

**Essays in Systematic Theology 48: ‘No Other Gospel’:  
Ecclesial Integrity in the Appropriation of the Second Vatican Council<sup>1</sup>**

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‘I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and turning to a different gospel – not that there is another gospel, but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be accursed’ (Galatians 1.6-8).

‘I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve ...’ (1 Corinthians 15. 3-5).

The original inspiration behind this paper was a hermeneutic of suspicion regarding the proclamation of the ‘Year of Faith’ and also regarding some talk of ‘the new evangelization.’ Not only did these moves seem to me, rightly or wrongly, to be an attempt perhaps to draw attention away from the Second Vatican Council and what I have regarded as its aborted reforms; they also might be, I thought, an ideological attempt, however unobjectified, to substitute another gospel for the gospel of God in Jesus Christ. I completed writing most of this paper prior to the election of a new pope, and so I did not know at the time whether there was any chance of a change in the direction I was afraid could be taken by the church. I confess that I did not entertain much hope. My feelings matched those that Joan Chittester eloquently expressed in a recent article in *National Catholic Reporter*: feelings emergent from a weariness that is ‘far worse than anger. Far more stultifying than mere indifference,’ a weariness that

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<sup>1</sup> Presented at the 2013 West Coast Methods Institute, Loyola Marymount University, April 2013

‘comes from a soul whose hope has been disappointed one time too many,’ a weariness that is ‘a condition of the heart that has lost the energy to care anymore.’

I am also happy to report that as I put the final touches on this paper, desolation turned to consolation, and not because the new Pope is a Jesuit – believe me, I have had Jesuit superiors whom I would never want to be Pope! I care again, hope again, am engaged again, because something quietly authentic might just be emerging.

I propose to draw on several of the entries in the next two volumes of the Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan, *Early Works on Theological Method 2* and *Early Works on Theological Method 3*.<sup>2</sup> I want to share with you some observations of Lonergan’s that are not yet well known but that may have a great deal to offer to the contemporary crisis of ecclesial integrity. The principal texts are the notes for Lonergan’s spring 1963 course ‘De methodo theologiae’ and notes for his 1959 course ‘De systemate et historia.’ I find categories in these courses that are illuminating as we attempt to appropriate fifty years of effective history of the Council. I will supplement my presentation of these categories with an application of the stages of meaning to the current situation in the church.

## **1 A 1963 Schema**

In the spring of 1963 Bernard Lonergan taught the second of three courses at the Gregorian University titled ‘De methodo theologiae.’ The content of the three courses differs. I find this second course to be the most creative and most interesting of the three. The first new and original notion that appears in the course, one that runs throughout a good part of Lonergan’s lecture notes, has to do with a three-step schema of (1) lived history, (2) understood history, and (3) the crisis both of the lived history and of the understanding of that history. The schema can be applied to general history but also to the history of the concepts that proceed from understanding in various disciplines. ‘... for every stage in the progress of understanding there are concepts that

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<sup>2</sup> These volumes have since been published.

express understanding, and so there is a history of concepts of the same thing, and there is an understanding of this history, and a crisis of this history' as well as a crisis in the understanding of this history. It is the application of this schema to theology that concerns Lonergan in this course.

The schema was introduced very early in the course, but a bit later it is complicated, so that it becomes a six-fold schema. In this complication its application to the human sciences, philosophy, and theology becomes clearer. In these disciplines there is (1) the commonsense understanding that characterizes the object of the science, (2) the understanding of that object that the human scientist is searching for, which is not coincident with (1), (3) the mutual influence between (1) and (2) so that (1) itself undergoes a *Wendung zur Idee* under the influence of the human science that studies it, (4) the experimental correction of (2) as history goes forward, (5) the histories that are written about (1), (2), (3), and (4), and finally (6) crises that affect (1), (2), (3), (4), and (5).

