COLLECTED WORKS OF BERNARD LONERGAN

A Second Collection

1

The Transition from a Classicist Worldview to Historical Mindedness[1]

I had best begin by quoting my terms of reference. In the mimeographed circular the ninth topic area was:

'The Church addresses the world. A theological perspective on how a community of love adapts and directs itself for effective mission and witness. Are the transition of forms and the principle of change theological requisites?'

More fully in a letter of July 22, 1966, from Fr Coriden:[2]

'It seems to me that the transition of organizational and structural forms in the Church is a pattern that parallels the transcultural transmission and consequent development of dogma. The changing laws and forms and methods in the Church down the centuries, the borrowing from different cultures and civilizations and adaptation to altered circumstances in the world – all these seem to be more than mere facts of history, they seem to be a theological requisite. The pattern of adaptation and change appears to be a mandate based on the very nature and mission of the Church, just as growth and development are inherent in the nature of a living organism.

1 [An address delivered at a meeting of the Canon Law Society of America in 1966. Reprinted in the Proceedings of the Canon Law Society, *Law for Liberty: The Role of Law in the Church Today*, ed. James E. Biechler (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1967). The meeting occurred in Pittsburgh, 8–10 October 1966.]

2 [Rev. James A. Coriden, S.T.L., J.C.D., of the Catholic University of America.]

'This point seems to me to be much more than a nice theological observation. It seems to be central and synthetic. It is the motive for the whole effort toward renewal and relevancy. It sums up the basis for a fearless adaptation of forms and structures. The theological point should be made very clearly and forcefully right at this time.'

1 State of the Question

I do not think any Catholic would exclude all change on a priori grounds. Even the most embattled conservative would grant that circumstances alter cases, that positive church law has not the same immutability as divine law or natural law, that besides the substance of things there are the accidents; that, *salva substantia*, the accidents may at times be modified, provided, of course, that the change is made prudently and, above all, that one keeps ever in mind that human nature is always the same.

At the other extreme I am not certain it should be maintained that change in the church's forms, structures, methods, etc., should be a continuous, irreversible, ongoing process. There are static periods in most cultures and civilizations, and while the rest of society is quiescent it is not clear that the church must keep on initiating change.

Between these extremes there are two positions. One may be named classicist, conservative, traditional; the other may be named modern, liberal, perhaps historicist (though that word unfortunately is very ambiguous). The differences between the two are enormous, for they differ in their apprehension of man, in their account of the good, and in the role they ascribe to the church in the world. But these differences are not immediately theological. They are differences in horizon, in total mentality. For either side really to understand the other is a major achievement, and when such understanding is lacking, the interpretation of scripture or of other theological sources is most likely to be at cross-purposes.

Accordingly, though I have been asked for a theological opinion, I must proceed in roundabout fashion. Only after the differences between classicist and historicist viewpoints have been indicated, can their respective merits in the eyes of the Christian be estimated.

2 Human Nature and Historicity

If one abstracts from all respects in which one man can differ from another, there is left a residue named human nature and the truism that human nature is always the same. One may fit out the eternal identity 'human nature' with a natural law. One may complete it with the principles for the erection of positive law. One may hearken to divine revelation to acknowledge a supernatural order, a divine law, and a positive ecclesiastical law. So one may work methodically from the abstract and universal towards the more concrete and particular, and the more one does so, the more one is involved in the casuistry of applying a variety of universals to concrete singularity.

It seems most unlikely that in this fashion one will arrive at a law demanding the change of laws, forms, structures, methods. For universals do not change; they are just what they are defined to be; and to introduce a new definition is, not to change the old universal, but to place another new universal beside the old one. On the other hand, casuistry deals with the *casus*, with the way things chance to fall. But every good Aristotelian knows that there is no science of the accidental,[3] and so from casuistry's cases one can hardly conclude to some law about changing laws.

