

Reverend Father Crowe, Your Excellency Bishop Boissonneau, Vice-President Tuohy, Professor Tracy, Fr Lapierre, distinguished representatives of the Toronto School of Theology, faculty and staff of Regis College, my fellow workers at the Lonergan Research Institute, honored graduates, friends:

It is a distinct honor and privilege to be invited to address this convocation audience during this year in which so many celebrations are being held around the world to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the birth of Canada's and Regis College's own Bernard Lonergan.

As Director of the Lonergan Research Institute and General Editor, with Frederick Crowe, of Bernard Lonergan's Collected Works, I could appropriately say a few words that would draw on his theological wisdom and learning, and I will. But I will try to do so from the standpoint of the integration of the academic with the spiritual and the social that is so much a hallmark of Regis College's vision of theological education. I will speak also from the standpoint of one who was privileged to be Bernard Lonergan's friend. For what I eventually allowed myself to imagine as I composed this address was that there might be several things that Lonergan himself might want to say to you on this occasion, and, while I know that I cannot say them as well as he could, I still can attempt to give them some adequate (and, I promise, brief) expression. There are three points, and each of them is allotted about three minutes.

The first point is hermeneutical. It is about dialogue. The second is social. It is about history, and history today entails confronting fundamentalism and terrorism. And the third is existential and, ultimately, Trinitarian. It is about love. The three points are sequential in my presentation: the first leads into the second, and the second eventually surrenders to the third.

First, then, dialogue. At the end of one of his most important papers, 'Natural Right and Historical Mindedness,' Lonergan emphasized that 'beyond dialectic there is dialogue.' He encouraged his listeners and readers to 'transpose issues from a conflict of statements to an encounter of persons.' 'Every person,' he wrote, 'can reveal to any other his [or her] natural propensity to seek understanding, to judge reasonably, to evaluate fairly, to be open to friendship.'

I often wonder when reading this whether Lonergan was addressing especially his own disciples, for if there is one area where we have not followed our teacher's practice and advice as well as he would have liked, it has been in the way many of us have engaged in reading other authors. In an informal remark, Lonergan once gave some advice as to how to read philosophical and theological texts: 'What are they onto?' he said. 'Go for the insights.' His own reading of other authors, with very few exceptions, was an intellectual and academic embodiment of the presupposition to the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius, where St. Ignatius tells us that every good Christian will be more ready to accept than to refute the proposition of another. It is not only Lonergan's own disciples and students who have yet to learn this from him. While there is a superb collegial atmosphere at Regis College, still I believe that it is salutary to remind ourselves constantly that beyond dialectic there is dialogue, beyond the conflict of statements there is the encounter of persons. It is easy to cease to be interpreters of one another's statements and to become controversialists. It is easy to play with our own words rather than to determine the meaning of another's words. 'What are they onto?' 'Go for the insights.' What a marvelous piece of advice! What a guarantee that one stands a very good chance of learning something from almost everyone one meets or reads or listens to.

Next, history. Only now are we beginning to realize that history is a theme that is more important to Lonergan than epistemology and method. His desire was to contribute to an account of history that 'is concerned ... not only with knowing history but also with directing it,' an account that is not only empirical, but also critical and normative.

In his own day the importance of this concern was manifest in the rise of the fascist and communist totalitarianisms of the twentieth century. In our day the competing forces are somewhat different, and I'm not sure he or anyone else could have foreseen this twenty-five or fifty years ago. On the surface they would seem to be two forms of religious fundamentalism, and on that surface level they are calling rational people everywhere to question the future of religion and faith itself. Perhaps you have seen reviews and advertisements for a new book entitled *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason*. The author, Sam Harris, is quoted as saying, 'Our technical advances in the art of war have finally rendered our religious differences – and hence our religious beliefs – antithetical to our survival.'

This is now partly constitutive of the situation that theology must address. It will not be easy. And the great temptation for Christians, including Catholics, will be to overlook the fact that there is a deeper source doing everything it can to twist Christianity into a very dangerous tool in the service of domination, namely, one of the most secularist, materialist, cynical inventions of the political imagination, the individualist ideology that would collapse an entire scale of values into the pursuit of economic and political power for their own sake. The churches, including the Catholic Church, must be very cautious that they not become the dupes of profoundly antireligious manipulators.

Why do I bring up such a subject on this, a day when Regis College commemorates the centenary of the birth of the greatest theologian in the College's history? Because, while fundamentalism and terrorism did not constitute the situation to which Bernard Lonergan directed his attention, the antidote to their destructiveness may perhaps be found in something he wrote toward the end of his life. In a paper entitled 'Religious Knowledge,' he asked a wrenching question: '... how can one tell whether one's appropriation of religion is genuine or unauthentic and, more radically, how can one tell one is not appropriating a religious tradition that has become unauthentic.' To that question his answer, in brief, is quite simple but very comprehensive: Have the criteria of authenticity as self-transcendence been fulfilled, or have they been sidestepped and covered over by rationalization and ideology? And more radically with respect to Christianity, has self-transcendence carried us in our religious lives to live in the heightened tension that would return good for evil, love for hatred, kindness for violence, forgiveness for betrayal and desertion? In this latter formulation, he joins with René Girard in stressing that such self-transcending love is, ultimately, the only form of authentic religion there is. There are no other guarantees besides these that one is appropriating an authentic religious tradition, and in the face of these criteria we all must admit failures, personal and ecclesial, for this kind of authenticity is ever precarious, ever a withdrawal from inauthenticity.

Finally, then, love. Lonergan surprised a lot of us in the late 1960s when all of a sudden, or so it seemed, this rigorous thinker who had written some almost impenetrable pages on understanding in mathematics, physics, and even everyday life started waxing eloquently and repeatedly about love. Some people who had been captivated by the relentless intellectualism of what they were used to started wondering, 'Is he going soft in the head?'

Others more prone to gossip starting asking, ‘Has something happened in his life that we don’t know about?’ What it has taken us a long time to realize is that he was writing about love before he wrote his major works about understanding. He just didn’t call it that. He called it operative grace, or to be exact, habitual operative grace, sanctifying grace.

To be in love in an unqualified fashion, without reservations, without hedging your bets, is to participate in the trinitarian love that is the agape that is the Father, the yes that is the Son, and the proceeding love that is the Holy Spirit. He saw this with a vision that was mystical in the sense of Ignatian Trinitarian mysticism. We participate in the very inner-trinitarian act because the divine Three decided from eternity that they want our company. As Lonergan once responded to someone who asked him to send a postcard with a simple answer to the question, Do we make any difference to God? ‘We make an eternal difference to God.’ And how do they secure our company? To quote Lonergan, ‘It is as if a room were filled with music though one can have no sure knowledge of its source. There is in the world ... a charged field of love and meaning; here and there it reaches a notable intensity; but it is ever unobtrusive, hidden, inviting each of us to join. And join we must if we are to perceive it, for our perceiving is through our own loving.’ If you know that invitation, and especially if you have accepted it, however imperfectly, then you are in the company of the divine Three as they work their way through even the deepest wretchedness of our fractured and terrorized history.

I have proceeded, then, from dialogue and friendship to self-transcendence in the face of evil, and from self-transcendent love to Trinitarian companionship. But really, it goes the other way around. Trinitarian love is poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us, and to the extent that we allow ourselves to cooperate with that love, we will abide in the heightened tension that returns good for evil. From that stance it is an easy step to be open to dialogue and friendship, to transpose the conflict of statements into the encounter of persons.

In this, the one-hundredth year that the world has known of Bernard Lonergan, these words, I hope, are some faint approximation to what he might want to say to us today.