The experience of increasing freedom from the journey itself gives us the motivation to continue, as finding our most authentic self slowly comes into light.

But the journey is not as easy and clear as it might first appear, which brings us to the need for a critical hermeneutics as my final point in this general section on deliberation. Conflict is always involved in deliberation, since conflict often highlights or stimulates the drive toward greater freedom. Because of these residual conflicts, deliberation never really finishes or is put to rest.⁴³ The tradition and heritage of one’s culture may need more attention than a simple, unquestioning adherence or a frustrated dismissal, depending on the situation and the temperament of the subject involved. Deliberation, that delicate process of discerning the true path to freedom, openness and receptivity, needs the tool of a critically reflective hermeneutics that can sift through the

⁴¹ McLean, *Ways to God*, 398. McLean may designate it a path to liberation, while Lonergan may have called it a move towards authenticity. Here McLean is comparing the second stage of Tillich’s dialectic, “antithesis,” to Hegel’s more ideal and Marx’s more utopian goals. The recognition of nonbeing as part of the reality of our experience keeps us humble and opens the door to God’s grace.

⁴² Lonergan describes the dynamic of this deliberative journey of conversion to human authenticity as “ever precarious, ever to be achieved afresh, ever in great part a matter of uncovering still more oversights, acknowledging still further failures to understand, correcting still more mistakes, repenting more and more deeply hidden sins.” Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 252. Though it is tempting to delve more into the dynamics of grace at this point, my aim here is simply to discuss the dynamic of the subject coming to a new awareness and recognition of oneself and surrounding realities.

⁴³ This is especially so because misunderstanding can be systematized as easily as understanding can be. The necessity of recognizing and maintaining a healthy dialectic, as Lonergan says, at least frees us from being totally at the mercy of its conflict, when one “sets up criteria for distinguishing between positions and counter-positions, and invites everyone to magnify the accuracy or inaccuracy of his judgments by developing what he thinks are positions and by reversing what he thinks are counter-positions.” Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 350-351.

light and darkness, as well as the affective movements. In his own hermeneutics McLean tries to take the best points from all of the more prominent thinkers to develop one which is geared to attentive listening for interpersonal cooperation that can be extended to the global context.⁴⁴ From a more theological perspective, my focus will be to develop hermeneutics for the various stages of the faith journey to a relationship with God, which I shall divide into three: one of deliberation, one of decision or acceptance (chapter IV), and one of commitment and engagement (chapter V). My interest for the moment is only in the first one: an inquiring hermeneutics of deliberation.

The subject who engages in deliberative reflection conducts his or her own reflection in a synthetic manner, entering an internal dialectic that reviews the history of experience and the various interpretations of that experience. As appreciation of one's history and its interpretation grows, an inquiring attitude develops that sharpens one's attentiveness to affective listening. Taking this understanding of dialectic as a basic outline, I shall enhance it with McLean's contributions on tradition and culture to develop an inquiring hermeneutics for this first stage of conversion – recognition or new awareness.⁴⁵ Any process of deliberation, however, needs a subject as a moral participant.

⁴⁴ Without getting too bogged down in trying to describe McLean's hermeneutics here it is worth our mentioning the background of his hermeneutic emphasis. The context and methodologies of his own philosophical seminars has led him to merge insights from several people for a hermeneutics of global cooperation, especially between cultures, though that must necessarily begin with individuals and extend into a people's institutions. McLean's clearest summary of who he sees as most important for the development of hermeneutics can be found in his book, *Hermeneutics, Tradition and Contemporary Change*. In it McLean presents Gadamer's vision of tradition as a 'prejudice' or fore-understanding of the spirit, Habermas' social critique based on material conditions, Ricoeur's middle path of continuity and critique, and, finally, Tillich's dialectic of liberation through history born of the experience of World War II and the holocaust.

⁴⁵ Regarding the methodology or process to be followed for exploring the dynamics of deliberative reflection, I will apply McLean's cultural and hermeneutic insights to Lonergan's outline guide for dialectics. In place of Lonergan's term of dialectic, I choose to use 'deliberation' or 'deliberative reflection', so as not to confuse it with Lonergan's dialectic. The goal is to present the subject's process of inquiry, reflection and deliberation as synthetically as possible. Lonergan outlines the process for a general dialectic, which provides a working outline for my own presentation. Dialectic, he maintains, reviews one's value-based moral activity and history with an evaluative hermeneutics. The end of this evaluation leads, in turn, to conversion and authenticity, accompanied by an awareness of vertical transcendence. In following Lonergan's outline for the first task of dialectics we shall look briefly

Moral Participant

By introducing the human subject as a moral participant my aim is not to go into the finer points of any moral theology, but only to describe briefly the breadth of moral participation and its implications for conversion and human freedom. Again, starting from his ontology, McLean speaks of the human being as “essentially a sharing-with-others.”⁴⁶ The journey towards freedom and the realization of one’s identity, then, has to take account of one’s development as a moral participant in the wider society. This development involves an ongoing conversion that shifts a person’s consciousness from selfish concerns to magnanimity of heart inspired and moved to action by charity. After a shift in recognition from more selfish satisfactions to shared values, one still has a long way to go. The rooting out of the various biases comes as a fruit of deliberation and decisions. Our concern here is the recognition element: the recognition of a value-based reflection on one’s history. Those initial values are what we receive from our heritage, both familial and cultural.

There are, however, some general observations to take into account regarding moral actions in the application of tradition for guiding or focusing deliberation. McLean makes two points regarding the moral participant that are important for understanding what I want to present as an inquiring hermeneutics. In the first, when speaking of how subjects constitute themselves through their moral action, he notes that “moral knowledge as an understanding of the appropriateness of human action cannot be fully determined independently of the subjects in their situation.”⁴⁷ This is not a reduction to mere situational ethics, but an acknowledgement that one’s moral compass cannot be abstracted out to

at the two elements he names as crucial to this stage: moral history and an evaluative hermeneutics, which I name for this stage an inquiring hermeneutics of deliberation. The work done in this dialectic by a subject’s deliberation builds upon one’s already existing history and world of interpretation. As Lonergan puts it, “It has to add to the interpretation that understands a further interpretation that appreciates. It has to add to the history that grasps what was going forward a history that evaluates achievements, that discerns good and evil.” Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 246. The research needed for this new appreciation and evaluation follows from that attentive affective listening, to which I alluded earlier. For Lonergan’s full discussion see his Chapter 10, “Dialectic,” in *Method in Theology*, 235-266. Also important for how I shall approach the subject is Lonergan’s Chapter 5, “Functional Specialties,” where he describes the interdependence of the phases, field and subject specializations, and the intermingling of the functional specialties.

⁴⁶ McLean, *Persons, Peoples and Cultures*, 79.

⁴⁷ McLean, *Hermeneutics, Faith and Relations between Cultures*, 52.

form rigidly, clear-cut criteria for decision-making. Related to this point is his second observation that “adaptation by moral agents in their application of the law does not diminish, but rather corrects and perfects.”⁴⁸ Any law begins as a general guideline and its boundaries and reach are more clearly defined only through its specific application in particular circumstances through time. Law, like the human person, needs to be perfected, a process that takes time for truth and charity to be given the due regard they need.

The point to take away from these two observations of McLean is that the deliberation that accompanies moral reflection on experience is not always as straight-forward as it might first appear. For constituting themselves and refining their interpretive considerations (again, identity and freedom), each person and every culture uses the particular circumstances of their context for the practical application of law, truth and wisdom in a process of self-correction and growth. Clear, objective rules that rise to the level of law still need the application of charity in lived experience to be perfected; so, too, the action and experience of subjects are the means by which they constitute themselves. The affective movements reflect the anxiety or comfort of the conscience. As the conscience develops it becomes ever more attuned to truth, charity and the movements of grace given by the Holy Spirit. Through experience questions arise regarding behavior and values that need to be addressed through focused deliberation, so that conversion to greater truth and charity may be recognized.

Inquiring Hermeneutics of Deliberation

The process of deliberation or alert discerning going on in the mind and heart of any subject is critical to the conversion process, and consists of the moral component discussed above plus an inquiring hermeneutics to explore outlooks, questions and affective movements that arise. As McLean relates, hermeneutics is a work of interpretation that “concerns how truth, especially that of wisdom and revelation, is received and comprehended, and how this takes place in the very center of self-understanding, self-determination, and self-responsibility.”⁴⁹ The work of interpretation, then, is a deliberative process of receptivity by the subject of the truth and love of God. But this work evolves in stages: first the recognition of the various levels of reality and one’s essence and dignity as a human being, then the awareness of the capability for self-transcendence, and later, the possibilities of graced transformation through relationship with God. My primary concern in the presentation

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 104.

of an inquiring hermeneutics of deliberation addresses the first stage. In another place McLean says that hermeneutics “must be able to take account above all of the work of human freedom; it cannot abstract therefrom.”⁵⁰ The subject’s internal work of interpretation consists of taking account of and moving oneself deeper into a conversion towards greater freedom and authenticity. The goal is for the subject to be able to manage the personal inquiry until God is encountered and one’s receptivity to truth and love is freely activated.

The journey of conversion, however, requires freedom to promote growth in freedom. The deliberation that ensues, both personally and communally, has to take the subject through conflicts that can offer very little clarity or no discernible presence of the grace of God. In addition to the subject’s divided heart and the danger of self-deception, sometimes the deliberation has to take account of a divided community, one in which conflict exists through lack of common meaning. This demonstrates again why I said the task of this deliberation is anything but straightforward. As various situations arise in community the subject has to learn to take account of the multiple diagnoses by different members. More differences and conflicts may arise until a crisis ensues. All these unknowns, conflicts, and failures of meaning within the mind and heart of a deliberating subject can make the work of clear interpretation near to impossible. The effort needed can appear daunting, but the desire for freedom and clarity of truth usually pushes the person onwards. Because of the mix of truth and falsehood, good and evil, in human life, McLean asserts that “the process of realizing the good in human history has always been complex and often compromised. Our historical situatedness must be deciphered or interpreted in order to identify its truths and values and to distinguish these from their negations.”⁵¹ This statement contains references to

⁵⁰ Ibid., 10. As I pointed out earlier, freedom likewise evolves in stages as the subject makes discoveries through the evolution of interpretations. A more detailed discussion of these levels of freedom will follow later.

⁵¹ McLean, *Hermeneutics, Faith and Relations between Cultures*, 11. For a complementary theological approach to McLean’s, Lonergan’s thought offers further insight. His way of saying this is to “develop positions” and “reverse counter-positions.” Positions are those compatible with conversion, while the counter-positions are incompatible with it. See Lonergan’s *Method in Theology*, 249-253. He calls it a “foggy procedure” since the extent to which one is able accurately to develop positions and to reverse counter-positions depends on how much one has already been converted. He also speaks of how alienations and ideologies are present in a community, born from a refusal to submit to the levels of conversion. In order to shed light on the personal dynamic that unfolds in a subject’s heart one must also consider the dynamics that ensue from dialectic in a community. See *Method in Theology*, 358.

knowledge and values, as well as tradition and culture, through the focus on “historical situatedness.” My concern here rests with inquiry as the first step of full evaluation to distinguish values from their opposites. So I shall use these insights of recognizing an emerging religious dimension or faith terrain to present an inquiring hermeneutics of deliberation. I divide these reflections into four parts: 1) questioning knowledge; 2) questioning values; 3) appealing to tradition; and 4) culture as life and text.

Questioning Knowledge. As a person enters into an internal deliberation, one of the first things to be questioned is one’s personal knowledge level. This interior questioning is not simply about the amount or accuracy of the knowledge, but also about any conditioning that might prevent one’s grasping more of what reality has to offer. This conditioning is part of one’s horizon and, as mentioned earlier, is not to be considered negatively, but only as an inevitable reality. Absolute or abstract knowledge is not “of ultimate interest, for one’s life develops with others in this community with its culture, time and place.”⁵² But the reflection of the subject, pushed forward by the call of freedom, does seek to be responsible and to free itself from any structures or outside forces that may inhibit it. One’s horizon is a positive element, but there comes a time when that horizon needs to expand to incorporate broadening interests and understanding. As McLean observes, “cognitive processes are embedded and reflect life structures; since these in turn express our interest in preserving and promoting life through knowledge and action, interest is internal to knowledge.”⁵³ The experience and wisdom gained from encounters challenge the subject to question interests, to expand knowledge of reality, and to assess the effectiveness of life structures. Questioning knowledge, then, leads to new awareness and recognition of one’s own conditioning and of the operative cultural structures that contributed to that conditioning. Consciousness of one’s intending and attention to internal, affective responses to experiences test one’s cognitive processes and encourage one to expand the notion of rationality beyond strictly confined, empirical zones. The inquiry into the adequacy of one’s knowledge spurs reason on to look for new answers and to widen its reach. As a form of knowledge, faith stands ready to offer reason a sensible vista to explore. This internal deliberation leads one on to question values as well.

⁵² McLean, *Hermeneutics, Faith and Relations between Cultures*, 43.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 63.

Questioning Values. The internal deliberation process is not a solitary exercise but takes place in the context of one's immediate and broader community. So it is a shared experience with others. The shared set of common values, as noted earlier, reflects the cumulative acts of freedom and wisdom gained from experience. It provides a framework for culture to develop and grow. And though abstract and absolute knowledge may not be of immediate interest because of its need for application in one's context, one does need the assurance that values are not forever-changing, fleeting fancies. Without such an assurance, experience would be reduced to a shifting matrix of relativity. The horizon has to be sound, yet ever expanding to embrace the variety of events and challenges that come one's way. Once deliberation reaches to the level of questioning values, a new caution presents itself. If one's horizon ever feels under threat, then so too will personal and shared freedom. Horizon informs the world of interpretation one ultimately shares with others, which "is essentially concerned with a vision of what is most real in itself and most lasting through time, that is, with the perennial religious meaning regarding being and values."⁵⁴ So, as one questions values through an inquiring hermeneutics, personal reflection moves to the deep world of meaning where guiding values are shared and evaluated against the possible new meaning coming through experience.

This brings us to an important point for theology to consider in a hermeneutics of deliberation as concerns human freedom. The internal dialectic has to be free to consider reality in its totality as experienced: the good, the bad, the emotions, etc. – all the hard facts as best known. As McLean puts it, for hermeneutics to be sound "it is important to avoid the danger of attempting to take either the good or the bad – values or their negations – in isolation one from another."⁵⁵ Otherwise the whole process would be too abstracted from real life and end as an overly simplistic observation, rather than a critical evaluation in search of truth. As the absence of good, however, evil cannot offer any measure of value. In good Thomistic fashion, theology maintains that evil is not something to be considered in itself, but merely the absence of the good. It is the good, present or absent, that is of value concern in

⁵⁴ McLean, *Hermeneutics, Faith and Relations between Cultures*, 9. As a comparison to McLean, when Lonergan speaks of knowledge and values, he notes that in addition to using one's mind, heart and senses, everyone also "learns from others ...by taking their word for the results. Through communication and belief there are generated common sense, common knowledge, common science, common values, a common climate of opinion." Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 43-44.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

deliberation. McLean links this to the following observation on freedom.

Where all, including evil, is a mere state of affairs, one cannot hope to generate a sense of the good or of value. When the horizon becomes one of more sociological or psychological manipulation of the ego, the response can be only further manipulation, in which the ego dominates the self and thereby excludes human freedom.⁵⁶

Here we see McLean's value-based foundation on the good as essential to the exercise of human freedom. Once evil were to become an accepted element of the day to day operations, a truly value-based system would shift to one of ever-more sophisticated manipulations, where the true self would drop deeper into slavery and freedom would become ever more distant. The frustrations of working in such a situation would mount, while the ability to comprehend with clarity exactly why the system were not producing the desired results for all the energy expended would diminish. The values would no longer be true values, but only mechanisms of manipulation disguised as values. Through the questioning of values, then, the aim is to recognize the structural blocks to freedom, so that the hidden manipulations they promote might no longer limit one's development. Similarly, in its discernment of the signs of the times, theology assists a culture in its value-based developments by remaining free of societal manipulations. By continuing to listen to the good and the true, while avoiding the manipulations and ideologies of what otherwise might be understood as new social norms, theology not only discerns the signs of the times but contributes creatively to forming them. If, through one's inquiring hermeneutic, the subject can reach the point of questioning values so as to uncover systems of manipulation, no small favor will have been done to reopen paths to freedom and paths to God.

Appealing to Tradition. Initially, I considered entitling this section 'questioning tradition,' but such a designation could leave the wrong impression as to what is really happening when someone in the midst of deliberation looks to tradition for answers or insight. A popular temptation today in the long wake of the Enlightenment is to disregard tradition as if it had nothing to offer to an age full of quick change, rapid progress and new challenges. But real critique of oneself, one's community or one's culture, "rather than being opposed to tradition or

⁵⁶ Ibid., 13.

taking a questioning attitude thereto, is itself an appeal to tradition.”⁵⁷ My aim here is to show how this appeal can open the door to both new meaning and faith in God by developing McLean’s hermeneutic distancing insights.

For such an appeal to tradition to prove fruitful, the subject has to be able to examine tradition with a certain critical distance, so that previously hidden opportunities may emerge into the light of one’s consciousness. McLean cites especially two tools for reaching such critical distance: history and social critique. For historical distance, the aim is not to seek a distance in time such that the subjective factors contained and carried in tradition tend to disappear in order that a sort of raw objectivity might remain. Instead, McLean insists that “Rather than removing falsifying factors, the contribution of time lies in opening new sources of understanding which reveal unsuspected elements and even whole new dimensions of meaning in the tradition.”⁵⁸ Notice, then, that for theology the emphasis would lie not in some easy clarity of distinguishing what is true and false, but in understanding, discovery and meaning. New elements or dimensions of meaning do not require tradition to be purified of the subjectivity of past generations, but may actually emerge from that subjectivity to communicate a wisdom or meaning previously unrecognized.

Social critiques provide another distancing tool for hermeneutics to aid it in the ability to penetrate the more intricate and technical structures which impose themselves on cultures in this age of immediate communication and global interaction. This tool may be beyond the reach of an individual on a personal journey of liberation and movement to the faith, but theology needs it as much as philosophy or any other reflecting science. For McLean this tool is provided by the social sciences in the data they can produce for new insight. Those data provide the critical distance through “an analysis of the historical structures as a basis for liberation from internal determination by, and dependence upon, unjust interests.”⁵⁹ But such data have to be examined carefully to discover the internal biases that may have been used to

⁵⁷ Ibid., 80. As an example, McLean refers in the same place to how “modern criticism appeals unabashedly to the heritage of emancipation it has received from the Enlightenment.”

⁵⁸ McLean, *Hermeneutics, Tradition and Contemporary Change*, 13-14.

⁵⁹ McLean, *Hermeneutics, Faith and Relations between Cultures*, 78. In the same place McLean discusses how a sacred text provides a tool for such critical distance as well: “By making possible imaginative variations of one’s ego, one can achieve the distance required for a first critique of his/her own illusions and false consciousness, and of the ideology in which he/she has been reared.” Ibid.

gather the information. Theology has to examine the data closely to uncover the contextualized struggle of a people for deeper understanding, discovery and meaning. The data cannot be used for mere judgment of what they did rightly or wrongly, good or bad, but as an indicator of their struggle for freedom and of their receptivity to grace offered by the Holy Spirit and to the possibility of hearing the Word of faith.

As a comparison I offer the example of how a sacred text carried by tradition can provide an individual or a community a critical distancing tool internal to the tradition. Religiously grounded traditions are not meant to be static entities fixed in some manner outside of time; their basis in God and their reference to sacred texts demand a constant, ongoing search for new meaning hidden away in the tradition.⁶⁰ Hermeneutics allow theology to recognize new paths of meaning in consonance with tradition as the people live out their faith in new times. Through the faith of its people, a religious tradition continues to develop, just as its relationship with God does. One's personal journey to faith never occurs completely separately from that of the faith community. Any appeal to religious tradition by a community or an individual ultimately has consequences for the full culture and the development of that tradition within the culture.

Culture as Life and Text. The last element to consider in the hermeneutics of deliberation is the often unnoticed role that culture plays. As noted near the end of the last chapter, culture provides the foundation for one's operative hermeneutics. Here I want to consider culture as more than just some added element to one's experience, but as a vehicle of life itself, which allows a place for God in the hermeneutic while offering itself as a sort of *living text for interpretation*. From this consideration of culture appears another critical aspect for an effective hermeneutic process. Using McLean's insights I would call this quality the *prudent discretion of symmetrical relations*, a choice of words that will shortly become clearer.

Tradition is carried along by a culture and its people, so culture must be understood in a broader context. McLean tends to go further than many other writers on culture in this area. When he looks back at how culture has often been considered, he notes that it was usually as "an afterthought, a possession of varying degrees of value perhaps, but

⁶⁰ For a similar discussion in McLean's work see his *Hermeneutics, Faith and Relations between Cultures*, 83-84.

more an adornment than life itself.”⁶¹ He goes on to relate that culture progressed to the level of form or structure of life, and then beyond, to be considered as the very life of a people. As such, culture entails the consciousness of a people living in time. More importantly for our own study, culture can carry within itself the ongoing relationship of that people with God. The faith of the people bridges the gap of their experience from its worst failures to its highest achievements. Thus it is necessary, McLean maintains, “to have a hermeneutics which does not reduce all to the human, but allows for faith and grace, that is, for God in our life – that is the wonder as well as the daunting challenge of a religious hermeneutics.”⁶² Even at the early stage of initial deliberation theology’s hermeneutics must be able to assess all human intentions, without reducing everything to the human. Grace and faith demand horizons that push human horizons beyond anything originally intended.

Building on the comparison I made above regarding tradition, I want to go a step beyond McLean’s own discussion in order to compare one’s life journey, as well as one’s culture, to a sacred text. In such a text the object of hermeneutics is not so much the intention of the author, “but the text itself as it appears in the tradition.”⁶³ As the subject lives through time, his or her experience of existence, of living the ‘text’ of life, is marked by constantly evolving horizons as life unfolds. The application of one’s life text, then, includes this unfolding articulation that is able to embrace the operations of grace and movements of faith as they occur, as long as one is staying faithful to maintaining a consistent hermeneutics of deliberation. This movement of conversion, which begins as deeply personal and intimate, can become communal, then historical, as would be demonstrated in culture.⁶⁴ The attitude that accompanies such a hermeneutics expects transformation and

⁶¹ McLean, *Persons, Peoples and Cultures*, 99. In this same place one can follow McLean’s development of culture from Husserl onwards to the level of life and being.

⁶² McLean, *Hermeneutics, Faith and Relations between Cultures*, 103.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 121. Though I am citing McLean’s discussion, the analogy of one’s life journey or of one’s culture to a sacred text is my own. But based on the ontology we have already covered and the theological reality of being created in love, the comparison is not a stretch. Inherent to considering one’s journey or culture as a sacred text lies the expectation that redemption and purification would be forthcoming in order to ‘complete the text’. Such a view not only makes room for the possibility of faith and grace, but expects or anticipates those transcendent realities in the journey of unfolding relationship with God. It is, then, the journey of salvation.

⁶⁴ Here I make reference to an insight of Lonergan where he discusses the conversion of culture. See his discussion where he speaks of the movement from personal to communal to historical in *Method in Theology*, 103-131.

conversion. One, therefore, would be open to recognizing the movements of grace when they happen.

Given that it can accept this analogy and look upon the conversion journey of a culture or of a person as texts to be revered, respected and interpreted as they unfold in time, theology, then, has a role to play in the unfolding of the new awareness of these personal subjects. Inhibitions are carried by each subject or by each culture, a reality which requires the necessary respect so as not to threaten the subject's freedom. McLean explains how the operative hermeneutics can respect this freedom in the midst of helping the subjects grow in self-awareness.

This requires great discretion regarding the hermeneutic process in order to avoid an elitist attitude in their regard – which would be but a new repression. For this, symmetrical relations are essential in assisting those who, due to their social circumstances, lack the necessary conditions of dialogue for comprehending their interests and real situation. Prudent discussion is required in any effort to change these conditions.⁶⁵

Here we see how critical one's attitude is when accompanying people on a journey of recognition and conversion. Similarly, theology must approach these journeys with an attitude of great pastoral concern and respect. When theology engages a culture, just as when a believer engages a non-believer, discretion demands that care be taken in how one listens to the other, how one allows the other to express freely the entirety of his or her experience. The symmetrical relations imply that people would not feel condescended towards, that they would not somehow feel disrespected because of their training, education, experience or world-view. The listening needed in order to help them shift their horizon requires great patience and prudence, so that the respect given would come across as sincere. In no way can the subjects feel pushed or coerced. Their comprehension, or lack thereof, has to be accepted and explored so that the shift in new awareness happens within them, from their point of view, rather than imposed from outside. Timing, then, also plays a vital role in this act of accompaniment. As I conclude this section on the hermeneutics of deliberation, one of the qualities or roles of theology as midwife is to promote such mutual respect and appreciation for the interpretive viewpoints of the other, the

⁶⁵ McLean, *Hermeneutics, Faith and Relations between Cultures*, 73. McLean makes reference here to Habermas' interpretation of Freud for constructing an effective social critique.

prudent discretion of symmetrical relations with those subjects journeying the road of conversion to greater freedom for faith.

Conversion to New Level of Freedom

As I begin this section it is worth our time to orient ourselves again in the overall argument of the dynamics of deliberative reflection. I first covered the overall process of deliberation, and then examined it under two elements: moral participant and inquiring hermeneutics of deliberation. For the hermeneutics I divided our discussion into questioning knowledge, questioning values, appealing to tradition, and then concluded with a discussion of culture as life and text. In the process of deliberation, the fruit of the hermeneutics creates openings for the recognition of a vertical transcendent in one's horizon that leads on to conversion to a new level of freedom and greater authenticity. Without this recognition of transcendence beyond the horizontal plane of relationships, growth to a new level of freedom proves nearly impossible, much less the more integrated level of freedom for faith.

As a moral participant, the subject evaluates one's life through questioning one's knowledge and operative values. In the appeal to tradition and reflection on the resource that one's culture provides for evaluation, a new clarity for a course of action manifests itself. In tradition the help of previous generations in their walk with God provides a needed transcendent reference. As McLean relates, "In order to know what is morally required, the situation must be understood in the light of what is right, that is, in the light of what has been discovered vertically through tradition with its normative character about appropriate human action."⁶⁶ The light of wisdom from this vertical transcendent gives one the initial assurance needed for appropriate response. The real fruit of the deliberation leading to conversion stems from reaching a new clarity of understanding and meaning in light of this wisdom. The new clarity may illuminate past behavior or responses to situations, causing the subject to reconsider past judgments of value. The journey, then, is one of new awareness and self-correction in quest of a fuller freedom.

The measure of the subject's peace or unease of conscience will depend on how these past judgments measure up to the new light of higher value which results from the responsible deliberation and the recognition of God in this vertical transcendent. A state of peace or calm in the conscience confirms the moral development as a move towards freedom and maturity. For McLean this "consists in bringing my pattern of personal and social virtues into harmony with the corresponding sets

⁶⁶ McLean, *Ways to God*, 363-364.

of values along the vertical pole of transcendence.”⁶⁷ Even though the person may not initially name the transcendence as God, the response, confirmed by the accompanying peace, work together to provide the possibility of realizing a new relationship outside of one’s previous social commitments. The subject experiences something new when tapping into this transcendent source and a simple symbolic communication or limit experience can open the doorway to such encounter with God.⁶⁸

Recognizing and tapping this transcendent element moves one along the path of conversion and to a new sense of freedom. When one is not acquainted with this transcendent dimension, the acts of freedom remain mostly on the level of autonomy, rather than freedom in its fullest sense.

When McLean presents his understanding of freedom, he borrows from the theories of others and names three specific levels: a) empirical choice, as a circumstantial freedom in the mode of self-realization; b) a freedom of law or essence, which is an acquired freedom in the mode of self-perfection; and c) existential freedom, which is a natural freedom in the mode of self-determination and self-constitution.⁶⁹ At the level of

⁶⁷ McLean, *Persons, Peoples and Cultures*, 111. One exception to a state of peace or calm can be the turmoil God may inflict on a soul to shake or jolt it away from serious sin and back to grace. See St. Ignatius’ rules for discernment regarding the various emotional responses possible. A person in such a state would not normally be engaged in the dynamics of deliberative reflection we are discussing. For Lonergan value judgments depend on one’s historical development and the level of appropriation of one’s heritage. He goes on to say, “It is by the transcendental notion of value and its expression in a good and uneasy conscience that man can develop morally.” Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 40-41.

⁶⁸ Without getting into great detail here on the subject of symbols, it is still worth reminding ourselves of the power they have to communicate God’s revelation, especially when the person’s heart is well-prepared, as would be the case when one is in the midst of such deliberative reflection. Avery Dulles provides us with sound advice regarding the power of a symbol to communicate “by inviting people to participate in its own meaning, to inhabit the world which opens up, and thereby to discover new horizons, with new values and goals. Symbols do something to us. They shift our center of awareness and thereby change our perspective and values. Symbols, therefore, have the kind of transformative power that is needed for conversion to come about.” Dulles, *The Craft of Theology*, 65.

⁶⁹ McLean draws upon the work of Mortimer Adler and his team from The Institute of Philosophical Research, *The Idea of Freedom: A Dialectical Examination of the Conceptions of Freedom* (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, 1958). McLean also references L. B. Geiger’s study, “De la liberté, les conceptions fondamentales et leur retentissement dans la philosophie

conversion to recognition and new awareness, the concern rests especially with the movement to the second level of acquired freedom. The transcendent dimension has to be recognized in order to pursue self-perfection as *imago Dei*. True growth in freedom demonstrates itself not simply on the horizontal plane, but especially on the vertical axis of transcendence. Once a person has an experience of this vertical freedom, that part of the self always open to the transcendent finally experiences an activation that opens new dimensions of relationship and love. What McLean calls the “ambit of freedom” is this “ability to transcend and live in a positive relation of love to what is beyond oneself – to others and to the absolute Other.”⁷⁰ The newfound freedom shifts the focus away from oneself and directs one’s attention to love. Love, in turn, beckons the subject to renew the search for broader horizons of meaning and for other subjects of its affection. Love becomes its own driving force to search for further meaning and relationship with God as the personal transcendent and with a wider array of people.

