

**Methodological Presuppositions for Engaging the Other
in the Post Vatican II Context:
Insights from Ignatius and Lonergan:**

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“There is a principle which is a bar against all information, which is proof against all arguments and which cannot fail to keep a [person] in everlasting ignorance—that principle is contempt prior to investigation.”
-Herbert Spencer

“I repeat with insistence—research and interreligious and intercultural dialogue are not an option but a vital necessity for our time.”
-Pope Benedict XVI

Introduction

The Protestant theologian David Bosch and the Catholic theologian Karl Rahner both characterize our era of Christian self-understanding in terms of a paradigm shift.¹ Bosch refers to the paradigm shift as the ecumenical age. For Rahner Vatican II represented the formal recognition that the Church was coming of age as a ‘world Church’. He suggested that the Church had not been involved in this kind of shift in its self-understanding since the time of St. Paul.

In the past few years there has been a plethora of books and articles addressing the significance of Vatican II.² Regardless of how historians will eventually weigh the historical significance of the Council, one cannot ignore its achievements. Some of these include the recognition of the *ecclesia particularis*, or local church; the movements towards reconciliation with the Eastern Church; the incorporation of the vernacular into the liturgical life; the *Declaration on Religious Freedom*; and, for the purposes of this

¹Rahner’s articulates two major paradigm shifts in the Church’s theology of mission while the Protestant Bosch articulates five major shifts in more detail. Karl Rahner, “Towards a Fundamental Theological Interpretation of Vatican II,” *Theological Studies* (1979): 716-727; David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991).

² This hermeneutic has been bolstered by the five volume history of Vatican II recently made available in English. Giuseppe Alberigo, *History of Vatican II*, ed. Joseph A. Komonchak, 5 vols. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995-2005); See also John O’Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II?* (Harvard: Belknap Press, 2008). And Anthony Barratt, “Interpreting Vatican II Forty Years On: A Case of *Caveat Lector*,” *Heythrop Journal*, XLVII (2006): 75-96.

colloquium in particular, the affirmation of other religions, including a marked *about face* concerning the Church's relationship with the Jews. In addition, I have argued that the Council is unprecedented for invoking the language of mutuality in terms of the Church's relations *ad extra*. Pertinent documents include *Gaudium et Spes*, *Unitatis Redintegratio* and *Nostra Aetate*.³ What is paradigmatic about this shift in the Church's self-understanding is the recognition that the Church's relations with the Other now must include mutual relations. In previous work I have argued that this dimension of the Church's self-understanding is best captured by an ecclesiology of friendship that complements communion ecclesiology. *Communio* would remain the primary conception of the Council documents in terms of *Ecclesia ad intra*.⁴

³ *Gaudium et Spes* invokes the idea of mutuality in the Introduction to Chapter IV, which is titled, "The Church and the World as Mutually Related." The chapter speaks about how the Church can enrich the individual and society and then in §44 acknowledges how the Church is enriched by the other: "Just as it is in the world's interest to acknowledge the Church as a historical reality...the Church herself knows how richly she has profited by the history and development of humanity." There is recognition that historically the Church has been involved in a mutually enriching relationship with the other. Again, what makes this document and others of Vatican II distinctive is the formal, explicit recognition of this relationship—a development, as Komonchak states, of the Church's self-constitution and reflective self-consciousness.

Moreover, the document advocates a continuing, living exchange between the Church and various cultures (GS, §44). Similarly, in a subsequent chapter, it speaks of a mutual enrichment between the Church and other cultures: "Faithful to her own tradition and at the same time conscious of her universal mission, she can enter into communion with the various civilizations, *to their enrichment and the enrichment of the Church herself*" (GS, §58, emphasis added).

The *Decree on Ecumenism* (*Unitatis Redintegratio* I §4) emphasizes the importance of maintaining "mutual relations" in the dialogue with other Christian traditions. The decree advocates a "change of heart" or conversion for those involved (presumably both parties) in the process. "Mutual brotherly [and sisterly] love" is viewed as the fruit of unity (UR II §7). It acknowledges the importance of mutual respect, esteem and mutual understanding. In matters of doctrinal differences, one could say, it encourages the focus on complementary rather than contradictory differences: "In such cases, these various theological expressions are to be considered often as mutually complementary rather than conflicting" (UR III, 1 § 17).

