

Essays in Systematic Theology 28: Spontaneity, Autonomy, and Cultural Critique: A Meeting Point for Lonergan and Girard¹

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‘... the real human *subject* can only come out of the rule of the Kingdom; apart from this rule, there is never anything but mimetism and the “interdividual.” Until this happens, the only subject is the mimetic structure.’²

1 The Collapse of Classicism and the Sacrificial Crisis

The theme of this year’s Fallon Memorial Lonergan Symposium is ‘Personal and Cultural Integrity after Classicism.’ In the call for papers, the theme was specified by two quotations from Bernard Lonergan: ‘As the breakdown of Scholasticism has left many Catholics without any philosophy, so the rejection of the classical outlook leaves many without even a *Weltanschauung*.’³ And: ‘It is cultural change that has made Scholasticism no longer relevant and that demands the development of a new theological method and style, continuous indeed with the old, yet meeting all the genuine exigencies

1 This paper was delivered at the West Coast Methods Institute, Loyola Marymount University, April 2008. It has not been previously published.

2 Jean-Michel Oughourlian, in René Girard, *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987) 199, emphasis in the text. Girard’s response (*ibid.*): ‘That is quite right.’

3 Bernard Lonergan, ‘Doctrinal Pluralism,’ *Philosophical and Theological Papers 1965-1980*, vol. 17 in *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, ed. Robert C. Croken and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004) 75.

both of the Christian religion and of up-to-date philosophy, science, and scholarship ... [T]he worthy successor to thirteenth-century achievement will be the fruit of a fourfold differentiated consciousness, in which the workings of common sense, science, scholarship, intentionality analysis, and the life of prayer have been integrated.’⁴ Both of these quotations occur in an essay whose title is emblematic of the crisis, ‘Doctrinal Pluralism.’

I was remotely preparing to teach a course entitled ‘Lonergan, Girard, and Soteriology’ when I read the call for papers and these quotations, and so I thought immediately of the kinds of situations that René Girard generalizes under the rubrics of ‘loss of social differentiation’ and ‘sacrificial crisis.’

Girard uses the word ‘differentiation’ in a manner quite distinct from, and indeed almost opposed to, Lonergan’s meaning. It refers to social differences that are built into the structure of a society, that are taken for granted at the level of common sense, and that, if my thesis here is correct, would prevent the sort of differentiation of consciousness that Lonergan is promoting, since the need for the fourfold differentiation of consciousness that Lonergan speaks of would seem to have emerged only when certain social differentiations had collapsed. ‘Differentiation’ for Girard thus has a strictly social meaning. It is something that is built into the social fabric of stable societies, of societies that, however advanced they may be in the kinds of philosophic endeavors that mark the classical and classicist past, still retain something of the cosmological emphasis, in which order is embodied first in the community and then in individuals only insofar as they assume their allotted place within the society’s firmly established structures. Those structures determine social differentiation.

For Girard, quite correctly I believe, conflictual mimetic desire is exacerbated wherever such traditional social structures have eroded. It becomes more widespread,

⁴ Ibid. 85-86.

more virulent, endangering even the very continuance of the society's existence. In modernity, mimetic rivalry has triumphed because the social differences between people, however arbitrary they may have been, have been erased. Modern individualism and modern suspicion of authorities hide a new form of imitation, one in which the imitating subject and the imitated model or mediator exist on a more level plane than in hierarchically ordered societies. This form of imitation, called by Girard 'internal imitation,' is far more filled with the potential for envy, jealousy, and hatred than were the forms of imitation in a more hierarchically ordered society, where the model to be imitated was often held so lofty that conflictual desire was either limited or impossible, and where mechanisms were generally in place to make sure that mimetic conflict did not escalate out of hand. My father used to describe particularly difficult people by saying, 'He'd even argue with the Pope!' Classicism had its accompanying social hierarchy that for centuries was taken for granted, whether in the church or in civil society. Traces of it remain clearly perceptible even today in the hierarchical structures of the Catholic Church, but the fact that almost everyone not benefiting from these structures recognizes the need for reform clearly indicates that something is afoot.

