

Article published in Italian translation as “La dottrina sociale della Chiesa e il terzo livello de coscienza,” in *Dottrina Sociale della Chiesa: alcune sfide globali*, Daniel McDonald (Ed.) (Roma, Il pozzo di giacobbe, 2010), 33-76.

CATHOLIC SOCIAL DOCTRINE AND THE METHOD IN THEOLOGY

GERARD WHELAN SJ¹

This article seeks to locate the promoting of Catholic social doctrine (CSD) within wider questions of Christian practice and the theology that seeks to guide it. It invites readers to undertake what the theologian Bernard Lonergan has called “a withdrawal from practicality for the sake of practicality”² and to consider questions of theological method. It suggests that, at present, CSD lives in a certain state of isolation from other realms of theology and is not always incorporated into strategic plans within Catholic communities. It suggests that this is likely to remain the case until a consensus emerges within the Church regarding how to relate the heart of our theological reflection to a careful study of the “signs of the times” in which we are planning to exercise our Christian mission to evangelize. It suggests that only when theological method itself undergoes such a shift will CSD be taken in from a relatively marginal role in Catholic teaching to one that it is more central. Finally, it suggests that the thought of Bernard Lonergan can assist helping this methodological shift to occur in theology.

Bernard Lonergan was arguably one of the greatest philosophical and theological minds of the twentieth century. A Canadian Jesuit, he was born in 1904 and studied and taught at the Gregorian at different stages of his working life. He is best known for two major works: one on epistemology named *Insight* (1957) and a second named *Method in Theology* (1971).³ Central to his thinking was that, increasingly in this complex world, only if we self-consciously appropriate the structure of our coming to know and decide are we likely to employ these capacities authentically and produce truly good and effective solutions to the problems facing the human race. He understands it as central to the mission of the Church to concern itself with such questions and so also central to the task of theology which should be in the service of the praxis of the Church. When this act of self-appropriation is performed by an individual it is what Lonergan calls “intellectual conversion”; when an encouragement to undergo this act becomes normal within a culture then that culture has arrived at what Lonergan calls “the third stage of meaning” **This article will center on a proposal that the Church needs to understand that a key dimension of its mission in the world today is to help cultures move toward this third stage of meaning. The future of CSD should be understood within this context.**

¹ Fr. Gerard Whelan SJ is an Irish Jesuit who has worked for fourteen years in Africa. He teaches practical theology in the Gregorian University, Rome.

² Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, Vol. 3, Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan, revised and augmented by Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), p. 266.

³ Bernard Lonergan, *Method in theology* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press; 1990).

In this article I rely on the patience of the reader because it takes me quite some time to reach any specific discussion of CSD. I first introduce some basics of Lonergan's thought—both his analysis of individual consciousness and his theological theory of history. Next, I outline basic aspects of Lonergan's theological method that Lonergan proposes—one that explains as helping to guide the Church in promoting redemption in history. I conclude with reflections of how CSD might be understood and promoted in a Church that employs this method.

PART 1
LONERGAN BASICS:
AN INVITATION TO CONVERSION
AND SELF-APPROPRIATION

Lonergan's major work *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* is devoted to inviting the reader to a process of discovery of and appropriation of the structure of his or her acts of knowing and deciding so as better to employ this structure consistently and well. His thinking on just what we needed to discover continued to mature through later writings such as *Method in Theology*; a shift in his vocabulary is noticeable during the forty-odd years of his professional career: during the 1940's and 1950's his vocabulary is recognizably Aristotelian and Thomist, from the 1960's onwards it becomes noticeably similar to that of existentialist philosophers—now he uses words like “authenticity”, “horizon”, and “self-transcendence”. However, a central approach is recognizable throughout his life and this is already well stated in *Insight*:

Thoroughly understand what it is to understand, and not only will you understand the broad lines of all there is to be understood but also you will possess a fixed base, an invariant pattern, opening upon all further developments of understanding.⁴

An invitation to “self-appropriation” along these lines remains a constant throughout Lonergan's life and he remains convinced that action of this kind by individuals is of paramount concern for the positive directing of historical events. I proceed now to offer a rudimentary overview of the steps Lonergan takes to elaborate these insights.