The *Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions* (*Nostra Aetate*) repeats the call for "mutual understanding" and respect in the dialogue between religions (§3, 4). In his commentary, Walter Abbot clarifies the significance of the Council's use of *mutual*: "The word 'mutual' indicates the Council hopes for two-way communication; the Council Fathers here take an initiative (just as the *Decree on Ecumenism* urges Catholics to take the initiative in proposals for dialogue with other Christians) and hope for a response" [*Documents of Vatican II* (NY, Herder and Herder, 1966), p. 665, n. 20.] Indeed, the initiative the Council Fathers call for is something new historically in the Church's relations with other religions and Christian traditions.

⁴ John D. Dadosky, "Towards a Fundamental RE-Interpretation of Vatican II." *Heythrop Journal*, 49/5 (September, 2008): 742-63.

For Rahner, in the centuries leading up to Vatican II, ecclesial identity was not differentiated from European culture. His acknowledgment that the post-Vatican Church is coming of age as a world-church is harmonious with the Council recognition of the local church.

Bernard Lonergan addresses this paradigm shift in terms of the movement from a *classicist notion of culture* to an *empirical notion of culture*. Such a transition is brought about, among other things, by the emergence of modern science and in philosophy by the turn to the subject. The classicist notion of culture was conceived as “normative” rather than as empirical; as universal, rather than particular. Classicist assumptions emphasized fixed laws that were static and unchanging. The method of theology proceeded from above downwards by deducing from Aristotelian-like first principles to the context in question.⁵ The implications for evangelization meant that Christianity was not different from high European culture and so to plant the Gospel was to supplant the indigenous cultural context with European Christianity, save for a few exceptions. In the words of Lonergan, “The classicist is no pluralist.”⁶

By contrast, an empirical notion of culture begins from below. Various contexts inform any broader notion of culture in a heuristic way. The method is historical, dynamic and begins with the particular context moving upward for a more deeply informed theology. It is noteworthy, however, that current post-modern tendencies tend to go in the opposite direction of the classicist notion of culture. That is, they claim that there are no universals and that cultural differences are expressions of an unbound tapestry of meanings that can never be fully understood. Differences must be affirmed in their uniqueness, hence

⁵ Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990) 300-302.

⁶ Ibid., 301.

vive la difference! However, the post-modern perspective has overlooked (as have some Christians) that there are different types of differences, some which are not worthy of celebration and some which mark the difference between good and evil.⁷ The failure to distinguish the different types of differences accurately or the failure to differentiate them at all is a failure of discernment. I will return to the topic discernment in part three of this paper.

The recognition of a shift to an empirical notion of culture underpins much of the shift in modern theology which takes its starting point ‘from below’. Most clearly this involves an emphasis on the particular or local church (*ecclesia particularis*). When the notion of culture (and, incidentally, ecclesiology) was classicist, the focus of the Church was as *universal*, and so the local church was construed as a uniform ecclesial extension within the larger universal church. Following Vatican II, the emphasis on the local church was differentiated from the universal church in a new way. Principally, the local church is defined as the See of an individual bishop. Practically speaking, however, the notion broadens to include multiple diverse contexts because a bishop can have within his See many particular cultures, each which have their own distinct ecclesial context. In short, the empirical notion of culture will give rise to an empirical notion of *ecclesia*.

This development, along with the ecumenical priority of the last 50 years, raises new questions, especially for missionaries. How does one express the Gospel message and values in terms of the meanings and values of the local context? The question of inculturation emerges. Moreover, within those local contexts the cultural meanings are often wedded to the religious values of the indigenous cultures. If one is to carry on the

⁷ Lonergan helpfully distinguished between complementary, contradictory and genetic differences. But I will return to this below. *Method in Theology*, p. 236.

process of inculturation, how does one determine the line between successful inculturation and syncretism? Yes, the question of syncretism also emerges. Second, missionaries encounter various religions in their respective contexts, so with this new emphasis on interreligious dialogue the proclamation-dialogue debate emerges. That is, how do Christians reconcile the Great Commission, the call to evangelize with the ecumenical priority of dialogue of Vatican II? Is dialogue really just to be veiled evangelization? Is dialogue a compromise of the evangelical task? Moreover, this question takes on renewed significance by documents issued separately by the Vatican and the World Council of Churches where dialogue is viewed as part of the mission of the Church. Both have also recognized the principal of mutuality in the process of dialogue.