Girard's point, however, is that when such a ready-made world begins to collapse for whatever reason – and in the present case the reasons would include the pressure of modern scientific methods, modern political movements, historical consciousness, and the anthropological turn in philosophy – no matter how welcome these developments may be, they are accompanied by an increase in the potentiality for the internal mediation of desire that, once it becomes conflictual, results in violence of one sort or another, whether physical harm or social exclusion or relentless *ressentiment*. Such a crisis Girard calls a sacrificial crisis.

The notion of the sacrificial crisis is quite complex, and understanding it depends on having appropriated, even if with reservations, Girard's controversial theory of the origins of culture in a response to religious violence, a response that through prohibitions,

ritual, myth, and the institutions of culture establishes safeguards against the outbreak of mimetic contagion and its attendant forms of destructiveness. The instruments of the response cover over the original motivation behind the response, which thus suffers a forgetfulness that only fairly sophisticated forms of cultural and literary criticism are able to overcome. These instruments, and increasingly in more educated classicist societies the institutions of culture itself more than myth and ritual, establish parameters of social order that include distinctions of function, canons of rightness, and even hierarchies of persons, parameters whose principal function it is to preserve the peace and to safeguard against the resurgence of mimetic violence. Breakdowns of these instruments of cultural response constitute the sacrificial crisis, thus called because the instruments themselves developed (1) from the sacrifice of a surrogate victim or scapegoat whose immolation or exclusion brought the culmination of violence, and (2) from the peace that the sacrifice finally brought as the contagion that erupted in bloodshed was brought to an end. The sacrificial crisis, then, creates the conditions in which mimetic contagion and violence can erupt once again, and in fact probably will erupt again, to run their course until new scapegoats are found to canalize the community's violence and bring an end to the disruption.

The breakdown of classicism represents, from this point of view, precisely such a sacrificial crisis, and on a massive scale. For classicism itself may be interpreted at least in part as characterizing a set of cultural institutions that established precisely the distinctions, canons, and hierarchies required for social peace. Many are left without even a *Weltanschauung*, as Lonergan said. Many are left resentful of the cultural change that has destroyed, if not their world view, at least the institutions that were perpetuated by and that perpetuated that world view. Many suspect the call and demand for a new philosophical and theological method and style. Witness the unreasonable hesitation in Catholic circles to appropriate and build upon Lonergan's achievements, even though clearly they represent both continuity with the best in the Catholic tradition and honest

engagement with modern advances. Many resist even the fourfold differentiation – scientific, scholarly, interior, and transcendent – that would make that new method and style possible and effective. Many refuse to listen even to those who would explain to them how the new method and style are indeed ‘continuous with the old,’ and so who would minimize the shock of the changes that are required to advance to a position that can operate on the level of our time.

What is even more disturbing is that, if Girard is correct regarding the meaning of the sacrificial crisis, times such as ours are breeding grounds for the mimetic contagion and violence that are destructive of human relationships and that, if left unchecked for a long enough period of time, will require the subtle but nonetheless real transference of the entire community’s violence onto a scapegoat or victim whose suffering is arbitrary yet does put a stop to the community’s bickering, at least for a time. In our age, however, as Girard emphasizes, we are becoming savvy about the victimage mechanism, and so we are more apt to continue in the path of communal self-destruction unless reason can prevail to overcome the violence. And the violence can, of course, be quite subtle. It will not necessarily be physical. It can take such forms as blocking academic careers, destroying new centers of cultural development, or simply ignoring those who might have something to say that could raise the community beyond its present divisions. It is in this sense, and perhaps with personal experience of such realities among his own Jesuit brothers, that Lonergan found so much meaning in Max Scheler’s analysis of *ressentiment*. *Ressentiment*, Lonergan said, is ‘perhaps the most notable’ of all aberrations of feeling. And as Scheler indicates, it creates a situation of mendacity, a situation ruled by the lie. In what we can reasonably interpret as the fruit of autobiographical reflection, Lonergan remarks that ‘less differentiated consciousness finds more differentiated consciousness beyond its horizon and, in self-defence, may tend to regard the more differentiated with that pervasive, belittling hostility that Max Scheler

named *ressentiment*.⁵ On the current reading, this would mean that a consciousness suffering from the loss of social differentiation would adopt an attitude of *ressentiment* when faced with the call for the fourfold differentiation of consciousness that is the appropriate response to the social crisis. Any of the many forms that *ressentiment* can take are likely to appear in exacerbated fashion in times of sacrificial crisis and loss of social differentiation. The collapse of classicism is precisely such a time.