AUTHENTIC SELF-TRANSCENDENCE

Lonergan spends the first half of the long book, *Insight*, outlining the structure of what human authenticity consists of and expands this in later works such as *Method in Theology*. By the time of this second work he speaks of four levels of consciousness through which the authentic and self-transcending individual passes on a regular basis. The first level involves an honest and open **attending to the data of our senses**, the second involves a patient pursuing of the “pure desire to know” that is inherent in us and that drives us forward to self-transcendence on each of the four levels of consciousness. At the first level it compels us to attend to the data of our

⁴ *Insight*, p. 22.

senses with questions along the lines of “what is it?” With an act of **insight into the data**, we arrive at the second level of consciousness. Lonergan is operating within an Aristotelian tradition on this matter and uses the example of Archimedes crying “Eureka” in his bath as he gains his insight into what we call today the scientific principles of displacement and specific gravity. From this, Lonergan proposes a first description of the act of insight:

Insight 1. comes as a release to the tension of inquiry, 2. comes suddenly and unexpectedly, 3. is a function not of outer circumstances but of inner conditions, 4. pivots between the concrete and the abstract and 5. passes into the habitual texture of one’s mind.⁵

Lonergan next brings us to a discussion of the third level of consciousness by asserting that “insights are a dime a dozen”. What has felt like a blinding insight is by no means always true. He asserts that our “pure desire to know” now prompts us to move from questions of the type: “What is it?” to those that ask “Is it so?” In this process, the mind turns to the concept that has been produced by the act of insight and begins to check it. This checking process involves a series of steps: first we establish conditions which, if fulfilled, would render the insight “invulnerable”, second when the insight warrants it, we come to a “reflective insight” that the conditions are, indeed, fulfilled. Finally, we make an act of assent and affirm the insight as true.

After making an act of judgment, so to speak, of cold fact, Lonergan describes how our drive to self-transcendence promotes us to a fourth level of consciousness. At this level affectivity comes more explicitly into play. Lonergan explains the fourth level of consciousness as calling us to pass through a process of **experiencing an affective response to values, of making a judgement of value, and then of moving to a decision to act.**⁶

In many respects the first of these steps is the key one. Lonergan asserts that when we judge a fact to be true the self-transcending drive within us does not let us stop there; feelings begin to stir in us that are in fact an affective response to the values or disvalues that are inherent in the fact we have judged. He then explains that we have a natural capacity to respond to values according to a hierarchy of importance. Thus we respond naturally to “vital” values but are willing to submit them to the requirements of “social” values; the authentic person will resonate with “cultural” values as those which legitimate social institutions and thus require a higher loyalty. Again the authentic person acknowledges that cultural values must be rooted in his or her own commitment to “personal” values if his or her commitment to the more public cultural values is not to be hypocritical. Finally, an authentic individual will recognize that a genuine commitment to personal values begs a question about what is the source of all value and what follows is an openness to “religious” value at the top of this hierarchy, or scale, of values.

Lonergan asserts that when we find ourselves confronted with certain facts and stimulated to evaluate them and to come to some kind of decision we have an inherent ability to recognize what kind of values are at stake. Our affective response to the particular values at issue helps us move to a moment of judgment of value. On the basis of this judgment of the value or values at stake in a situation, we can then proceed to a decision to act. He points out that authenticity at the fourth level of

⁵ *Insight*, p. 28.

⁶ *Method in Theology*, pp. 30-41.

consciousness is a fragile thing. A reason for the long periods of education and remaining with parents that is normal for human beings before they are considered to have reached adulthood is related to the need to educate their capacity to respond to value according to this hierarchy. He asserts that they do have an inherent capacity to respond in this manner, but he adds that this capacity of “vertical freedom” is all too easily limited by a temptation not to self-transcend but to remain at a level where one pretends to oneself that more animal-like motivations of seeking pleasure and avoiding pain are sufficient motivations for decision making. This point brings us to the next stage of Lonergan’s analysis of human consciousness, his analysis of inauthenticity, or bias.