In view of the Vatican Council's positive valuation of the Other, a question unique to our time emerges: What is to be an adequate method for engaging the Other and for accounting for the various array of contexts? How are we, in the words of Francis Clooney, going to insure that our dialogue does not become monologue?⁸

I believe that the Presupposition in paragraph 22 of Ignatius's *Spiritual Exercises* provides a methodological guide for engaging the Other. Moreover, I believe this methodological guide, wedded with insights from Bernard Lonergan's methodology, provides a further technical specification of the Ignatian presupposition, one that is adequate for addressing the Church's potential identity crisis during this ecumenical paradigm shift. With the proper tools of discernment, these methodological presuppositions can serve as a priori principles for engaging the Other in a pluralistic context.

⁸ Francis Clooney, "Dialogue Not Monologue," *Commonweal* (October 21, 2005), 12-17.

The Contribution of Ignatius

In the Presupposition to the *Spiritual Exercises*, Ignatius wants to set the tone for the method of interaction between the director and the exercitant. He directs them in the following way:

That both the giver and the maker of the Spiritual Exercises may be of greater help and benefit to each other, it should be presupposed that every good Christian ought to be more eager to put a good interpretation on a neighbor's statement than to condemn it. Further if one cannot interpret it favorably, one should ask how the other means it. If that meaning is wrong, one should correct the person with love; and if this is not enough, one should search out every appropriate means through which, by understanding the statement in a good way, it may be saved.⁹

However, as the paragraph indicates, this is not just an expectation for the director and the maker of the exercises. Rather, it is the expectation, as Ignatius indicates, 'of every good Christian' so presumably the Presupposition has a wider application than just within the Spiritual Exercises.

The late Carl Starkloff, S.J., a celebrated authority on inculturation and dialogue with aboriginal traditional religions, invoked this Ignatian Presupposition experimentally in his cross-cultural dialogue with Native peoples.¹⁰ Reinterpreting the presupposition in more contemporary terms, he emphasized the following principles:

⁹ *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, trans. George Ganss, S.J. (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1992), p. 31.

¹⁰ Carl Starkloff, "'As Different as Night and Day': Ignatius's Presupposition and Our Way of Conversing across Cultures" *Studies in the Spirituality of the Jesuits* 28/4 (Sep 1996): 1-21.

1. Authentic discourse demands sincere openness in all parties involved—perhaps the Pauline readiness to “believe all things” (1. Cor. 13:6)—that never descends to mere credulity.
2. One must be prepared to offer considered and probing questions to one with whom one disagrees.
3. Challenges in a discussion are based on a desire to find the truth in the very position that is challenged.¹¹

Starkloff admits, and most of us would agree, even in light of the ecumenical emphases of Vatican II, that what Ignatius is calling for is very demanding. It has rarely been carried out in the history of the Church. While this is not the place to go into textual commentary of the Presupposition, it is interesting, Starkloff notes, that one of the early redactors of Ignatius’s proposition rendered the interpretation as *save the person, rather than the proposition*.¹² This subtle change in emphasis alters the entire tone of the Presupposition to a one-way communication or what I have called *strict self-mediation*.

In contrast, Starkloff points out that the Presupposition emphasizes the mutuality of the exchange between the director and exercitant, and this also presupposes the self scrutiny of both parties in order to insure each has properly understood the other. Further, this mutuality presupposes the possibility of “mutual correction.”¹³

This focus on mutual understanding and correction places the Ignatian Presupposition on the avant-garde of inculturation methodology. In the final section of his

¹¹ Ibid., p. 7.

¹² Ibid., p. 9.