The discovery of the vertical transcendent in deliberation, then, brings forth the fruit of a new receptivity through which attention to freedom and love is increased and by which conversion progresses through clarification and purification of one’s relationship with God. The conversion to deeper authenticity begins in earnest. The discovery of that transcendent dimension opens the eyes of the heart to recognition and illuminates the way to true conversion and greater authenticity. In

pratique,” *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 41 (1957): 601-631. It is an analysis of André Lalande’s senses of freedom in *Vocabulaire technique et critique de la philosophie*. For McLean’s own discussions of these levels of freedom see: *Tradition, Harmony and Transcendence*, vol. 5 of Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change, Series III: Asia (Washington, DC: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1994), 57-83; *Ways to God*, 328-334; and *Freedom, Cultural Traditions and Progress: Philosophy in Civil Society and Nation Building: Tashkent Lectures*, vol. 22 of Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change, Series I: Culture and Values (Washington: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2000), 5-20. In the latter two McLean goes on to offer cultural tradition as a cumulative freedom of a people. Here the focus is especially on the second level of acquired freedom, while the next chapter will focus more on the third level of existential freedom in preparation for the acceptance of faith.

⁷⁰ McLean, *Religion and Cooperation between Civilizations*, 60. Lonergan speaks of an horizontal exercise of freedom which occurs within an existing horizon, while a vertical exercise of freedom flowing from the discovery of the transcendent represents a jump in horizons. Lonergan goes on to describe that these vertical acts of freedom can result in dramatic conversions, since the movement to a new horizon can at times result in a complete ‘about-face’ from previous positions.

her encounter with Jesus, the Samaritan woman's conversion began with an observation he made that awakened her to recognize the overall sense of her life. She was moved beyond the practical needs of immediate considerations, wants or goals to the realm of meaning. His words caused her to reflect on the totality of her life, moving her to an inductive, subjective awareness of an overall glimpse of her identity. As the person begins to look at and objectify his or her existence and actions, it must be remembered that all objectifications fall short or remain incomplete of the full mystery. The rational analysis of the objectifications of the subject cannot be allowed ultimately to displace the subject him- or herself. For McLean, the focus on the subject implies keeping sight "of the reflective dimension in which alone authentic interest and hence real liberation can take place."⁷¹ An important insight from this, then, is that the measure of conversion cannot be contained in a sort of checklist of objectified points, but always remains an internal mystery of the receptivity of a living subject on the road to greater freedom. Condemning or criticizing does not constructively help people in their conversion. They need to discover a positive good towards which they can steer their lives in order to offer true freedom to their conscience, especially if failures or shortcomings are pointed out. Otherwise, the journey of conversion may come to be seen as an exercise in deconstruction that can leave them without the needed hope, rather than an invitation of grace leading to open receptivity.

Finally, I want to stress again the importance of understanding this conversion or movement to authenticity as a journey. This is especially true when it comes to religious conversion where one's surrender is not simply an act, but a dynamic, lifelong process. Too often this dynamic movement is not fully respected, resulting in negative feedback or disillusionment that only impedes the conversion. In a family or communal environment this freedom of the subject has to be respected, even guarded, so that his or her openness to the movement may unfold through personal cooperation with the grace offered. As McLean relates, "It is in this situation of dynamic openness, of communication and of community that the moral growth of persons takes place."⁷² Theology protects that openness and freedom best by

⁷¹ McLean, *Hermeneutics, Tradition and Contemporary Change*, 28. Similarly, Lonergan names as the "rock" on which one can build this movement of conversion, not the objectifications, but "the subject in his conscious, unobjectified attentiveness, intelligence, reasonableness, responsibility." Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 20.

⁷² McLean, *Persons, Peoples and Cultures*, 61-62. Again, it is worth considering the complementarity of McLean with Lonergan. Lonergan distinguishes intellectual, moral and religious conversion as to their objects and

uniting the personal and communal: highlighting the importance of the communal dimension and the communal attitude needed to revere this dynamic of the paschal mystery unfolding in the lives of individual subjects. The desired result is a convergence of spiritual quest and belonging to a tradition of meaning. Key to this is guiding them in hope, pointing people to the realm of self-transcendence, even when the call of turning away from past sin, vice or tragedy may threaten their confidence. The theological virtues of faith, hope and love are the necessary elements to tame the disposition or attitude in the midst of the conversion to a new level of freedom. For these virtues to take root in a timely manner as the dynamic unfolds, the contribution of community and the conscious awareness of culture remain indispensable.

DEEPER AWARENESS OF CULTURE

At the very end of the scriptural passage that began this chapter, the Samaritan woman perceives that Jesus is a prophet and, while acknowledging the difference of cultures between them, turns the subject of the conversation to worship. Within any deliberation of meaning and coming to terms with the truth of one's own existence, each person returns to his or her own cultural context as a reference. In the midst of that cultural context, for many there resides also the more profound reference to one's religious identity. A deeper awareness of culture goes hand in hand with a renewed sense of God and the personal attitudes and deliberations that accompany conversion: gratitude for the gift of one's existence and the search for authenticity in one's religious identity. I divide these reflections on growing in cultural awareness, then, into two parts: a) culture and awareness of the gift of existence; and b) culture as locus of religious identity.

Culture and Awareness of the Gift of Existence

My aim in this section will be to show how the culture one inherits is ideally a gift that offers immense riches, riches which also include a religious foundation for relationship with God. Becoming aware of the wide variety of riches in this source called culture requires

the type of self-transcendence each engages, describing that "it is possible, when all three occur in a single consciousness to conceive their relations in terms of sublation." Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 240-241. That sublation is a synthetic dynamism that occurs as the fruit of an ever-deepening relationship with the living God, unfolding within the heart of the individual, but always in the context of and with the encouragement, witness and assistance of the wider community.

us to take account of human creativity and its search for security, freedom and meaning. Once the religious basis of culture is recognized, the challenge becomes to reconstruct one's idea of culture and tradition from what may have been a limited, non-religious understanding. When one becomes aware of the religious impulse in oneself, as well as its incorporation in one's own culture, the transcendent reference invites one to reassess and shift the application of one's own tradition. The responsibility slowly becomes more apparent to move beyond a subject who merely receives what one chooses from a static tradition to an engaged, free subject called to apply creatively new truths to a living, developing tradition. The goal, then, is to map out this shift in awareness of one's responsibility and how it affects one's sense of identity in relation to God.

Since our concern here remains growth in awareness I want to begin with an insight McLean has of human consciousness and its relation to culture. The deductive manner of science, with its analytic style of seeing things as isolated component parts, does not call human consciousness to new awareness of God. As we have come to expect from McLean, he maintains that the real drama is that of existence; in relation to that gift each person has the responsibility to cooperate in shaping one's own life and the life of the community.

We should note that this is not a matter of particular beings, either objects or subjects. What breaks into explicit human consciousness is neither God as creator nor oneself as creature. Rather, it is God's work of creating, that is existence or *esse* precisely as act, and man's work in shaping this act creatively, constituting thereby a distinctive culture. This is the new content of human consciousness at the turn of the millennia.⁷³

Note that McLean specifically avoids the more static identifiers of Creator and creature with what is foremost in human consciousness today. He emphasizes, instead, the dynamism of the participatory act of existence in God's ongoing work of creating. One's creative work in shaping this act of existence contributes to constituting one's own culture. This should not be interpreted as a sort of desire to pay back the gift one has received. McLean insists on the non-reciprocal nature of the gift, and that any attempt to repay it would destroy the gift and remove the sense of gratitude which the gift naturally engenders.

Here theology has a natural opening to reach people through their culture, while also influencing that culture in a positive manner. One's

⁷³ McLean, *Persons, Peoples and Cultures*, 202.

awareness shift has to include coming to the realization of living in an entirely graced condition. Culture reflects this graced condition and our own creative contributions to it. New awareness, then, has to do with a grateful receptivity that moves us to creative responsibility in thanks to a love shared. “The non-reciprocal character of our life is not merely that of a part to the whole; it is that of a gift received to its source.”⁷⁴ The Samaritan woman’s desire for living water was purified by the awareness of her life history and its meaning, including her own integrity and sense of gratitude. She came to a new recognition of the sense of the gift of her existence and the context in which she found herself. Jesus’ words about how she had lived her life shift her awareness to consider her own culture’s response of how to give thanks in worship to the living God.

To develop a healthy cultural awareness today, a strong sense of the gift of one’s existence is a necessary first step. McLean connects the gift of existence to freedom or liberation through the reality of culture with its reference to transcendental relationship with God. But as Benedict XVI points out, “Every culture has burdens from which it must be freed and shadows from which it must emerge.”⁷⁵ Theology, then, has to find new ways to help the Christian faith incarnate itself in cultures to help them continue their creative growth in freedom. In reality, culture reflects what McLean would call the dynamic instability of life experienced by a people, since they are caught in the paradox of a limited realization while always exposed to infinite openness. This dynamic instability reflects why culture cannot be seen only from some sort of pristine, positive or exclusively humanizing sense, but carries with it some of the turmoil and distorted perceptions that need purification as a people journeys in freedom. The desire for freedom and purification remains open in the midst of all the instabilities life brings. This open-ended, yet ever unfulfilled desire provides the energy that drives one’s creativity, freedom, and the search for meaning and for God.

This engages us in the search for liberation and fulfillment from which values, virtues and ultimately cultures emerge. It situates this striving at the very center of human life. Further, it provides for an open and inclusive search for liberation in which we are concerned to share with others and grow in the very process. Finally, it provides a goal

⁷⁴ McLean, *Ways to God*, 298.

⁷⁵ Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, # 59.

and direction for the process of liberation which elevates and transforms.⁷⁶

This passage illustrates McLean's insight that culture can reflect the desire for wholeness and freedom at the center of human life. It also should mirror the grace and transformation in the cross through its inherent energy flowing from the paradox of dynamic instability. Culture reflects the human heart's desire for significance and meaning flowing from a dynamic relationship of transcendence with the living God. But without the sense of gift, the instability from the limited realization of the relationship would not lead to the development of culture and a search for a transforming liberation with others. It would, instead, end up leading to frustration, competition and a separation from others based on fear. Wherever culture emerges into a form of quest for creative growth, there exists a sense of this gift and gratitude for it. When this sense of gift and the accompanying gratitude disappear, culture begins to weaken, becomes less identifiable, and invites less creative participation. Freedoms slowly shrink and meaning becomes more difficult to access. Without an appreciation of the infinite openness to God as personal, divine transcendent, the instability in life becomes a chaos without hope. The window to God remains always there, but most need help finding it. Thus culture can provide theology the help needed to keep the window to God in sight for people. The energy that flows from the dynamic instability of their lives becomes positive and creatively fruitful as recognition for this open window to God grows. But they have to recognize the dynamic instability and its accompanying energy as gift, not as a burdening restriction on their freedom. As gift it provides the foundation for religious identity.

Culture as Locus of Religious Identity

The inherent religious character of the human person finds expression in any culture, while culture, in turn, offers a living reminder of the gift of one's existence and of God as the ultimate gift-giver. As I explore culture as the locus of religious identity, I want to compare how McLean sees the religious element of culture with Ratzinger's view on the matter. McLean sees life at its heart as ultimately religious: "if

⁷⁶ McLean, *Religion and Cooperation between Civilizations*, 119. As mentioned earlier, the desire or energy for the search for liberation and fulfillment are built into our existential reality and into culture. Awareness of the gift of one's existence then, confirms that energy as a trusted source. When it guides one to face the reality of God, gratitude for the one who has given the gift can likewise be more easily trusted.

culture is awareness of God's creative gift of being and our empowering responsibility for shaping this divine gift, then it is but natural that we thank God for this gift, seek his help in bearing this burden, and live in founded hope that a faithful life will lead to fulfillment in his love."⁷⁷ As we saw earlier, a culture's ontology is based on the presence of the Holy Spirit accompanying a people on their historical journey. McLean observes that the religious character of culture follows naturally. Ratzinger makes a similar observation when he writes, "In all known historical cultures, religion is an essential element of culture, is indeed its determinative center; it is religion that determines the scales of values and, thereby, the inner cohesion and hierarchy of all these cultures."⁷⁸ The manner in which the religious character of the culture is embraced, then, reflects the overall health of a culture as open to transcendence. From the fruit of the ongoing dynamics of deliberative reflection, a new recognition of one's identity as centered in God and as coming to expression in culture becomes more pronounced. One's identity finds its home in culture and in religion at the center of the culture.

One's culture and religion, then, are to be appreciated for the gifts they have been to one's identity and wellbeing. Here, Ratzinger continues his reflection by challenging theology with the dilemma of respecting another's culture, especially while trying to guide them to faith in the Gospel. After noting that religion provides the inner cohesion and hierarchy of cultures, Ratzinger highlights how this might first appear to pose an even greater challenge to inculturating Christianity into an already existent culture. "For one cannot see how a culture that is interwoven with religion, that lives in it and intertwines with it, could be transplanted into a different religion, so to speak, without both being destroyed in the process."⁷⁹ His point here is to emphasize that the Christian faith does not replace or supplant a culture, but purifies and completes it. Time and again the world has seen that all sorts of cultures are capable of inculturating the Christian faith. Not only does a culture maintain its identity, but it deepens it as it clarifies its deepest religious truths in the Gospel. At the same time, the culture contributes to how the Christian faith is understood, incarnated and demonstrated in the life of a people. As midwife to faith, theology must give attention to support a people's struggle to see the gift of their identity through the lens of their culture and of their heretofore operative religious outlook. The sense of gift for all elements would best be maintained so that people can know and feel that they are journeying

⁷⁷ McLean, *Persons, Peoples and Cultures*, 204.

⁷⁸ Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, 59.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

in freedom. Their journey is part of their creative responsibility to the gift of their existence and their culture. Theology, then, can benefit from a culture's creativity and energy, even as it seeks to guide the culture to faith.

Once awareness of the religious foundation of culture takes hold, it confronts us with our own religious standing or bias. The next challenge is to interpret all this as a gift of truth, and then seek to undertake what McLean calls a "religious reconstruction of culture and tradition."⁸⁰ This reconstruction comes from a shift in awareness of the transcendent dimension and the acknowledgement of the reality of God. Awareness changes everything. New dimensions of meaning open and possibilities of accepting real change or conversion make more sense. The more common considerations of empirical and economic reality lose their importance as the spiritual realm becomes ever more significant. The Christian faith can then be freely embraced and absorbed as clarification and deepening of previously held religious insights. The reconstruction implies that tradition and culture can now be embraced as more than static realities, but treasures to be received, embraced and infused with new lessons from experience.

But it all begins with awareness of the transcendent dimension in oneself and in one's culture, which elicits new questioning and wonder. One's vision of life undergoes more than an accidental adjustment based on finite realities; it shifts to a newness founded upon the God of infinite transcendence and love. "Hence we are always drawn forward and called to radical newness. A tradition then is not a matter of the past, but of new applications. As reflecting the infinite creator and goal this is the decisively religious characteristic of human life."⁸¹ Tradition and culture need a steady infusion of this newness to remain connected to the roots from which they sprouted. This creative newness could also be called the mechanism by which tradition and culture remain aware of their historical situation and surroundings, but also of their identity. This is how cultures remain open to hear the Gospel and make adjustments to it, even when they may not originally have been founded on Christian religious adherence. Ratzinger's thought complements McLean's own when he writes, "The historical character of culture signifies its capacity for progress, and that implies its capacity to be open, to accept its being transformed by an encounter."⁸² But this capacity has to be discovered and filled in freedom. If encounters and outside influences from other cultures, traditions or religions were perceived to be hostile or manipulative, the culture would begin to shut down and close in on

⁸⁰ McLean, *Hermeneutics, Faith and Relations between Cultures*, 25.

⁸¹ McLean, *Religion and Cooperation between Civilizations*, 30.

⁸² Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, 62.

itself, just as would be the case for an individual. Freedom, then, has to be respected so that the identity of the subject, whether person or culture, does not feel itself under threat. That freedom is tied to identity and transcendent relationship with God.

One of the odder phenomena today relates to a fear to admit this transcendent link to one's identity awareness, whether cultural or personal. In the more secular societies the public discourse avoids any reference to God or religion under the mantle of not wanting to offend. But the result is that the public discourse no longer touches people in their deepest longings and often leaves them either frustrated or apathetic about the political process. The common reasoning set forward is that religion has been the source of too much strife and conflict in the past, and would only inhibit future human progress. McLean offers theology encouragement to be bolder in its presentation of God through more assertive cultural contributions regarding one's religious identity.

In sum, instead of considering the religious basis of culture to be inimical to human progress and undertaking a futile effort at exiling it from human life, this suggests recognizing that the religious view is an essential and necessary foundation of human life and meaning. This implies searching out how this can be enabled to fulfill its task of founding truth and inspiring efforts toward the good in all aspects of life.⁸³

Here we see an opportunity for theology's relationship with culture. Much of McLean's philosophical work has been committed to the reintroduction of the religious view, which proves to be no small task in today's historical context. But the religious view has been part of humanity for ages and it still remains so. For its own part, theology can take advantage of reawakening the religious identity from within the values and meaning carried by culture. The task is to highlight the transcendental dimension of culture present in its narratives, symbols and values, so its religious view could make itself more visibly present again in the public discourse. Even if people or nations are unwilling to acknowledge religion as part of their own identity, perhaps they might see the value in understanding it as a critical part of the cultural and national identity in the mindset of other peoples.

⁸³ McLean, *Religion and Cooperation between Civilizations*, 137. As previously pointed out, the secular mindset has been developing from a confluence of many factors over a long period of time. Again, see Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age* to gain perspective of the complexity of its historical development.

To conclude, culture gives expression to people's creativity, an expression of their existence as God's ongoing work of creating. The dynamic instability of human limitations experienced in view of the inherent transcendent openness reveals itself in culture's strengths and shortcomings. But that dynamic instability also drives the search for fuller freedom in relationship with God and others. The sense of gift and gratitude for gifts received are essential for maintaining an open consciousness and appreciation of mystery. Culture expresses a people's lived experience of mystery and provides them with a starting point, a reference, for understanding the religious dimension of their own life. As awareness of religious character grows, one's identity and place in creation begs to be reinterpreted. As viewed more from their role as incarnating a living relationship with God in the Holy Spirit, tradition and culture call out to be religiously and creatively reconstructed in freedom and in faith. The increased awareness of culture, in turn, can lead one on to deeper awareness of God.

DEEPER AWARENESS OF GOD

The dynamic that leads to greater awareness of God draws from the richness of experience and meaning that culture provides. The search for truth, goodness, and meaning drives the inquiry that might initially look like selfish motives. But the inquiry needs to be present for one to enter the transcendental vertical zone of experience that would lead to discover the divine and move towards conscious relationship with God. My goal here is to explore the dynamics of deeper awareness of God, while showing that openness to such awareness is tied to one's sense of gift, identity, and the manner in which one can find a symmetry to life's paradoxes. McLean would see the move to deeper awareness of God as a transition from the preoccupations of self-interest to the more meaningful consideration of self-identity, a move that would necessarily "touch on culture, family and faith."⁸⁴ The inquiry of a subject that leads to new awareness is not about self-interest or effort, but transcendence and receptivity. Hidden within it, culture offers a transcendental reference for identity and meaning. Identity, like the gift of life, is something we receive. Initially, one has a sense of identity from family, and then later, identity extends to the wider zone of culture. As life experience causes inquiries to intensify, the realization grows that identity cannot be confined by culture, but has to extend its reference

⁸⁴ McLean, *Religion and Cooperation between Civilizations*, 164. I am using words such as 'move' and 'transition' because I still want to stress the fact that it is a dynamic, not just a jump between two different static realities. Engaging the dynamic necessitates an ongoing open receptivity.

beyond culture to that transcendent dimension where God can be discovered.

The discovery of God is not a subjective journey inwards, but an objectively existential journey of a subject seeking love. At the beginning of the chapter I introduced paths to God based on McLean's insights that referred to philosophical causalities: paths of participation from efficient causality in terms of origin; a path of manifestation from formal causality in terms of the level of being; and a path of purpose from final causality in terms of goal, purpose or meaning. Building on the discussions of reflective deliberation and of culture as life and text, I want to make a point of clarification in the dynamic of coming to recognize this mystery of transcendent love, namely, by pointing out something which it is not. One's transcendent relationship with God consists of more than a mere depth dimension within one's own being. If God were lowered to the level of a depth dimension of the human subject, the individuality and freedom of both God as revealer and the subject as receiver of a word would be lost. The false perception of God as a depth dimension contributes to what we could call an over-emphasis on the individuality of the human subject.⁸⁵ For theology, then, any exaggerated emphasis or insistence on the primacy of individuality might also manifest itself as a diminished notion of the gratuitous nature of gift or diminished sense of mystery. An authentic journey to God always reveals itself as the dynamism of love marked by meaning, gift, mystery, community and event.

In the last chapter we saw that the central reality of God informs how one understands the realities of the human person and culture. The human being is created for open relationship with God, openness to transcendence. Growth in that awareness is related to one's growth in engaged participation with all of one's reality. As that growth continues, the *paradox* of the human condition – of being directed toward that which transcends oneself – becomes more prominent, regardless of the primary path to God on which one is journeying.⁸⁶ The dynamic of

⁸⁵ In one of his own articles on Paul Tillich's thought McLean discusses one of Tillich's weaknesses regarding God as a depth dimension of the human person. When this notion of God is fused with the notion of participation, a fully free and transcendent participation is lost and the identities of God and the human become nebulous. See his discussion in his article, "Tillich's Existential Philosophy of Protestantism," *The Thomist* 28 (January 1964): 1-50, especially 47-50.

⁸⁶ McLean reaches two conclusions regarding the realities of God and the human person in relation to transcendence: a) created reality is from God as origin and toward God as goal; and b) God's character is absolute. These can be affiliated to the paths of efficient and formal causalities. The two together demonstrate the paradox of the human condition in the path of final causality:

coming to recognize God becomes more and more guided by this paradox. The paradoxical condition of being directed towards that which transcends us sooner or later captures our attention and moves us to explore that transcendent realm, even if that exploration consists only of a need to explain away the paradox as a psychological consequence of the struggle for survival. But this state of being directed toward what transcends us stems from who we are as *imago Dei* and thus retains a significant connection deep in one's being. The deep connectedness seeks to be understood within the lived paradoxes of one's existence. Reflection on the lived paradox of one's condition, in turn, prepares the ground for the recognition of the paradoxical love of the cross. The reality of this paradoxical love piques at one's conscious awareness until fully addressed.

Even up to the point of death this strange, paradoxical reality will seek to be understood, for such is the nature of the gift of transcendence. Its gratuitous nature is carried in one's being and ultimately traces itself back to the reality upon which it was founded, or which is its source. As one's incomplete understanding seeks clarification, a phenomenon which McLean calls a '*symmetry*' to the gratuitous nature of the gift offered becomes more apparent: the gift of transcendence given to the subject originates from and leads to the transcendent God. For McLean this symmetry reveals the distinctive nature of the gift, "the giving is not traced back further precisely because it is free or gratuitous. Once again, our reflections lead us in the direction of that which is self-sufficient, absolute and transcendent as the sole adequate source of the gift of being."⁸⁷ The gift of the paradoxical experience of being directed toward that which transcends us keeps moving our consciousness toward God as the origin or source of the gift. Gratitude leads one back to God as the source of all gifts, especially that intimate gift of self-transcendence built into our being from the moment of creation. It is little wonder, then, that believers who give thanks in the Eucharistic celebration are also celebrating this intimate transcendent relationship with God at its deepest level. This experience of the gift of transcendence makes up part of one's inherent religious nature to which I referred earlier. Though the dynamic of God's love may begin as a merely unconscious dynamic of life, inferred yet unknown, it can, through more experience, understanding and judging, slowly become known.⁸⁸ The mystery of this

"both humans and their universe are directed toward that which definitively transcends them." McLean, *Knowledge of God and the Discovery of Man*, 50.

⁸⁷ McLean, *Ways to God*, 297.

⁸⁸ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 106. I would maintain with Lonergan that this religious part of our being characterizes itself as a conscious dynamic force that maintains us in the mystery of love that overshadows our entire

dynamic love, however, never really goes away, because the depth of God's love can never be fully known, even though one's conscious awareness of it may grow through loving experiences of contemplation and encounter.

The movement to a deeper and more decisive awareness of this dynamic, transcendent love is one that, I believe, fundamental theology is always called both to explore and to nurture. And, as we have seen, the dynamic is not one-dimensional, but comes to be embraced at a variety of levels and in a variety of experiences. At some point one hopes for an *inductive knitting together* of these experiences so that the window to new awareness of God might be realized. The second, vertical level of learning goes deeper to reflect the meaning of life, by which we become able "to distinguish between what is only temporarily distractive or temporarily satisfying, in contrast to that which fulfills or perfects in a more ample sense."⁸⁹ The pathway to this deeper vertical learning of significance and meaning opens up from all the varied scattered events of horizontal learning. Learning in this vertical dimension involves putting things together into an overall picture that gives sense and unity to one's life, rather than an insignificant array of unrelated experiences that would provide only temporary entertainment or amusement. Temporary satisfactions slowly prove themselves incapable of satisfying the thirst for deeper truths, for fulfillment in the significance of one's life, or for the perfection of virtues that would bring a sense of peace in identity before God and others. The second, deeper level of learning remains always available, but we are not always available to it through a more conscious search for deeper meaning. Fundamental theology, then, can use all the paradoxical lessons of experience – both significant and insignificant events; both the sense of peace and its absence; both the strong identity from one's family and culture, along with the restlessness to understand oneself more; the feeling of being loved, yet always needing assurance in that love – to illuminate their convergence in the dynamic love of God.

existence, a mystery of which one may be only vaguely conscious, much less know in any expressed detail. Lonergan makes a distinction between consciousness and knowledge: consciousness reflects one's experience, while knowledge adds to experience both understanding and judgment. Here he refers this to one's fourth level of intentional consciousness, one that "deliberates, makes judgments of values, decides, acts responsible and freely." *Ibid.*, 107. The ground of this fourth level is the gift of God's love. Compare this distinction with Newman's distinction between inference and apprehension in his *Grammar of Assent*.

⁸⁹ McLean, *Religion and Cooperation between Civilizations*, 59-60.

To reach this point at which they actively build a world of meaning and significance from their varied life events, theology must help people synthesize and unify those experiences, so that they look in the direction of the deeper questions of existence. The deeper questions provide the terrain for the highest engagement of the aspirations of the human spirit and bring one to the threshold of openness to God as the transcendent center of life. John Paul II spoke of these deeper questions which bring people back to their religious selves and open them to the possibility of faith. As he explains it, “when *the why of things* is explored in full harmony with the search for the ultimate answer, then human reason reaches its zenith and opens to the religious impulse.”⁹⁰ This religious impulse comes from the bigger questions of existence that always linger in the background of human consciousness. Like a good teacher who uses various pedagogies to reach students who learn in different ways, so theology has to be attentive to the bigger questions of interest and the more dominant path to God for each culture. People spend most of their time and energy with their horizontal relationships of family, friends and acquaintances. The deeper lessons are accessible from these horizontal relationships, but only if two critical elements are being reflected upon in harmony: the why of things and an active search for the ultimate answer. Half measures or temporary insights, which may serve in a pragmatic or functional approach, leave one wanting when considering the weightier matters of purpose and meaning. These inquiries are the fruit of the inductive search for truth and love. Whether one’s path is primarily of participation, manifestation or purpose, only truth and love can provide answers beyond mere functional stopgaps when facing the challenges of the deeper questions.

CONCLUSION

Here we have looked at the internal dialectic, that personal deliberation, into which a person enters as the full gift of existence is recognized and the dilemma or paradox of meaning and purpose is addressed. From the example of the Samaritan woman’s encounter with Jesus, as well as from our analysis of the dynamics of recognition, we see that one of the first gifts of the Holy Spirit to anyone on the journey to faith is the illumination of one’s history, including both blessings and sins. The discovery of the Christ event and the introduction to the dynamics of the paschal mystery open up new possibilities of meaning and deliberation. The affective self becomes more aware as attitudes

⁹⁰ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, # 33. This quote is actually taken from a footnote to that paragraph and came from his General Audience (19 October 1983) 1-2: *Insegnamenti* VI, no. 2 (1983): 814-815.

soften in relation to aspirations of freedom and the possibilities of relationship with God in that under-utilized openness to the infinite transcendent dimension. Once the gift of existence is realized and God is discovered as 'being there,' one's identity awareness shifts: one not only exists ('I am'), but one realizes that one is forever in open relationship with the God of love ('I am in and with God'). But that relationship is not a forced one; we are free to accept and embrace it, or reject and ignore it.

As we have seen, attitude or disposition is shaped by the values that motivate us and by the affective feelings that move and influence us. The quality of these attitudes determine to a large extent the quality of one's religious sensibility, and whether one chooses to acknowledge the illumination of sin and of the lack of authenticity disclosed through any Christ-like encounter that may offer the living water of the Holy Spirit. The impediments or barriers that present themselves to impede conversion to new awareness will either be addressed and dismantled, or neglected and left in place. Each person's journey is radically unique, so the choice made depends, in large degree, on receptive sensibility, a certain critical openness in one's affectivity that heeds the call of love in order to risk moving on in freedom. The world that awaits a person in the journey forward is one of grappling with arduous, deliberative reflection. In the inquiries of that deliberation, personal and cultural history has to be honestly faced, values questioned, resources of tradition and culture tapped, all in order to come to greater awareness of truth, meaning and authenticity. The personal freedom of others has to be totally respected or else they might recoil from the fear or sensed threat of coercion and manipulation.

If one can persevere through the deliberation, one reaches a new awareness of culture, with its many gifts and shortcomings, as a critical context of identity. The dynamic instability of one's finite limitations before the open invitation of love from the infinite transcendence of God moves one, through the paradoxes of life, to a deeper understanding of religious identity and culture. This movement expresses the newly grasped meaning from that discovery of transcendence and the possibility that the personal God of love awaits. The ups and downs, the agonies and ecstasies of this new awareness, and the difficult responsibility of attending to one's own personal dialectic and of contributing to the analogous dialectic at work in one's culture, are an introduction to participation in the paschal mystery of Christ. Ultimately, one shies away in fear or attempts to avoid the suffering from the transforming, costly upheaval that necessarily accompanies the new recognition of these realities, or one chooses to move toward a new life commitment. Saying yes to such a call to deeper

commitment involves saying yes to an invitation to love, to a being-in-love, which must be freely embraced for ongoing transformation.