2 What Is René Girard Up To? The Heuristic Structure for a Lonergan-Girard Integration

The perpetual response to crises in social differentiation, namely, the ganging-up of all against an arbitrary one, whether the one be a person, a group, an ideology, or anything else, will no longer do. We are onto that. We recognize it for what it is. For Girard, it is the Passion narratives of the New Testament that unveiled that mechanism for all to see, once and for all, even though for much of the history of Christianity, the professed disciples of Jesus did not get the point. The solution today, if there is to be one, will be found in the realms of interiority and transcendence: not the deviated transcendence of the false sacred that arises out of the sacrifice of an arbitrary victim, but the genuine transcendence that consists in loving God with all one's heart and mind and strength and loving one's neighbor as oneself. This is the rule of the Kingdom to which Oughourlian refers in the quotation with which I began. But the requisite transcendence will need to be informed by a discernment of operations and states of interiority that goes beyond the commonsense wisdom of, for example, an Ignatius Loyola in his *Spiritual Exercises*, no matter how profound that wisdom may be, to the self-appropriation of the *subject* who emerges out of what Oughourlian calls the rule of the Kingdom.

⁵ Ibid. 273.

Finding the solution in the realm of interiority, however, will involve more than an appropriation of intentional operations, even though it must – and I do mean *must* – begin there. For the realm of interiority consists not only of the intentional operations that Lonergan emphasizes and enables us to differentiate and appropriate but also of the sorts of compositions and distributions of sensitivity that from the beginning of my own work I have highlighted by speaking of psychic conversion. I propose now to create a term based on the work of Manfred Clynes to speak of these compositions and distributions: sentic forms. Clynes speaks of sentic states and of ‘essentic forms,’ but I think the expression ‘sentic forms’ is more useful.⁶ It does not mean exactly what Clynes means by ‘essentic forms,’ so in some ways I am inspired as much by his vocabulary as by his ideas. I am using the word ‘form’ here in the metaphysical sense of conjugate formal intelligibility. The compositions of sensitivity are conjugate sentic forms, while their distributions occur in accord with statistical schedules of probability.

The forms and their distributions are studied (or should be studied) in the sciences of sensitive or psychic development. Girard’s work is about some of these sentic forms. The psychoanalytic (Freud) and analytic-psychological (Jung) understandings of these forms on which Lonergan relied in *Insight* and on which I relied in my first attempts to speak of psychic conversion may, I believe, safely yield in large part to the interindividual psychology of Girard, which is in my view far more helpful in specifying the precise domain of interiority that would be affected by psychic conversion. It is a domain of interiority that coincides with the primordial intersubjectivity that, as Lonergan emphasizes in *Insight*, defines primitive community, where schemes of recurrence are ‘simple prolongations of prehuman attainment, too obvious to be discussed or criticized, too closely linked with more elementary processes to be distinguished sharply from

⁶ See Manfred Clynes, *Sentics: The Touch of the Emotions* (New York: Doubleday, 1977).

them.’⁷ It is in this domain that Girard is working, and he has managed to disclose something of its formal intelligibility as well as something of the dynamics of the emergence of the genuine subject out of the interindividual, out of primordial intersubjectivity.