¹³ Ibid., p. 13.

paper, Starkloff goes as far as to declare the Presupposition as the principle of inculturation.¹⁴

The formative aspect of the Presupposition may explain why the Jesuits have been so successful at inculturation in the past. Almost from their beginnings, the Jesuits were on the cutting edge of inculturation, practicing mutuality within various mission contexts. This was certainly the methodology of two of the earliest pioneers of inculturation, Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) in China and Roberto de Nobili (1577-1656) in India. While adapting to their respective missionary contexts, they fostered mutual enrichment. The success of their methodology is summarized by Michael Foss:

The best of the Jesuit missions had conducted international relations with dignity and intelligence and so had won both the love of the simple Guaranís and the respect of the cultivated Chinese. And this was the more remarkable because it was not the habit of Europeans at this time to treat other nations with kindness or with understanding.¹⁵

Yet in spite of the Jesuit successes, he admits their “hints were not taken up.” In fact, they were eventually thwarted:

Rome thought that the Jesuit method endangered not only orthodoxy, but also Roman rights and jurisdiction, and therefore condemned the Jesuit experiments. National rivalries, Western foreign policy and jealousies between the missionary orders then undid most of the Jesuit’s laborious achievements, leaving only a

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 19-20.

¹⁵ Michael Foss, *The Founding of the Jesuits 1540* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1969), 220.

nostalgia for what might have been and a memory of uprightness in a period of greed, cruelty and bad faith.¹⁶

In hindsight, it would seem that the Jesuit “hints” and “experiments,” though short-lived, were in fact what Lonergan might call nonsystematic divergences from an otherwise strictly self-mediating recurrent pattern of relating with the Other that prevailed during this ecclesial era. Rahner’s recognition that with Vatican II the Church comes of age as a world church was prefigured in the examples of Ricci and De Nobili.

Starkloff raises a question in his paper about the exigences of dialogue that may move the Church into a theological territory as yet unexplored. He asks whether one can truly understand another’s religious view without some kind of “participant observation.”¹⁷ In fact, Starkloff participated in several aboriginal ceremonies throughout his career and earned the respect of many traditional elders for his efforts at inculturation.¹⁸

Participant observation would add a new dimension to the method of dialogue. The 1990 joint pontifical statement *Dialogue and Proclamation* (§1, C) speaks of the different types of dialogue: *the dialogue of life, the dialogue of action, the dialogue of theological exchange* and *the dialogue of religious experience*. The first two deal with dialogue as the fruits of believers from various religions working together practically, and for social justice, in everyday life. The second two are carried out through verbal exchange in technical theological debates and in the mutual sharing of religious experiences. But although this document enriches our notion of dialogue, it does not speak to the kind of observer participation that Starkloff advocates. The latter seems akin to John Dunne’s call for

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Starkloff, p. 16.

¹⁸ See Carl Starkloff, “Theology and Aboriginal Religion: Continuing the Wider Ecumenism” *Theological Studies*, 68/2 June (2007): 287-319.

‘passing over’ and then return to/from another’s perspective.¹⁹ It also suggests that interreligious dialogue needs to remain exploratory, and it calls for those carrying out the dialogue to be careful and for restraint from overly zealous ecclesiastical oversight. This is why an expansion of the Presupposition into the arena of interreligious dialogue will require discerning individuals.

Another pioneer of observer participation deserves mention. Just before his death Thomas Merton began looking for a Tibetan Buddhist adept at meditation to be his mentor in those practices. Sadly, Merton’s untimely death robbed him and us of any fruits of his exploration as a participant in Tibetan Buddhist practices.²⁰ But it would seem that his explorations had taken him beyond the forays of dialogue, and he was preparing to steep himself deeply into the Tibetan traditional religious worldview by way of participation.

If the Presupposition is going to become a principle for interreligious dialogue in this ecumenical and pluralistic age, in the next section I would like to spell out how this might look in terms of specific methodological presuppositions derived from Lonergan’s method. Lonergan was a Jesuit who was formed in the tradition of the Spiritual Exercises. And while he may have not explicitly invoked the language of the Presupposition in his thought, the language is implicitly there. The task is to specify it.