CHAPTER IV

FREEDOM FOR FAITH: GIFT RECEIVED

Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”

The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ); when he comes he will show us all things.”

Jesus said to her, “I who speak to you am he.”

Just then his disciples came. They marveled that he was talking with a woman, but none said, “What do you wish?” or “Why are you talking with her?”

(John 4: 21-27)

The drama of this encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman now reaches its climax. From recognition, facing the truth of her history, reflecting on her identity – both personal and cultural – and questioning her inherited tradition of religious worship, Jesus leads her to a new level of sensibility for identity rooted in God: worshipping in spirit and truth. She reveals two important qualities of the freedom needed for faith: expectation of a Savior and the humility that neither she nor her culture can ultimately save her. Knowing that her freedom has matured to a point of receptivity, Jesus declares his identity and awaits her assent in faith. The marveling of the disciples reflects what must be theology’s ongoing task to marvel and reflect upon the dynamism at work in the heart of a person ready to give the assent of faith.

McLean does not go into details regarding the theological act of faith, but he does cover topics that are crucial to the assent of faith, including freedom, imagination and hermeneutics. My intention is to

use his insights in order to apply them to the faith dynamic in a manner that he does not explicitly designate. The scriptural passage above poses for us some questions to be addressed:

- In any encounter with Jesus, how do we reach that point of “believing him” so that our response can be one of faith? In other words, for credibility, what are some important elements of the faith dynamism for us to consider?
- How can we reach a point of freedom in truth such that reality can be perceived as an expression of love? Put in a way that refers to this scriptural text, how can we be sure that we worship what we know, in spirit and truth?
- How does our interpretation shift, so that culture not inhibit, but aid us in making a faith commitment?

As can be ascertained from the chapter title our interest now arrives at the dynamism involved in being free or ready to receive the gift, or grace, of faith. That dynamism has many elements that come together and coalesce for an act of faith, which is our response to God’s offer of love in his Son. The response to this revelation, this offer of truth and love, is made only by God’s grace, but the act of will on the part of the subject is made possible through a process of credibility that engages the intellect, the imagination, the sense of identity and freedom. The elements of the process of credibility popularized in theology over the last few decades include sense, meaning and significance.¹ The movement of this process of credibility, then, hinges around what one knows of reality and how one knows reality. But the assent one gives in faith is an assent to love, a response to a love offered. This love presents

¹ See especially Rino Fisichella’s article, “Credibility,” in *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, ed. René Latourelle and Rino Fisichella (New York: Crossroad, 1995), 193-209. Without going into long details to explain the historical development of these concepts I do want to give my own simplified version of what they mean theologically. If something makes sense it coincides with reality. There is an agreement of evidence with the nature of reality as it exists; revelation makes sense when it does not contradict reality as it is, but may even deepen one’s understanding or grasp of reality’s fullness. Meaning pertains to a deep truth or something significant as pertains to existence and life, including relationships and that which is vital to human dignity and flourishing; revelation is filled with meaning for the person, and when recognized and understood, marks these deep truths by opening up reality and highlighting God’s providence and love. Significance indicates the more personal element of sense and meaning ‘for me,’ in my own life and horizon; when God’s revelation makes sense and inspires new horizons of meaning for me, its significance completes my responsible check of credibility.

itself to change one's interpretation of the past, to expand one's horizon in the present and to guarantee one's future salvation.

The challenge to reach a level of freedom to respond in faith to this offer of love, however, is a formidable one. McLean's material will help by giving us some tools we need to explore the movements in this dynamic. We looked at the more objective, ontological aspects of reality that interest us: God, person and culture. We saw how our growth in awareness has to confront this truth of reality, this metaphysics, or philosophy of being. Phenomenology, or the philosophy of consciousness, sheds light on objective reality, as well as reveals our subjective aesthetics, helping us to grow in affective awareness of ourselves. The questioning and evaluation of our existing theories of interpretation call us to a deeper authenticity and a deeper awareness of our culture, which provides the locus for our religious identity. The transcendent reality that becomes apparent in our lives points us to the reality of God.

The task before us now is to investigate the movement beyond objective clarity and subjective aesthetics to open a door to a new sensibility that can dispose one to receptivity for faith. To do so I shall look first at how freedom acts as a lens and a filter for our perception of reality. The discussion on disposition in the last chapter sets the stage for examining freedom's role here. I shall highlight the importance of the imagination's directing the focus of this lens of freedom on reality. McLean speaks of the imagination's directing freedom in this manner, but does not explicitly apply it to the dynamic of reaching a point of assent in faith. While the imagination directs the aim of the lens of freedom, freedom, in turn, focuses the imagination. From freedom's focus of the imagination on reality, I shall outline how it investigates the credibility of God's revelation in a hermeneutics of assent, followed by some brief reflections on the acceptance of faith.² So I divide the chapter into four main sections: 1) the lens of freedom; 2) imagination's crucial role; 3) investigative hermeneutics of assent; and 4) the assent of faith.

THE LENS OF FREEDOM

Once moved by encounters to face reality in all its objective truth, we saw that the recognition of those truths demands that one confront

² As I developed what I called an inquiring hermeneutics of deliberation from McLean's general hermeneutic reflections in the previous chapter, so I intend to do here for what I shall name an investigative hermeneutics of assent. These specifications on various types of hermeneutics for different stages in the dynamic are my own designation, though I shall be developing them from McLean's material.

many aspects about the subjective self. Such deliberative reflection consists of more than a mere internal musing, but includes assessing reality as one knows it through cultural awareness and conscious intentionality. Human freedom is central to this journey.³ From our discussions in the last chapter we saw that, as recognition progresses, so, too, does one's freedom: one moves beyond the simple freedom of choice for immediate satisfaction and acquires a fuller freedom to do as one ought in conformity to society and culture with their laws and norms. The next step in the growth of freedom moves one to a level of ease and natural affinity to the good and the dignity of the human person. This more natural, existential freedom moves one beyond essential or acquired freedom, regulated by law and custom, to a creative zone of responsibility that contributes to perfecting the law through one's actions. As awareness of culture and its influence in one's life grows, especially culture's inherently transcendent dimension, one accepts the responsibility to contribute creatively to its development. This newly discovered responsibility has the effect of moving the person more easily to what McLean calls the more unrestrained, creative freedom of self-determination. This is the level of freedom that most readily prepares one for the assent of faith.

Freedom and the Horizon of Truth

As we have seen, this existential level of freedom does not come easily, but only after much growth and deliberation regarding the truth of one's reality, one's self and one's relationships. As John Paul II noted, "Only in this horizon of truth will people understand their freedom in its fullness and their call to know and love God as the supreme realization of their true self."⁴ This horizon of the truth of reality I highlighted in the second chapter, while the recognition of it

³Back in chapter two, in the section entitled "Freedom, Imagination and *Imago Dei*," I used an extended citation of McLean that demonstrated the centrality of freedom in his thought. The citation began with the statement that "human freedom becomes at once the goal, the creative source, the manifestation, the evaluation, and the arbiter of all that imaginatively we can propose." McLean, *Ways to God*, 333. Though I do not intend to repeat how he sees freedom's completing these various roles, it is why I have chosen to place this discussion of freedom here, before imagination. Freedom provides the person with a lens, but the imagination, as we shall see shortly, has to be employed to focus this lens for a responsible investigative hermeneutics of assent. All of this builds on my previous discussion of McLean's levels of freedom from my section, "Conversion to New Level of Freedom," in the previous chapter.

⁴John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, # 107.

was introduced in the last chapter. As the awareness of truth grows so, too, does freedom, until one's heart is ready for an encounter with God through revelation. A critical part of this recognition of the truth of reality is that the human being cannot satisfy his or her deepest longings. We cannot save ourselves. McLean asserts that this truth has been confirmed repeatedly through history: "Inevitably, reductive humanisms, man-made utopias, projects to control human history in terms however scientific, all enclose and then repress the dynamic openness of human freedom: life turns into death."⁵ The balance that has to be gained from this truth is that one still has to do all in one's power to grow in freedom with the existence and creative gifts one has received. In so doing, however, one must realize that dependence on God does not stifle, but actually enhances the exercise of freedom.

Freedom as Dynamism of the Heart

In the growth of awareness there resides a concurrent growth in freedom, which we have seen moves from a basic freedom of choice to an acquired freedom of self-perfection, and then to an existential freedom of self-determination. McLean maintains that to each level there correspond different operative epistemologies and metaphysics. The shift to the existential level is the most profound and most important for the anticipation of faith. "When the contemporary mind proceeds beyond objective natures to become fully conscious of human subjectivity or of existence precisely as emerging in and through human self-awareness then the most profound changes begin."⁶ This shift alters not simply how subjects view themselves, but how they begin to perceive others. And this pertains not so much to objective knowledge of the mind, nor has it to do with subjective aesthetics, but more to do with respect and affective appreciation. The level of existential freedom, then, taps into the dynamism of the heart, "not in terms of its ability to include the other within itself, but in terms of its ability to reach out to the other and to let it be. Thus in love or benevolence one supports the other person and promotes his or her freedom to be."⁷ The important aspect of this dynamism of the heart is that the person is freed from focusing only on oneself – the introspective, self-consuming side that

⁵ McLean, *Ways to God*, 382.

⁶ McLean, *Religion and Cooperation between Civilizations*, 103.

⁷ McLean, *Knowledge of God and the Discovery of Man*, 99-100. The details of just how this movement to allow the other the freedom to be shall be explored in the pages ahead. The movement coincides with the dynamic of accepting that one's personal identity can only be fully discovered in God, or what I call the freedom for faith.

can sometimes predominate in a subjective emphasis gets put to rest. The desire to try to help people perfect themselves (according to the previous level of acquired freedom) also dissipates. The movement to this different level of freedom happens when law, culture and structures cannot fully satisfy the desire for meaning. The emphasis shifts, instead, towards a new appreciation of the radical gift of one's own existence and that of others. Objective and subjective elements are still recognized, but they are placed in a new perspective: existence and identity, not just one's own, but that of others, are rooted in God. As this newly appreciated existential freedom comes to be embraced, then, the movement towards faith becomes more possible.

As the dynamism of the heart shifts a person's focus outwards, away from mere subjectivity and yet not back towards objective analysis, a new sensibility makes itself felt that allows a person the freedom for a new receptivity. This openness or expanded receptivity becomes critical for the assent of faith to follow. McLean explains this connection between existence, freedom and receptivity as follows:

In this light human freedom is the proper mode in which, as distinctively conscious and responsible, people live their being. Moreover, it is precisely through this freedom that they accept and hence receive the gift of life over death in sin. Existence, in other words, is responding to both creator and savior as that in which, by which, and for which we exist.⁸

The horizon of truth teaches us that we cannot satisfy our own longings or search for meaning and fulfillment. The deeper appreciation of the sense of life as gift and the freedom that follows from this reality of existence expand one's heart and helps to cultivate the sensibility of receptivity. This dynamism of the heart, then, opens the possibility of comprehending that Christ died for all, a notion that ultimately has to be embraced personally by human freedom under the influence of grace.

Influence of Culture on Freedom

Much of what I have said of freedom here so far has sounded mostly personal, which could prove a distraction to fully understanding how freedom acts as a lens for a person to focus on reality. Freedom can

⁸Ibid, 27. By the manner in which McLean closes this passage, we can see that the response can be to any of the causalities – efficient, formal, or final – as a path home to God. Those paths I already introduced in the last chapter as the paths of participation, of manifestation, or of purpose.

never be treated as a generic, standard, one-form-fits-all sort of quality into which the subject finally grows. Growth in freedom is never guaranteed; it has to be continuously cultivated. One's freedom does not develop in isolation, but is always linked to one's community and culture. The nature of personal freedom, then, emerges from what McLean calls "the actual cumulative freedom that has constituted our culture as the pattern in terms of which we see, judge and act."⁹ That pattern forms the shape of the lens which freedom provides, without compromising the contribution of personal identity. Culture acts as the basic lens of freedom while one's personal acts can be compared to the specific level of correction needed for the best vision through this cultural lens. Referring to what I said above regarding the shift in emphasis towards the gift of one's personal identity and the gift of others, culture is there to provide the community and the values for freedom's growth. Similar to McLean, Benedict XVI connects this sense of gift, being, freedom and the development of one's conscience as follows.

Our freedom is profoundly shaped by our own being, and by its limits. No one shapes his own conscience arbitrarily, but we all build our own "I" on the basis of a "self" which is given to us. Not only are other persons outside our control, but each one of us is outside his or her own control. *A person's development is compromised, if he claims to be solely responsible for producing what he becomes.*¹⁰

All this confirms, then, that the gift of our existence, of our development in freedom, of our identity in the world, all depend upon God and the cooperation of others from family, community and culture. Living one's identity in concert with others and embracing one's culture to the fullest do not hinder freedom's development but assist it. The wisdom of the accumulated freedom of those who preceded us contributes to the personal experience of one's own existential freedom. The assent of faith, in turn, calls for the exercise of this freedom and an embrace of one's deepest identity as being loved by God.

McLean never specifically relates all this to the point of an explicit theology of the act of faith since his emphasis is more on preparation for faith from the philosophical viewpoint. But he does

⁹ McLean, *Persons, Peoples and Cultures*, 205.

¹⁰ Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, # 68. The italics are his own. Like McLean's thought, this passage rejects the notion of the solitary, isolated individual's ability to develop fully in freedom.

speaking of the emergence of being by way of a growing awareness of human consciousness that engages intellect, will and imagination. All three of these are crucial for making a free act of faith. The existential freedom needed has to be responsible and creative, since it involves “disposing or shaping one’s being in the very process of its reception.”¹¹ This has theological implications that McLean does not pursue as a philosopher. Grace builds on nature, and the dynamism of freedom and how it enhances our receptivity reflect the action of grace operating in our lives. There results a seamless fabric between the natural receptivity of our existential freedom and the graced receptivity of the influence of the Holy Spirit for the assent of faith. The dynamic within the person merges with the communication or dialogue with the Holy Spirit, a dialogue that correlates to experience in family and culture. As pertains to freedom, the dynamic allows for doing away with dualities we often try to impose on the Holy Spirit operative in culture. Culture, as manifesting the cumulative acts of freedom of a people, reflects that people’s dialogue with the Holy Spirit. That dialogue carries on and gets engaged on the personal level through the intellect, will and imagination in the assent of faith. The important role of the imagination in this new sensibility of receptivity provides the next step for understanding the dynamic.¹²

IMAGINATION’S CRUCIAL ROLE

Philosophers, theologians, poets and artists have all spoken of the importance of the imagination. McLean does also, but he stops short of applying it theologically to the assent of faith, so I shall attempt to make that step as we try to tie together some of our material from previous chapters. Imagination has to embrace the full freedom available to it in order to awaken in the subject a deep sense of reality. Once having done so, the imagination can then apply this deeper awareness of reality creatively to develop the religious sensibility latent in the person’s being. As noted above, freedom acts as a lens for a person’s perspective or observation of reality. Imagination’s role is to direct the focus of that lens for creative understanding and engagement, a vital element for the faith dynamic.

¹¹McLean, *Persons, Peoples and Cultures*, 203.

¹² McLean never explicitly names the term ‘sensibility of receptivity’ – that term is my own. I do not, however, think that the term represents a big jump from his reflections on the necessary freedom to experience reality in its fullest sense. Nor should the term be considered as separate or other than religious sensibility. My effort is to describe the heart of that religious sensibility as receptivity.

Directing the Focus of Affectively Influenced Cognitive Perception

The level of a person's freedom directly relates to the clarity or refinement of the lens through which the world is seen. Numerous things, such as self-perception, the level of freedom we have reached, the culture that formed us, the employment we have, all combine to determine how we perceive the reality around us, our experience and our relationships. Our freedom has to deal with the truth of the objective reality while processing subjective preferences in order to give space for the imagination creatively to explore. McLean describes this task of the imagination as a sort of weaving.

Freely, purposively and creatively, imagination weaves through reality focusing now upon certain dimensions, now reversing its flow, now making new connections and interrelations. In the process reality manifests not only scientific forms and their potential interrelations, but its power to evoke our free response not only of hate and disgust, but especially of love and admiration.¹³

By that weaving, then, the imagination enables reality to elicit or evoke a response on the affective level. This is not a purely subjective, aesthetic response, but a response derived from a sensibility that marks the subject's interaction or communication with reality. The imagination provides us with an expanded cognitive perception by marking, as John Coulson explains it, "the arousal of a state of deep but highly ordered feeling, which is never mere feeling but has as its object a new sense of reality."¹⁴ As a means of cognitive perception it belongs to the faculty of reason, rather than somehow cut off from it. In order to fully grasp imagination's role, we have to be able to expand our consideration of reason and our notion of rationality, a concern of Benedict XVI which I have already noted. Explanations and clear, concise descriptions more often than not come up lacking when mysteries, deeper truths and love

¹³McLean, *Persons, Peoples and Cultures*, 131.

¹⁴John Coulson, *Religion and Imagination* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 6. In this little book that stresses the priority of the imagination for a religious outlook, Coulson compares the theological thought on imagination of Newman with T. S. Eliot's literary thought. He touches on many other literary figures as well, especially Samuel Taylor Coleridge. The premise of his argument is that theology uses (or must use) many of the same tools of literature to communicate clearly its insights. I shall refer to his reflections in the pages ahead since they help to provide a bridge between McLean's philosophy and the theological points I am trying to highlight.

are at stake. Imagination operates so that we might freely relate to nature and surrounding structures in a creative, rather than a required or pre-determined way.¹⁵ The imagination, then, belongs to reason, but in a way that is not limited to empirical, quantifiable realities. Imagination penetrates to the deepest sensibilities, which involve questions of life and death, of meaning and sacrifice. Though not limited by any set patterns, it has the ability to derive new patterns and possibilities based on the sensibilities it perceives as it freely explores reality. In this way it focuses the mind's attention on reality to discover the fuller drama of one's existence and identity as immersed in love.

Creative Integration

One of the fruits of the imagination's focusing of cognitive perception is that creativity is tapped in ways previously unforeseen. Relating to structure in a way that is not necessitated does not mean that structures or patterns are not seen or recognized; it simply means that they no longer control how one engages reality. Reality's fuller potential to communicate its deepest truths slowly emerges, offering new ways of reordering things. It is here that the subject can tap the wisdom of culture to the fullest, without being confined by it, and then creatively contribute to culture's development. McLean describes this relation between the imagination operating in freedom and its effect on culture as follows.

Unrestricted by any *a priori* categories, it (the imagination) can nevertheless integrate necessary dialectical patterns within its own free and, therefore, creative production and scientific universals within its unique concrete harmonies. This is properly creative work. More than merely evaluating all to a set pattern in one's culture, it chooses the values and orders reality accordingly. This is the very constitution of culture itself.¹⁶

¹⁵See McLean's third chapter, "Harmony as a Contemporary Metaphysics of Freedom: Kant and Confucius," in *Tradition, Harmony and Transcendence*, 57-83. In it McLean discusses imagination in Kant's critiques, especially the first and the third (or those on pure reason and aesthetic judgment, respectively). His goal, similar to ours here, is to develop the idea of freely engaged, creative imagination that goes beyond aesthetic sensitivities.

¹⁶McLean, *Tradition, Harmony and Transcendence*, 74. Parentheses are my own.

Imagination does more than just focus and enlarge one's cognitive perception; it reorders perception and integrates one's values into reality in a creative manner. This re-creative power of the imagination is the fuel that powers the engine of one's freedom so that culture can develop, and especially so that it can be transformed by faith.¹⁷ This characteristic is what allows our minds and hearts to respond to a revelation of love in a way that, when the assent of faith is given, the new-found faith can transform not only our powers of perception, but reality itself. In addition to allowing oneself to be transformed, the imagination then takes up the task of working to see that culture can absorb the wisdom of this act of freedom into its own heritage. The reordering that the imagination conducts bases itself on accumulated experience, but also on something more primal: a unifying principle on the part of the intellect that works towards an integrating unity of all reality.¹⁸ The important element to take away from this short discussion, then, is that the imagination, as it focuses one's perception, operates freely from any set patterns or pre-existing structures to reorder creatively how one views reality and integrates its various components into a unified whole.

¹⁷ This re-creative, productive power of the imagination could be compared and contrasted with how others have developed their own sense of the term imagination. As an example, in *A Secular Age* Charles Taylor speaks of "modern social imaginaries" that tend to define our horizon and help to formulate our cultural attitudes. Such broad social imaginaries, I would maintain, reflect the essentialist freedom of acquired perfection, based primarily on natures and laws (McLean's second level of freedom). My use of imagination here is based instead on the existential freedom of self-determination (McLean's third level). It can derive the benefits of the cultural perspective and structures, while also superseding them. Through this creatively responsible application of the imagination, cultures stretch and develop. In this sense the imagination proves capable of opening up constrictive social imaginaries so that new horizons and possibilities can be explored.

¹⁸ Recall what I have said in earlier chapters of developing a more inductive style of thinking and the challenge to theology to serve as a unifying science. I shall have more to say about this integrating task towards unity in the next chapter, where I shall review McLean's thoughts on intellection in his discussion of a global paradigm. What has been said thus far is adequate for our discussion here, as we move to reflect on some of the implications of a freely engaged imagination readying itself for the assent of faith.

Implications

Before moving on from the subject of imagination, I would like to pause to tie some things together that have already been discussed and to draw out some theological implications. All of this will help to assist in understanding the movements within the investigative hermeneutics that make up my next section. Hopefully, the above discussion of imagination has already begun to clarify certain implications for fundamental theology as the dynamic of various elements come together. For faith readiness, the ‘jump’ in sensibility sought has to do more than move beyond the empirically objective and the aesthetically subjective. It also has to push beyond a renewed religious sensibility, even beyond a generous receptivity which could still be interpreted in a sort of utilitarian sense of openness for fulfillment. Faith demands something more: a ‘jump’ in sensibility to the perception of reality as an expression of love.

But I have already mentioned that one of the main driving forces in a person’s search for meaning, in that quest to inquire, resides in the affective realm, a realm often laden with a sort of restless anxiety that moves the person to explore reality more closely. Part of the challenge, then, requires that we leave space for a certain level of anxiety and mixed emotions, even as the subjects come to the realization that all of their experience – the good and the bad, the joyful and the tragic – can come to be perceived as enveloped in an expression of love. Here I want to apply the earlier discussions of McLean’s insights on totemic and mythic thought to the theological task. Both totemic and mythic thought tried to give expression and space for the wide variety of human experience and emotions, while keeping them united under a common umbrella of meaning. Both systems of thought could cope with ambiguous and paradoxical elements which often prove to be insurmountable obstacles in any rationalistic system fixed on clear and direct explanations. The imagination fills out reason; reason appeals to the imagination when clear and precise explanations fall short.

By the manner in which it operates, the imagination can carry the ambiguity and paradox latent in one’s experience of reality. It does this through metaphorical allusion, which has no need to over-explain itself by reducing questions to answers, thus losing the whole scope of meaning hidden in reality’s depths. Metaphors can be used translucently, as simple, explanatory modifiers, or densely, as loaded with meaning and possibilities not easily confined to a specific explanation (such as ‘the-kingdom-of-heaven-is-like’ metaphors in the Gospels). Dense metaphors are more assertions than they are specific interpretations. When they become overly explicit or are utilized as clear modifiers for explanation, dense metaphors tend to lose their broad

depth of meaning. The result is the impoverishment and loss of sensibility, especially that religious sensibility of receptivity so conducive to the assent of faith.¹⁹ Metaphors open the imagination to that fertile ground of meaning which is not fantasy but refers to reality, even though it may not present itself with the clear empirical data of fact. Like symbols, we need metaphors to communicate more to us than what can be explained or analyzed. By this very manner of communication, the sacraments retain their powerful effect.

Understanding the imagination's scope, then, proves a critical element in what I am presenting as fundamental theology's role of midwifery for people's and cultures' developing a freedom for faith. My central point here is that the imagination directs the focus of one's freedom, and that freedom reflects the quality of one's affectively influenced cognitive perception. The felt anxiety that we carry in life has to be somehow adequately digested in order to be credible to our sensibility. In an encounter with Christ, our understanding of this latent anxiety becomes transformed as we become aware of the eschatological tension in our existence: that we are destined for great things, though they seem out of reach; that we are driven to live in full knowledge of our fulfillment now, though it lies in the future. Combining McLean's philosophical insights with Coulson's more literary reflections, the metaphors of myth and the density of meaning, unity and interpretation of the totem can carry these tensions, paradoxes and ambiguities. To carry successfully all such complexities while interpreting all of life and reality as an expression of love requires something more than a totem, myth, symbol or metaphor can give in isolation. Their power comes from their creative integration based on a common referent, which, in the case of faith, is God – or even better, is the discovery of a loving relationship with God through an encounter with Christ. But to discover this relationship as the common referent of one's reality, the imagination needs to be employed to direct freedom's focus creatively, thus allowing for that sensibility that leaves one receptive to meaning. The encounter sets one on a journey of freedom towards the faith,

¹⁹ See Coulson's discussion of the importance of metaphorical thinking for the act of faith in *Religion and Imagination*, 15-33. I am referring here especially to his assertion that the dense metaphor's form is essentially poetic: "...when it is held that there is always a better way of saying what the poet says, when his metaphors are held to be inferior to clear and distinct conceptions, or when reason is elevated above feeling, we are close to the dissociation of sensibility." Coulson, *Religion and Imagination*, 24. Interestingly, Coulson speaks of the loss of dense metaphor near the end of the 17th century, as the demand intensified for everything to be explicit, deliberate and clear.

passing through recognition and employing the imagination for a hermeneutic investigation that seeks credibility for the manifestation of love.

INVESTIGATIVE HERMENEUTICS OF ASSENT

Having introduced McLean's perspective related to the importance of freedom and the imagination for advancing along the path of faith, I now want to highlight the internal dialectic that goes on within a person in order to make a responsible assent. As was the case with the inquiring hermeneutics of deliberation in the last chapter, I will employ McLean's insights to this next stage in the dynamic: the investigation necessary to validate experiences of reality and those new constructions that are the fruit of the imagination's work. The investigation for responsible assent is critical, because the faith calls us to "worship the Father in spirit and truth" (Jn 4:23). The truth has to be verified by investigation that confirms the living reality of God. And since the assent is essentially a response to an invitation of love, the verification has to confirm the jump in sensibility described above in order to perceive reality as an expression of love. This investigative hermeneutics, then, has to be able to achieve an insight expressed in Benedict XVI's encyclical, *Charity in Truth*: "Truth is the light that gives meaning and value to charity. That light is both the light of reason and the light of faith, through which the intellect attains to the natural and supernatural truth of charity: it grasps its meaning as gift, acceptance, and communion."²⁰ How one encounters the truth of the visible reality of creation and the less tangible reality of God guides both faith and reason. The fruit of any successful hermeneutics of assent must confirm this truth by finding it credible. This prepares the person to receive the infusion of grace, raising one from the natural state of creation to the supernatural state of communion with God.

The inquiry that made up the deliberation of the subject coming to a recognition or new awareness of reality has to deepen at this stage of the dynamic in order to verify or confirm one's relationship with the reality of God. The credibility sought at this stage has to reach to the point of assent to faith, rather than the questioning and doubt that

²⁰ Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, # 3. In an earlier writing before he became Pope, Ratzinger expressed the task less in terms of explicit charity and more in the sense that "We need a readiness to seek the truth and also the humility to let ourselves be found." Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, 159. The discipline for the search ultimately leads to being found and embraced by God. The investigation to be discussed here represents the responsible search, while the final assent in faith is accepting that graced embrace of God's love.

accompany simple inquiry. In the scientific sphere one seeks to confirm theories by experimentation that can prove their validity. Similarly, in the sphere of credibility of revelation for the faith one seeks to confirm one's imaginative assents by investigation that can verify or authenticate their truth. My intention here is to introduce a theological hermeneutic specifically to do this, applying the tools in McLean's more general hermeneutics. Part of the challenge calls for establishing a hermeneutic that can take the free work of the imagination and discipline it to remain both rational and fully human. The hermeneutics, then, has to stretch reason to a new horizon. To quote Benedict XVI again, reasoning "becomes human only if it is capable of directing the will along the right path, and it is capable of this only if it looks beyond itself."²¹ To put all of this as succinctly as possible, the investigative hermeneutics has to be able to take account of the full human subject who freely engages the imagination to expand his or her own horizon of reason in response to revelation. I shall cover this in three sections which could be said to correspond to those three elements of credibility introduced earlier: sense, meaning, and significance. But, since I am presenting these in an investigative hermeneutics, I name them differently as follows: a) respecting a new sensibility; for b) discovery of meaning; and c) hearing the invitation for personal assent.

Respecting a New Sensibility

As one's awareness or recognition of the depth of reality grows, the accompanying sensibility for the depth of life's mysteries grows as well. This places a challenge on one's theory of interpretation and the motivations of response. This growing sensibility has to be respected. Present within a cultural matrix, yet not confined to it, this sensibility goes beyond cut and dry, or black and white mechanisms of interpretation that can operate easily under more empirical circumstances. It has to allow space for anxiety, ambiguity, and paradox – states that often accompany the deeper mysteries as they become more

²¹ Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, # 23. He refers this to the concept of freedom, which fits nicely into our own reflection, when in the same place he maintains that "where freedom is concerned, we must remember that human freedom always requires a convergence of various freedoms." Ibid. Again, in an earlier work he touched on this theme of pushing reason to expand, when he wrote of how Christianity combines enlightenment and religion "...in a structure in which each has repeatedly to make the other purer and more profound. This desire for rationality, which still constantly pushes reason to go beyond itself in a way it would rather avoid, is part of the essence of Christianity." Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, 83.

apparent. Through respecting a person or culture's sensibility, then, theology acknowledges and honors the restlessness and struggles that accompany the exploration of life's mysteries. As mentioned earlier, regarding deep metaphors which can hold the full content of mystery, the subject who grows in this new sensibility would turn away from any attempt to impoverish the meaning held by such metaphors by overly explaining or trivializing them. For at the root of the subject's shifting world of interpretation inside the culture resides that growing perception of reality as an expression of love, a new sensibility that cannot be easily fooled or over-rationalized. I want to explore this sensibility for the religious imagination in three areas: hermeneutic direction, cultural context, and diachronic tradition.