BIAS AND MORAL IMPOTENCE

While Lonergan speaks more about affectivity in the second half of his academic career already in *Insight* he makes some profound use of the insights of psychoanalysis. He does this especially when talking about what goes wrong with us and inhibits our acts of knowing. He discusses the manner in which traumatic childhood experiences can create distortions in our affectivity, these distortions then interfere with the functioning of our pure desire to know and create bias. Sad to say, we all have, to some degree or other, biased minds. What Lonergan calls “**dramatic bias**” begins already with our ability to attend to data. The phrase “there are none so blind as those who will not see” is unfortunately relevant here. The problem is that the refusal to be ready to “see” in this phrase can have roots in unconscious resistances, or “complexes”. Bias, in fact, plagues each of our levels of consciousness. We have already spoken of tendencies at the third level of consciousness to be either “indecisive”, or “rash”; these tendencies can have unconscious dimensions connected with the history of one’s childhood etc.⁷

Finally, and perhaps most obviously, bias functions at the level of our response to value and our making of decisions. For a description of the kind of “moral impotence” that becomes especially evident at the fourth level of consciousness, it is hard to beat St. Paul in his *Letter to the Romans*: “I do not understand my own actions. . . for I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. (*Romans* 7:15-19). In this kind of moral impotence, Lonergan speaks of a kind of “gravitational pull”, or “entropy” whereby we find it easy enough to respond to values that are lower in the hierarchy of values and a terrible strain to reach higher. So it is that is often only on the basis of motivations stemming from vital and perhaps social values that we proceed to make judgments of value in many situations and decisions to act.

In addition to dramatic bias Lonergan introduces us to a notion of “**general bias**”. This second bias involves a set of attitudes that insist that common sense realities are the only realities worth considering. It believes that knowing is achieved by “taking a good look”, that all the important things in life are obvious enough and that people who say otherwise are worthy of ridicule. This readiness to ridicule opposing ideas assures that self-criticism is avoided and the individual remains in his or her current state of partially authentic knowing and partially biased knowing. We can regard this as an ingenious mechanism of self-protection of the biased mind. We

⁷ *Insight*, pp. 214-231.

will revisit this point below when we discuss how general bias can come to characterise a whole culture.⁸

RELIGIOUS CONVERSION AND “DEVELOPMENT FROM ABOVE”

Perhaps the reader has already recognised that there exists an unequal battle between the draw to self-transcendence and the temptation to bias—be it conscious or unconscious. Lonergan asserts that, left to our own devices, we are hopelessly trapped in habits of biased acts of knowing and subsequent behaviour.⁹ He proceeds to state that the good news of human consciousness is that there is in fact a third factor that saves us from this dilemma: religious conversion. In the less accessible vocabulary of *Insight* he explains this as “God’s supernatural solution to the problem of evil.” There he carefully employs metaphysical argument to explain how this intervenes in—without contradicting—laws of nature that characterise human thinking and willing. He speaks of new “conjugate forms”, or habits, of faith, hope and love that come to inhabit our minds and wills.¹⁰

In *Method in Theology* Lonergan describes this experience in a more existential manner: he first describes a situation where the individual in a state of moral impotence has become open for “something to happen”. What can occur next is an event whereby “**the love of God floods our hearts**” and we become “Beings-in-love.” This love we experience is well explained in terms of the scale of values at our fourth level of consciousness. Paradoxically, individuals, who do not habitually submit vital to social values, social to cultural values, cultural to personal values, or personal to religious values, suddenly have a light switched on, so to speak, at the level of religious values. Now, suddenly, and mysteriously, the world is “transvalued” and we apprehend the world in the light of this new state of mind.

Being-in-love is of different kinds. There is the love of intimacy, of husband and wife, of parents and children. There is the love of one’s fellow men with its fruit in the achievement of human welfare. There is the love of God with one’s whole heart and whole soul, with all one’s mind and all one’s strength (Mk. 12, 30). It is God’s love flooding our hearts through the Holy Spirit given to us (Rom. 5, 5).¹¹

Lonergan employs a spatial metaphor to explain what happens after this initial experience of religious conversion. He speaks of “**development from above**” where God’s grace heals our natural capacity to authentic self-transcendence.¹² This natural

⁸ *Insight*, pp. 250-267.

