

D0260

A NOTE ON "PUTTING IT IN YOUR OWN WORDS"

RE: the writing and grading of papers for Theo. 128, Spring '77

This handout is intended to explain the purpose of the weekly short papers which you are asked to write for this course. Hopefully it will prove helpful to you when you sit down to write the papers, and when you look over the grades you'll find on them when they're given back.

We will be reading nine essays by Bernard Lonergan in the course of the semester, one each week, and we are asking you to write a 1-1½ page essay on seven of those nine essays. You are free to choose the seven which you find most intriguing (or, to leave out the two you found least intriguing) with the exception of the following three: "Belief, Today's Issue", "Theology in its New Context," and "The Subject". An essay is required for each of these.

The short essays are meant as ~~an~~ exercises in helping you to collect your thoughts about the various individual essays. The basic idea is for you to put in your own words the major points raised in the essay at hand. ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ As an aid to help you focus on the points that are major, we will usually formulate a question or two, to be handed out a week before the paper is due, towards ~~w~~ (one of) which your essay is to be directed. In your own words, then, you will address the question which is asked of each essay. Now there are several ways of putting something in your own words--one is to simply write 'Lonergan said "...' followed by a quotation of the relevant passages. Of course that is not much better than copying. One step above this is paraphrasing. For example, many of you, in your essays on the Vatican II document, patterned your paragraph structure after the numbered paragraph structure in the document, paraphrasing the content of each as you went along. Now at this level of writing you are certainly putting the document's thought in your own words, but you are still simply repeating, for the most part, the contents of the document. If someone came along and asked you, "Now just what did that document say?", you would have no choice but to read him your entire paraphrase!--since your paper doesn't ~~xxx~~ say what the Council members were trying to get at, it only repeats ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~, although in different words, their thought.

A much better way of putting something in your own words is to ask yourself the question, "Now just what is this essay saying?"--and answer it, in a brief, clear, concise essay. This usually involves isolating a dominant theme in the work at hand (for example, a major theme of the Vatican II document seems to be the conception of modern ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ world as one ~~in~~ which sees rapid material progress without a correspondingly rapid spiritual growth) and organizing your essay around that theme, interpreting other themes and issues raised in the work in the light of this theme (for example, the document makes a point of also characterizing

the modern world as a place of contradictions--another theme-- an example of which is the possession of an immense amount of technical know-how and equipment, in spite of which there is still much starvation, etc., and which is ~~now~~ even used for oppressive purposes. From the standpoint of the theme we have chosen as the one we will work with, the one which will be definitive, we can see ~~immediately~~ that this situation is a result of a value system which is not as mature as the technology which it is directing --that is, our spiritual growth has not kept pace with our material growth. Note that this could have been worked the other way-- We could have chosen the theme of contradiction as our major theme, and understood the theme of immense material growth/meagre spiritual growth as a function of this theme. The point is, we do choose a theme, and use it to unify, to make sense out of, all the other points we bring up.). This way the paper says something in the end--we truly say something in our own words, something all our own, (a synthetic commentary.) And it doesn't have to be long, either. In fact, it's best when kept down to a page or two, made ~~up~~ of two to four (about) tight, well-conceived paragraphs, which follow each other in logical sequence.

You should not be discouraged if your first few attempts don't quite make it. The idea is--we're practicing. In some manner of speaking, this should be an enjoyable task (although admittedly difficult). Read the ^{essay} through several times, one or two times quickly to get the general idea, not getting hung up on difficult spots, and then perhaps a third time more carefully, working over the places you found difficult. It is best to separate the readings from each other by a day or two. But write immediately after your careful reading. Of course this method is only a suggestion, a place to start from. You should feel your own way.

With the above in mind, grades were assigned the papers on Vatican II in the following way:

An A was given those papers which said something, which represented a synthesis of the material in the way explained above. Such synthesis is by its nature original work, shows a thorough amount of comprehension buttressed by a good bit of reflection.

A B was given ~~for~~ those papers which for the most part were paraphrasing, and doing it correctly. Also receiving B's were papers which tried to be synthetic, but failed at the same time to raise all or most of the issues that were in fact raised in the document.

A C was given for those papers which paraphrased, but with no evident structure grounding the attempt (not even the ordered paragraph sequence of the document), and which either paraphrased incorrectly, or failed to raise issues which the document in fact raised. Usually a C paper could be described as "vague".

A D was given those few papers which had almost nothing in common with the document, reflecting a perfunctory or a non-existent reading of the text. No F's were given this time.

IF ANYONE FEELS THEY HAVE BEEN TREATED UNFAIRLY -- it is your responsibility to come talk about it. Please do.