Transposing the Presupposition into Lonergan’s Method

Transposing the language of the Ignatian Presupposition into Lonergan’s method will involve three aspects: 1) an understanding of mediation, 2) distinguishing between different

¹⁹ Dunne, John S. *A Search for God in Time and Memory* (London: Macmillan, 1969), p. 5. Dunne was a doctoral student of Lonergan’s at the Gregorian University in Rome.

²⁰ Bonnie Thurston (ed.), *Merton and Buddhism: Wisdom, emptiness and everyday mind*, Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2007.

kinds of differences, and 3) the implementation of discernment in order to distinguish the different kinds of differences. The first two are specifically Lonergan's contribution; the third would draw on the Ignatian tradition of discernment as well as other spiritual traditions where useful.

I have argued for these three aspects in previous work. However, Starkloff's work has challenged me to go further by placing them in the context of the Ignatian Presupposition on the one hand, and by the suggestion that dialogue may require some kind of participant observation on the other. I cannot suppose that Ignatius would have approved of participant observation although Mateo Ricci presumably did practice it successfully to some extent in 16th century China. The explication of observer-participation however would be new territory for the twenty first century Church and we do not know to what extent it is possible given the dangers of syncretism and identity dissolution. It is not surprising that Starkloff wrote extensively on syncretism and came to the opinion that we might have to allow for some of what he called 'theological messiness' as we investigate these questions.²¹ Nevertheless, many Christians might say that the First Commandment is very clear and there is nothing to be messy about.

Mediation and Difference

Lonergan's *Method in Theology* begins with an axiomatic statement that theology mediates between religion and culture. In subsequent reflection on this statement it becomes clear that this mediation is not a one-way relationship or *strict self-mediation* of

²¹Carl F. Starkloff, "The Problem of Syncretism in the Search for Inculturation," *Mission: Journal of Mission Studies/Revue des sciences de la mission* 1 (1994), 93. He develops this idea in more detail inspired by Eric Voeglin and Lonergan. See his *A Theology of the In Between: The Value of Syncretic Process* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2002). Further, I have made this argument for the importance of discernment for the future of theology in the context of three Lonergan's stages of meaning. See John Dadosky *Is There a Fourth Stage of Meaning?* *Heythrop Journal*, forthcoming.

religion to a culture or vice versa, but rather, it is one of graced mutual self-mediation. In addition, we can presume that religions can mutually self-mediate between each other and they do so within diverse cultural contexts. This mutual self-mediation has occurred throughout the history of the church but the uniqueness of Vatican II is that mutuality is invoked explicitly in terms of the Church's relations *ad extra*.

This recognition of mutual self-mediation means that we need a methodological correlate in order to articulate the multifarious relations that the Church can have with the Other. Such multifariousness entails a specification of different types of differences and Lonergan identifies three: complementary, contradictory (or dialectical) and genetic. As complementary, mutual relations can enrich all the parties involved. As dialectical, the relations can be mutually disagreeable, or conflictual. Sometimes the differences between a religion and culture or between religions are merely developmental. An example of this would be when Hellenist culture demanded a move from narrative stories about the person of Jesus to a more systematic examination of his ontological status.

Complementary differences can be mutually enriching. The Dalai Lama states: "It is useful for the Christian to adopt some Buddhist ideas. And similarly for Buddhists to learn from the Christian tradition. To help each other. It will help to enrich both traditions."²² In general, Merton was attracted to Buddhist meditation practices because he felt the Buddhists were more adept at that aspect of the contemplative life and so he could learn from them. Meanwhile, the Buddhists have been influenced in part by Christians on the development of social teaching in Buddhism. The Dalai Lama admits that Christianity has challenged him to incorporate into his spirituality the socially responsible dimension of Christianity, including social welfare, social action and education. Likewise, the

²² Paul Wilkes, *Merton By Those Who Knew Him Best* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984), 146.