This domain is also acknowledged in a more heuristic fashion in the following statement from Lonergan’s systematics of the Trinity. ‘... we are conscious in two ways: in one way, through our sensibility, we undergo rather passively what we sense and imagine, our desires and fears, our delights and sorrows, our joys and sadness; in another way, through our intellectuality, we are more active when we consciously inquire in order to understand, understand in order to utter a word, weigh evidence in order to judge, deliberate in order to choose, and exercise our will in order to act.’⁸ The first way of being conscious is sensitive or psychic, the second intelligent, reasonable, and responsible. The first entails a preponderance of ‘undergoing,’ while the second, though it surely involves passivity – ‘intelligere est quoddam pati,’ Lonergan repeats from Aquinas⁹ – stresses as well and indeed highlights the self-governed and self-possessed unfolding of operations that is indicated by Lonergan’s repetition of the phrase ‘in order to ...’ The first appears more spontaneous, though if the ‘undergoing’ is interindividual this may be an illusion. The second shows greater autonomy, but only if it manifests what Oughourlian calls ‘the real human subject,’ the subject that has transcended the mimetic, however precariously. The first is more (though not exclusively) characterized by the

7 Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005) 237.

8 Lonergan, *The Triune God: Systematics* 139.

9 Lonergan, *Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas* 142, quoting Thomas Aquinas, *Super I Sententiarum*, d. 8, q. 3, a. 2 sol, who himself is quoting Aristotle, *De anima*, III, 4, 429a 13-15.

emergence of act from potency, and the second more (though not exclusively) by the emergence of act from act, by *emanatio intelligibilis*, intelligible emanation or what I prefer to call autonomous spiritual procession. Girard specializes in the first of these ways of being conscious, emphasizing its intersubjective or 'interdividual' character, while Lonergan has explored the second perhaps more acutely and thoroughly (to say nothing of more accurately) than any other thinker.

Such would be at least an initial heuristic structure for the integration of Lonergan and Girard. It would occur in the interactions between these two spheres of consciousness and their respective modes of desire.

3 Spontaneity and Autonomy

The distinction of spontaneity and autonomy, however, raises a problem, since Girard tends to use these two words almost (but not quite) as synonyms and regards as illusory most of our attempts to describe our actions as either spontaneous or autonomous. In the first book-length presentation of his theory of mimetic desire, *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque*, translated into English as *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, Girard speaks of the illusion we have that our desires are spontaneous inclinations toward attractive objects.¹⁰ But the same illusion is spoken of as the 'illusion of autonomy.'¹¹ As an illusion of spontaneity, the desire is imagined to be 'deeply rooted in the object and in this object alone.'¹² As an illusion of autonomy, it is thought to be 'rooted in the subject.'

10 René Girard, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1976) 12.

11 Ibid. 16.

12 Ibid. 12.

In fact the two delineations of the illusion cover over the same fact, namely, that the desire has been mediated by another.

The objective and subjective fallacies are one and the same; both originate in the image which we all have of our own desires. Subjectivisms and objectivisms, romanticisms and realisms, individualisms and scientisms, idealisms and positivisms appear to be in opposition but are secretly in agreement to conceal the presence of the mediator. All these dogmas are the aesthetic or philosophic translation of world views peculiar to internal mediation. They all depend directly or indirectly on the lie of spontaneous desire. They all defend the same illusion of autonomy to which modern man is passionately devoted.¹³

I wish to propose some considerations that will enable us to cut through these difficulties and to give due credit both to Girard and to the intentionality analysis of Lonergan.

The fourfold differentiation that Lonergan argues is required if we are to replace classicism with an acceptable *Weltanschauung* for our time he speaks of as ‘science, scholarship, intentionality analysis, and the life of prayer.’ These, he says, must be integrated with common sense. That is a tall order. And as I have attempted to argue from the beginning of my own work, ‘intentionality analysis’ is one dimension of ‘interiority analysis,’ but not the only one. There is also the sensitive-psychological dimension, the dimension of what I am now calling sentic forms, conjugate intelligibilities residing largely in the intersubjective roots of Lonergan’s first ‘way of being conscious.’ If classicism contained a social differentiation, the new *Weltanschauung* is grounded in a differentiation of consciousness, where ‘consciousness’ includes the two ‘ways of being conscious.’ The fourfold differentiation to which Lonergan refers is a differentiation of

13 Ibid. 16.

consciousness, not of social classes, and it must include the differentiation of the two ways of being conscious, the intentional (in the sense of intelligent, rational, and moral intentionality) and the sensitive-psychic-intersubjective, whose response to objects is often mediated by the mimetic attachment to a model.