Still, the foregoing is not the only possible approach. One can begin from people as they are. One can note that, apart from times of dreamless sleep, they are performing intentional acts. They are experiencing, imagining, desiring, fearing; they wonder, come to understand, conceive; they reflect, weigh the evidence, judge; they deliberate, decide, act. If dreamless sleep may be compared to death, human living is being awake; it is a matter of performing intentional acts; in short, such acts informed by meaning are precisely what gives significance to human living, and, conversely, to deny all meaning to human life is nihilism.

As meaningful performance is constitutive of human living, so common meaning is constitutive of community. A common field of experience makes for a potential community; and without that common field people get out of touch. Common and complementary ways of understanding make for a community of mind; and without it there are misunderstanding, suspicion, distrust, mutual incomprehension. Common judgments constitute a consensus; and without it an easy tolerance gives way to amazement, scorn, ridicule, division. Common commitments, finally, are the stuff of fidelity to one another, of loyalty to the group, of faith in divine providence and in the destiny of man; and without such commitments community has lost its heart and becomes just an aggregate.

3 Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, VI [E], 2, 1027a 19–20.

Now the common meanings constitutive of community and of the lives of individuals in community are not some stock of ideal forms subsistent in some Platonic heaven. They are the hard-won fruit of man's advancing knowledge of nature, of the gradual evolution of his social forms and of his cultural achievements. There is such a thing as historical process, but it is to be known only by the difficult art of acquiring historical perspective, of coming to understand how the patterns of living, the institutions, the common meanings of one place and time differ from those of another.

It may be objected that substantially there are always the same things to be known and the same things to be done. But I am not sure that the word 'substantially' means anything more than that things are the same insofar as you prescind from their differences. In contrast, the point I am endeavoring to make is not verbal. Modern man is fully aware that he has made his modern world. There are modern languages and modern literatures, consciously developed by turning away from the Latin and Greek languages and literature. There are modern mathematics and modern science, and they differ not only in extent but also in their fundamental conceptions from the Greek achievement. There are modern technology and industry, modern commerce and finance, the modern city and the modern state, modern education and modern medicine, modern media and modern art, the modern idea of history and the modern idea of philosophy. In every case modernity means the desertion, if not the repudiation, of the old models and methods, and the exercise of freedom, initiative, creativity. So to modern man it seems self-evident that he has made his own modern world and, no less, that other peoples at other times either have done the same or else have made do with a world fashioned by bolder ancestors and inertly handed on.

I have been contrasting two different apprehensions of man. One can apprehend man abstractly through a definition that applies *omni et soli* and through properties verifiable in every man. In this fashion one knows man as such; and man as such, precisely because he is an abstraction, also is unchanging. It follows, in the first place, that on this view one is never going to arrive at any exigence for changing forms, structures, methods, for all change occurs in the concrete, and on this view the concrete is always omitted. But it also follows, in the second place, that this exclusion of changing forms, structures, methods is not theological; it is grounded simply upon a certain conception of scientific or philosophic method; that conception is no longer the only conception or the commonly received conception; and I think our scripture scholars would agree that its abstractness, and the

omissions due to abstraction, have no foundation in the revealed word of God.

On the other hand, one can apprehend mankind as a concrete aggregate developing over time, where the locus of development and, so to speak, the synthetic bond is the emergence, expansion, differentiation, dialectic of meaning and of meaningful performance. On this view intentionality, meaning, is a constitutive component of human living; moreover, this component is not fixed, static, immutable, but shifting, developing, going astray, capable of redemption; on this view there is in the historicity which results from human nature an exigence for changing forms, structures, methods; and it is on this level and through this medium of changing meaning that divine revelation has entered the world and that the church's witness is given to it.

3 Propositional Principles and Transcendental Method

In the article on *Naturrecht* in the *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* (7: 827)[4] Father Karl Rahner observed that natural law should be approached through a transcendental method.

Any serious elaboration of this remark would take us too far afield, but three assertions may perhaps be permitted.