Hermeneutic Direction. McLean sees the developments in hermeneutics, especially those like his own that take the importance of culture fully into account, to be suited to respecting this new sensibility. An investigative hermeneutics for theology has to leave room for what McLean designates as those properly human concerns of truth, beauty and love. These concerns form the foundation of the sensibility that has to be respected. To accomplish this, the subjects' internal hermeneutics have to go beyond the objectivism of the empirical, "while avoiding a subjectivism which would leave people so self-enclosed as no longer to be open to the work of the divine in their lives."²² The task here is to grasp how respecting the growing spiritual sensibility can honor the subject's freedom and imagination, while directing the deeper human concerns of truth, beauty and love towards openness to God.

This marks another one of those points where we are able to pull some previously mentioned insights together in order to shape the argument for what theology can do to enhance its mechanisms for reflecting on the dynamics of conversion to the faith. To do this, I want to quote McLean again at some length, after which I shall attempt to simplify his words for respecting sensibility as a first investigation in the check of credibility. The context of the following quote comes from McLean's discussion of Piaget's theory of development that gave priority to the cognitive dimension of the person. McLean believes the emphasis needs to shift away from this purely cognitive approach, while moving towards a more integrated equilibrium that can take human affectivity fully into account.

From this point of view the higher cognitive capability becomes the effect rather than the cause in the process of development. This centers on affectivity as understood as

²² McLean, *Hermeneutics, Faith and Relations between Cultures*, 14.

the tendency toward a good (the equilibrium in general and specific objects in particular) or toward a goal that is absent. Affectivity, in turn, is set within the pattern of existential life activities in which we are engaged. Thus the pattern of development can be traced, and perhaps more effectively, through affective concerns than through cognitive capabilities. But affectivity directs attention further to types of action that are not merely of mind or will, but of the full human person, mind and body. Such integrally human actions are the root of the more partial mental processes.²³

McLean's intention, then, is not to replace cognitive capability with affective sensibility, but simply to reorder how one arranges these in the actual pattern of human development. If taken seriously, it opens the door for theology to employ reason in a manner that would allow it to go "beyond itself," as mentioned above in the challenge of Benedict XVI. Life, daily existence and activity are the starting point. In life, the full person engages reality in a naturally integrated way, guided especially by this seeking for the good or movement towards a goal. The natural movements of human affectivity take place within these activities of daily life – within a family's patterns or within a particular culture's patterns – in response to the equilibrium (or its disruption) of this affective tending. The cognitive capabilities develop from this affective engagement in daily life and its patterns first, not the other way around. As I discussed earlier, the imagination, freely and creatively employed, can engage reality and the experiences of existential life without being confined to cognitively developed patterns or structures. Respecting this sensibility, then, implies honoring the person or culture as more than a rationally, cognitive creature that analyzes reality and employs ingenuity to use materials available. This is why in the second chapter we discussed in such detail the human being's constitution as body, soul, and spirit, possessing intellect and will: an integrated unity in the plurality of its dimensions (physical, psychological, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual, etc.). And human reason, in order to go "beyond itself," has to extend beyond cognitive considerations to the origin of full human sensibility in existential being.

All of this can have the result of shifting theology away from mere analysis and adherence to structures or systems back to the data of religious experience, back to a greater emphasis on its roots of attentive listening to encounters of peoples with the living God. This shift may initially look to place theology in a more fragile or vulnerable position,

²³ McLean, *Ways to God*, 134.

since its claim to understanding would rest more on the unusual surprises offered by God and less on the speculative grasp of defensible assertions. McLean describes such a shift, not specifically for theology as I have here, but for understanding in general. He calls it a reversal of the direction of hermeneutics: the character of understanding moves away from objective analysis towards “the practical engagement of one’s being in the realization of its capacity for life.”²⁴ Such a reversal of hermeneutics for theology is what I want to offer here in order to respect the latent sensibility within a person of the wider perception of reality as an expression of love. The effects of such a shift would actually strengthen theology’s impact. A subject on this journey to faith has to allow the imagination to reorder old structures and patterns as required in order to take in this new perception. The reordering also protects the sensibility by allowing for the mysterious mix of the good and the bad, the comfort and the disillusionment, the ambiguity and paradox, found in life experience. Respecting this broader sensibility demands this shift of hermeneutics back to existential life, so that the folly of the cross can be understood to embrace the totality of life’s drama.

Cultural Context. An important element that has to be investigated for understanding one’s operative sensibility and the possibilities for growing in religious sensibility is culture. The values and virtues of a culture provide an integrated vision of life in which one can grow, or as McLean says, “a way of cultivating our freedom personally and socially.”²⁵ This integrated vision of the culture is based on freedom’s informing our imagination. Culture and our other life experiences, then, have to be investigated to discern and confirm the validity of any new sensibility. Regarding revelation and other experiences moving us to faith, we have to be sure that the creative work of our imagination would not just be applied to that to which we were somehow predisposed.²⁶ The reality of one’s imaginative or pre-conceptual assents has to be confirmed to be true, so that what one comes to believe is not just some internal prejudice of upbringing or mindset. Culture provides the context for this investigation. The culture and its tradition are used implicitly by people to check the quality and validity of their assents. McLean maintains that whenever people are not

²⁴ McLean, *Hermeneutics, Faith and Relations between Cultures*, 32. In the same place he goes on to say, “It (hermeneutics) is no longer a search for necessary and objective, repeatable and universal truths for all. Rather, it is the conscious emergence of being in time.” *Ibid.*, 32.

²⁵ McLean, *Religion and Cooperation between Civilizations*, 68.

²⁶ See Coulson’s *Religion and Imagination*, 55.

able to engage freely in open discussion, then any conclusions drawn are “open to the charge of being not reasonable, but the effect of either external social manipulation or of some form of internal self-delusion.”²⁷ This leaves one in a sort of quandary to consider whether culture would be more gift or curse when it comes to validating any experience of revelation. If culture, however, provides us with an integrated vision of life which influences our imagination’s creativity by shaping its strengths and weaknesses, thus leaving it open to social manipulation or self-delusion, how can culture also provide us with a reliable context for investigating what might be called the imagination’s vulnerabilities or prejudices? This ambiguity of culture, then, has to be addressed.

Any context has these challenges, but the work of the imagination can still be free of ‘fooling itself’ from assents not in tune with reality. In consonance with McLean, I want to promote the use of culture for theology in this hermeneutic effort. Just as in the last chapter I presented it as the key to inquiry, here culture provides the reliable foundation for the necessary investigation that accompanies assent. Reason, as Ratzinger has noted, is never fully autonomous but exists within an historical context. “Any historical context, as we see, distorts the vision of reason; that is why reason needs the help of history in order to overcome these historical limitations.”²⁸ Culture can distort reason in its historically conditioned state with misplaced values. Culture, however, not only sets the context but also offers the aid of history to overcome any distortions in any particular time. This culture does by providing the tools for a critical distance, thus acting as a sort of protection for the freedom of the subject. This critical distancing is necessary for ensuring an authentic sensibility. As I did in the last chapter, let me present McLean’s two main components of this critical distance, but expressed differently here.

It must include an analysis of the actual historical social structures by the social sciences as a requirement for liberation from internal determination by dependence upon unjust interests. In addition, critical distance has also an existential dimension opened by the temporality of being and man’s projection toward the historical future. Together these make possible the liberation of the subject himself.²⁹

²⁷ McLean, *Hermeneutics, Tradition and Contemporary Change*, 28.

²⁸ Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, 136.

²⁹ McLean, *Hermeneutics, Tradition and Contemporary Change*, 46-47. McLean recognizes that cultures are not fully redeemed or where they need to be in their expression of values for full freedom at any point in time. Like a

So we can see that both the historical analysis of the social sciences and the existential projection of life into the future relate to or depend upon culture. The social sciences developed by the culture are developed over time to ensure unjust interests cannot take over and slowly extinguish a people's freedom. Culture also reflects the temporality of history, taking time seriously. It does this by linking the present moment to past wisdom and by orienting a people's focus to the future. Tradition is that element of culture that serves this purpose, not so much in its synchronic sense which we discussed earlier, but in its diachronic sense, which will be the subject of the next section. As I mentioned above, the growing religious sensibility necessary for a subject's credibility check on the road of faith has to respect the full dimensions of the human person, especially the affective, so that reason can expand beyond itself. It does this especially by taking the full influence of culture into account as the person's context. Culture in McLean's positive and harmonizing sense not only establishes the foundation for one's investigative research, it also provides the tools necessary to avoid either manipulation or delusion. Culture, then, can protect the growing religious sensibility, but only with the understanding of the richness of tradition in its diachronic form.

Diachronic Tradition. One of the great challenges to protecting a religious sensibility involves what McLean would call broadening the idea of tradition beyond the more static, synchronic form to the more dynamic, diachronic understanding. This challenge pertains to people on both ends of the theological spectrum: the traditionalists who would prefer to stay fixed to a tradition of a specific time, and the progressives who would prefer to abandon all tradition as if it were no longer applicable to the present day, much less the future. Both these groups hold to positions that cannot cultivate a sensibility to hold up to rigorous investigation. The way of sensibility requires the middle course where the cumulative meaning and value of tradition can be embraced, but also applied for its "particular meaning for each new time, receiving from the

person on the spiritual journey, a culture struggles to come to its fullest expression in freedom as intended by God. McLean takes an extremely positive view of culture, however, even while recognizing its limitations at any one point in time. Though he does not specifically explain it this way, I would say that this can be compared to sin in a human person being equated with, in good Thomistic tradition, a lack or an absence of being. Where culture is distorted or undeveloped, it is an indication of its lack of being – the absence of culture – rather than something of the culture itself. Similarly, I am speaking here of culture and tradition in their positive sense, rather than their limited, distorted, and incomplete sense.

past, ordering the present and constructing the future.”³⁰ This demands not only taking time seriously, but also what McLean names as the insight “of recognizing that reality includes authentic novelty.”³¹ A diachronic understanding of tradition respects this newness that reality offers each new generation, expecting it to tap into the wisdom brought forward by tradition, while creatively developing that newness offered by reality in the present, in order to orient the community towards the future.

The values and virtues that knit together a people into an identifiable culture are not static entities to which each new generation must adhere. They are, rather, what McLean calls living realities transcending any time and inspiring the living action of a people.³² The diachronic sense of tradition involves the dynamic sense of people’s renewing their values and virtues and making adaptations to them. McLean is careful to point out that this is not the same as seeing ahead of time all that is necessary or making a plan that has to be adhered to as to some formula. Such an approach would end up stifling creativity and suppressing freedom. All of this would likewise apply to the Church in how she cherishes, lives, and creatively develops the tradition she receives. But my concern here involves especially how this diachronic sense of tradition, blending with the synchronic sense, honors the freedom and religious sensibility of a person or culture on the road to faith. Any misunderstanding that the tradition were merely a straightjacket of rules to which one would be expected to adhere, rather than a covenantal relationship of love to be lived, would result in extinguishing the full sense of freedom. In that case the subject’s investigation of credibility would become jeopardized.

Before proceeding to the second element of the investigative hermeneutics of assent, I would like to make a short summary of fundamental theology’s need to respect this new sensibility informing a subject’s response to revelation. We saw that the full person has to be considered – the person’s full unity in the plurality of its dimensions – in order to respect the growing sensibility. An objectively empirical

³⁰ McLean, *Ways to God*, 361. He has an extended discussion of the active sense of diachronic tradition in these pages.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² See McLean’s discussion of this in *Religion and Cooperation between Civilizations*, 55-57, where he specifically addresses the virtue of justice as its sense changes with time. The sense of other virtues similarly develops and changes over time as the community attempts to shape the future from its present-day challenges. As to the suppression of freedom, he offers the example of the naïveté of dialectical utopias and prenuptial agreements that outline the terms of the end of a covenant before it has been entered.

form of analysis would not suffice; the full affective reality of the person has to be respected. I mentioned how this implies a change in direction away from the objective towards the person's practical engagement with reality in daily life. The hermeneutic has to be able to protect a sensibility that can hold the existential tensions of life without trivializing them: the ecstatic and the tragic, the joyful and the sorrowful. As such, the paradox and ambiguity of existence are respected and become part of the relational mystery of the faith invitation. Culture provides the context for this drama, since it expresses the Holy Spirit's ongoing dialogue with a people. It provides a starting point of wisdom and understanding, but also the tools for expanding an existing horizon through creative contribution to a living, dynamic tradition. Culture and tradition, then, make up the environment in which the subject applies his or her imagination to live and develop inherited values and virtues for a living response to the invitation of love offered in revelation. When that invitation resonates with one's sensibility, the subject discovers new meaning.

Discovery of Meaning

In this section on the second primary component for a hermeneutics of assent, I want to focus on theology's task to highlight and develop inroads for people's discovery of meaning. All that we said above regarding the importance of respecting the religious sensibility was necessary to ensure that the subject remain open to listening and responding to revelation as meaningful. Again, McLean offers important tools to aid theology in a subject's check of credibility for assenting to such revelation in faith. I shall divide the discussion here into three steps: 1) the Providence of God; 2) meaning and community; and 3) harmonious reference.

The Providence of God. Meaning ultimately unfolds from its connection with the mystery of God. The context of a subject's experience, one's community, culture, nation and time, may or may not have many overt references to God. The subject who reaches the stage of an investigation for assent, however, addresses this reality of God as both meaningful and personally significant. This may require a shift of the subject's dimension of experience beyond that of the merely horizontal. It is this step to the vertical transcendent that is so necessary to free oneself from an inherently relativistic thinking, a danger quite common today as already mentioned earlier. McLean notes that, for a subject's theory of interpretation to develop adequately, it must open "to a vertical vision of what is highest and deepest in life, most real in itself and most lasting through time. This is the eternal or divine in both being

and value, which is the key to mobilizing and orienting the life of society in time.”³³ This vertical vision in hermeneutics can be likened to taking into account the reality of grace acting on a subject; it allows the subject to explore transcendent truths and to connect these to the reality of God. To refer again to something we discussed above, the vertical vision allows reason to go beyond itself to enter the realm of mystery, while also keeping one grounded to existential being and values. This mystery moves one to mobilize and orient one’s life, and also opens one to a wider horizon where identity need not be restricted by the burden of particular circumstances. The desire for meaning pushes one to open to this vertical dimension, so as to understand one’s identity in the context of meaning. As Ratzinger once noted, the mystery of meaning is ultimately connected to the mystery of the Incarnation: “only the God who himself became finite in order to tear open our finitude and lead us out into the wide spaces of his infinity, only he corresponds to the question of our being.”³⁴ Personal identities and meanings can truly only find themselves in this encounter with the Word made flesh. A subject’s investigation of credibility ultimately remains dissatisfied until it realizes that God personally shares in his or her own world of meaning and concerns.

The question remains, however, as to how this dynamic of receiving revelation unfolds in the consciousness of the subject. Here I want to knit together revelation and a few elements I have already introduced in order to link them to the discovery of God’s speaking. Like the parables in the Gospels, metaphors, especially those that can carry the ambiguity and paradox of reality, cannot be easily explained; they represent worlds of meaning. But even when these meaning-laden metaphors are mixed together, they can still make sense and complement one another easily when they have an underlying common referent. With the diachronic understanding of tradition, we have seen that those in the culture not only receive the wisdom that is the treasure

³³ McLean, *Ways to God*, 347. See also his discussion in *Religion and Culture*, 122-123. Here I would like to allude to John Paul II’s call to develop a hermeneutics “open to the appeal of metaphysics.” John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, # 95. McLean offers us such a hermeneutics. In the paragraph cited, John Paul II’s concern is that the hermeneutics be able to reach beyond “the historical and contingent circumstances in which the texts developed to the truth which they express, a truth transcending those circumstances.” The texts to which he referred are those of sacred scripture. My intention is to treat a subject coming to belief, whether person or culture, in an analogous manner. Personal or cultural narratives can in a sense represent living texts of sacred potentiality. As subjects, they are called to discover the transcendent truth they are meant to express, giving them rest in their identity.

³⁴ Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, 137.

of the cumulative experience, but also contribute to the understanding and living of virtues in the present to help shape the future. In his discussion of sacred scripture and tradition in the Church as sources of revelation, Avery Dulles notes that these “transmit the message less by explicit statement than by forming the imagination and affectivity of the Christian community. The biblical and traditional symbols impart a tacit, lived awareness of the God who has manifested himself of old.”³⁵ In a similar manner, a culture communicates its religious heritage and the experience of God acting in its history not so much through explicit articulations, but through the manner by which it forms the imagination and affectivity of its members. A culture’s relationship with God is communicated by affectivity and imagination through symbols and metaphors, narratives and music. But the true depth of meaning of these cultural elements is only fully disclosed if that relationship, that journey with God, can be grasped as their common referent. Herein lies the challenge of inculturation. Instead of stripping culture of its religious foundations and limiting it to a human enterprise, McLean emphasizes the importance “to search out the Providence of God in history in order to protect it from perversion for merely human ends and to cooperate instead in the realization of its plan for the transformation of mankind after the image of God, Creator and goal of human life.”³⁶ So, hidden away in the symbolism, stories, etc., of a culture resides a dialogue of the people with the Holy Spirit. The Providence of God active in a people’s history is passed on, not so much through explicit words or statements, but in the hidden zones of the imagination and affectivity of the people. For a subject’s thirst for meaning to be satisfied, that hidden zone has to be touched or stimulated through symbols or metaphors that awaken this hidden dialogue with God.

Meaning and Community. Though each person conducts his or her own search for meaning and fulfillment, that search is undertaken within a community that has helped to develop and form the culture as the context of meaning. As such, the community also forms the vehicle

³⁵ Dulles, *The Craft of Theology*, 23-24. Theology uses analogy to speak about God and the things of God; analogy is especially useful for explanation and argument, and thus will always remain an important theological tool. My intention in bringing up metaphor again relates especially to theology’s role as midwife to cultures. Metaphors hold meaning and present it so that subjects can reflect upon it and ponder it in their hearts. This dynamic of pondering best describes how revelation unfolds in a subject’s consciousness. My aim is to focus theological attention especially in this unfolding of consciousness by creative use of metaphor and literary imagination, rather than through analogy, proof and logical argument.

³⁶ McLean, *Religion and Cooperation between Civilizations*, 124-125.

or sounding board for its members' search. The community acts as an integral part of one's hermeneutic investigation and assists in the ongoing discernment of meaning. The community provides the caretaking of the tradition. Tradition, as we have seen, is not something to which we have to conform, but a treasure we receive, "a wealth of vision which is a resource for the future we are now building."³⁷ That wealth of vision taps the community's relationship with God, a relationship that takes the form of an ongoing search for meaning. It is within the experience of the community that this relationship gets expressed, often unknowingly unfolding as a dialogue with the Holy Spirit.

In the ongoing discernment of this dialogue the community has some important challenges to face in its hermeneutics. McLean believes these challenges center around two relationships in particular: "the perennial transcendent horizon of *faith* vis-à-vis the changing this-worldly horizon of *history*, and the interaction between the search for scientific and religious truth and the realization of the *human good*."³⁸ We have looked at the importance of the vertical faith horizon blending with the horizontal historical horizon, but now need to look more closely at the relation of the search for truth and the realization of goodness. These should not be considered as dualities, as if the horizontal and vertical horizons somehow compete, or truth and goodness somehow act contrary to one another. Both relationships should be understood as complementary disclosures of God's love affair with us. The transcendental and historical horizons complement each other, as do the search for truth and the realization of the good. The challenge resides especially in the community's ability to balance these relationships so that a valid discernment might ensue. That balancing act has points, gaps or openings where grace and faith bring continuity, thereby illuminating God's presence. These graced points of continuity offer the most fertile zones of meaning and, therefore, warrant theology's attention.

A hermeneutic investigation finds these graced points and recognizes the unfolding of meaning especially in the events of daily life. Seen in isolation most events appear trivial or unimportant, lacking

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 58.

³⁸ McLean, *Hermeneutics, Faith and Relations between Cultures*, 8. McLean goes on to explain the burden placed on the community, especially the religious community (*umma*). The activity or Providence of God has to be discerned in the activity and growth of the community. The presence of God ultimately has to be seen as shining through people's words and acts. Any investigative hermeneutics has to be able to mind this gap that only faith can fill. See especially McLean's discussion on page 10.

any significant meaning. But when taken together in the light of the ongoing life of the community and in the cumulative picture they construct, meaning shines forth. Daily life contains the rudimentary causes and effects of the realization of the good. Daily life also reveals the quality of one's commitment to search for scientific and religious truth. The blend of these together serves to develop the moral pulse of the subject and the community. As McLean describes it, "Moral consciousness must seek to understand divine Providence, not as an ideal to be known and then applied, but rather through discerning the good, that is, the love of God for concrete persons in their relations with others in the *umma*."³⁹ God's love is the primary element of discernment and hermeneutic investigation. The, at times, nonsensical demands of love might seem to threaten one's sensibility and erase any image of meaning taking shape. The varied and often chaotic expressions of love are the ultimate measure of meaning as it unfolds in the messy conditions of human life. The activities and grind of daily life influence the development of the community's guiding principles and form the community's character. Love measures the fruit of the community's success in discerning meaning in daily life; it is also the unifying force in the relations of faith and history, truth and the realization of human good.

Communities vary in how they apply their reason and concentrate their experience to discover meaning. A community's culture tends to reflect the depth of the religious context, and so influences the tendencies of the application of reason. Communities, then, do not always have love as their focus. McLean notes that more individualistic cultures tend to stress the virtue of justice, which often bases itself on truth to the diminishment of the realization of human good. Justice is not, in itself, a negative, but if it is emphasized to the detriment of charity it can have the result of a rather strict or harsh interpretation of

³⁹ Ibid, 53. The *umma* is to be understood as the believing community. McLean goes on here to discuss how the community has to discern and adapt its own abstract ideals in the unfolding of their meaning through time. He insists that "This is not an abandonment of absolutes, but a recognition of the human condition and of the way in which it adds to, and enriches, our understanding of the principles for concrete human life." Ibid., 54. In another place, McLean writes that "rather than turning away from daily life in order to contemplate abstract and disembodied ideas, the place to discover meaning is in life as lived in the family and in the progressively wider social circles of civil society into which one enters." McLean, *Persons, Peoples and Cultures*, 153. All of this fits well with what we already discussed regarding diachronic tradition, but it also reflects McLean's concern that philosophy may have strayed too far from its richest ground for reflection: the daily life and struggle of the community.

events. This can make the discernment of meaning in daily life, though not impossible, quite challenging. “However, where a religious sense is present and the family and community rather than only the self is the focus, the virtue of love comes forward and becomes the form of all the virtues.”⁴⁰ McLean’s insight here affords us an important insight into a community and its discovery of meaning. When love operates as the form of the other virtues, justice can be tempered by love so that mercy has room to enter. This entry of mercy into the life and experience of a community is what ultimately moves it toward a greater appreciation of meaning and its transcendent quality. The intermingling of truth, justice, mercy and love creates ambiguities and paradoxes that can initially frustrate even the most well-intentioned, but holding those tensions helps to clarify the community’s values and to tame its spirit with a healthy humility. Communities struggle to sift through the pull of the values and their apparent oppositions to one another, but the fruit of the work is the discovery of meaning and a freedom from self-absorption.

This process of discovery and growth in freedom, however, can be painful and involve much suffering. In *Spe Salvi* Benedict XVI writes that “even the ‘yes’ to love is a source of suffering, because love always requires expropriations of my ‘I’, in which I allow myself to be pruned and wounded. Love simply cannot exist without this painful renunciation of myself, for otherwise it becomes pure selfishness and thereby ceases to be love.”⁴¹ The fullest depth of meaning can open up in the experience of this suffering love, and every culture carries some sense of how to endure it and even prosper from it. It is this understanding of a self-giving, suffering love that gives the folly of the cross a foothold in the midst of every culture. Anger, bitterness and revenge may be tolerated for a while by a culture because of difficult circumstances, but every community knows deep down that these do not lead to life and meaning. Theology’s task, then, is to assist the culture in finding its way back to its life-giving values and in sublimating its experiences through a suffering love.

Harmonious Reference. In this last section on the discovery of meaning in an investigative hermeneutics of assent I want to make apparent a certain dynamic characteristic of meaning that will prove helpful to theology for any discernment regarding culture. Meaning resonates with the tastes or sentiments of a subject to create a harmony from what might first appear to be opposing elements. This resonant harmony discloses the object of meaning as a common reference from these disparate elements. The deepest meanings, however, only come to

⁴⁰ McLean, *Knowledge of God and the Discovery of Man*, 34.

⁴¹ Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, # 38.

be understood when the self-centeredness alluded to above can be set aside in the subject's investigation. Life and being take on a much grander scale than the limited horizon of the self. As McLean notes, "The good is not only what contributes to my perfection: I am not the center of meaning. Rather, being is received and, hence, is essentially outgoing."⁴² Once we realize that meaning is not ours to control, that the center and source of meaning is beyond the self, but reaches us as a fruit of our receptivity of the fullness of reality, then new harmonies become apparent. It is here that what to the intellect might first have seemed the nonsensical ambiguities and tensions of reality can be resolved into harmony by the imagination through an encounter with love. Cultures reflect these tensions and conflicts, but they also carry the means and wisdom to harmonize them. Referring to these tensions of reality Cardinal Ratzinger made a similar observation: "Oppositions are complementary; they constitute the richness of reality.... Oppositions refer us to one another; each needs the other; and only between them do they produce the harmony of the whole."⁴³ We could say, then, that cultures manifest a certain inner harmony because of the challenges, oppositions, conflicts and tensions they have had to face, and which they may still carry. McLean would maintain that these work to help establish the identity of the community, but I would go further to say that these challenges and tensions also reveal how the Holy Spirit works in the community to establish its worlds of meaning. The Holy Spirit, then, works to shape a people's identity through their experience of facing challenges and conflicts. By attending to this action of the Holy Spirit, theology can assist cultures in transforming even their most difficult tensions and conflicts into instruments of harmony, rather than leaving them as sources of division.

Within a culture, the work of the Holy Spirit unfolds the depth of truth slowly, so that these oppositions and tensions not destroy any sense of meaning. The Spirit allows us the space and the time to discern or find the interrelated harmony that reveals the common referent of love. Rather than referring to the Holy Spirit as I have here, McLean understandably takes the philosophical approach to watch for being revealing itself and calls for the need of a new openness to stay attentive to new disclosures of truth and love. Because life and being are rooted in God's being that transcends time, any particular human insight remains relative, "not in the sense that scientific knowledge is invalid, but rather in the sense that the mind must ever be open to new

⁴² McLean, *Persons, Peoples and Cultures*, 195.

⁴³ Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, 48.

applications in the ongoing flow of tradition.”⁴⁴ Through their traditions cultures contain complex webs of meaning that connect them to a common standard of truth. Cardinal Ratzinger referred to this when he noted that this truth or standard guides each culture to its heart, since “each exists ultimately as an expectation of truth.”⁴⁵ As an expectation of truth, a culture is able to hold the internal tensions and conflicts, test them, and give them time to guide people back to God as their common reference. Ratzinger goes on to say, “only when this happens can things in opposition become complementary, because they can all, each in its own way, unfold and be fruitful in relation to that central standard.”⁴⁶ Both McLean and Ratzinger are referring to what I would say is the same phenomenon. A community’s or a culture’s historical dialogue with the Holy Spirit manifests itself in traditions, symbols and narratives. This relationship with the Holy Spirit provides the link or common reference to truth and love, as these shape the community’s response. People often have an inherent trust of their culture and traditions, because they know that these protect their world of meaning and help to resolve their conflicts and oppositions into complementary pointers to a deeper truth.⁴⁷ This is also why people will seek to defend their culture with great vehemence if they feel it is under threat. The loss of their culture would separate them from their most reliable resource of meaning and from their reliable link to transcendent truth, that hidden dialogue they keep with the Holy Spirit.

There remains one last thing to mention regarding this harmonious link or reference to the divine, and that takes us back again to symbolism and metaphor. By the manner in which symbols and metaphors link us to worlds of meaning they demand that selfish concerns be put aside. Symbols and metaphors, as noted earlier, do not

⁴⁴ McLean, *Hermeneutics, Faith and Relations between Cultures*, 83. Perhaps the wording of merely human insight would be more understandable. McLean is not promoting relativism here, but pointing out the errors of the Enlightenment’s claim that human science is “the supreme and indeed sole valid knowledge.” Ibid. Instead, McLean is supporting Gadamer’s metaphysical claim from the inheritance of Heidegger that there are higher truths that transcend time and human measurement.

⁴⁵ Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, 66-67.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Here, again, I am speaking of culture in its positive sense. In the case of what might be termed societal breakdown or the dissolution of cultural values, people can be very distrustful. That distrust, however, has to do with the breakdown of culture, its disintegration. I would argue that they still turn to the world of meaning that they received from their culture as a starting point for their creative contribution in sharpening the culture’s value system and world of meaning.

stand in isolation but connect us to a web or structure of meaning containing related symbols. The self must enter that web of meaning, leaving its own preoccupations behind in order to grasp the truths communicated there. Here I would like to cite again Coulson's reflection on Newman's *Grammar of Assent*, where he describes the dynamic as follows: "To respond to metaphor and symbol is to be bound, not to an instance, but to an interrelationship as a whole; and the appropriate form of verification must itself be similarly complex."⁴⁸ The complexity of this verification involves the various stages in the investigative hermeneutics I am attempting to describe. The interrelationship of a symbol to the whole demands the reassessment of one's own horizons and worlds of meaning to test them, not by oneself in abstract isolation, but together with others. McLean ties person and community together for a dynamic in social life that produces or verifies the development of a cultural harmony. The two principles McLean names are "complementarity which makes the formation of culture and interchange possible, and generosity which passes it along in the process of tradition."⁴⁹ Any verification, then, of a symbol or metaphor or revelatory event, passes through this standard of harmony, this relationship with the Holy Spirit, alive in the cultural tradition. This allows a subject to build added layers or deeper insights onto any existing world of meaning in the culture through the revelation. Although a revelatory event may initially shock or jolt a subject or culture as a matter of course, fundamental theology must artfully ensure that the dynamic fusion of new meaning onto existing cultural meaning unfolds seamlessly, just as grace builds on nature.

This concludes our discussion of the discovery of meaning as the second critical element in a check of credibility by way of an

⁴⁸ Coulson, *Religion and Imagination*, 56-57.