Now, in this context the word ‘autonomy’ takes on a different connotation from that attached to it in Girard’s text quoted above, even if Girard provides perhaps a needed and constant hermeneutic of suspicion regarding any illusions we may have about our own authenticity. Let me refer to the discussion of autonomy that appears in *The Triune God: Systematics*, precisely at the point where Lonergan is attempting to specify what kind of analogy will be suitable for a theology attempting to reach a very imperfect but still fruitful understanding of the divine processions of the Word and the Holy Spirit. Presumably, if Lonergan is at all correct in proposing his analogy – and I believe he is profoundly correct – it has a great deal to do with the rule of the Kingdom to which Oughourlian refers, that rule out of which alone there emerges the ‘real human subject.’

Lonergan reaches a clear specification of the proper analogy through a series of disjunctions. The disjunctions, he says, will provide a set of criteria by which we may discern whether any given analogy is appropriate or not. The first six of these disjunctions may be treated very briefly.

In the first disjunction Lonergan establishes that we must move from the appropriation of some concrete mode of procession in human consciousness, rather than from an abstract definition of procession; in the second that any knowledge of divine procession must be analogical; in the third that the analogy must be systematic, that is, capable of resolving every other theoretical question in Trinitarian theology; in the fourth that the analogy must be from what is naturally known; the fifth establishes that it must be from a specific nature, not from metaphysical common notions as in natural theology; and the sixth that that nature must be spiritual.

The seventh disjunction brings us closer to the notion of autonomy. The seventh disjunction is between those spiritual processions in which act proceeds from potency and those in which act proceeds from act. Since in God there is only act, only the latter processions in human consciousness will provide an appropriate analogy. 'The analogy ... must be selected from the conscious originating of a real, natural, and conscious act, from a real, natural, and conscious act, within intellectual consciousness itself and by virtue of intellectual consciousness itself.'¹⁴ Such are the procession of conceptual syntheses from direct understanding, the procession of judgments of fact and of value from the grasp of sufficient grounds, and the procession of decisions from reflective grasp and the inner word of judgment that follows upon it.

The eighth disjunction is between an *appropriation* of the dynamics of intellectual consciousness and a more distant metaphysical statement of cognitional fact. Only appropriation can enable us to distinguish the autonomous intellectual procession of act from act under the power of transcendental laws from the spontaneous intellectual procession of act from potency and from the spontaneous sensitive processions of act from both potency and act in accord with the laws specific to continuations of prehuman processes such as those manifested in primordial human intersubjectivity. Note that Lonergan has here introduced his own meaning for the words 'spontaneous' and 'autonomous.' By 'autonomous intellectual procession of act from act' Lonergan is referring to a consciousness that is under rule or law only inasmuch as it is constituted by its own transcendental desire, to which there are attached what he came to call the transcendental precepts. But by fidelity to these precepts such a consciousness 'rules itself inasmuch as under God's agency it determines itself to its own acts in accordance with the exigencies' of intelligence, rationality, and existential responsibility.¹⁵

14 Lonergan, *The Triune God: Systematics* 175.

15 Ibid.

This autonomy of what Oughourlian called the ‘real human subject’ does proceed from an intellectual spontaneity, namely, the conscious transcendental notion of being that is the native desire to know and the conscious transcendental notion of value that extends that native desire by force of a further question, a question in the existential order. But that spontaneity becomes preceptive, and this is what converts the spontaneity into a genuine autonomy: not only *do* we raise questions, we must raise them; not only *do* we doubt, we must doubt; not only *do* we deliberate, we must deliberate. We must raise questions lest we pass judgment on what we do not understand; we must raise doubts lest we adhere to a false appearance of truth; we must deliberate lest we rush headlong to our own destruction.¹⁶ And it is in fidelity to the *must*, to the exigency into which the spontaneity has been transformed, that there emerges the only genuine autonomy of which the human subject is capable. That autonomy governs only some of the processions that occur in intelligent, rational, responsible consciousness, those processions in which act proceeds not from potency but from act. Such is the case with the autonomy of freedom whenever we choose *because* we ourselves judge and *because* our choice is in accordance with our judgment; such is the case with the autonomy of rationality whenever we judge *because* we grasp the evidence and *because* our judgment is in accordance with the grasped evidence; such is the case with the autonomy of clarity whenever we define *because* we grasp the intelligible in the sensible and *because* our definition is in accordance with grasped intelligibility.¹⁷ And it is only in the procession of act from act, and not in the procession of act from potency as in the emergence of insight from questions, that the proper analogy is found for understanding, however remotely, the Trinitarian processions: ‘as is the case when a word arises by virtue of