Next, Lonergan writes, (1) is to (2) and (3) is to (4) as the implicit is to the explicit, *actus exercitus* to *actus signatus*, the *vécu* to the *thématique*, *verstehen* to *erklären*, the *existentiell* to the *existentiale*, life to theory, experience to experiment, the practical-dramatic subject to the theoretical or scholarly subject, the perceivable world to the intelligible world. Historians (5) combine (1) and (3) into a history of lived religion, of culture, of economic life, etc. They combine (2) and (4) into a history of doctrines, ideas, intellectual objectifications. They combine (1) and (3), (2) and (4) into a history of the total movement. But crises can occur with respect to all three histories. In all of this what is being investigated is meaning, including what is meant, the operations or acts of meaning through which it is meant, and the people, the subjects, who perform those operations and intend those objects. As we go back in history, Lonergan adds, meaning is less and less differentiated, more and more total, more and more over-determined. But this dimension of elemental meaning never completely disappears. It can be overlooked, but it is never eliminated. It is also intersubjective. 'I' and 'you' are not yet distinguished when it

comes to the discernment of meaning. All live by the same meanings, which are taken for granted.

The present paper is an initial foray into an attempt to apply this threefold and then sixfold schema to the contemporary situation in the post-Vatican II Roman Catholic church. In terms of the threefold schema with which Lonergan began the 1963 course, there was the lived history of the Council itself, which was an instance of the history that is written about; there have been histories written about that lived history, attempting to understand it and to narrate what was going forward; and as we well know, today we are experiencing crises with regard to both the lived history of the Council and the attempts to understand what was going forward in the Council.

In terms of the sixfold schema into which Lonergan complicated the initial threefold proposal, there was (1) what was actually going forward in the Council, (2) the attempts by subsequent theologians and historians to understand and evaluate what was going forward in the Council, (3) the mutual influence between this understanding and the actual effective history of what went forward in the Council itself, so that this effective history takes on a separate life of its own through a *Wendung zur Idee* influenced by theological and historical study, (4) the experimental correction of the attempts by theologians and historians to understand and evaluate the lived history of the Council, (5) some subsequent histories of the Council itself, histories of the attempts to understand the Council, histories of the mutual influence of these two, and histories of the corrections, and (6) a series of crises regarding (1), (2), (3), (4), and (5).

I risk the judgment that the central experience of serious Catholics today with regard to the Council is (6), the experience of a manifold of crises regarding the Council, its effective history, its implementation, its acceptance, its meaning, its actual chance at making any difference whatsoever in the life of the church.

## **2 Premature Systematization and Premature Closure**

In an earlier course on 'System and History,' Lonergan introduced another set of ideas that may account for this series of crises: premature systematization and premature closure of questions. We are well aware of Lonergan's description of the future of the church issued in 1965, with its solid right that is determined to live in a world that no longer exists and its scattered left captivated by now this and now that but too restless to work out each element in the effective history not only of the Council but of the shift to the modern ideal of science and the move to historical consciousness. In both the solid right and the scattered left, there has occurred a premature systematization or a premature closure of questions that is responsible for the crises regarding the Council, its effective history, its implementation, its acceptance, its meaning, its actual chance at making any difference in the life of the church. Insofar as such a premature systematization or closure affects the solid right, those who are *determined* to live in a world that no longer exists and that will never exist again, we find the authentic promotion of an inauthentic tradition, and so major inauthenticity. But unfortunately an analogous charge of premature closure of questions at times has to be made of many of the rest of us (and I include myself), at least if we fail to reach the serene confidence, which I think is the fruit of grace, that would enable us to participate in the perhaps not numerous center that alone will count in the long run as this all works itself out.

### **3 A Heuristic Guide to the Crisis**

Next, I wish to formulate what I think is going forward today, this experience of a multitude of crises, in terms of Lonergan's stages of meaning, adding to Lonergan's three stages John Dadosky's suggestion of an emergent fourth stage in our time. I used this same analysis to speak about globalization in my contribution to the Marquette colloquium in early November, and it may be that some of you have read that paper on the website [www.lonerganresource.com](http://www.lonerganresource.com). I will quickly review that application to globalization and then turn to the crisis of the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of the Second Vatican Council. My efforts here are an attempt to reach

toward some kind of explanatory understanding not only of the crisis but also of its source in interiority and of its solution in appropriated interiority.