⁴⁹ McLean, *Persons, Peoples and Cultures*, 195. McLean maintains that the person and community seen in terms of gift manifest these two principles of complementarity and generosity. It is worth mentioning, also, Avery Cardinal Dulles' notion of "dialectical retrieval," by which he uses symbolic mediation as a dialectical tool so that his various models may be seen to interact and become harmonized. See Dulles' *Models of Revelation*. The harmony has not so much to do with the various models as to that which they are commonly referring, God's message of love. The meaning from this common referent makes the dialectical retrieval effective; or, we could say, it makes the "symbolic realism" real. Dulles, *Craft of Theology*, 50. This also coincides with Geertz's approach on the importance of cultural "footprints," and how these symbolic connotations have to be taken into account for any effective presentation of the Gospel. See Robin Konig's essay, "Clifford Geertz's Account of Culture as a Resource for Theology," *Pacifica* 23, no. 1 (February 2010): 33-57.

investigative hermeneutics of assent. We have seen that theology's responsibilities grow and encompass many areas. Meaning depends on a vital link to the Providence of God. This happens in a community and under the influence of the community's symbolic understanding of meaning that has taken shape over its history of experience and its hidden dialogue with the Holy Spirit. A critical part of a subject's check on the validity of any new meaning consists of the quality of harmony it has with already existent, interrelated structures or webs of meaning existing in the culture and tradition. A fruitful aspect of this check on harmony is that the self has to set personal ego to the side in order to validate the resonance. Meaning has to extend far beyond the concerns of the self. But once that meaning is confirmed to be valid, its significance for the self has to be heard, received and accepted as one's own.

Hearing the Invitation for Personal Assent

The final element of credibility to consider in the investigative hermeneutics of assent is the personal significance of revelation for the subject. Any revelation that makes sense and contains deep meaning calls on the subject to engage the imagination and to stretch the horizon of reason so that a new world of meaning might be freely embraced. Absorbing the significance of this truth "for me" means coming to the full realization that one is being invited to respond, invited to give one's full assent to this message of love and its consequences. Up to now the revelation has been investigated for sensibility and meaning, but the relation to God could have been relegated to a sort of impersonal background presence. At this stage of the hermeneutic the investigation has to address an encounter with the living God, not as a background figure, but as a personal subject actively engaged in one's own life. The invitation offered by God is personal, and the response, once heard and accepted, would necessarily be deeply personal and would lead to ecclesial expression through joining a community of others responding similarly to God's invitation.

Revelation as Gift of Identity. A growing sense of identity, touched on earlier, comes into dramatic focus at this stage of the hermeneutic. Previously occupied with inquiry and then investigation for sensibility and meaning, now the subject must shift energies to receptivity, receptivity of a new gift. Benedict XVI affirms that the "human being is made for gift, which expresses and makes present his

transcendent dimension.”⁵⁰ Confronted with sensible revelation filled with meaning, the subject has to come to terms with the nature of gift as life, identity, and call to transcendent relationship with God. Refusal to respond would ultimately mean the denial of these gifts and the distortion of one’s life narrative. The last chapter considered awareness, but here the revelatory event opens a new level of significance and heightens the drama of acceptance, or lack thereof. Many things can fall into the category of revelation, whether the holy text of sacred scripture, or an encounter, or an event that manifests God’s presence and Word. As mentioned earlier, a believing subject or culture can be considered as a sort of text, revealing the script of God’s dialogue alive in history. When speaking of revelation as text, McLean considers it primarily in the sense of a holy religious text, such as sacred scripture. He maintains that the text “must remain central for that is God speaking to us, but the reception of its meaning requires an attunement of mind and heart to God.”⁵¹ The subject receives, as it were, an invitation to enter a new world of interpretation, to allow heart and mind to be attuned to the heart and mind of God. In so doing, God does not ask a total repudiation of one’s own world of meaning, as if it had to be discarded as totally irrelevant. Instead, God enters into, builds upon and expands our world while simultaneously correcting its misguided trajectories. As the subject accepts the significance of meaning, that meaning complements and confirms the subject’s identity, the text which the subject or culture represents in its life and being. By thus respecting a subject’s identity, context, and history of experience and interpretation, the Holy Spirit protects the significance of the new vistas for the subject.

The process of accepting this invitation from God is not without its own turmoil and suffering as the accounts in the Bible demonstrate. The meaning of a subject’s whole narrative comes into question and the investigation calls for a move beyond mere consciousness, a road of growth that may have proved challenging enough in itself. It has to

⁵⁰ Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, # 34. In the same paragraph he notes that “the truth of ourselves, of our personal conscience, is first of all *given* to us. In every cognitive process, truth is not something we produce; it is always found, or better, received.” Ibid. In previous chapters I made allusion to this theme of gift as encountered (chapter 1), gift offered (chapter 2), and gift recognized (chapter 3). Here the focus is on gift as received.

⁵¹ McLean, *Hermeneutics, Faith and Relations between Cultures*, 60. His subject here relates to the inadequacy of conceptual language for “meaningful speech,” recommending instead a much broader rhetoric to capture the sense of the religious experience of a text. So, too, with a culture or a subject when considered as meaningful life text: a broader rhetoric and more detailed hermeneutic are required.

move to the level of forming one's moral and religious conscience.⁵² This movement from consciousness to conscience, from concern for knowledge to concern for sanctity, only occurs with the new-found responsibility flowing from the significance of a real, living relationship with God. Much of the suffering of accepting this invitation comes from weighing up what the consequences might mean for one's freedom. Initially, the invitation may appear to demand a relinquishing of freedom and autonomy. It takes time, and internal suffering of ambiguity, to be able to abandon oneself into a relationship that actually leads to the fulfillment of freedom and a greater grasp of personal identity. McLean believes this invitation to live more meaningfully calls for awareness "that can appreciate the concrete particularity of acts of human freedom. It must do so in a way that stimulates, integrates and harmonizes them in intuitions united in terms of beauty and the sublime."⁵³ Personal acts of freedom, then, have to be understood in relation to the much bigger picture of relationship with God and the harmony of their effects with the wider community. Moving from this more solitary sense of freedom to a freedom lived in relation to God, and thus a freedom for others, can only be possible through an authentic event of revelation that dramatically alters how one understands one's own life narrative.⁵⁴ Once that narrative is harmonized in relationship with God, then can all the mixed-up, paradoxical experiences of life enter into the 'non-sense' or absurd logic of the cross, and finally fall

⁵² Coulson's reflections on Newman's wrestling with this topic are relevant to us. Awareness and knowledge, so prominently important for full consciousness, now take a back seat to values of holiness, mercy and the consideration of final judgment. More than objective evidence is required at this stage. As Coulson writes, "to speak, in Newman's sense, of the accumulation of probabilities is to speak of something more than a dispassionate weighing up of evidence. It is to suffer anxiety and ambiguity as we come into the truth..." Coulson, *Religion and Imagination*, 61. I shall have more to say about this *accumulation* in our section on the assent of faith.

⁵³ McLean, *Faith, Reason and Philosophy: Lectures at The Al-Azhar, Qom, Tehran, Lahore and Beijing*, vol. 20 of Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change, Series I: Culture and Values (Washington, DC: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2000), 80. Here McLean is discussing how eschatology lived consciously in time needs an aesthetic awareness.

⁵⁴ Avery Dulles describes as one of the roles of fundamental theology the need "to show why the affirmations of Christian faith must seem implausible to all who do not experience the power of God's word in Christ." Dulles, *The Craft of Theology*, 68. The consequences of the shift in how one understands human freedom really only becomes plausible in the implausibility of the salvific event of the cross and resurrection.

into place as an invitation to meaning, depth, love and freedom. Revelation ultimately leads to this encounter with the cross's logic. And it is in the cross that all the seemingly useless suffering and all of the striving for human freedom can be reconciled with God's love. Then, and really only then, does revelation impart to us the gift of our identity.

Significance and Community. Just as the importance of community is critical to the discovery of meaning, so is it also for hearing God's invitation for a personal assent. Not only does community contribute to the quality of how well any revelation is perceived, it also presents itself as an integral component of the world of faith into which one is invited to join. Here community presents itself sometimes as a double-edged sword, especially if the community of one's culture differs radically from the community of faith. Even when the two communities coincide the shift in mindset can still be daunting. As presented in *Dei Verbum's* chapter six, the ecclesial life, the community's input and context for discernment, of any sacred text proves vital for its reception.

McLean notes that if text and personal faith alone were the only considerations, then the reader of the text would be left "at the mercy of social forces, rather than as shaping society in the light of the Spirit as lived by the community of believers."⁵⁵ The community of believers helps to free one from both external and internal constraints, making room for faith to take root. Confirming this relation to community, Benedict XVI writes of the community's importance for conviction and freedom: "Freedom requires conviction; conviction does not exist on its own, but must always be gained anew by the community."⁵⁶ Faith, and the conviction that comes with it, lives and develops and is sustained in the community life of the believers. So the invitation to personal assent necessarily includes opening to a new community and accepting the community's role as offering guidance and encouragement along the way.

But this does not have to mean an abandonment of one's original faith or pre-faith community, though relationship within it may change as witnessing to a religious faith grows. It does present challenges, however, and is part of that suffering into truth that I mentioned above. It is here that one's hermeneutics of assent has to reach a level of significance profound enough for us to undergo possible public humiliation. Avery Dulles states the risk clearly when he relates that witness to a new-found faith can jeopardize one's reputation in the community of origin, exposing us to "what is most intimate and

⁵⁵ McLean, *Hermeneutics, Faith and Relations between Cultures*, 26.

⁵⁶ Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, # 24.

vulnerable in ourselves, most subject to ridicule and rejection.”⁵⁷ For the subject invited to be changed by revelation, then, the significance of the response involves both the joy and freedom involved in its reception and the widening horizon of new community and faith. The acceptance also carries the inherent risk of possible suffering. The threat of humiliation often accompanies the invitation to faith, so a subject has to be personally convinced of the revelation’s significance and accept the aid of the believing community to overcome any threats to one’s free response.

At some point the subject has to reach a level of contentment with the investigation into the credibility of revelation for personal assent, so that the investigation can end and the grace offered can be received and activated. This occurs when subjects no longer need to question or investigate a revelation’s authenticity, but understand and claim its meaning for themselves personally in the world of their experience. In this way a sacred text or revelation remains alive, speaking through history in the dialogue of the Holy Spirit with a person or culture. Once satisfied with the investigation, they begin to apply the learning gained from the disclosure of revelation to the transformation of community or culture.

All that I have said in this section on an investigative hermeneutics of assent has tried to unveil the complex dynamic of a subject moving through a check of credibility towards assent to faith. The boundaries are wide, and different people have different hierarchies of concern. Moved by an encounter with an event of revelation or sacred text, they move through a check of sensibility, the discovery of meaning, and finally, hear an invitation to assent personally to the significance of revelation’s truth and consequences. All stages of the dynamic demand theology’s attention and accompaniment. McLean summarizes well the fruit of such hermeneutics, the new world of interpretation for the subject, once the investigation proves sufficient.

The way out of the hermeneutic circle is then not by ignoring or denying our horizons and initial judgments or prejudices, but by recognizing them as inevitable and making them work for us in drawing out, not the meaning of the text for its author, but its application for the present. Through this process of application we serve as midwife for culture as historical or for tradition, enabling it to give birth to the future.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Dulles, *The Craft of Theology*, 62-63.

⁵⁸ McLean, *Ways to God*, 370-371. See also *Hermeneutics, Faith and Relations between Cultures*, 57. McLean cites Gadamer’s *Truth and Method*,

Here we can see McLean's own reference to midwife, allowing culture to develop through attentive hermeneutics. For fundamental theology I maintain that the role of midwife must encompass the cultural and the personal at all stages of the dynamic of conversion to freedom for faith. It is a role of midwifing the missions of the Son and Holy Spirit, their incarnation and coming into the world as relational transformation. The key to this whole investigation, then, is to grasp the revelation offered, so that the boundaries of our old horizons and old prejudices open up new zones of meaning for us in our everyday life, as well as point to an entry-way to faith. The check of credibility not only confirms the truth being offered in the revelation, but also calls forth the fuller wisdom latent from our culture and community context. Then, when assent is made in faith, the full resources of the revelation and the culture become available so that the imagination can construct a future based on relationship with God.

THE ASSENT OF FAITH

The assent of faith comes from one's readiness for and cooperation with God's grace. As a virtue, faith is not merely a one-time moment or an instance to be remembered, but a habit to be lived. We have discussed God's gift of life and revelation as gift to be encountered, inquired into and recognized, investigated and now received. Someone's encounter with Christ reveals "a mystery hidden for long ages,"⁵⁹ a relationship of love that waits to be engaged. The gift of faith cannot itself be earned; the discussion above did not imply that. The hermeneutic investigation is necessary for a credibility check and for fully disposing the subject to receive the gift of faith. That check allows one to identify what has indeed become real to the imagination, not mere fancy or fantasy. The investigation helps a subject to identify the hunger for faith and to realize that one shares, as Dulles says, the "human drive to be known, valued, and loved; to be drawn into communion with others; to be delivered from death and from the threat

trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 1995), 235-332, on the notion of midwife for the culture. My own notion of midwife has more to do with theology's role in guiding a person or a culture through the complex dynamics of encounter, awareness and interpretation. But anyone who successfully negotiates the dynamic becomes midwife to culture and faith as well.

⁵⁹ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, # 7. See also Heb. 1:1-2.

of final absurdity.”⁶⁰ As a philosopher, McLean does not delve deeply into the dynamics of faith, so I intend to draw more on other writers in this closing section to round out some of McLean’s points.

The primary goal of reaching a level of freedom for the faith has been presented. Rather than going into great detail on faith itself, I would like to point out some of its important dynamics as a bridge to engaging the new freedom for full participation in a global context, the goal of the next chapter. McLean follows the classical Thomistic understanding of faith as an act of the intellect directed by the will. Once God is apprehended as both our source and our goal, that God has first loved us, then our life of faith consists of wanting to return the life we have received as gift. This dynamic of being loved and wishing to respond in self-giving love is what McLean calls “the center of our life and the prime mover of our acts of knowledge.”⁶¹ When faith in God truly operates as the center of our life, the confusing elements that seem to pit meaning against meaninglessness, love against sacrifice, and the known against the unknown, resolve themselves into a common standard of truth and love, relating us to the Holy Spirit on the deepest personal level. To explore briefly this dynamic of faith, then, I would like to divide it into two sections: faith as cumulative convergence in freedom and as lived relationship of love.

Faith as Cumulative Convergence in Freedom

One of the greater challenges to the faith begins with the risk it demands from the person just before assent. In light of that risk, the necessary acquiescence to receive the gift of grace calls for a cumulative convergence that can move the will to assent. The often confusing and ambiguous data taken from experience can make the faith act appear to casual observers as an absurdity or a copout, a ridiculous commitment to a fantasy.⁶² The logic of the cross remains an absurdity or stumbling block, except for those invited into its world of love, touched by grace. McLean speaks of the person entering into the depths of the cross, where the mind has to face utter meaninglessness and, perhaps, even

⁶⁰ Dulles, *The Craft of Theology*, 61. In the same place Dulles calls this ability to satisfy the hungers of the spirit as the “chief criterion for a viable religious faith.” Ibid.

⁶¹ McLean, *Hermeneutics, Faith and Relations between Cultures*, 63.

⁶² Avery Dulles asserts that the gift of faith only makes sense once one has made the commitment. As he writes: “To persons untouched by a grace-filled Christian experience, I submit, Christian faith can only appear as exorbitant and irrational. At best it would be dismissed as an over-commitment.” Dulles, *Craft of Theology*, 56.

despair. In such a seemingly hopeless state, only God's grace can answer the questions of existence. "For this God must grasp the human person; this is revelation. The power of being is present in the affirmation of meaninglessness and in the affirmation of ourselves as facing meaninglessness; it affirms itself in a person in spite of nonbeing."⁶³ I would prefer to call this grasping of the human person by God an experience of grace, where God knits together our world from the confused fragments that our mind was originally unable to comprehend meaningfully. Since natural knowledge is insufficient, this experience of God's grace, or as McLean likes to say, this "power of being," offers us a new sort of knowledge. The subject reaches a new level of secure comfort while embraced by the mystery of it all.

Earlier I mentioned the importance of a shift to more inductive thinking, rather than more deductive analysis, in order to see things in terms of the larger whole. This is especially true with faith. The assent of faith follows upon the ability to allow things to converge to a central source of belief and meaning. The dynamic is not one of rational analysis or demonstration, but a growing into certitude that can connect all of the paradoxes, ambiguities, and doubts. Looking again at Coulson's work, we see that the certitude of faith "does not come under the reasoning faculty, but under the imagination."⁶⁴ The rational, reasoning side of the human being cannot always carry the various tensions and perplexing ambiguities and contradictions of life, much less their accompanying emotions. Very often God chooses instead to reach us through our literary imagination, by which we can apply the metaphors and symbols needed to unite poetically the prose of the disparate experiences of life. It is our narrative of life that has to find its place in a context of meaning. As that narrative comes into focus our truest identity is sharpened so that meaning, identity and life narrative

⁶³ McLean, *Ways to God*, 405. Here he is recalling Tillich's own theology, where the person is able to come to a new synthesis out of the desolation of an experience of antithesis.

⁶⁴ Coulson, *Religion and Imagination*, 59. I recommend reading 52-61 for a fuller account of his explanation of the imagination's role for slowly dissipating doubt (61) and accumulating evidence for successful induction. He maintains that "We are obliged to describe our way of proceeding not as by inference and strict demonstration, but as by a gradual convergence (or focusing stereoscopically) which induces belief (rather than proving it)." *Ibid.*, 52. This resonates well with what I have already described from McLean's own thoughts on the imagination's role of focusing freedom as one explores the depths of reality.

all converge together in God.⁶⁵ As I said above, great risk is involved in the assent of faith; our very identity is at risk. Only with the imagination operating freely can the risk be made in confidence, assuring us that we shall not lose, but find ourselves. “The more imagination is recognized as synthetic in a truth-finding way – however unusual its products may be – the more the reflective mind is called upon to be synthetic, and the more it will risk.”⁶⁶ The imagination, then, is critical for negotiating these risks of identity. It must especially apply itself synthetically in order to allow the inductive movements necessary to unite the various experiences of life to meaning. The convergence happens slowly, but it is necessary for the assent of faith to occur under circumstances that might initially seem absurd or insurmountable.

We have spent much time discussing the person’s journey of freedom to get them to this point of faith. With everything already attained by the patient journeying through listening, inquiry, recognition, and investigation, now the freedom into which the subject had to grow also reaches its climax. I also believe this is the reason McLean spends so much of his philosophical effort on the dynamic of freedom. If the choice were made against God, the subject’s full freedom could not be realized. John Paul II observed that in the act of faith “the intellect and the will display their spiritual nature, enabling the subject to act in a way which realizes personal freedom to the full. It is not just that freedom is part of the act of faith; it is absolutely required. Indeed, it is faith that allows individuals to give consummate expression to their own freedom.”⁶⁷ The convergence that faith brings has to do with the subject’s freedom, identity and certainty of a greater truth about God and God’s personal wish for the subject. The convergence confirms the person in a certain assurance about who God is and how God created reality to be. Regarding the type of knowledge that faith represents, McLean calls it the essence of thought itself, “the religious reconstitution of all in God.”⁶⁸ This reconstitution marks the fullest

⁶⁵ It may also be why Newman chose to describe the act of real assent as “imaginative.” By these creative acts we achieve our personal identity. See again Coulson, *Religion and Imagination*, 59.

⁶⁶ Francis Patrick Sullivan, “Imagination,” in *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, 496. Sullivan is stressing here the role of creativity for those who accept responsibility for a tradition, asserting that fundamental theology “depends on the state of aesthetic consciousness in a specific tradition.” *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, # 13.

⁶⁸ McLean, *Ways to God*, 146. This is not the usual sense of knowledge but is related to McLean’s understanding of religion as “*re-ligatio*”, a reconnecting of one’s life back to God. McLean is commenting on the fruit of a subject’s dialectic that had one leave one’s home of meaning and interpretation, go into the past and then return home to reconstruct the truth of faith. He says a

freedom of the subject realizing him- or herself, a convergence of all things in God brought about by the cumulative work of the imagination sorting through the history of one's experience.

Faith as Lived Relationship of Love

With the faith assent grows also that perception of reality as an expression of love. Reality as an expression of love converges and becomes focused on relationship with God and flows over to our other relationships as well. The shift in the understanding of identity takes on this new emphasis on relationship. Our identity as Christian is shared with the wider community of believers. As Dulles says, "It is the corporate identity of the Christian community, into which the individual is integrated as an extension of his or her own self."⁶⁹ One's faith is tied to this new community and expresses itself as a relationship of love finding expression there. This coincides well with how McLean describes "the reality of faith as a way of living religiously in a progressively historical manner."⁷⁰ Just as the journey to reach a freedom for the faith was dynamic, so is the life of faith. The dynamic is lived with others as an expression of charity alive in the history of the believing community. New categories of thinking about and expressing this lived dynamic become necessary. A new language with a grammar of love takes shape and develops within the community's response to challenges.

This question of developing a language of meaning for the believing community from the grammar of love confronts theology with what I believe to be its biggest challenge today. The imagination cannot be abandoned as the new language is developed, but has to be employed along with all the demands of reason. I would like to recommend again the resource which a turn to a more literary, narrative imagination offers to theology. Opening up the mind to symbol, metaphor and meaning remains the work of the imagination. The imagination directs the focus of our lens of freedom. The starting point cannot be about the

bit more about faith as a type of knowledge, but it mostly stems from his analysis of Tillich's thoughts on faith. These are found primarily in his review of Tillich's "synthesis" in the dialectics of liberation. See McLean, *Hermeneutics, Tradition and Contemporary Change*, 66-67.

⁶⁹ Dulles, *The Craft of Theology*, 65-66.

⁷⁰ McLean, *Hermeneutics, Faith and Relations between Cultures*, 107. Here McLean uses Gadamer's insights to avoid what could be called a frozen faith: stuck between an inner faith of the individual and an objective sacred text. Such a frozen faith would leave one open and vulnerable to the constantly changing ideologies of the day.

expressions developed by reasoning, and then attempting to go from there to the imagination. Working from the imagination as the starting point instead, theology can then leave space for exploring faith as a lived relationship of love. It shifts the priority back to the raw material of experience. The implicit, pre-conceptual, or inarticulate notions have priority over the explicit, conceptual, or articulate.⁷¹ Here theology can effectively act as midwife by using metaphors and narratives to catalyze people's reflection, while remaining attentive to a culture's lived relation of love to identify a new language from the ever reliable grammar of faith and love. McLean's step back to look at totemic and mythic cultures was an attempt to gain new insights from the ancient grammar of wisdom. Theology can do the same to tap the ancient grammar of faith and love with more of a literary imagination in order to discover more effective articulations of belief. My effort here has been to show that the hermeneutic or internal dialectic people employ as they explore meaning and faith taps the imagination and its affective domains more than it does any conceptual expressions. Lived relationships of love can be expressed only inadequately through explicit articulations. They need, instead, space to allow the full range of experience and affective movements to make their mark on the imagination before new articulations are attempted.

There is one last thing I would like to highlight in this lived relationship of love and it returns us again to the notion of human freedom. Once the assent of faith has occurred the subject enters into cooperation with grace that brings forth an even wider sense of freedom stemming from the security and well-being of knowing that one's life reflects an embrace from the God of love. McLean has an insightful passage about how he sees this new freedom expressed in the historical acts of a believing community. These historical acts serve as symbolic witness to the quest for freedom in religious cultures. As symbolic witness, the acts open new possibilities for shedding light on the manifestation of God's love and for centering a people on a foundation of this relationship of love for creative response. Here McLean gives his philosophy of being a Trinitarian emphasis.

In this manner they (historical acts of religious cultures)
point to fundamental dimensions of being: to Being Itself
as the unique existent in whom the alienated can be

⁷¹ None of this is particularly new since I would say that Newman made the same recommendation in his *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*. I have referred to Coulson's own efforts to focus attention anew on the possibilities available from a literary imagination. See Coulson's reflections on a common grammar in *Religion and Imagination*, 51.

reunited, to the logos which founds subjectivity without an estranging selfish subjectivism, and to the spirit through whom human freedom can be creative in history. Remembrance and celebration of this heritage provides needed inspiration and direction. It enables persons and peoples to reach out in mutual comprehension, reconciliation and concern in order to form social unity that is marked by emancipation and peace.⁷²

Though McLean sticks with philosophical language, he sets it in a fully Christian context. The passage highlights that convergence of all things in God that we mentioned above, and highlights also the shift of understanding life as this lived relationship of love calling us to promote values of understanding and peace. One of the valuable elements in McLean is that he ties that new life of graced freedom to the missions of the Son and Holy Spirit. The acts that flow as an expression of being are, as it were, manifestations of these missions of the Son and Spirit as they go about the redemption and healing, the liberation and sanctification, of creation. Our faith assent draws us into the activity of these missions and makes us vital cooperators in God's activity of sustaining, renewing and making holy all that may be wounded or somehow estranged from this lived relationship of love with God. One can also see McLean's allusion to Eucharistic thanksgiving, when he refers to remembering and celebrating the heritage of these acts for inspiration and discernment. The remembering and celebrating may not take the form of a formal Eucharist, but the manner by which a culture goes about this remembrance expresses its own historical dialogue with God in the missions of the Son and Spirit. More discussion on engaging this gift of God's love I shall leave for the next chapter, where we shall look at how theology might help to broaden this activity.

CONCLUDING IMPLICATIONS

The above discussion on the assent of faith offers us the opportunity to look back to those questions that initiated our focus to this chapter on receiving the gift of faith. The exploration of those questions has brought to light several important areas for fundamental theology's present and future development. Its attention needs to be directed:

- not just to rational discourse, but to the operation of the imagination and the importance of aesthetics;

⁷² McLean, *Hermeneutics, Faith and Relations between Cultures*, 81.

- to respecting a new sensibility that can allow space for tensions and paradoxes in subjects' life journey, by which they can find a gateway to the paschal mystery;
- to a person's growth in true freedom, along with understanding the impediments to that growth;
- to the full dynamism of the faith assent, taking account of the human person's many dimensions through an investigative hermeneutics;
- to culture as providing the context of and tools for the hermeneutics;
- to the aesthetic and rational mechanisms that drive a person's inductive convergence to truth, faith and love;
- and to developing languages of meaning, contextual articulations within particular cultures, from the common grammar of love.

The life of faith has to unfold in full human freedom, directed and inspired by the creative imagination, or as Newman would say, the *religious imagination*. Freedom, we said, is a dynamic of the human heart facing the horizon of truth with a growing sense of integration, of personal integrity. The imagination, through its creative integration, expands reason beyond itself for a more affectively influenced cognitive perception that directs freedom's focus on reality.

The first question asked how we come to believe in Jesus, and so demanded that we try to explore the dynamism inside the human mind and heart in the act of faith. By an encounter with Jesus we come to recognize deeper levels of reality that may have always been there as offered, but not apprehended. The dynamism consists of the full human self, trying to come to terms with the recognition of various levels of reality in freedom. The imagination directs freedom's focus on these manifestations of reality and guides the internal dialectic.

Believing in Jesus requires that the demands of credibility be satisfied, a process I named an investigative hermeneutics of assent. The first element of the process, respecting the person's full sensibility, included: a) reversing the usual hermeneutic direction so that affectivity's role in shaping cognition can be taken into account; b) paying attention to the cultural context that shapes us and gives us tools so that we do not fool ourselves; and c) allowing the diachronic nature of tradition its proper space, so that cumulative meaning and value may be embraced and applied to authentic novelty today, thus orienting us to the future. The discovery of meaning, the second element of the process, consisted of: a) the Providence of God as a hidden dialogue of the Holy Spirit with a people; b) meaning and community encompassing the vertical horizon of faith experience and the horizontal horizon of history (the search for truth and the realization of human good) as

complimentary disclosures of God's love affair with us; and c) the disclosure as a harmonious reference our relationship with God in the Holy Spirit, linking us to truth and love. The final element of the process of credibility I described as hearing the invitation for personal assent. By this hearing, a) God's revelation of love in Jesus comes to be understood as a crucial gift for the realization of one's personal identity, and b) the community's role proves crucial for claiming the full significance of the revelation.

The second question posed directed our focus on how one reaches a point of freedom so that reality might be perceived as an expression of love, or how one can be sure that one worships what one knows in spirit and truth. This question demanded the detailed exploration of the faith dynamic just outlined in response to the first question. Reality contains many paradoxes that confuse and frustrate, but as freedom grows, meaning can be found in both the negative and positive experiences of life. The heart is where God encounters our freedom, which is key to a more meaningful application of values and tests of authenticity. Life experiences slowly force us to face the paradoxes and to challenge the heart's growth in freedom. It is here that the dynamic logic of the cross reveals itself. If perceived as an expression of love, then the paradox of the cross can be accepted affectively, even if not totally grasped cognitively. In the light of the humanity of Jesus crucified, our affectivity reorders the structures and patterns of our sensibility and understanding. The logic of the cross stimulates the imagination to direct the focus of our freedom on wider expanses of reality, while the growth in freedom, in its turn, sharpens the creative work of the imagination. The result is that one's perception of life and freedom come to be understood as an ongoing participation in Christ's paschal mystery. Everything, then, comes to be understood as an expression of love.

All this leads us to consider the third question that asked how our interpretation shifts, and more specifically, how culture aids us in our faith commitment as our interpretation shifts. Time is needed to fully claim one's identity. The first step of that claim comes from one's being at home in one's own culture. For an invitation to faith to be heard, rather than avoided as a threat, it has to be understood as a friend to oneself and one's culture. This does not imply that the invitation would never strain the sensibilities or guidelines of the culture. But community and culture are foundations for our understanding or view of God. Before we can become active participators in the diachronic development of our culture, we must first have embraced and claimed all that it can offer. The invitation to faith, then, has to be assessed in light of the culture's strengths and weaknesses. The internal tools a culture has developed to face its weaknesses or correct its course have to

be drawn upon as the assent to faith is made, so that the act of faith can serve as an enrichment to the culture, rather than an act of rebellion or estrangement. Each culture, as I noted previously, carries the wisdom gained from a people's historical dialogue with the Holy Spirit. Any revelation of Christ only illuminates and clarifies that dialogue. The revelation, even to small numbers who have heard and responded to the invitation to faith, acts as a medicinal healing. But this is a hermeneutic work that takes time and depends on timing. The culture acts as a bridge to God and the discovery of God's plan of love. Part of that hermeneutic work includes the responsible task of rediscovering the full wisdom latent in a culture and applying it anew to the challenges of the present. The interpretation of reality shifts slowly, by means of hermeneutic processes that have to embrace gradually the paradoxes of conflict and trial as a journey towards truth and freedom. By each personal response in faith to God's revelation, the religious wisdom of the cross emerges from within the culture to displace its more hardened, secular perceptions. Ultimately, only love can convince culture of this new, yet ancient wisdom.