First, just as the abstract apprehension of man provides itself with abstract ontological and ethical foundations in primitive propositions from which its doctrines, criteria, norms, etc., are deduced or somehow proved, so the more concrete and historical apprehension of man provides itself with its appropriately concrete foundations in structural features of the conscious, operating subject, by a method that has come to be named transcendental.

Secondly, the stock objections that historical mindedness involves one in relativism and situation ethics are to be met by adverting to the distinction just drawn. One cannot ground a concrete historical apprehension of man on abstract foundations; but this does not establish the inadequacy of the quite different foundations provided by a transcendental method.

Thirdly, what moves men is the good, and good in the concrete. *Verum et falsum sunt in mente, bonum et malum sunt in rebus; bonum ex integra causa, malum ex quocumque defectu.* If at one time law was in the forefront of human

4 [Karl Rahner, 'Naturrecht,' *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, Bd. 7, ed. J. Höfer und K. Rahner (Freiberg: Herder, 1962) 827–28].

development, as one might infer from the language of the Deuteronomist, from the fervent praise of law in the Psalms, from the role of law in the history of the clarification of such concepts as justice, responsibility, guilt, still, at the present time it would seem that the immediate carrier of human aspiration is the more concrete apprehension of the human good effected through such theories of history as the liberal doctrine of progress, the Marxist doctrine of dialectical materialism and, most recently, Teilhard de Chardin's identification of cosmogenesis, anthropogenesis, and christogenesis.[5]

4 The People of God in the World of Today

I have been asked for 'a theological perspective on how a community of love adapts and directs itself for effective mission and witness.' Presumably the reason for the request lies in points I have made elsewhere. There is in my book *Insight*[6] a general analysis of the dynamic structure of human history, and in my mimeographed text *De Verbo incarnato*[7] a thesis on the *lex crucis* that provides its strictly theological complement.

The analysis distinguishes three components: progress, decline, and redemption.

Progress results from the natural development of human intelligence: '... concrete situations give rise to insights which issue into policies and

5 [This is one of Lonergan's few references to Teilhard. See also below, pp. 80, 95. In *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990) he writes (at 315), 'It has been the great merit of Teilhard de Chardin to have recognized the Christian's need of a coherent image of himself in his world and to have contributed not a little towards meeting that need.' The context there is set by the 'novel scientific traditions' that seemed to assault the Christian's self-image.]

6 [Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study in Human Understanding*, vol. 3 in Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan, ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992). Lonergan's reference was simply 'London and New York, 1957.' Subsequent references in this volume are to the 1992 Collected Works edition.]

7 [Bernard Lonergan, *De Verbo incarnato* (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1964) Lonergan's reference was simply 'Rome, 1964.' In the Collected Works, the thesis on the law of the cross will appear in vol. 9, *The Redemption*, trans. Michael G. Shields, ed. Robert M. Doran, H. Daniel Monsour, and Jeremy D. Wilkins (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, forthcoming). Volume 8, *The Incarnate Word*, trans. Charles C. Hefling, Jr., ed. Robert M. Doran and Jeremy D. Wilkins, contains the first 14 theses of *De Verbo incarnato*. The thesis on the law of the cross is thesis 17.]

courses of action. Action transforms the existing situation to give rise to further insights, better policies, more effective courses of action. It follows that if insight occurs, it keeps recurring; and at each recurrence knowledge develops, action increases its scope, and situations improve.'[8]

Next, a flight from understanding results in a similarly cumulative process of decline.