Vietnamese Buddhist Thich Nhat Hanh, who also dialogued with Merton extensively, would have resonated with Merton's social conscience in his own lifelong endeavor to develop the social conscience of Buddhism, which he calls Engaged Buddhism.²³

In my own work, I have become interested in how the Diné (Navajo) notion of beauty might help to inform the Western notions of beauty which Hans Urs von Balthasar rightly claimed we have lost from theology.²⁴ The Diné notion of beauty is central to their entire worldview and is at once an aesthetic, psychological, philosophical, ethical, and religious notion. Balthasar admitted in the Foreword to his *Theological Aesthetics* that his own treatment of beauty was "all too Mediterranean" and left it to others to integrate non-Western (non-Germanic) categories into a theological aesthetics. These are just some examples of the potential mutually enriching aspects when encountering complementary differences in the interreligious dialogue.

Differences can be clearly contradictory as when two religious traditions make differing claims about the person of Jesus Christ. For example, the claim that Jesus was merely a prophet, albeit a great one, is untenable to the uniqueness of Jesus' ontological status for most Christians.

Some contradictory differences can be rooted in human biases signaling that one or both parties in the dialogue are in need of a conversion from their views. As *Dialogue and Proclamation* states: "Through dialogue they may be moved to give up ingrained prejudices, to revise preconceived ideas, and even sometimes to allow the understanding of their faith to be purified" (*Dialogue and Proclamation*, ¶ 49).

²³ See Thich Nhat Hanh, *Creating True Peace* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003), 94-109.

²⁴ John Dadosky, "Philosophy for a Theology of Beauty." *Philosophy & Theology*, 19 1-2 (2007): 7-34.

Throughout history, the prophetic dimension of Christianity often emerges when there is a dialectical difference. For example, John Paul II referred to certain aspects of the culture of the United States as reflecting a *culture of death*. He was trying to say something about the conflicting values between the secular culture in the United States and the Catholic position on values of life.²⁵ In order to put the best interpretation on John Paul's words, outraged Americans must place his concerns in context, shaped as they were in part by his own formative experiences living under two totalitarian regimes, Nazism and Marxism. John Paul II had first hand experiences of how governmental structures can behave decadently.

With respect to genetic differences, Lonergan points out that religious development is dialectical.²⁶ Therefore, we can anticipate that within interreligious dialogue, sometimes the differences encountered will reflect a difference in some aspect of a tradition's development. A dialogue between an Amish farmer and an urban Evangelical, for example, will bring to light differences pertaining to the interpretation of technological development. Moreover, the beliefs regarding the roles of women and men may differ between the societies who have integrated the fruits of secularity on the one hand and the so-called traditional societies on the other. These differences can be construed as genetic, although not exclusively so. Differing views on gender roles can be dialectical, depending on the the presence of bias. Feminist theologians identify a systemic bias in favor of men, namely patriarchy.

Discernment

²⁵ John Paul II, *Ad limina* address to US Bishops of California, Nevada and Hawaii, October 2, 1998.

²⁶ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 110-112.

If we are to invoke mutual self-mediation and the distinct types of differences as part of the basic presuppositions for interreligious dialogue and as embodying the methodological explication of the Ignatian Presupposition, then a renewed focus on discernment comes to the methodological forefront. Such discernment becomes necessary as soon as the Church acknowledges the possibility of the fruits of the Spirit residing in the Other. This idea concurs with *Dialogue and Proclamation* in section 30, titled “The need for discernment.”²⁷ “While keeping their identity intact,” the document states, “Christians must be prepared to learn and to receive from and through others the positive values of their traditions” (*Dialogue and Proclamation* ¶ 49). The authors of the joint pontifical statement put their finger on a significant methodological issue. How are we to dialogue authentically and keep our identity intact, or in other words, to remain faithful to our own authentic Christian witness? Discernment will help prevent the extremes of triumphalism on the one hand, and the risk of identity dissolution on the other.