16 Ibid. 177.

17 Ibid. emphasis added.

consciousness as determined by the act of understanding, and a choice arises by virtue of consciousness as determined by the act of judgment (that is, by a compound word).'¹⁸

The ninth disjunction is tripartite, for such autonomy can be manifested in the realm of practical intelligence and rationality, in the realm of speculative intelligence and rationality, and in the realm of existential self-determination through rational judgment and responsible choice. 'When one asks about the triune God, one is not considering God as creator or as agent, and so one is prescind-ing from practical autonomy. Nor is one considering God insofar as God understands and judges and loves all things, and so one is prescind-ing from speculative matters. But one is considering God inasmuch as God is in himself eternally constituted as triune, and so one takes one's analogy from the processions that are in accordance with the exercise of existential autonomy,' the autonomy in which one decides to operate in accord with the norms inherent in the unfolding of attentiveness, intelligence, rationality, and moral responsibility.¹⁹ That alone is the genuine autonomy of the 'real human subject,' and while it is an autonomy that has transcended the mimetic structure of the interindividual and thus emerged into genuine subjectivity, it has not transcended every form of subordination. Rather, 'the autonomy of human consciousness is indeed subordinate, not to every object whatsoever [and, we must add, not to every mimetic structure whatsoever], but to the infinite subject in whose image it has been made and whom it is bound to imitate.'²⁰ Even more precisely, of course, we must emphasize that the autonomy of human consciousness has been made in the image and likeness not of one but of three infinite subjects of the one divine consciousness, and its genuine autonomy consists precisely in its fidelity to that image, issuing a word *because* it has understood something and moving to loving decision

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid. 179.

20 Ibid. 215.

because that decision is in accord with the true value judgment that is its *verbum spirans amorem*.

4 Conclusion

I have suggested that the cultural crisis that attends the collapse of classicism is an instance of what Girard calls a sacrificial crisis, and that as such it unleashes the likelihood of an increase of that internal mediation of acquisitive and appropriative desire that leads to various forms of violence in human relations. As Girard has made clear, the scapegoat mechanism for preventing the escalation of violence no longer works as effectively as it once did. Lonergan suggests that the solution to the crisis that accompanies the collapse of classicism is a fourfold differentiation of consciousness. I have suggested that such a differentiation of consciousness must replace the social differentiation of function, class, and status that was characteristic of the classicist era. While real human subjects in the Girardian sense of subjects not infected by mimetic contagion certainly did emerge and flourish in the classicist period, the emergence of such subjects in the post-classicist world must occur through the fourfold differentiation of consciousness that Lonergan suggests, where the appropriation of interiority must, however, extend beyond the appropriation of intentional operations that Lonergan makes possible into the appropriation of the sentic forms of desire, many of which are interindividual and mimetic. It is out of that twofold appropriation that what Oughourlian called the 'real human subject' will emerge in the post-classicist age, and it is from that twofold appropriation that a *Weltanschauung* can be constructed that will sustain the new form of differentiation that is required for cultural integrity and social peace. The subject who emerges from that twofold appropriation will be relatively autonomous, where 'autonomy' means 'governing oneself through fidelity to the transcendental precepts' but

where 'relative autonomy' means 'subject to the eternal exemplar in whose image we abide as and only to the extent that we are faithful to these precepts.'