CHAPTER V

RESPONSE IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT: GIFT ENGAGED

So the woman left her water jar, and went away into the city, and said to the people, "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?" They went out of the city and were coming to him.

Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me all that I ever did." So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of your words that we believe for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world."

(John 4:28-30; 39-42)

Once the gift of faith has been received through a free assent, the natural response allows that faith to come to expression in witness or testimony. The Samaritan woman feels impelled to share her encounter with Jesus, so that they, too, might experience the fruits of her discovery. Many interpretations of the woman at the well in the Gospel of John declare her to be almost an outcast in her local community, due possibly to her serial relationships with men. But once faith takes hold, none of that matters. The previous divisions with the community cannot impede the effectiveness of her witness that prompts others from the city to go out to Jesus and to see for themselves. After having their own encounter with him and listening to him, they are able to profess his universal, global significance as "Savior of the world."

This dynamic of engaging the gift of faith as a response to God's love shall make up the reflections of this chapter, but with a particular focus on the global context of lived faith in today's world. In the most recent years of his work McLean has repeatedly returned to the increasing awareness throughout the world of every culture's interrelatedness in the global whole. He has introduced elements that he considers essential for philosophy to adopt a global paradigm for this new interrelated awareness of peoples. I intend to draw on many of his insights, but with a particular emphasis. In keeping with the dynamic of

growing in freedom for the faith, my intention will be to focus on that dynamic after the assent of faith, so as to illumine certain elements for an effective witness in today's global context. I also want to continue to explore some responsibilities for fundamental theology in its role as midwife to the witness and explanation of the faith for global times.

For the reflections that follow I would like to offer these questions in order to sharpen our focus.

- What sort of mental discipline can help one to keep an operative understanding of the global context and the unity of the many in the whole?
- How can theology help to form a real communion between diverse cultures in the global context?
- How can vastly different cultures, both with and without faith, and seemingly in tension with one another, be understood as converging in freedom towards a real unity?

In order to address these questions I will organize the chapter into three main parts: a) imaginative intellection; b) relational hermeneutics of communion; and c) towards the Kingdom of God: eschatological tension and unity in the global context.

IMAGINATIVE INTELLECTION

In earlier chapters I alluded to moving away from a primarily deductive analysis in theology toward a more inductive approach. In the last chapter I pointed out the imagination's crucial role for the final stages of the assent of faith. Here I want to use McLean's insights to combine the two, so that theology can use the notion of imaginative intellection to reflect in terms of the global whole. The assent of faith frees the imagination so that it can work towards an integrating unity that has God as its author.¹ Much of the shift to a more global way of thinking has been driven by recent technological developments. Perhaps such a manner of thinking about reality has always been in the mind of God and we are only now waking up to it. When McLean describes what he means by globalization he cites three meanings in Webster's

¹ As McLean puts it in his philosophical approach, "the imagination, in working toward an integrating unity, is not confined by the necessitating structures of categories and concepts, but ranges freely over the full sweep of reality in all its dimensions to see whether and wherein relatedness and purposiveness or teleology can emerge, and how the world and our personal and social life can achieve its meaning and value." McLean, *Persons, Peoples and Cultures*, 129.

dictionary: one geometrical, one geographic, while the last is more qualitative: “the state of being comprehensive, unified or integrated.”² But this last definition on quality was seen to imply the absence of differentiation or particular details. So McLean’s understanding of globalization has to do with the geographical and the qualitative senses of the word, but with a twist. He argues: “Today’s challenge is more complex and more rich, namely, to achieve a comprehensive vision whose integration is not at the expense of the components, but their enhancement and full appreciation.”³ For our purposes, then, globalization is not about economics or technological developments, but mainly about culture and a comprehensive, integrated vision that allows for full differentiation of diverse elements in their unique particularity. Rather than seeing theology’s consideration of the global reality in terms of a response to recent political, economic or technological dynamics, I prefer, instead, to see it as a view that has always been in the mind of God for our contemplation. My emphasis here is not intended to be focused so much on theological speculation, but on the ensuing practice and witness that follow from the assent of faith. As Newman pointed out in his own reflections, the goal is to allow the assent in faith to teach us the proper grammar for theology in a global context.⁴

Global and Literary Unity

When he presents his reflections on a new global paradigm for philosophical reflection, McLean begins by introducing the insights of the philosopher-theologian Nicholas of Cusa. McLean prefers the thought of Cusa for his reflections on globalization because, instead of the Aristotelian method of beginning with concrete particulars, Cusa employs a more Platonic approach that has him always considering reality in view of the unity of the whole. Cusa differs from the more formal and ideal approach of Plato by framing the unity in view of existential reality.⁵ This grounds the mind in the ontology of being, so

² McLean, *Hermeneutics for a Global Age*, 67.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ I refer again to Newman’s *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* and also Coulson’s *Religion and Imagination*. Coulson points out Newman’s distinction that theological verification requires faith “in matters of practice and conduct, skepticism in matters of speculation.” Coulson, *Religion and Imagination*, 48.

⁵ As McLean notes, Cusa added two important shifts to Plato’s thought. “First, that the One of Plato is not an ideal form, but the universe of reality (and this in the image of the Absolute One); second, that the human mind (also in the image of the divine mind) is essentially concerned with this totality of

that reality and the unity of the whole might be considered not as an idealistic form, but an existing reality that serves to inform the mind's inductive process. Cusa's approach also contains within it a correction to the Enlightenment's demand that everything be known clearly and distinctly or be discarded as inconsequential. As McLean puts it, the approach "includes humility before reality which it recognizes, and even reveres, above all where it exceeds the human capacity for clarity of conception and power and control."⁶ Theology, for its part, has the advantage of understanding this grammar of the unity of reality from its faith in the one God who is its source. But as I mentioned in earlier chapters, many people today have difficulty recognizing and interacting with those dimensions of reality that are not related to the body's five senses.

It is here that one can recommend again a more literary approach for fundamental theology to embrace its task of illuminating the less visible dimensions of reality that pertain to faith. Theology has the grammar which the assent of faith teaches, but always has the challenge ever to renew the articulation of the faith through a language that not only honors the grammar, but captures the narrative sensibility of people in their context. That context remains ever localized, but today it demands also to be situated in the global whole. Religious and theological language can learn to pattern itself after great literature, which can hold together seemingly disparate parts in a composition that maintains a unified message.⁷ Keeping the view of the whole allows all the various metaphors and narrative strands to find their natural place. Often, it is only with this wider view of the unified whole, or this link to an underlying common referent, that all the parts of the composition can make any sense at all. This is theology's challenge in today's global context.

Earlier in Chapter II I reflected on the unity of the human person in the plurality of its dimensions. The simple unity of God remains theology's central reference. McLean speaks of two other unities that

reality. In terms of this global awareness it develops all its knowledge." McLean, *Religion and Cooperation between Civilizations*, 79.

⁶ McLean, *Religion and Cooperation between Civilizations*, 82.

⁷ Let me refer again to Coulson's reflections on literary imagination. He cites both Shakespeare and Coleridge as literary masters who were able to achieve this art, so that their images and words were not confined to singular meanings. Their metaphors were not over-explained, so images were not locked, but hovered between alternate possibilities until clarified in view of the whole. As Coulson puts it, the goal is to compose so that "the words do not stand for terms possessing a constant meaning, but rather for constituents of a magnetic field, their signification being that of the field as a whole." Coulson, *Religion and Imagination*, 19.

specifically concern us for the subject of globalization: “the unity of each individual being as within the whole of being” and “the unity of the universe by which the individuals together form not merely a conglomeration of single entities, as with a pile of rocks, but a unified whole which expresses the fullness of being.”⁸ These unities do not look particularly special on initial examination, but if taken seriously, they help to change how we understand ourselves and others as members of humanity. Each individual has a special place in the unity of the whole; each is an integral part of the whole. Each demands respect in his or her self as an integral member in the larger unity. On the literary level, the challenge for theology is to extend more literal, confined expressions to the broader sense of analogy, symbol and metaphor. The intention is not to take away literal inferences, but to contain the literal sense while “extending the grammar” that the assent of faith teaches.⁹ By so doing, theology can give effective expression to the faith in both the local and global contexts.

Notion of Contraction and Internal Relatedness

In order to map out a structure that can provide an adequate relational network for incorporating each person’s individual uniqueness and the global whole, McLean turns to Nicholas of Cusa’s notion of contraction. Without going into all the details, the notion of contraction asserts that the significance of the whole exists in the unique reality of each individual. Each person keeps his or her uniqueness as a particular contraction of the totality of being or the global whole.¹⁰ In this manner, too, one cannot be considered depersonalized amidst a broad conglomeration of many. Each person has a value that is indispensable to the whole, just as the identity of each cannot be fully realized or comprehended without relation to the whole. Since each person is a microcosm or unique contraction of the totality of being, all are related and form a living community on an ontological level, not merely a functional level. This philosophical interrelatedness blends well with the theological reality of all being called to be unique members making up the mystical body of Christ.

⁸ McLean, *Religion and Cooperation between Civilizations*, 84.

⁹ See Coulson’s *Religion and Imagination*, 44.

¹⁰ Contraction may at first seem an awkward or strange word, but like McLean I choose to keep it in its original sense as used by Nicholas of Cusa. Each individual carries in its particular manifestation of being a microcosm or “contraction” of the totality of being, without losing its unique character. For a fuller discussion of the details, see McLean’s *Religion and Cooperation between Civilizations*, 85-91.

McLean's emphasis is that the relationships between people are of the internal order and are made so by the global sense of the whole.¹¹ He uses the relation between various members of a family as an example; their internal relatedness is based on the reality of the whole family. As such, the global interrelatedness of people can, by analogy, mirror the internal relations of the persons of the Trinity. The relation of each to one another and to the whole has an underlying ontology in being, but the internal relations are dynamic, rather than merely static. As all strive to be integrated into the whole, they develop themselves and contribute to the development of others and of the whole. One's participation in freedom for the good of others and the whole takes on more significant meaning: it gives expression to one's own identity and makes a vital contribution to the development and discovery of the identity of others and of the communal whole. From a theological perspective, the response called for after the assent of faith cannot be considered simply a functional service to build up the body of Christ. The dynamic that engages us as believers who made the assent of faith expresses a new awareness of who we are internally and most intimately; it expresses our identity in God with freedom for others. Theology has to nurture continually the imagination's focus on global unity and this intellection that reveals the constructive dynamic of freedom's engagement. The name I want to give to that dynamic expression of engagement, so vital to the development and perfection of the global whole, is a relational hermeneutics of communion.

RELATIONAL HERMENEUTICS OF COMMUNION

In the previous two chapters I distinguished hermeneutics that pertained to different moments or progressions in the dynamic growth of freedom for faith. Concerning recognition and new awareness, an inquiring hermeneutics of deliberation was presented as appropriate to describe the process. Regarding freedom for faith, I proposed an investigative hermeneutics of assent as the necessary internal dialectic characteristic of the stage. In order to highlight here the necessary components for a relational hermeneutics of communion in a global

¹¹ As McLean puts it, "What Cusa sees for the realm of being is relationships which are not external juxtapositions, but internal to the very makeup of the individuals." McLean, *Religion and Cooperation between Civilizations*, 87. The unity of the isolated individual tends to be the primary consideration today, which leads to a felt sense of external juxtapositioning, competition for resources, and conflict. Each person's uniqueness, instead, is to be embraced for the well-being of the unity of the whole as a "positive and inclusive relation to others." Ibid.

context I shall divide the reflection into four main parts: a) attitude of open participation for truth; b) horizons and the ambit of freedom; c) relational dialogue of cultures; and d) permeable horizon of communion.

Attitude of Open Participation for Truth

In an earlier chapter I introduced the subject of attitude and the importance of the origin of one's motivations on the level of attitude or disposition. Here I want to look more specifically at attitude for engaging in an effective dialogue that leads to communion. Following naturally from the assent of faith comes the desire to share the good news one has come to know and embrace; such a desire is a common element of virtually all religions and the cultures founded upon them. Referring again to the scriptural quote at the beginning of the chapter, the Samaritan woman could not wait to return to share her experience of encounter with Jesus and the good news she received from him. McLean notes that such a response is one of the characteristic attitudes of people of faith: "if religion is archetypically the level of the spirit, the attitude it generates is not in principle one of conflict, but one of openness and communication."¹² But he goes further with the theme of openness, extending it beyond simple sharing to the readiness to listen to others and allow their views to influence or change one's own perspectives. "In other words, it is an acknowledgement that our cultural and religious heritage has more to say to us. The characteristic hermeneutic attitude of effective historical consciousness is then not methodological sureness, but openness or readiness for experience."¹³ Both of these elements of openness, sharing and allowing views to influence one's perspective, are necessary for theology to conduct an effective dialogue of communion. A point I would like to highlight is McLean's assertion that the listening is not about being won over to another viewpoint, but about delving deeper into one's own heritage. Each new encounter, then, and each new dialogue, offers the opportunity to probe the intimate dialogue the Holy Spirit has had, and is having, with oneself and one's own culture or religion.

The openness described above is for participation which perfects and gives meaning to the individual, and also, as McLean says, "provides the real basis for unity with God by expressing the presence of the divine."¹⁴ I agree with McLean in that anything short of this union with God and engaged participation slowly deteriorates into the competition and oppression which so often characterize various forms

¹² McLean, *Religion and Cooperation between Civilizations*, 167.

¹³ McLean, *Hermeneutics, Faith and Relations between Cultures*, 88.

¹⁴ McLean, *Knowledge of God and the Discovery of Man*, 69.

of secular activity. Participation has to extend beyond the sense of a cooperative spirit between isolated individuals or groups who are seeing to their own needs while respecting others who are doing the same. The connection has to be deeper than respectful tolerance. Here I would like to use the example McLean offers in another place to test our communion with others as a participation in God. McLean relates that the real test “lies in our response to those who have nothing to give but their suffering.”¹⁵ Only by responding to the most vulnerable, to those who seem to have nothing to offer us, can we truly be sure that our motives are not actually self-centered, but a desire to participate in the abundance of God’s love. Our concern cannot be limited to self-realization and a narrow form of freedom, but has to flow over into inviting others to a new communion. Theology’s primary energies have to be similarly directed to the task of considering the valid signs that disclose God’s presence and the authentic participation of the Church in that presence. Assessing our generosity to give freely of our energy and time to share the good news provides the personal and the theological check.

It is just such a type of test that can offer the person of faith, or theology itself, the hermeneutic awareness needed for this relational participation. When dealing with a written text, the inquiring or questioning approach of hermeneutics generally can be easily understood. As McLean relates, hermeneutics “is not opinion which suppresses the position of the other, nor is it argument which looks for the weaknesses of the other’s position. Quite the opposite, it promotes the questioning in order to draw out possible new implications, even arguing at cross purposes in order to enable the text to unfold.”¹⁶ The questioning, then, is intended to dig into the various possibilities the subject might contain. In this manner, the meaning of the text can more easily expand into a wider sense of meaning. The same questioning applied to a written text has to be similarly applied to people, religions or cultures as living texts of God’s potential disclosure. Theology’s adoption of this questioning hermeneutic attitude requires that it continue its search for truth, since it can never be the sole bearer of God’s truth, which can be revealed in a myriad of ways in any place and time. By substituting theology in place of the original personal pronouns in parentheses, McLean’s following insight on horizons and tradition highlights the task for theology: “To be aware of *theology’s* (our) own horizon and to adjust it in dialogue with others is to make it work for *theology* (us) in discovering those new implications of *theology’s* (our)

¹⁵ McLean, *Ways to God*, 322.

¹⁶ McLean, *Hermeneutics, Faith and Relations between Cultures*, 121-122.

tradition which are required for our times.”¹⁷ The point here is that, just as a person who has made the assent in faith openly participates with a new hermeneutic attitude of communion, the same attentive openness for dialogue must also characterize theology’s spirit. And the real test for theology’s adopting such an attitude comes, not from its desire to defend or prove or convince, but to serve, especially to serve the suffering and marginalized who might appear to have nothing to offer. In such a service of listening and dialogue, theology might discover new opportunities for expressing the truths of faith and new disclosures of God’s love.

The whole journey of engaging the gift of faith becomes this relational hermeneutics of communion where the search for truth is carried out in dialogue with others. Once again I want to add another dimension to McLean’s reflections. For fundamental theology, the concept of truth must constantly be reconsidered and put to the test.¹⁸ The overly cited reference of Pilate’s question to Jesus – “What is truth?!” – is usually brought up whenever the pursuit of truth becomes uncomfortable. When distortions of truth prove more palatable than truth itself, then truth’s definition comes into question or is reduced to that interpretation which the powers that be decide to present. Jesus, however, points to a definition of truth in that same passage. His words to Pilate before that famous question were these: *For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice.* (Jn 18:37) Truth, then, is that for which Jesus was born, that for which Jesus has come into the world; truth is that to which Jesus bears witness. He reveals truth to be a hermeneutic work connected to his very person and mission. Through the action of his Spirit, Jesus continues to bear witness to truth in the religions, cultures and peoples of the world, especially those who have nothing to offer but their suffering and marginalization. Through ongoing dialogue with them in a spirit of communion, theology can continue to draw upon that truth for its mission of service. Dialogue cannot be taken as a threat, but as a gateway to deeper truth and

¹⁷ See McLean, *Hermeneutics, Faith and Relations between Cultures*, 86. I have substituted ‘theology’ in italics for the first person pronouns ‘our’ and ‘us.’

¹⁸ For a fuller discussion of this responsibility of fundamental theology, see Ruggieri’s “Il futuro della Teologia Fondamentale,” in *La Teologia Fondamentale: Convergenze per il terzo millennio*, 273-274, where he writes: “Per un verso vuole dimostrare la ‘sua’ verità. Per altro verso è costretta quasi ad omologare questa verità alla verità comunemente riconosciuta. Al ‘futuro’ della teologia fondamentale appartiene come compito primario, decisivo anche per altri ambiti, come quello storico-dogmatico, ecumenico e interreligioso, la rielaborazione del concetto di verità.”

meaning. Speaking of the attitude needed for effective dialogue, McLean asserts that “our attitude in approaching dialogue must be one of willingness continually to revise our initial projection or expectation of meaning.”¹⁹ Open participation with others for truth, then, demands that horizons be evaluated and extended in view of Jesus’ ongoing witness to truth in people and cultures of the world, especially the most vulnerable.

Horizons and the Ambit of Freedom

Finally, that other cultures are quintessentially products of self-cultivation by other spirits as free and creative implies the need to open one’s horizons beyond one’s self-concerns to the ambit of the freedom of others. This involves promoting the development of other free and creative centers and cultures which, precisely as such, are not in one’s own possession or under one’s own control. One lives then no longer in terms merely of oneself or of things that one can make or manage, but in terms of an interchange between free persons and peoples of different cultures.²⁰

This quote illustrates perfectly McLean’s approach to dialogue and cooperation between cultures in the global context. Just as we spoke of the need for openness above, openness to others and especially to hearing anew the wisdom of our own heritage, here the focus falls on respecting the freedom of others and the new freedom received from our assent to faith. The response in faith calls for a selfless involvement with others. Again, this responsibility remains true, not just for the believing individual, but for theology in its role of service, proclamation and learning. Attitude and horizon are the primary hermeneutic elements

¹⁹ McLean, *Ways to God*, 370. Those who have nothing to offer but their suffering and marginalization in fact offer us far more than we initially comprehend. In reference to our discussion on imaginative intellection, they stand as witnesses of their own personal dignity, but also of their contribution to the unity of the whole and the presence of God. In short they reflect the wounded Christ and the wounded global whole, along with the need to participate generously for deeper communion and healing.

²⁰ McLean, *Religion and Cooperation between Civilizations*, 118-119. Benedict XVI expresses many of the same sentiments regarding horizon related to culture and freedom: “Human beings interpret and shape the natural environment through culture, which in turn is given direction by the responsible use of freedom, in accordance with the dictates of the moral law.” Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, # 48.

that accompany us into any dialogue with others, or into any encounter with a text. I want to focus on horizons, placing them in the context of the theme of freedom for faith. The passage above demonstrates clearly that one's own operative horizon and freedom have to be able to give full space for the freedom and horizon of others. Far from being considered a problem, respecting the ambit of the freedom of others provides an opportunity to listen, learn, discover new truths, and expand one's own horizons. Without this respect for freedom, theology would not be able to engage the world in an effective relationship leading to communion.

Taking into consideration how a culture or person represents a text, I want to try to apply the notion to aspects of McLean's textual hermeneutics, in order to sharpen the understanding of horizons. He speaks of the need for the members of any tradition to do the work of decontextualizing the text of its heritage. Only after that decontextualization can it be adequately re-contextualized for effective application to current circumstances. He goes on to say that "this requires opening and adjusting horizons through dialogue with others, for which two levels of critique are required: structural and existential."²¹ This process also has to be followed by theology, since insights develop in response to challenges. Though the truth of the insights does not diminish, the context of thinking through those insights changes constantly. Thus, theological frameworks have to adapt to think through new expressions of truth. Any theological framework has to be de-contextualized from its original horizon, then, re-contextualized for the new horizon of application. Such a method can protect theology from falling into systemic traps.²² The constant re-

²¹ McLean, *Hermeneutics, Faith and Relations between Cultures*, 61.

²² McLean does not speak of theological systems specifically, but he does often caution against allowing any sort of systemic thinking or operating to take over, since it has the unfortunate effect of restricting people's freedom and creativity. Part of the danger comes from today's more technocratic consciousness, what he calls "the final step in the rationalization of modern life into a cybernetically self-stabilizing system." McLean, *Hermeneutics, Faith and Relations between Cultures*, 74. His concern is to keep people fully engaged, rather than having their response pre-programmed by another's history or by "abstract and impersonal, depersonalizing and secularizing structures, slogans or utopias." *Ibid.*, 48-49. Theology, influenced by the intellectual climate of the day, has to take precautions not to fall into these same traps. But it can only do so by engaging itself anew in people's free religious response to the good from within their cultural tradition. My argument is that the locus of Christ's ongoing witness to the truth will be found in each cultural heritage, so theology has to be there too, not as a system, but as an attentive participant in the Spirit's unveiling of truth among the interplay of

thinking and re-contextualizing also has the effect of keeping theology attentively observing people's response to the good, so that the shifting and fusion of various horizons might indicate new manifestations of God's truth.

The existential critique is just as important as the structural one. Theology is called to this constant vigilance because human freedom lived with others through time reveals insights and worlds of meaning that are constantly changing. Shifts in the horizons of peoples and cultures reflect newly understood lines of meaning that need to be recognized. Each participant in a dialogue carries a context of meaning in his or her horizon. Each also carries a particular projection of the others' worlds of meaning. These various horizons are real, but not fixed or set in stone. For effective dialogue they must remain transparent and dynamic, fluid or malleable. Ideally, McLean relates that, when in the midst of dialogue our own projected horizon of meaning can no longer be maintained, then "our passion to hear the Word of God in the sacred text or the other in the conversation drives us to make needed adjustments in our projection of their meaning."²³ If such adjustments are not made, then the parties involved in the dialogue may be genuinely trying to hear one another, but without forming any real communion. Real communion establishes a new community of relationships through the achievement of a commonly embraced meaning.²⁴ Theology must be an active participant, rather than a neutral observer in this search for common meaning founded on truth. It can shift its horizons of articulating newly discovered dimensions of truth, but always with the mind of shaping those expressions within the grammar of love set forth by the Gospel and the person of Jesus. Otherwise, it would not be an accurate discernment of the Holy Spirit in the dialogue. An authentic dialogue of communion, then, operates as an open participation of free subjects seeking truth who are willing to modify their initial assumptions and horizons as they discover together new horizons of common meaning. As gift of the Father given through the Son, the Holy

various cultural horizons. Cultures need theology to provide the grammar of love from faith for their expressions of freedom.

²³ McLean, *Hermeneutics, Faith and Relations between Cultures*, 56-57.

²⁴ As Lonergan writes: "A community is not just a number of men within a geographical frontier. It is an achievement of common meaning, and there are kinds and degrees of achievement.... Community coheres or divides, begins or ends, just where the common field of experience, common understanding, common judgment, common commitments begin and end." Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 79. See his full discussion of community and meaning in the same chapter.

Spirit is the author of that common meaning and the keeper of faith horizons.

Relational Dialogue of Cultures

The preceding two sections were necessary to situate the place of one's attitude and freedom for a relational hermeneutics of communion. Here I want to describe some key aspects for it during the process of dialogue. The intention is not to enter into a complete description of the process; the Church has well established norms and tested procedures already in place. Instead, I want to highlight aspects of the dialogue that show it to be more than a mere functional activity for discussion. All of the discussions of previous chapters regarding encounter, reality, recognition and assent come into play here. The dialogue of cultures can be described as a way of communion, an engagement in Christ's drawing all things into one, or an expression of charity that reflects the journey of various cultures along the path of unity. The discussion falls into three parts: a) creative discernment; b) gift of differences; and c) imaginative reconfiguration in charity.

Creative Discernment. When cultures or members of cultures engage one another in dialogue, the encounter has to be understood to consist of more than a functional conversation of respect and good will. If the attitudes and freedom of the participants are understood as outlined above, then the encounter has the opportunity to be a creative discernment. To each encounter one brings the horizon of a living tradition and a history of discovering meaning. By carrying or projecting their expectations, meaning is anticipated for participants as they enter an encounter or dialogue. As previously mentioned, this anticipation of meaning cannot be understood as static, since the tradition we carry lives in the present. When tradition is fully embraced in its living sense (synchronic plus diachronic sense), McLean calls this anticipation of meaning "what we produce as we participate in the evolution of the tradition and thereby further determine ourselves."²⁵ Each participant brings his or her own horizon to the discussion and has this creative responsibility to grow freely in self-determination. McLean continues, "Our horizon is a creative stance which reflects the content not only of the past, but of the time in which one stands and the life project in which one is engaged."²⁶ To translate this passage for our purpose here, I would maintain that theology has to be about establishing clear language and mechanisms for building the

²⁵ McLean, *Hermeneutics, Tradition and Contemporary Change*, 13.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

communion God intends. In coming to a cultural dialogue, theology, like any other participant, brings a horizon of a creative stance for this project of communion. Theology's task has to engage cultures with the philosophical tools both to recognize and demonstrate, as Pope John Paul II would say, the universality of faith's content. As he described in *Fides et Ratio*, such engagement "enables us to discern in different world-views and different cultures 'not what people think but what the objective truth is'. It is not an array of human opinions but truth alone which can be of help to theology."²⁷ Theology, then, takes a creative stance at the table of cultural dialogue so that it can be assisted in its discernment of truth and its task for building up a living communion between peoples.

Just as an individual has to tap into resources of self-transcendence for discerning clearly God's will, theology (or perhaps more appropriately the theologian) has to overcome personal shortcomings by discerning the ambivalence at work in itself and others in order to discover new ramifications of truth. The transcendence needed has its origin in God; for non-believers, the origin of self-transcendence may only become visible in terms of the unity of the whole and one's participation in it. Lonergan writes that "Just as it is one's self-transcendence that enables one to know others accurately and to judge them fairly, so inversely it is through knowledge and appreciation of others that we come to know ourselves and to fill out and refine our apprehension of values."²⁸ The values give direction to a culture's orientation to God as the good, the one, the true and the beautiful. For the same dynamic discernment, McLean recommends what he calls "principles of coordination" to discern beyond political or economic goods to the spiritual goods of mind and heart.²⁹ Those spiritual goods can bear the fruit of objective truth and new possibilities for communion, whereas the economic or political goods are too often tainted by possession or competition. The creative discernment, then, for theology as for any other culture or participant in the dialogue, demands this transcendent pursuit of the truth and meaning in the ambivalent and

²⁷ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, # 69. See also Benedict XVI's reflections on discernment based on charity and truth, while taking account of freedom in *Caritas in Veritate*, # 55.

²⁸ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 253.

²⁹ See McLean's discussion in *Religion and Cooperation between Civilizations*, 131. He offers knowledge as an example of a spiritual good that can be shared without being lost. Unfortunately, today's world can also offer examples where knowledge is pursued as an exclusive possession that can cause competition and conflict.

affective zones of the mind and heart. The truth and meaning hidden in those ambivalent zones give expression to God's will.

Gift of Differences.

Were dialogue and cooperation to result only from the ways we are the same then the road to peace would lie in suppressing that which is distinctive of persons and their cultures or rendering it inoperative in the public square. This has been a strong factor in the liberal "approach." If, instead, personal life is appreciated as creative and hence as differentiating the pattern of one's life and culture, then it is necessary to find ways in which even the differences in human and cultural formation can be principles of cooperation, indeed even the means for the internal enrichment of traditions from their proper resources.³⁰

Contrary to what might be expected, McLean stresses that dialogue is most effective when it stresses the distinctive nature of the participants, rather than their similarities. The differences are "principles of cooperation" rather than areas of conflict, competition and division. Similarities might serve as starting points, but the dialogue cannot stay there or it would risk becoming a vehicle of suppression and denial of reality. The whole point of this thesis has been to recognize and embrace the full complexity of reality in any encounter. Otherwise the richness of life's gifts risks being lost in an avoidance that would lock one into prejudices and block the insights needed for growth in freedom. Theology has always learned new insights through proclaiming the Gospel to any new culture it encounters. As the Gospel purifies, challenges, and enriches the culture, the culture, in turn, discloses new depths of meaning and grace in the Gospel. By cultivating the extraordinary richness of multiple cultures, theology can broaden its understanding of the Gospel and discover new ways to bring expression to faith and doctrines. In addition to benefiting from the differences and interchange between the Gospel and cultures, theology also has the responsibility to promote cultural differences as real principles of cooperation.