The failure of discernment can affect the dialogue process in two ways. First, there can be the failure to distinguish the different types of differences at all, so that one falls back on a default stance of construing the relationship with the Other in strict dialectical terms. Consider the bishops’ own admission from the Extraordinary Synod of 1985:

We are probably not immune from all responsibility for the fact that especially the young critically consider the Church a pure institution. Have we not perhaps favored this opinion in them by speaking too much of the renewal of the Church's external structures and too little of God and of Christ? *From time to time there has*

²⁷ “The fruits of the Spirit of God in the personal life of individuals, whether Christian or otherwise, are easily discernible (cf. Ga 5:22-23). To identify in other religious traditions elements of grace capable of sustaining the positive response of their members to God's invitation is much more difficult. It requires a discernment for which criteria have to be established. Sincere individuals marked by the Spirit of God have certainly put their imprint on the elaboration and the development of their respective religious traditions. It does not follow, however, that everything in them is good.” (*Dialogue and Proclamation* § 30/

*also been a lack of the discernment of spirits, with the failure to correctly distinguish between a legitimate openness of the Council to the world and the acceptance of a secularized world's mentality and order of values.*²⁸

Of course, the bishops were speaking about the dialogue with the 'world' and not with other religions, but what I am claiming for the methodological presuppositions would apply to all of the Church's relations *ad extra*. The significance of this quote from the bishops is that it clearly recognizes the need for discernment on the part of everyone between legitimate openness and uncritical acceptance. I applaud their honesty, and I will add my suggestion that their suspicion followed from the fact that the methodological explication of mutual relations and discernment has yet to be fully articulated and implemented within the Church's theology.

The second way in which a lack of discernment may negatively affect the dialogue process is to mistakenly distinguish between distinct differences. Most commonly this occurs by not distinguishing between complementary and dialectical differences or by confusing the two. One of Robert Doran's important academic achievements is his critical retrieval of Carl Jung's work. Doran's correctly observes that Jung mistook contradictory and complementary differences in his reading of the Book of Job. The result of Jung's blunder was his suggestion that God has an evil, shadow side, and this is clearly unacceptable for Christians. For one thing, by Jung's own definition of the *shadow*, it would be logically impossible for an omniscient God to be unconscious of something.²⁹

The failure to distinguish properly between differences can lead to a compromise of one's religious identity especially if, through dialogue, one surrenders certain mysteries of

²⁸ 1985 Final Report of the Extraordinary Synod of Bishops, ¶ 4.

²⁹ See Robert M. Doran, *Theology and the Dialectics of History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 334-335.

the faith that are bound up and integral with that identity. Following the post-Vatican emphasis on inculturation and contextualization, the question of syncretism has emerged anew. On the one hand, there are those who view syncretism as a threat to the integrity of the faith and dismiss it outright. On the other hand, there are those who see syncretism as an inevitable consequence of intercultural and interreligious mediation. I am sympathetic to Carl Starkloff's view that some type of syncretism or 'theological messiness' will be inevitable. However, rather than despair or be threatened by this possibility, we need to prepare ourselves with the tools of discernment in order to distinguish in the specific contexts to what extent we can allow for some of aspects of what Starkloff calls the *metaxy* of the syncretic process. Proper discernment will enable us to properly distinguish between those aspects of the tradition that can be inculturated, those aspects that can be blended without serious consequences, those that must be integrally preserved, and those aspects of the other tradition that must be resisted in the inculturation process.

Dialogue as Participation?

If we are going to ask what another person means by their proposition, can we rely on the integrity of adequate verbal discourse in order to fully understand the proposition? Or, should there be some experiential component in order to enrich our understanding?

Starkloff's suggestion of participant observation brings a new question to the Ignatian Presupposition and to the method of dialogue in general. To what extent do we need to, in the words of John Dunne, pass over to another's tradition in order to understand those religious claims more deeply? To what extent *can* we pass over? I do not have the answer for this, but I will share my own experience which led me to take Starkloff's suggestion of dialogue and participant observation more seriously.

In the summer of 1994 I was the patient in a traditional Diné (Navajo) Blessingway ceremony. The ceremony in which I participated in was an abbreviated version of one that can last as long four nights.³⁰ The purpose of the ceremony is to restore one to the path of beauty—to promote more beauty in all aspects of one’s life. It was not until 1996 as a graduate student in theology that I began to reflect upon and interpret my experience with the Diné medicine-man, or *hatathli* (singer).