> For the flight from understanding blocks the insights that concrete situations demand. There follow unintelligent policies and inept courses of action. The situation deteriorates to demand still further insights and, as they are blocked, policies become more unintelligent and action more inept. What is worse, the deteriorating situation seems to provide the uncritical, biased mind with factual evidence in which the bias is claimed to be verified. So in ever increasing measure intelligence comes to be regarded as irrelevant to practical living. Human activity settles down to a decadent routine, and initiative becomes the privilege of violence.[9]

If human historical process is such a compound of progress and decline, then its redemption would be effected by faith, hope, and charity. For the evils of the situation and the enmities they engender would only be perpetuated by an even-handed justice: charity alone can wipe the slate clean. The determinism and pressures of every kind, resulting from the cumulative surd of unintelligent policies and actions, can be withstood only through a hope that is transcendent and so does not depend on any human prop. Finally, only within the context of higher truths accepted on faith can human intelligence and reasonableness be liberated from the charge of irrelevance to the realities produced by human waywardness.[10]

This analysis fits in with scriptural doctrine, which understands suffering and death as the result of sin yet inculcates the transforming power of Christ, who in himself and in us changes suffering and death into the means for attaining resurrection and glory.

Sin universal: Romans 1.18–3.20, 7.14–24; Ephesians 2.3.
Sin leads to death: Genesis 2.17, 3.19, Romans 5.12, 6.22–23.

8 Lonergan, *Insight* 8.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid. chapter 20.

The first and last Adam: 1 Corinthians 15.20–22, Romans 5.12–21.
Christ died to rise again: John 10.17, Philippians 2.8–9, Hebrews 2.9
He died and rose for our salvation: Romans 4.25, 5.10, 1 Corinthians 15.55, Philippians 1.21, Ephesians 1.7, Colossians 1.14, Titus 2.14, Hebrews 2.14.

As Christ's death is a principle of salvation, so also are our own deaths, whether understood physically (Philippians 3.20–21), ascetically (Romans 8.13, 1 Corinthians 9.27), morally (Romans 6.11, Colossians 3.1–4), sacramentally (Romans 6.4, 1 Corinthians 11.26, Colossians 2.12).

So we have the law of the cross: Mark 8.34–35, Matthew 16.24–25, Luke 9.23–24, John 12.24–25, Matthew 5.11–12, 38–48.[11]

5 Concluding Questions

It was recommended that the papers conclude with a few salient questions. There occur the following:

Does law function in the same fashion in a dynamic society as in a static society? If there are differences, in what do they consist?

What contribution does law make to progress? Are there direct as well as indirect contributions? Could law impede growth, development, progress?

Is the proper Christian ethic the law of the cross, i.e., the transformation of evil into good? Does law 'use good to defeat evil' (Romans 12.21)?

11 [Lonergan ended with 'See *De Verbo Incarnato*, pp. 552 ff.,' referring to the whole of thesis 17. As was stated above in note 7, that thesis now will appear in *The Redemption*, vol. 9 in Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan.]

2

The Dehellenization of Dogma[1]

With considerable warmth Prof Leslie Dewart appeals to Pope John's decision 'to adopt a historical perspective: to "look to the present, to new conditions and new forms of life ... to dedicate ourselves with an earnest will and without fear to that work which our era demands of us"' (172).[2] This decision, he feels, and the unhesitating acclamation that greeted it, reversed a policy that had been gaining strength for centuries. 'This policy was, for the sake of protecting the truth and purity of the Christian faith, to resist the factual reality, and to deny the moral validity, of the development of man's historical self-consciousness, especially as revealed in cultural evolution' (172).

His purpose, then, is 'to sketch an approach to ... the problem of integrating Christian theistic belief with the everyday experience of contemporary man' (7). He aims at 'the integration of Christian belief with the

1 [This appeared in *Theological Studies* 28 (1967) 336–51 as a review article of Leslie Dewart's book *The Future of Belief: Theism in a World Come of Age* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1966). A typescript may be found on www.bernardlonergan.com at 24370DTE060. The subdivisions by Roman numerals seem to have been made by *Theological Studies* and have been preserved here. Lonergan used asterisks to divide the paper at the same places, beginning with what here is section II. Several corrections are made here to Lonergan's citations from Dewart's book. Page numbers from the book are given in the text, but without the 'p.' that was in Lonergan's text.]

2 [See the translation of the Opening Speech by Pope John XXIII in Walter Abbott (ed.), *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1966) 710–19. Dewart cites the *Toronto Globe and Mail*, 12 October 1962.]