Earlier I spoke of the character of a culture as giving flesh, albeit in a limited and imperfect manner, to a people's ongoing dialogue with the Holy Spirit through history. McLean spoke of it more as the cumulative acts of freedom of a people through time. The people and their relationship to God in the Holy Spirit give a culture its ontology in

³⁰ McLean, *Religion and Cooperation between Civilizations*, 143.

being, as well as its consciousness in history. Cultures, then, are what McLean describes as “matters of subjectivity.”³¹ Creative dialogue between cultures that embrace differences as principles of cooperation offers a mechanism to engage another’s subjectivity. It also affords the opportunity to discover new meaning in one’s heritage as one’s own subjectivity is reflected back by others in the dialogue. What slowly occurs is a fusion of horizons, through which a new perspective is obtained for evaluating and deepening one’s own identity and heritage.³² Theology is suited for facilitating such a dialogue because it recognizes that God forms the foundation of the subjectivity of each participant and, thus, the basis of relationship in unity. The differences are understood as gifts that broaden the expressions of the subjectivity of each culture’s journey with God and refine those expressions in dialogue.

Witness and Imaginative Reconfiguration in Charity. Embracing dialogue as a creative discernment and seeing the differences as gifts should not imply that dialogue represents a relatively easy exercise of positive engagement. The challenges are considerable. They range from confronting one’s biases to how to go about one’s witness to the faith, to respecting freedom, to truly hearing the other so that shifts and transformation may take place. Dialogue tests the full level of charity and forbearance.

To explore these challenges I return again to the notion of midwifery that was introduced earlier. Fully involving ourselves in the hermeneutic dialogue requires not only taking stock of our initial horizons and pre-judgments, but placing our world of meaning at risk. This would include for theology placing its own framework of meaning at risk, even as it attempts to manage the proclamation of the faith in dialogue. The meaning of revelatory texts has to engage the newness of possible clarification and deepening in dialogue. This does not imply that faith itself be at risk, only that horizons of meaning be open to expansion and reiteration. With any proclamation of the Gospel, however, such risk has to be part of the midwifing process that gives space for the birth of new meaning that may carry new implications for both speaker and listener. Faith allows theology to trust fully the

³¹ McLean, *Knowledge of God and the Discovery of Man*, 54.

³² In some ways this reiterates what I have already said in other places. The purpose, however, is to integrate this important engagement of the faith into a disciplined dialogue of communion. For some related reading on dialogue in McLean, see *Hermeneutics, Faith and Relations between Cultures*, 47-49, 122; *Religion and Cooperation between Civilizations*, 38-41; and *Ways to God*, 372.

heritage it has received, even as that heritage is put to the test in intercultural dialogues. The process yields the fruit of new insights, meaning and forms of expression. Faith, in turn, becomes deepened and strengthened, not weakened or lost.

One of McLean's insights that I already highlighted is a deeper sense of freedom catalyzed by the proclamation of the Gospel.³³ McLean uses the word "catalyzed" because culture is a matter of subjectivity, as mentioned above. Deductions for meaning and freedom may work for scientific analysis, but not for proclamation and dialogue with other cultures. The trust needed in dialogue, then, extends to the Gospel message and to the subjective receptivity of the cultures who are the participants. Pope John Paul II confirmed this insight regarding cultures' receptivity in his encyclical *Fides et Ratio*. Three points he mentioned that I would like to highlight are that cultures a) are fed by the communication of values, b) have a deep impulse towards a fulfillment, and c) through encounter with the Gospel "are prompted to open themselves to the newness of the Gospel's truth and to be stirred by this truth to develop in new ways."³⁴ In dialogue with cultures, theology can not only be confident in the necessary gentle presentation of the Gospel, but it can also be at peace in its role as listener or hearer. Theology has to trust that God has indeed implanted within cultures a deep impulse towards fulfillment, one that only the Gospel can satisfy. When cultures are stirred by the truth of the Gospel to develop in new ways, theology has to listen attentively to the culture's own witness of perspectives and meanings. This demands what I would call *theological empathy*. As theology attempts to evangelize in the dialogue, it also avails itself to being evangelized. Avery Dulles describes the dynamic as follows: "Through empathy it will be possible for the hearer to imagine what reality must look like to the speaker, and this vision, once grasped, may seem far more attractive than anything the hearer could have conceived apart from this testimony."³⁵ Theology's role as midwife, then, is to catalyze and stimulate the subjective receptivity of cultures to the Gospel by its own testimony through dialogue, while also

³³ See McLean, *Ways to God*, 183. He builds from Cornelio Fabro's intuition that the deepened metaphysical sense of being (existential) from the early proclamation of the Gospel was stimulated or catalyzed by the freedom proclaimed.

³⁴ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, # 71.

³⁵ Dulles, *The Craft of Theology*, 63. Dulles is describing here generally the effect of the testimony of a witness to Gospel transformation. My point is that theology not only has the responsibility of giving witness, but also of hearing the others' experience as witness to the transformative effects of God's grace.

recognizing and giving articulation to new expressions of graced transformation through empathetically entering into the subjectivity of the cultural awakenings to faith.

By witnessing and hearing the witness of others, participants in dialogue are drawn to reconsider their original assumptions and return to the richness of their respective traditions. If dialogue were to end with merely an interesting conversation and expression of opinions, no real mining of new veins or threads of meaning would result. The contact has to return the participants to their heritage so that the dialogue can enable them to apply their imagination to reconfigure the elements of their own tradition. All that was said earlier regarding attitude now gets put to the test at this stage of imaginative reconfiguration. McLean describes the attitude at this stage as having to move beyond defensiveness, compromise or the development of new techniques of manipulation. "Instead it is the conviction that our culture especially as religiously grounded and open to transcendence has resources of meaning that thus far have been mined but partially, and consequently that they have more to say to us."³⁶ The reconfiguration cannot be aimless but, through applying the imaginative intellection discussed earlier, follows instead a movement towards unity. The imagination, then, has guideposts that direct its energies. New insights have to be considered in light of revelation for clarification of the faith and modification of the tradition as necessary. This would allow for the creative expression in freedom for the ongoing development of the tradition.³⁷ To do it well requires the full use of theology's hermeneutic tools and also the use or understanding of another culture's hermeneutic tools.

The imaginative reconfiguration of one's heritage is a specifically creative work stimulated by new disclosures of revelation perpetuating itself. God's love acts as the catalyst, because the disclosures are God's attempt to renew that communication of love. God's love establishes the differences as principles of cooperation and acts as the integrating point for the relation between cultures. This relation, as McLean points out, integrates various modes of human life and "is in principle one of

³⁶ McLean, *Religion and Cooperation between Civilizations*, 70.

³⁷ Dulles similarly describes tradition through its ongoing development: "Tradition is the process of diachronic communication whereby revelation, received in faith, perpetuates itself from generation to generation." Dulles, *The Craft of Theology*, 23. McLean asserts that response to dialogue cannot consist of either a rejection of one's own heritage (nihilist path), nor a substitution of another's (alienation), but creative transformation. See McLean, *Ways to God*, 316.

complementarity and outreach.”³⁸ Theology has to see its own role as facilitating the integration and helping the participants understand their relation to others as a complementarity. The origin of the outreach is God’s love, and the entire dialogue that supports the relations necessarily advances in charity or not at all. Committing to such dialogue demands a decision about expanding the context of one’s world of meaning, thus broadening the foundations of one’s framework and possibilities for new insights.³⁹ It is also a decision to allow one’s horizon to be opened to the horizons of others and become permeable to the worlds of meaning held by other cultures.

Permeable Horizon of Communion

The goal of dialogue is the establishment of a new communion formed through allowing horizons to become permeable to one another. The idea is that the horizons, which are vantage points of meaning for the mind, come to know their own limits and become more aware of transcending those limits through interacting with horizons of others. This permeability of one’s horizon, this ability to move in and out of other horizons, allows for each culture to retest constantly its assumptions and its special place in communion with others. Theology has the role of guiding this slow journey towards communion, ensuring that the growing unity in God’s plan not be replaced by a sort of tolerant relativism without rudder or direction. McLean does not comment on theology’s role, but he does offer a check for any culture testing the boundaries of its horizons while trying to integrate it with the horizons of others. Cultures similar to our own do not help much in stretching our horizon. I would call this cultural horizon check that McLean recommends the *gift of the marginalized* for growth towards communion.

Real liberation from our most basic limitations and deceptions comes only with a conscious effort to take account of the horizons of those who differ notably, whether as another ethnic group, as a distinct culture intermingled with our own, or – still more definitively – as

³⁸ McLean, *Ways to God*, 374-375.

³⁹ My aim here is to point to the complementarity in thought on what I have said here using McLean’s insights and Lonergan’s own understanding of how he sees the functional specialty of foundations. “Foundational reality, as distinct from its expression, is conversion: religious, moral, and intellectual.... It is a fully conscious decision about one’s horizon, one’s outlook, one’s world-view.” Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 267-268.

living on the margins of all of these societies and integrated into none.⁴⁰

Just as the marginalized offer a challenge for cultures to become more aware of their blind spots in their horizons and relations with others, they also provide theology with a check on a culture's dynamic movement towards real communion. Because they live on the edges of cultures and are not integrated, the marginalized demand that cultures move beyond not only their existing horizons, but their whole way of thinking about horizons or boundaries in general. With the introduction of the Gospel, horizons begin to appear sometimes as artificial constructs maintained for reasons of security or dominance. Taking account of the marginalized breaks down those constructs and makes existing horizons more flexible and more permeable, not simply for a relativistic inclusion and tolerance, but for a more genuine and responsible communion with its foundation in God who created all.

How theology takes the witness of the marginalized into account determines the quality of its response to the Gospel mandate and to cultural horizons in general. Cultural and religious pluralism can be viewed as an obstacle to be overcome or a theological opportunity to discover new riches in God's plan of love to draw all things into a living communion.⁴¹ To deal with the reality of pluralism McLean calls on Kant's third critique – that of aesthetic reason – to be developed to help establish the needed harmony for today's global realities.⁴² The Gospel, while appealing to human freedom and meaning, always speaks to the aesthetic dimensions of a culture and challenges it to envision a new harmony in its relations. Theology, then, has to attend to orchestrating the harmony of the existing pluralism as the various cultures try to tap their aesthetic sense for a working communion that seeks to include all,

⁴⁰ McLean, *Hermeneutics, Faith and Relations between Cultures*, 87-88.

⁴¹ Here I want to allude to Lonergan's insight that existing pluralism is not so much the challenge to theology as is the absence of conversion. As he puts it, "Such pluralism will have little appeal to persons with a propensity to oversimplification. But the real menace to unity of faith does not lie either in the many brands of common sense or the many differentiations of human consciousness. It lies in the absence of intellectual or moral or religious conversion." Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 330.

⁴² McLean notes that religions especially need to pay renewed attention to aesthetic reason to harmonize the universalization and diversification that are part of globalization. McLean maintains that the aesthetic awareness is part of an infrastructure in all cultures that extends to their totemic origins and that "it needs now to be brought out from behind Enlightenment hubris as the ground for creative relationships in the new millennium." McLean, *Religion and Cooperation between Civilizations*, 132.

even those on the margins of societies, cultures or economic systems. For this reason, much of what has been presented has focused around respecting and developing this aesthetic sense, especially in the hermeneutic reflections necessary for the various stages of midwifing the freedom of people and cultures as they move towards the faith.

All of the hermeneutics that I have presented – inquiring hermeneutics of deliberation, investigative hermeneutics of assent, and, here, the relational hermeneutics of communion – are marked by the questioning common to any hermeneutics, though with a different emphasis specific to its stage of the dynamic. For the critical hermeneutic step beyond questioning, however, it is important for theology to cultivate gratitude as it seeks to carry out its mission of helping cultures in their dialogue of communion. McLean expresses it best:

Hence, the properly human attitude is not one of questioning, but of thanksgiving. This most deeply inspires and gives dynamism to human life as it is thanksgiving for the gift of one's very being. The gift of life can never be repaid in kind; it must be received and treasured, interpreted and shaped; and in turn creatively passed on to others. This itself is a hermeneutic process; indeed it is the essence of all hermeneutics.⁴³

No better summary could be offered for a relational hermeneutics of communion than to point the way to thanksgiving. Ultimately, all hermeneutics are a response to how we interpret life as gift; they also reflect how we interpret the life of others who differ from us. The learning from, sharing and merging of mutual horizons reflect an appreciation of these gifts and a willingness to build a communion based on the common elements of meaning. In this short passage McLean demonstrates how the philosophies of being and consciousness enrich each other to serve the mission of leading Catholic philosophy, and therefore theology, to new frontiers of reflection. Theology's goal is one of proclaiming the faith, even as it listens and learns, in thanksgiving, from the various cultures of the world new expressions of God's manifestations. Through aesthetically assimilating those diverse testimonies of cultures while taking into account the witness of the marginalized, theology seeks to harmonize the horizons of all and lead them ever closer to the eschatological unity God intends.

⁴³ McLean, *Persons, Peoples and Cultures*, 101.

TOWARDS THE KINGDOM OF GOD: ESCHATOLOGICAL TENSION AND UNITY IN THE GLOBAL CONTEXT

The communion described above does not exist as some type of utopia, nor does it happen all at once. Even with its gradual formation, the communion remains ever fixed in the eschatological tension that all union with God manifests. Contrary to secularization, which has “the disastrous effect of pitting a seemingly imperial Western civilization against other civilizations which it threatens to undermine,”⁴⁴ eschatology in the context of the Kingdom of God provides the safest strategy for theology to interpret and guide the process of globalization. When McLean proposes for philosophy a holistic paradigm for global times, he necessarily, as a philosopher, leaves out any discussions of eschatological dynamic. The paradigm he introduces, however, represents what might be called an eschatological trajectory that depends upon the grace of God and the active participation of the multiple cultures of the world. McLean rightly insists that unity and diversity have to be kept in balance for globalization to be understood in its proper light. Both must be affirmed without ever being lost, since “the domination of either unity or diversity at the cost of the other would lead to a great impoverishment of human life both materially and spiritually.”⁴⁵ In this final section, then, I want to set McLean’s insights related to his global paradigm for philosophy into the backdrop of the eschatological tensions that mark the growth of the Kingdom of God. I divide my reflections into three sections: a) the reality of diversity; b) convergence of cultures and the eschatology dynamic; and c) harmonious fulfillment in freedom.

The Reality of Diversity

In discussing Nicholas of Cusa’s notion of contraction, we noted that, while beings maintain a unique identity, this identity is intimately intertwined with the whole or the totality of being.⁴⁶ Just as each person is unique but united with the whole, so also is every culture. From the perspective of eschatology, each person’s subjectivity has a dialogical character of immortality in reference to God. Before the assent of faith, this dialogical character reflects on itself between the moments of its creation and the impending arrival of death. After the assent of faith, the

⁴⁴ Ibid., 91.

⁴⁵ McLean, *Religion and Cooperation between Civilizations*, 130.

⁴⁶ See McLean, *Religion and Culture*, vol. 38 of Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change, Series I: Culture and Values (Washington, DC: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2010), 147.

reference for this dialogical subjectivity is centered on Christ; the poles of the tension shift to the Christ-event, with the Gospel on one side and the fulfillment of one's salvation on the other. The gift of faith is recognized and embraced, but the fullness of transformation, the working out of one's salvation, takes a lifetime. With the assent of faith the reality and force of the resurrection changes the meaning of death. Rather than a threat of annihilation, death comes to represent another step in one's dialogue with God. Similarly, one's creation is viewed differently. Life is no longer a biological accident, but a mysterious gift of relationship with God to be shared with others. Each person's unique dialogue with God, then, becomes joined with the diverse dialogues of others with God. The understanding of creation becomes transformed in this image of God uniting this rich diversity of expressions. Cultures share this same dynamic in their dialogical subjectivity. With the slow process of conversion and transformation in their hidden dialogue with the Holy Spirit, the Christ-event changes the poles of reference in cultures and moves them to share this mystery of love. A culture's understanding of its identity comes to be intimately linked to unity with the whole, a unity that is of God's making.

When McLean describes the rich diversity of human life and its unique existence in relation to the whole, he begins with the analogy of proper proportionality. Here each being is unique in its existence in relation to its essence; it is like another only through that similar, unique proportionality in the other.⁴⁷ Each being, then, has its own unique existence in relation to its own unique potential or essence. As such, rich diversity is present everywhere, in each person, or in common species, or in those who come together to make up a common culture. The shared effort creatively to develop culture comes from each person's taking responsibility, while trusting that others must likewise contribute.⁴⁸

As regards eschatology, the drama and gift of one's relationship to God in Christ are uniquely personal. Each person's intimate dialogue with God develops from the moment of creation, forming a sort of holy memory deep in one's being. One's life and identity, then, are marked

⁴⁷ The four-term analogy consists of at least two proportions, such as A:B::C:D. As McLean puts it, the "realities are not identical or equal to each other, but are similar only in the proportion that each represents within itself, i.e., in the relations of A to B and of C to D. In each proportion there is nothing of A in B, neither of its existence nor its essence." McLean, *Persons, Peoples and Cultures*, 174-176.

⁴⁸ Benedict XVI calls this shared responsibility a reciprocity that is fostered best by societies through a balanced subsidiarity. See his discussion in *Caritas in Veritate*, # 57.

with a dialogical character expressed in the soul and rooted in a mysterious relationship with God. That uniquely personal relationship and existence unfold within a context of complex diversity, since others also share this experience of unique relationship with God. One's personal *memoria* time that continues even after death is forever marked by this personal uniqueness amidst a diverse community of others.⁴⁹ The eschatological tension that marks the drama of one's own life in a unique manner, then, similarly marks the life of every other person or culture in a unique way. God is the unifying factor. The poles of eschatological tension within each life are established by the same Christ-event that sets the parameters for the diverse personal dramas. In embracing our life and relationship with God as gift, we also embrace God's relationship with others.

Convergence of Cultures and the Eschatology Dynamic

The image that McLean returns to repeatedly in his writing in order to demonstrate the convergence of cultures is that of the holy mountain, towards which many peoples and nations stream in eschatological fulfillment.⁵⁰ The mountain is not so much a place as it is a reference to God. The mountain is where the fullness of God dwells. In the more eschatological sense, then, it comes to represent one's

⁴⁹ Death marks a close to our life's expression. The relationship we nurtured with God during life becomes finalized in the act of death. Earthly time ends at death, but the status of this relationship continues in *memoria* time. This finality of life's expression in time makes death a critical juncture in one's lived freedom. The quality of one's *memoria* can be changed or transformed up to the very moment of death, but with death our human freedom is finalized and our *memoria* at death remains in the soul as the expression of our earthly existence. See Ratzinger's discussion of the theology of death and the dialogical character of immortality in *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life*, trans. Michael Waldstein, translation edited by Aidan Nichols, OP (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1988). See also Rahner's reflections: "Theological Considerations Concerning the Moment of Death," in *Theological Investigations Volume XI: Confrontations 1* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1974), 309-321; and "Ideas for a Theology of Death," in *Theological Investigations Volume XIII: Theology, Anthropology, Christology* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975), 169-186.

⁵⁰ This scriptural image is one McLean uses in many places, usually in direct reference to his proposed new paradigm for philosophy in the 21st century. See Isaiah 2:2-4 and Micah 4:1-3. The image or theme of the holy mountain recurs throughout the Hebrew Testament. The Greek New Testament echoes the image as well, most notably in reference to the holy mountain of Tabor where Jesus is transfigured, the mount of Calvary where he is crucified, and the Mount of Olives where he ascended into heaven.

relationship with God. It is towards deep relationship with God that the many peoples are drawn. That fullness of relationship that God intends for each of us, with God's self and with others, reaches perfection in Jesus, who personally calls each person in a unique manner. The diversity described above is as true for cultures as for individuals. Here I want to look specifically at cultures and how they progress towards unity within the eschatological tensions that bear upon them.

The Gospel penetrates cultures slowly, through the conversion of individuals who then bring the influence of the Gospel to bear as they creatively apply the Gospel values to reinterpret their culture's tradition through the light of those values. The diversity and similarity of cultures can be described using the same analogy of proper proportionality as for individuals. Each culture is unique and similar to another in how its existence is expressed in relation to its own particular potential or essence. With the Gospel's influence, a culture's potential becomes more and more realized. As such, its communal subjectivity becomes more aware of its dialogical character in relation to God through the Christ-event. The historical dialogue that the Holy Spirit has carried out with a culture forms that culture's heritage by the free acts of the people over time in response to events. Before the advent of the Gospel, the dialogical character of the culture's communal subjectivity with God may only be partially or remotely known. Their primary reflections may have been about survival and celebration, stemming from interpretations on the origin of the culture and threats to its existence from surrounding peoples. With the Gospel this field of interpretation changes in light of the Christ-event. The dawning of this conversion of culture demands constant hermeneutic reflection, as converts to Christian faith attempt to reinterpret the culture's heritage and the lived tensions under a more eschatological light, while others continue to interpret the heritage more in light of survival than eschatology. Slowly, the fields of interpretation begin to merge and, like yeast added to flour, the Gospel leavens the culture.

A similar scenario can be said to apply to multiple cultures in the global context. In order to describe the internal relation between cultures, McLean uses the analogy of attribution based on final causality. This analogy consists of three terms rather than the four-term analogy of proper proportionality. In the analogy of attribution, then, two elements are "similar by their causal relation to a third on which they both depend."⁵¹ Each culture is similar to another by their common

⁵¹ McLean, *Persons, Peoples and Cultures*, 176. These two analogies form McLean's bedrock for understanding how he sees that diversity can be protected and go hand-in-hand with the unity or sense of the whole in the global context. An understanding of the analogy of proper proportionality

relation to God, on whom each depends. That relation, however, is not equally recognized or engaged by each culture. Different though each culture may be, the shared element common to each is characterized by relation to the one God. For this reason cultures, even dramatically different cultures, are inherently complementary to each other. As McLean puts it, “if each culture is a limited but unique manifestation of the One infinite existent, the facet each expresses must be complementary to all other such manifestations.”⁵² As each progresses and strives for perfection, the result is a closer and more developed relationship with God. Other cultures not only share in the same origin in God, but also need to be seen as “sharing in the common goal and hence as companions in convergent pilgrimages.”⁵³ Those pilgrimages include undergoing the hermeneutic shift from survival and competitive values to more unitive, eschatological values. Theology can help to place in perspective where various cultures might be on their pilgrimage, so that expectations between cultures and their levels of faith not expand beyond working realities. Cultures converge not to a common place, but to a common person, Christ, and the Spirit leads cultures on that eschatological journey.⁵⁴

As the conscious tensions which mark a culture shift more to their eschatological relation to Christ, the dynamics of their conversion change as well. But the call to conversion must always be accompanied by the proclamation of the Kingdom of God in the person of Jesus, who connects the culture’s *memoria* from its hidden dialogue with the Holy Spirit to its destination in him. Like an individual person’s *memoria* that characterizes one’s identity and relationship with God and survives after death, so a culture’s *memoria* defines its identity and relationship with God. Though various totemic symbols may be adopted during its

protects the rich diversity of each person and culture; an understanding of the analogy of attribution protects the unity of all diverse elements through their common relation to the one God.

⁵² Ibid, 206. The fact that each has a relationship with God establishes a real complementarity that has to be recognized and nurtured for an operative communion and convergence of cultures.

⁵³ McLean, *Hermeneutics, Faith and Relations between Cultures*, 124.

⁵⁴ I have already mentioned how a culture reflects the dialogue of a particular people with the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the unifier, guiding subject for all cultures. As Yves Congar related, “The Spirit, then, is unique and present everywhere, transcendent and inside all things, subtle and sovereign, able to respect freedom and inspire it. At the end...there will be one life animating many without doing violence to the inner experience of anyone.... The Spirit is therefore an eschatological reality.” Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit, Vol. II*, trans. David Smith (New York: The Seabury Press, 1983), 17.

historical journey, at the heart of each culture's *memoria* and thought exists a totemic link to Christ: specifically, the cross of Christ as the symbol for God's love that illuminates and clarifies the meaning of the culture's historical events and strivings in freedom. Through a deep listening to the culture, the proclamation of the Gospel and theological reflection, the Church accompanies a people in its slow discovery and uncovering of this universal totem in the culture's conscious reflection.

Harmonious Fulfillment in Freedom

In Christ, the Kingdom of God is already present in the global context, but still on its way to fulfillment, the classical "already – not yet" condition. Theology has not only to grasp the consequences of this eschatological reality, but must take account of how the missions of the Son and the Spirit continue to act in ways that draw the Church ever forward in her reflections. McLean's paradigm for philosophy in the global context, and his use of the analogies of proper proportionality and attribution, provide useful tools for theology to reflect on those Trinitarian missions. The Gospel takes root and flourishes where people feel fully free to hear its wisdom and apply it in their culture and daily lives. McLean recommends that the shift needed in the global context for nations and cultures, a recommendation I would extend also to theology, "is to appreciate the whole globally, rather than merely as a set of contrasting individuals. It is this context which truly enables and promotes the exercise of human freedom."⁵⁵ For the full exercise of human freedom, order rather than conflict provides the best environment. The Gospel's flourishing is best served by a theological imagination ordered on global unity formed from the freedom and love flowing from the paschal mystery and symbolized in the universal totem of Christ crucified. As theology reflects on the life and conversion of the individual and the Church, it must situate it in the global context and take account of the movement of all other cultures as well.

In addition to this appreciation of the global whole, there also has to be an appreciation of the eschatological dimensions of time. Time and history are not only a relentless forward movement of events; they also retain a plasticity that eschatology constantly addresses. The plasticity influences the way the tensions are addressed and also makes the Christ-event, which occurred in the fullness of time, alive and active in every time and place. John Paul II alluded to this when he wrote that "For the People of God, therefore, history becomes a path to be followed to the end, so that by the unceasing action of the Holy Spirit (cf. Jn 16:13) the

⁵⁵ McLean, *Religion and Cooperation between Civilizations*, 92.

contents of revealed truth may find their full expression.”⁵⁶ It is this unceasing action of the Holy Spirit that demands the attention of fundamental theology so that truth can reach its full expression. In Christ the full expression exists, but the full revelation of that expression continues to unfold in time. Theological midwifery, therefore, broadens its scope to include the universal action of the Holy Spirit in cultures so that the full truth of reality and God’s love can become known.

The universal significance of the Christ-event, and the scandal of its particularity in the historical person of Jesus of Nazareth, come into full focus in this unfolding of truth’s full expression in the global context. Truth needs the communicative interaction of free subjects and groups. The hermeneutic work needed to attend the truth is far more demanding than science’s concern for abstract, objective content that is universally true. As McLean explains the situation for truth unfolding in the global context, “here the universality is attached to interests and hence to the inclusion of all peoples as bearers of the many dimensions both of question and answer. The resources lie in the consciousness of persons and groups as distinct and free; these are what must be promoted and brought forward.”⁵⁷ Since Christ is of universal significance, the voice of Christ and his expression of truth demands to be heard. One of the great paradoxes of the cross of Christ is that it exposes the infinite freedom of God for all to see. As such it also gives an example of the difficult road of fully respecting the freedom of others. God does not use violence or force to communicate, but kenosis and self-giving, the persuasive language of love. To truly listen to other cultures, the demands of such self-giving can really only be embraced if the response in faith fully accepts that one’s personal journey and that of the culture do indeed converge with the journey of others. McLean’s insistence on the notion of gift, which I have tried to maintain at each stage of this reflection, returns again with force. “Knowing and valuing oneself and one’s culture as gifts implies more than merely reciprocating what the other does for me. It means, first, that others and their culture are to be respected simply because they too have been given or gifted by the one Transcendent source.”⁵⁸ Every other person or culture is vital to my own culture, to my identity, and to my perception of the global whole. Our interdependence calls forth co-responsibility. Each person and each culture are a gift. Each needs the other for the expression of one’s narrative, for the narrative of the whole, for understanding God’s narrative with oneself and the whole. The demands of stewardship reach to all people, places and even to all times of

⁵⁶ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, # 11.

⁵⁷ McLean, *Hermeneutics, Faith and Relations between Cultures*, 66.

⁵⁸ McLean, *Ways to God*, 374.

history. The universal significance of the particular Christ-event and the interdependent bond it forms between cultures remain a scandal still, and they call forth theology's imaginative response.

This response for theology, as with an individual or culture, will always remain in an ambiguous light. We are involved in a local, particular context, but are responsible to the whole global context. Carrying the ambiguity and challenges of local involvement with a wider concern of the whole taxes the full exercise of freedom in the paradox of the cross and the scandal of the Christ-event. Taking account of cultures and peoples who may appear to have no connection with our local issues may initially seem an absurd waste of time. As McLean puts it, globalization requires that the response to regional issues be "from a more inclusive vantage point in terms of which all can have their full meaning and the opportunity to work together to determine their own destiny. This is the heart of the issue of globalization and cultural identities."⁵⁹ The freedom of cultures has to be honored as they strive for meaning and slowly discover the deep riches of the Gospel for their life and history. Identities cannot be stretched or overlooked, but need nurturing so that the significance of the Christ-event can illuminate and deepen cultural identities in freedom. The mystery of God's love remains wrapped in an ambiguous matrix of paradox, of diverse cultures, and of plastic, malleable notions of time. Christ stands always at the center, universally significant, while the Holy Spirit forms different peoples into an ever deeper communion of love and truth. Theological imagination, then, has to embrace this mystery in its full complexity and ambiguity for the freshness of the Gospel to be communicated clearly. Theological care for the full breadth of such mystery will earn Christianity the respect it deserves, offer deeper disclosures of God's truth, and provide new expressions of faith using the grammar of love.

CONCLUSION

We are now ready to return to the questions posed at the beginning of the chapter that guided our reflections for a response to the assent of faith in a global context. By using the philosophical notion of contraction and the internal relatedness that follows from it, we were

⁵⁹ McLean, *Religion and Cooperation between Civilizations*, 76. This incorporates the elements we cited at the beginning of the chapter when we referred to McLean's definition of globalization as both geographical and qualitative, providing a comprehensive vision, whose integration comes by way of the appreciation and enhancement of particular elements, rather than at their expense. See also McLean's *Hermeneutics for a Global Age*, 67.

able to combine inductive thinking with active theological imagination to formulate the mental discipline to keep an operative understanding of the global context and the unity of the many in the whole. I proposed the cultivation of a literary imagination to help theology claim the grammar that the assent of faith teaches for new expressions of peoples' faith experiences.