### *3.1 As Applied to Globalization*

I began my discussion of the ambiguity of globalization by observing, ‘Globalization is caught ... between two distinct communal mentalities, one of which is an unconverted neoliberal economic mentality and the other of which is an immature and undifferentiated, relativistic and at times nihilistic protest against the global reach of such a mentality.’ From there I proceeded to the attempts to align these two mentalities, respectively, with what have been called ‘modernity’ and ‘postmodernity.’ But then I proposed that Lonergan’s stages of meaning provide a better set of models for understanding what is really happening. There is another characteristic of globalization that can be exploited to the good, namely, the exposure of the fact that no culture is normative; and that fact almost begs for an appeal to the model of the stages of meaning. ‘The so-called modernity that characterizes globalization both positively and negatively – positively as the fruit of modern science and negatively as the immature posture that asserts the superiority of cultures governed by technical rationality – is really a late version of Lonergan’s second stage of meaning. In the second stage of meaning theory governed by logic exercises the control of meaning. In the *late* second stage of meaning, the invitation to yield to the appropriation of interiority is on the table, but it is refused. Theory that refuses to move to interiority as the locus of the control of meaning, by this very refusal, makes for a *late* version of the second stage, where the word “late” connotes not only a temporal difference from “early” but also the qualitative difference connoted by the word “moribund.” But the other side of globalization, namely, the concrete exposure of the fact that no culture is normative and that every culture has something to contribute to the fulfilment of the *humanum*, reveals in a positive light that Lonergan’s third stage of meaning, grounded in the appropriation of interiority, is not only an intellectual and methodological exigence but a global cultural requirement. For only through that

appropriation is there discovered what truly and solely *is* normative. Everything else really is up for grabs, and should be, but not the validity of the injunction to be ever attentive, intelligent, reasonable, responsible, and, by God's grace, loving.'

At this point, however, it becomes clear that Lonergan's third-stage appropriation of the concrete universal that is the normative subject is not the end point of communal conscious development, but simply a withdrawal, however long, for the sake of a return. The return would advance us to a fourth stage of meaning, a stage of interpersonal community both emergent from the deference to the *other* that characterizes the postmodern and issuing in collective responsibility for the human good. But for the ensuing stage to take such form, the appropriation of the normative and integral scale of values isomorphic with the normative subjectivity appropriated in the third-stage withdrawal must guide the movement to the exercise of communal responsibility.

### *3.2 As Applied to the Church*

If this set of models is helpful in describing the contemporary globalized world, there is no reason to think that it would not be helpful as well in understanding the present set of crises regarding the implementation of the Second Vatican Council. For, as Karl Rahner has emphasized, the Council mediated the emergence of a self-consciously global church, thereby initiating a new stage in the church's self-understanding and self-constitution. That stage may be understood as requiring something like the self-appropriation of the normative concrete universal that is the authentic subject in Christ Jesus, precisely for the sake of elevating the communal reality of the church to global responsibility for the implementation of the scale of values.

If this is the case, then resistance to such a proposed way beyond the crises that affect the church in the wake of the Council may indeed be traced either to a determination to live in a world that no longer exists, that is, to live in the second stage of meaning, or to the kind of rejection of that old world that nonetheless has no solid foundation for establishing alternative

schemes of recurrence in the church's procedures and life. These correspond to Lonergan's solid right and scattered left, respectively. In either case, but in different ways, there will be diagnosed premature systematizations and premature closures of significant issues. In either case there will be a rejection of an offer that is on the table to move to interiority as the sole arbiter of what is normative in human living and in Christian discipleship. In either case the way forward is the perhaps not numerous center that does take that long withdrawal for the sake of a return. And in either case the return, which is now long overdue, will entail the organization of resources for the implementation through the ministry of the church of the normative and integral scale of values on a global proportion. Such implementation, I propose, may be accepted as what the upshot of the Council really should be and still can be, but only if the protagonists in the ongoing drama of church life accept the invitation to interiority for the sake of a return to concrete living in accord with the scale of values.

All of this is very sketchy, but I can do no more in the time allotted. Historians who find these proposals helpful may wish to use Lonergan's threefold and sixfold schemata as a framework for understanding what has been going forward from the very start of the Council to the present day. Theologians who find these proposals helpful may wish to mobilize their resources into the composition of a systematic theology that would promote first the understanding, and then the implementation, of the normative and integral scale of values in an effort to move human relations and communities to an ever closer approximation to the reign of God in human affairs.