In 2001 after I completed my dissertation on Lonergan and Eliade, I turned to my next project on beauty. The fruits of my experience with the Diné did not leave me compelled to ‘go native’; rather, I wanted to integrate what I had learned from them within my own tradition. Being convinced that Balthasar was correct in his diagnosis that the West had lost beauty, I became intrigued by the question of the Diné contribution to a theology of beauty. Moreover, I was not convinced that Balthasar’s theological aesthetics rested on adequate philosophical foundations, and so I began trying to probe Lonergan’s philosophy as a basis for the theological aesthetics which could better complement Balthasar’s endeavor.

In 2005, assisted by a grant from the Lilly Foundation, I spent three months on the Diné reservation which is located in the southwestern United States. This was my second field research trip to the region since 1994. I studied their worldview with some of my contacts at the Diné Community College, taking courses in Navajo language, culture and conducting interviews with some of the traditional medicine people. I came up against two problematic realizations. First, there was the limitation of language. The Diné language is

³⁰ See John Dadosky, “Walking in the Beauty of the Spirit: A Phenomenological and Theological Case Study of a Navajo Blessingway Ceremony.” *Mission: Journal of Mission Studies/Revue des sciences de la mission*, VI/2 (Fall 1999): 199-222.

one of the most difficult in the world. Recall that the Japanese were never able to crack their code during WWII. It would take a lifetime to master the language adequately.

Secondly, having obtained more than a cursory understanding and appreciation of the Diné notion of beauty, my theological reflections took me in a surprisingly different direction. That is, I began to formulate insights into the *Ecclesia ad intra*.³¹ The category of beauty provided by the Diné traditional worldview provided an analogy for understanding how the interaction between two dimensions of the Church might be understood. Time does not permit me to go into this detail, but the analogy pertained to an integral understanding of the relationship between what Yves Congar called the *structure* and *life* of the Church, what Karl Rahner called the *institutional* and the *charismatic*, and what Balthasar called *the official church* and *the church of love*. The point I wish to emphasize is that in my own attempt to pass over into traditional Diné religion, as partial and as incomplete as it may have been, the encounter paradoxically led to insights that helped me better understand my own tradition in a deeper and more appreciative way.

Conclusion

In the last few years, I have been attending meetings of comparative theologians at the CTSA and the AAR. I have noticed that many of their concerns are methodological. In speaking with some of the members individually I have realized also that their methodologies run up against a limit, a feeling of constraint which may be indicative of the exigence for what Starkloff identified as observer participation.

³¹ See John Dadosky “The Official Church and the Church of Love in Balthasar’s Reading of John: An Exploration in Post-Vatican II Ecclesiology.” *Studia Canonica*, 41 (2007): 453-471.

For example, it is possible that one of the things that Buddhism has to offer Christianity is the practice of being in the present moment through various forms of meditation. Indeed, if Augustine's achievement over Origen was to construe eternity in terms outside of temporal time as opposed to a never ending series of aeons, then perhaps the Buddhist meditation practices can steer the Christian to daily contemplation of the eternal within the temporal—a way of being in the world but not of the world. But we could not explore this unless we experiment and develop such meditation practices.

The theme of this colloquium then speaks to a theological frontier where the spirit of inquiry is best characterized by one of exploration, equipped with the presuppositions of mutuality, the anticipation of differences, and the principles of discernment to clarify those differences.

In terms of systematic theology, there is the recognition that because theology mediates between diverse religious and cultural contexts it may discover concepts from other contexts that help in the theological understanding of its deepest mysteries.

Just as the term *homoousios* was invoked at the Council of Nicaea in order to clarify an understanding of the relationship between the first and second persons of the Trinity, in this ecumenical age we will undoubtedly encounter categories from other religious and cultural contexts that may help us in a similar way.

The focus of this paper has been on methodological engagement with the Other in a post-Vatican II context. I have focused on the issue of interreligious dialogue, but the methodological presuppositions I am arguing for may be applicable to the Church's entire relations *ad extra* because it captures the multifarious range of relations with the Other but it relies on authentic and discerning individuals to lead the way.