In order to assist theology in its mission to help form a real communion between diverse cultures in the global context I offered what I named a relational hermeneutics of communion. Before effective dialogue can ensue between diverse participants, checks of attitude and operative horizons are necessary. One has to be ready to modify initial assumptions in a search for common meaning, the basic food of lived communion. In a relational dialogue of cultures, horizons are put at risk in this search, which demands creative discernment of ambivalent, affective zones and acknowledgement of differences as principles of cooperation. As it listens to the participants, theology reflects on the Gospel's work of catalyzing and stimulating their subjective receptivity and strives in charity to reconfigure imaginatively new expressions of faith. The gift of society's excluded and marginalized provides the real test for the open permeability of one's horizon and for authenticity in the journey of conversion. The aesthetic awareness formulated in the dialogue brings forth a gratitude and thanksgiving that reinforces the new communion with others.

Finally, I tried to situate the various elements of McLean's global paradigm for philosophy in the context of eschatology and the coming of God's Kingdom. The reality of the world's diversity proves no hindrance to the universality of the Christ-event. Cultures, different as they may be, are viewed as always inherently complementary. The reality of that complementarity, however, has to be recognized and engaged; theology can confidently take advantage of the reality while it assists cultures in their recognition of it. Cultures share a common link in their respective relationships with God. The mission of Christ stands as the unifying totem of meaning at the heart of each culture, while the mission of the Holy Spirit works to reveal and clarify the full mystery of freedom in God's truth and love. Theology reflects on these missions and interprets their fruits as the gifts of life and faith embraced.

CONCLUSION

Meanwhile the disciples besought him, saying, “Rabbi, eat.”

But he said to them, “I have food to eat of which you do not know.”

So the disciples said to one another, “Has any one brought him food?”

Jesus said to them. “My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work. Do you not say, ‘There are yet four months, then comes the harvest’? I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see how the fields are already white for harvest. He who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, ‘One sows and another reaps.’ I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor; others have labored, and you have entered into their labor.”

(John 4:31-38)

These words of Jesus to his disciples in the absence of the Samaritan woman who has returned to her village to tell others about him remain significant for the Church and theology today. The Spirit is at work in places and in ways that we may not notice, sowing seeds of faith and bringing it to birth in hearts and cultures. Jesus continues to send his disciples to reap what they have not sown. Theology both serves this reaping and learns from it. Theology also has the responsibility to attend to and learn from the sowing. George McLean’s philosophy of culture provides fundamental theology with some key tools to carry out its mission of attending to and learning from the conception, gestation and birth of faith.

On a more personal note, back in 1997 a lay minister and I were headed from Lukulu in western Zambia on the upper Zambezi river basin to one of the far distant mission stations of Sancta Maria parish near the Angolan border. Along the way we were stopped by four people who asked us why we had not yet come to their village to proclaim the Gospel and baptize them. I faltered and started to explain that we did not know of their interest, that we had several outstations on this side of the river and had trouble reaching them because of the annual floodwaters making travel impossible for about half the year.

The leader of the group listened patiently, but then posed the question, "So when will you come to teach us the Christian faith and bring us to baptism?" It took a few weeks of planning, but we put together a program for pastoral teams to make regular visits for sharing, teaching and preparing for baptism. By the next year, much of that remote village had been baptized and it, too, had become another of our numerous outstation communities. We had reaped that for which we had not labored.

If the Church is truly mother and the newly baptized her children, then the Holy Spirit acts as constant midwife, caring for the health and well-being of mother and child alike. Theology has to reflect on all aspects of God's presence and action in the world. As I began this study I raised the question of what new challenges are faced by theology in attending to faith dynamics among a multitude of cultures in a global context. That context formed rapidly with technological advances in communications and transportation. In my own years of missionary presence in Zambia, South Africa, Italy, England and the United States I saw firsthand the results of this changing global context. I witnessed a strong sensibility for the faith in some local contexts, but I also witnessed a rapid decline in this sensibility in others. Intrigued by this variable sensibility in different cultures and local contexts, my interests converged upon examining the dynamics of growing in freedom for faith. My early study of metaphysics with George McLean and my awareness of his own emphasis on the philosophy of culture and dialogue made him an easy choice as a source of reflection. Such was the origin of this thesis.

By providing a window into the Holy Spirit's dialogue with a people, culture offers new understandings of how the paschal mystery might more easily take root in a people's sensibility. The dynamic of conversion to greater freedom for faith reveals a journey of grace that can be likened to a birthing process. That birthing process reflects the paschal mystery and logic of the cross breaking through into one's world of conscious meaning. As stressed here in a particular way, the experience of encounter offers opportunities to awaken to and recognize new levels of reality. The inquiry and awareness are followed by a necessary investigation to ensure that any new truths of reality, especially those of faith, are credible to one's developed sensibilities and freedom. If the new realities of truth and love are found to be credible and the assent in faith made, a newer level of freedom and engagement ensues through personal participation. Faith purifies and perfects culture through shifts in horizons and the illumination of values and dialogue, forming new patterns of life, meaning and creative engagement.

The growth of freedom for faith, then, is a complex journey of encounter with Christ and of both personal and cultural dialogue with the Holy Spirit. The journey challenges horizons, dispositions, self-understanding, meaning, and powers of reflection and assessment. For theology, attending to and learning from the dynamics of human freedom's development include a host of factors: the sources of intentionality, the powers of imagination, the limits of rationality and the forms of cognitive reflection, among a few. Above all, theological hermeneutics must take account of the more affective zones of meaning and sensibility, often expressed in culture, in order to offer a reason for the hope of the Gospel with gentleness and reverence (cf. 1 Pet 3:15). To that end, after exploring encounter and presenting aspects of the fundamental realities of God, person and culture, I used McLean's insights to introduce theological hermeneutics for the various stages of conversion: an inquiring hermeneutics of deliberation for new awareness, an investigative hermeneutics of assent for the reception of faith, and a relational hermeneutics of communion for faithful response in today's complex global context. In what follows, I want to review some theological dimensions and then offer some possible trajectories for further research.

THEOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS

This study of McLean's philosophy of culture has revealed a multitude of theological dimensions important for fundamental theology. Rather than try to list them or restate the outline of the chapters as presented, I will place them back into the context of the Holy Spirit's action as midwife. Each chapter had a subtitle regarding gift and the particular stage of the dynamic: gift come upon, gift offered, gift recognized, gift received and gift engaged. As noted in the introduction, fundamental theology has the role of bringing to birth in others "a rediscovery of the desire for God and the intelligibility of his mystery."¹ The dynamic growth in freedom actually highlights a number of areas or zones of meaning related to this desire and mystery given during the journey. In the following brief sections I combine certain gifts as zones of meaning to highlight some of the theological dimensions and hermeneutic challenges pertinent to this study of McLean's philosophy of culture. These zones of meaning related to the Spirit's action are: 1) gifts of existence and identity; 2) gifts of culture and tradition; 3) gifts of struggle and truth; 4) gifts of love and sensibility; and lastly, 5) gifts of faith and interpretation.

¹ Fisichella, *Introduction to Fundamental Theology*, 70.

Gifts of Existence and Identity

Central to every stage of dynamic growth in freedom is the field of theological anthropology and the impact of revelation and grace. When trying to account for human freedom, the understanding of being and interpretation mechanisms must embrace the person's full complexity as a composite unity. We saw that the person as *imago Dei* reflects the fullest notion of that understanding. The philosophies of being and consciousness, both metaphysics and phenomenology, are necessary to offer an accurate account of the person's experience. McLean's philosophy provides precisely that combination. The gift of one's being as existence opens the door to understanding the range of possibilities in experience and for growth in freedom and identity. Just as the mystery of the incarnation serves as the resource for the person as *imago Dei*, so too it provides the point of identity for each person. Subject-object conundrums are transcended through the emergence of one's unique identity as made in the image and likeness of God. Understanding that identity, however, requires encounter and interaction, for it is through these that one's horizon and self-understanding are put to the test and Christ can become known.

These encounters form a narrative in a person's mind and heart by which one understands the self, God and reality. One's horizon also involves what we called the background landscape for inter-subjective communication. That landscape contains pre-cognitive symbolic systems that influence one's perspectives and provide natural links to transcendental intending. Expectations and affective tendencies that develop from experience also dwell here. This background landscape, then, shapes one's unconscious methods for verifying truth and establishing the credibility of new offerings of meaning. It is from here that the imagination develops to search for meaning and identity. But it is God who takes the initiative through encounter and through the action of the Holy Spirit to call upon the person's receptivity and openness to meaning and identity. The human heart, we said, resonates to being, and it is in the heart that God encounters human freedom. Grow as one might through human experience, the gifts of one's full existence and true identity can only be discovered when grace shifts one's life narrative through a new relation to God.

Gifts of Culture and Tradition

The Spirit acts in culture to form a bridge to God from the wisdom of a people's experience. The discovery of meaning and God's plan of love is a hermeneutic work by which people have to tap the riches of their tradition and creatively apply it to respond to new

experiences. Culture can reflect the positive and creative freedom of a people or its negative, destructive elements. The culture and its tradition, as pointed out on several occasions, carry within them the cumulative experience of a people's responses in freedom gathered over time. Dealing with a people's dynamic instability from their response to events, culture carries joy and meaning, suffering and paradox. As such it is the starting point or shaping context for one's sensibility; it contains within its experience the paradox, ambiguity, meaning and hidden logic of the cross. Culture also provides a key for escaping from systemic constraints in order to allow inquiry to open up new zones of meaning. As McLean points out, religion is integral to culture; though some may not recognize it, in culture the Spirit's dialogue with a people is ongoing, linked to them existentially in their being. The Spirit focuses the people's imagination and search, drawing on those more affective, pre-cognitive, yet still rational zones present in each person's and community's being. Theologically, then, I proposed that culture would be best understood as a living subject with its own personality and unique way of being. The standpoint of creation in Christ serves as the theological eyeglass for freedom, through which culture and its perspectives are to be understood.

Values develop over time, reinforcing patterns of behavior, creating in the culture manifestations of virtues and vices, depending on the quality of response. Containing within it the traces of the Spirit's dialogue, the tradition acts as an intimate link to God, as a reflection of the people's experience of relationship with God. Traditions that characterize the culture's self-understanding form from the history of these values and patterns of behavior. Tradition, McLean observes, can be understood in both its synchronic, more static sense and its diachronic, more developmental sense. Both senses are needed, because tradition acts as the substrata or foundation for personal and cultural self-understanding, often in a tacit way. Individuals in the community use tradition in concert with their family environment for the starting point of their personal identity. Culture and tradition provide the foundation for one's hermeneutic. In one's theory of interpretation, then, they contain the pre-conditions for meaning and sensibility by which the affective elements of the people resonate with personal significance and credibility. The matrix of a culture's values represents the most elastic, opportune point of contact for the Gospel to influence and slowly purify the culture.

Gifts of Struggle and Truth

For many it might sound strange to consider struggle to be a gift given by the Holy Spirit. Through struggle, however, many elements are

engaged and put to the test, such as freedom, truth, meaning, identity and interpretation. Struggle in all of these areas confronted the Samaritan woman in her encounter with Jesus, but to a purpose. One's personal and cultural narratives are always filled with ambiguities, paradoxes and mystery. Truth is never an easy find or a quick study. I mentioned earlier that the struggle to find truth is a hermeneutic work connected to Jesus' person and mission. The dynamic instability that life brings, and that a culture's symbols express, acts as a sort of entry point to the logic of the cross, to the experience of mercy and the healing of brokenness. Theologically, the paschal mystery, understood not as a conceptual abstraction, but within the struggle of lived experience, communicates the greatest truth of God's love and mercy. The mystery of life encountered through struggles also opens the window to gift-awareness and gift-dependency. The illusion of individual autonomy weakens when faced with inexplicable mystery. Dependency on God slowly displaces that illusion through the growing awareness of the gift of one's existence and the truth of reality.

McLean's efforts to establish the mutual enrichment of the philosophies of being and consciousness allow a synthetic approach to discovering truth. The truth of one's identity can only be found through a generous receptivity and an evolving sense of freedom. Human freedom provides the key to applying values and pragmatic tests in the discernment of truth. Theology's challenge, then, remains to expand reason beyond the confined, cognitively empirical sense to include affective qualities that awaken sensibility and stimulate the imagination. Reason needs both the cognitive and affective dimensions to move beyond fragmentary thinking to a more inductive, synthetic sense of unity and truth. Rather than the mere analytic vision concerned primarily with functionality, a synthetic vision leads to participation and cooperation in service of truth. Here the imagination plays a critical role. The imagination must be able to explore all levels and aspects of reality through the lens and creativity of human freedom, but it also must be tamed so that it remains in contact with reality, rather than wandering into fantasy. McLean's metaphysics acts as a balance to his phenomenology to offer imagination both the freedom and the discipline it needs. The imagination, then, proves to be an efficient tool of reason, tuning one's sensibilities and powers of perception to discover the truth of God's love.

Gifts of Love and Sensibility

The dynamic of conversion to greater freedom for faith reflects the mystery of a love story between the person and the culture with God. From the moment of creation throughout one's life, God takes the

initiative to bring this love story to fulfillment. We saw how God seeks to awaken us through simple imperatives, as Jesus did with the Samaritan woman: “Give me a drink” (John 4:7). All of reality contains within it seeds of the logic of the cross and resurrection. The great challenge is to shift one’s perception of reality to recognize and accept that logic as an expression of love. In the coming of the Holy Spirit, God deepens this awareness of love and creates a new relationship with each person. Personal or cultural identity, we said, truly discovers itself in this harmony of charity. The dynamism of love resonates with one’s being and consciousness, but a sensibility of receptivity, that measure of how awake or tuned in one is, must develop in order to discover the authenticity of one’s identity.

God’s seed of love deep within the soul, the “prior word” of love as Lonergan calls it, serves as the anchor for the imagination in the person’s development of renewed sensibility. The affective senses that make up an essential part of one’s sensibility resonate to this love. Since family and culture provide the foundation for the background landscape of inter-subjective communication, they remain critical components of one’s sensibility. God takes the initiative to ensure that revelation tunes in to the frequency of the subject’s affective sensibility. One’s affectivity, however, as a measure of one’s conscious intentionality, must be open and receptive to receive revelation’s signal. For this receptivity I used other authors, such as Newman, Coulson, and Dulles, to recommend to fundamental theology the use of the imagination to awaken a subject’s sensibility by way of the symbolic, analogical, metaphorical and narrative. McLean’s insight of a reversal of hermeneutic direction – that the cognitive develops from the affective, rather than vice versa – offers theology the opportunity to complement or shift its emphasis from objective analysis to an attentive listening to the more affective dimensions. That listening involves embracing culture as a means of God’s presence and as a foundation for sensibility in order to confirm how people come to recognize their personal love story with God. People growing in freedom for faith use culture to validate their sensibility of revelation and their imaginative assents necessary for faith and for shifts in horizons of meaning.

Gifts of Faith and Interpretation

Faith is the pre-eminent gift given by God for shifting one’s horizons and relationships from an unconscious or merely objective relation to an intimate, interpersonal communion. In preparation of the gift of faith, we saw how one’s sensibility has to be awakened to love, so that the theories of interpretation of one’s history, culture and daily experience can shift towards understanding even the tragic elements as

enveloped in mystery, ultimately intended by God as expressions of love. The journey moves one to renewed sensibility through a responsible check of credibility for the reception and engagement of the gift of faith. One's shift in interpretation has to account for aesthetic and affective dimensions, for ambiguity and paradox. I introduced an inquiring hermeneutics of deliberation to develop this sensibility and new awareness as one grows in freedom. I proposed an investigative hermeneutics of assent for harmonizing one's sensibilities and search for meaning with God's offer of love. Here one comes to comprehend the personal significance of God's embrace of love and can then interpret conflicts and oppositions common to human experience as complementary to meaning, especially in light of the cross. Slowly, a cumulative convergence of many factors to the love of God enables the reception of faith by a unified act of the intellect and will in freedom, as Aquinas would have said. Finally, I recommended a relational hermeneutics of communion for the engagement of faith that, through a renewed awareness of intentionality, can freely contribute to the creative transformation of personal and cultural values.

By this movement of freedom, then, one journeys through stages to receive the gift of renewed interpretation of God, self, others, and all reality. The Holy Spirit acts to clarify meaning, identity and the harmony needed for credibility and communion. Vision of the presence of God, perhaps only broken and fragmentary at the outset of the journey, comes into focus through these gifts of faith and interpretation lived out in community and culture. McLean's attempt to shift philosophy's emphasis from the more deductive analysis to a more inductive convergence towards beauty and unity can offer theology new tools for reflecting on relational communion in the global context. The revelations of God that stir us and seek acceptance in love include the revelations of freedom and identity, of the Holy Spirit acting in culture, of the dynamic logic of the cross, and of the face of God in others. After receiving the gift of faith, theories of interpretation shift to more permeable horizons that can be shared and broadened in dialogue. Tests for communion and open participation for truth include generosity, respecting the ambit of others' freedom, and a willingness to respond to those on the fringes of society, those who appear to have nothing to offer or give. Finally, the gifts of faith and interpretation open the possibility for a convergence of cultures through a common reference to God. That convergence is the fruit of the eschatological activity of the Holy Spirit, who strives to protect diversity and unity for all in the dynamism of God's love.

TRAJECTORIES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Any reader of this thesis on the subject of freedom for faith and the dynamics of conversion using George McLean's philosophy would have noted many areas that seemed to be left undeveloped or even unaddressed. I would like to recommend four general areas for fundamental theology to consider with more urgency in its role of midwifing the rediscovery of the intelligibility and desire for God: 1) pneumatology; 2) theological hermeneutics and the influence of culture; 3) truth and freedom; 4) theological discernment.

Pneumatology

The Holy Spirit's role in waking one up to love and identity, freedom and conversion, and a host of other elements active in the dynamic movement of life, calls out for more attentive consideration. Generally, fundamental theology has developed well its Christological reflections; these need to continue while increasing its emphasis on pneumatology. Love's synthetic magnetism, shifts in modern sensibilities, the growing attention to culture and greater emphasis on today's global context, all beg for this. Pneumatology has to consider the mission of the Holy Spirit and the gifts associated with it as primarily eschatological and always in reference to the mission of the Son.

Theological Hermeneutics and the Influence of Culture

Most of this study was either a preparation for or an elucidation of a theological hermeneutics for the dynamic movement of freedom for faith. Culture and tradition provide the background landscape for intersubjective communication and influence one's horizon, sensibilities and reference checks for experience and meaning. Imagination and freedom depend on culture, but they must also eventually transcend it, so that they can be applied to its purification and growth. I recommend more exploration of theological hermeneutics, especially for tapping and sharpening human sensibility, for validating meaning and checking credibility, and for exploring freedom and communion. These hermeneutics must do more than consider a single culture or even multiple cultures; they must always develop with the unity of the full global picture in mind and its demands of dialogue. McLean's philosophy has much to offer as a tool for this effort.

Truth and Freedom

McLean's philosophical project to develop both being and consciousness with metaphysics and phenomenology revealed to me just how important this balanced approach is in the consideration of truth and human freedom. Fundamental theology needs to use both for its inquiry to deal with the global context that includes both growing secularization in some countries and hardening religious fundamentalism in others. Just as the mutual enrichment of the philosophies of being and consciousness could be symbolized as the coming together of the Lublin and Krakow philosophical schools, perhaps fundamental theology would benefit from a deeper mutual enrichment of truth and credibility, previously symbolized by the schools of Tübingen and Rome. Person and culture, being and consciousness, aesthetics and identity, all interact in the search for truth and freedom. McLean's recommendation to shift away from systems towards a renewed inquiry into life experience could help in exploring that search further. Reason has to expand beyond mere empirical, functional considerations to embrace beauty, aesthetics, affectivity and values. As I mentioned earlier, reason and theology need an imaginative intellection that can lead to inductive steps towards synthesis in the global context.

Theological Discernment

This thesis, then, has highlighted many elements of the faith and culture conversation that need continued discernment. As it listens to God's revelation of love in the broader context of the global community, fundamental theology has the role of discernment through dialogue. First, it must continue to cultivate a discipline of listening to and learning from culture in order to understand today's active symbol systems better, and then develop new articulations for faith. As midwife, it must also direct culture in the development of its values and the discovery of God by offering it the grammar of love which faith provides. Carried out well, fundamental theology's listening, learning and directing can aid culture in its pursuit of the good and its search for meaning by highlighting the dynamic logic of the cross and the movements of the Holy Spirit. In addition, theologians can carry out their own discernment best through a Marian pondering (cf. Lk 2:19; 2:51) within the ecclesial community, reflecting on the mystery of God and the missions of the Word and Spirit. In this way fundamental theology can consider all cultures, events and changing circumstances not as challenges to faith, but as enrichments to faith's understanding for evangelization.

APPENDIX

This short appendix offers an opportunity to hear directly from Fr. George McLean about some topics I thought might be of interest to the reader. He was very gracious to respond and he kept his responses short, preferring, perhaps, to let his many works speak for themselves. The replies came to me by email in the beginning of 2012.

Could you share about blending a philosophy of being (metaphysics) with a philosophy of consciousness (phenomenology) for their mutual enrichment? What is the history of this effort? What is yet left to be achieved?

From the earliest days of metaphysics philosophy has sought to develop a way of thinking open to the whole of reality or all that is. The first efforts of the pre-Socratics attempted to do this in terms of fire or water, etc., but within the space of one or two generations they had moved beyond these cosmological efforts in the material or physical order to an approach open to whatever is, whether material or not, i.e., to a meta-physical approach to being.

The approach, however, remained objectively concerned with that which lay 'over against' the subject. Indeed, until well into the last century every effort was made to separate the observer from what was observed and, thereby, to protect objectivity. Even those most devoted to metaphysics shared in this concern for fear that to introduce the human knower into the equation would thereby introduce restrictions and limitations, restricting metaphysics to the human level and losing openness to God.

Thus a vast area, namely that of subjectivity, remained undeveloped. Yet it was there that being was conscious and indeed self-conscious, that it could speak for itself, that the full range of love and freedom could be explored, and that the human was properly open to others in constituting society. This, Levinas and Habermas note, is precisely where humanness begins.

This was not entirely omitted in the past, in particular the spiritual tradition of the Church with its acute focus upon human interiority and the conscious pursuit of the virtues was the main focus of the monastic life, of the spiritual writings of the Fathers of the Church and of spiritual direction throughout the ages of Christianity, as well as of other religious traditions. However, this was broadened in the 20th century by Husserl's, Heidegger's and Rahner's phenomenology, which etymologically meant precisely to bring into the light what had previously been present but unnoticed. This has opened the world of the

subject or the spirit, which we have only begun to explore. If I might use the instance of Martha and Mary, it is as if we have only recently begun to attend to the concerns of Mary – of contemplating the words of the Lord and responding thereto in heart and mind. If we learn to live in this way then the future can be rich beyond all telling.

Your philosophy of culture adopts many of Gadamer's insights, but also contains rich content from a mosaic of others. What has influenced you the most in developing your philosophy of culture? What direction would you recommend the Church pursue in her considerations of culture?

On reflection your question leads me to the notion of culture as a mediating notion, that is, one that bridges between and includes the important binaries in our life, e.g., between thing and practice, understanding and action, and knowledge or awareness of God as coming from and expressed in lives and sacrifices of the faithful in supporting and raising their children in the image of God.

To go more deeply into this, especially in terms of orthodox theology, is to recognize that all was created through the Holy Spirit and that God holds the initiative through his creation and that this continues through time as conserving all in their being and action. As a people responds to this initiative there is constituted a dialogue shaped according to the different circumstances of topology and history. The way of raising or cultivating the coming generation is in terms that will prove life-giving as becomes the joint effort of both God and each part of humankind. Culture understood in this sense would appear then as the place to find the Spirit and cooperate in its work.

This is crucial for the sense of mission or evangelization. I fear that we often fail in our task, which is not to bring the Spirit but to uncover its presence in each culture and to cooperate therewith. This I would say is the main task of the Church as witness to the Gospel, namely, engaging the human spirit of the people of God in the work of the Holy Spirit. In the light of what was said above in answer to the first question regarding the philosophies of being and consciousness, John Paul II termed this the 'New Evangelization.' It might also be termed mission to and within cultures.

The danger is that we might search for the New Evangelization in the old objectivist terms and thereby miss the contemporary dynamic of the human-divine dialogue of grace that is operative in hearts and minds. Charles Taylor has pointed this out in a number of ways: 1) the "seekers" who leave church participation not to reject religion but in a sincere effort to develop their own response to the Spirit as an authentic living search, rather than simply following a path of formulas made out

in the distant past; 2) the problem of a magisterium which understands its teaching authority in terms of jurisdiction to which is owed obedience, rather than sincere attention and critical response; 3) in the field of morality attending not only to essence and the moral law of nature, but also to the process of human history and, hence, in combination with the diversity of peoples, to shared spiritualities. All of which is to speak of the responsible person and people seeking to live out their daily life in the image of God in which they were created and are sustained in the Spirit.

You seem to link closely growth in freedom and hermeneutic considerations on both the personal and cultural levels. What cultural signposts would you identify as indicating a favorable moment for the proclamation of the Gospel?

Joining together I and II above as regards the proclamation of the Gospel message, it would seem to be of the greatest moment in this day that on the basis of technology and communication, developments now transcend the confines of our culture, so that we begin to live in newly global terms. While our conscious life was lived in a self-enclosed community and horizon that was taken for granted it was unconscious and unreflective.

What is special about our present moment is that being confronted by a global world we are enabled and, indeed, forced to be alert to the distinctive reality of many cultures. Moreover, as noted above, culture is the place where the Spirit dwells as both creator and initiator of all and that continues through the dialogue with the creative efforts of all humankind, whence cultures are formed. From this it follows that culture is the privileged point at which God and each people interact consciously and, hence, provide the terms in which the Gospel can be proclaimed and grasped.

Benedict XVI, like John Paul II before him, has challenged thinkers to expand the limits of reason beyond the inherited systems of thought that restrict it to confined categories. What would you consider to be the central elements for this effort and how would imagination figure into it?

It is a poorly grasped characteristic of conceptual knowledge that while it provides clarity, it does so at the cost of content; what is not able to be reduced to a concept is simply omitted. The result is the clear and distinct concepts that Descartes sought, but these are achieved at the cost of the real content of these same concepts. With all their brilliance, they are strong but impoverished. In this sense the mythic figures can

never express all that is bespoken by the totem, and scientific concepts in turn are impoverished in relation to the language of myth.

This is especially salient in relation to the work of the imagination as an inner sense. It is built upon the internal senses but is not tied to particular external objects. For this reason the imagination is able to range more freely. Moreover, Kant points out that the work of the imagination in its search for scientific knowledge is held to what is given; it is the servant of physical reality. But upon bringing freedom into the account he finds that humans would not be really free if they were held as in the first “Critique of Pure Reason” to the universal and necessary terms of science. To be truly free there is need for a third critique which is implemented especially by freeing the imagination to range freely, not only in terms of the true and the good, but uniquely in terms of the aesthetic, of beauty, where the universal can be enriched by recognition of the unique and free, and establish the dominion of the good over evil in the aesthetic terms of beauty.

You recommend philosophy adopt a new paradigm for the 21st century. Describe the primary mission challenges for Catholic philosophy and theology in relation to this paradigm and the methodologies you would recommend for addressing them.

The 21st century, with its global economy and politic, calls for a new paradigm. The first third of the 20th century had been marked by the establishment of multiple ideologies which enslaved mankind. The second third of the century consisted of a world war among a bitterly divided humanity, while the last third consisted in bifurcation of the world in what was termed the “Cold War.” Once this ended at the conclusion of the 20th century there emerged at last the world as a global whole. No longer was the paradigmatic text that of Exodus and the liberation theology of the oppressed. Instead the paradigm was holistic, that of a world in interaction and more deeply in intercommunication. The multiple riches of the many cultures were in motion along convergent paths traced out by Isaiah, namely all people converging on the holy mountain. It is a holism that is echoed in the environmental concerns and in the medicines and psychology of the human body and spirit. All of this can now be considered in ways that bring together globally God and humanity in Christ and his mission of being all things to all men.

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In addition to the many publications listed below, McLean has edited numerous others that are not listed. He has also acted as the general editor for all the publications of the Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change Series. For ease of reference I list the works most central to the research of my thesis. I then include a select bibliography of his many other works. Finally, I list the works of other authors.

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THE COUNCIL FOR RESEARCH IN VALUES AND PHILOSOPHY

PURPOSE

Today there is urgent need to attend to the nature and dignity of the person, to the quality of human life, to the purpose and goal of the physical transformation of our environment, and to the relation of all this to the development of social and political life. This, in turn, requires philosophic clarification of the base upon which freedom is exercised, that is, of the values which provide stability and guidance to one's decisions.

Such studies must be able to reach deeply into one's culture and that of other parts of the world as mutually reinforcing and enriching in order to uncover the roots of the dignity of persons and of their societies. They must be able to identify the conceptual forms in terms of which modern industrial and technological developments are structured and how these impact upon human self-understanding. Above all, they must be able to bring these elements together in the creative understanding essential for setting our goals and determining our modes of interaction. In the present complex global circumstances this is a condition for growing together with trust and justice, honest dedication and mutual concern.

The Council for Studies in Values and Philosophy (RVP) unites scholars who share these concerns and are interested in the application thereto of existing capabilities in the field of philosophy and other disciplines. Its work is to identify areas in which study is needed, the intellectual resources which can be brought to bear thereupon, and the means for publication and interchange of the work from the various regions of the world. In bringing these together its goal is scientific discovery and publication which contributes to the present promotion of humankind.

In sum, our times present both the need and the opportunity for deeper and ever more progressive understanding of the person and of the foundations of social life. The development of such understanding is the goal of the RVP.

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A set of related research efforts is currently in process:

1. *Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change: Philosophical Foundations for Social Life*. Focused, mutually coordinated research teams in university centers prepare volumes as part of an integrated philosophic search for self-understanding differentiated by culture and civilization. These evolve more adequate understandings of the person in society and look to the cultural heritage of each for the resources to respond to the challenges of its own specific contemporary transformation.

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