⁹ He speaks of us being “morally impotent”, of having an “incapacity for sustained development” and of being confronted with a radical “problem of liberation” from this condition: *Insight*, pp. 650-656.

¹⁰ *Insight*, p. 719.

¹¹ *Method*, p. 105.

¹² Lonergan develops this metaphor for the working of grace on human nature relatively late in life, see “Healing and Creating in History”, “Natural Right and Historical Mindedness” and other articles in *A Third Collection* (New Jersey, Paulist Press, 1985). Consequently, I am retrojecting the use of this metaphor back on his account of the scale of values in *Method in Theology* (1971). In doing this I follow the lead of Frederick Crowe who explores the significance of Lonergan’s reflection on value in his later years: “An Exploration of Lonergan’s New Notion of Value”, and the “The Expansion of Lonergan’s Notion of Value” in *Appropriating the Lonergan Idea*, ed. Michael Vertin (Washington D.C., The Catholic University of America Press, 1989), pp. 51-70, 344-359. See also discussion below under the section: “Redemption”.

capacity is capable, in principle, of a “**development from below**” where each level of consciousness is negotiated well. However, such is the inclination toward bias in human minds that development from below always falls short of the mark. So it is that development from above refers to the paradoxical event whereby a new energy is experienced first at the level of religious value at the fourth level of consciousness. Once this “transformation of horizon” has occurred, it reveals to us with distressing clarity what the true scale of values are and how far we have been from an authentic response to them.

An alertness to religious values can produce a transformation of our ability to respond to personal values. We can affirm that personal values hold a high place in a scale or hierarchy of values and resolve to be true to them. Lonergan calls this decision “moral conversion”. The morally converted individual can next begin to recognise how important it is that our culture support this kind of moral conversion and that social structures be organised according to the dictates of authentic cultural values. According to the spatial metaphor Lonergan is using, at some point development from above meets development from below and a return to authenticity is well underway. We can suppose that this meeting point may occur at the level of social values. Perhaps the biased individual had always been ready to submit his vital interests to the rules and regulations of certain social institutions. Now however he may be more than ever ready to do this, and he may also recognise that, in all justice, there are more social institutions to which he owes loyalty than he or she previously acknowledged.

Development from above does not limit itself to healing our responses at the fourth level of consciousness; it also helps heal our ability to be rational, to be intelligent, and to be attentive. This last quality of being authentically attentive can in fact involve a healing of dramatic bias. Here our confidence in being loved unconditionally by God begins to heal even the unconscious hurts that have received often in early childhood that have produced complexes that distort our very ability to attend to the data of our senses.

For human development is of two quite different kinds. There is development from below upwards, from experience to growing understanding, from growing understanding to balanced judgment, from balanced judgment to fruitful courses of action and from fruitful courses of action to the new situations that call forth further understanding, profounder judgment, richer courses of action.

But there also is development from above downwards. There is the transformation of falling in love: the domestic love of family. The human love of one’s tribe. . . The divine love that orientates man in his cosmos and expresses itself in his workshop. Here hatred only sees evil, love reveals values,. . . Where hatred reinforces bias, love dissolves it . . . love breaks the bonds of psychological and social determinisms with the conviction of faith and the power of hope.¹³

¹³ To expand on this theme one could follow Lonergan’s explanations “the law of the cross” (*Insight*, 721-2) and how Lonergan scholars such as Robert Doran have expanded on this theme and relate it also to the current notion of “option for the poor” in theology. Doran states: “Spelling out the implications of the scale of values allows transcendental analysis to join hands with political and liberation theologians on this crucial issue (of option for the poor)”, *Theology and the Dialectics of History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990) p. 421; on the Law of the Cross, see Doran, Chapter 5.

INTELLECTUAL CONVERSION

Lonergan stresses that the “three-fold dialectic” of authenticity, bias, and religious conversion has been going on in the consciousness of individuals for as long as there has been a human race. It is simply the central characteristic of the human drama. However, it is another matter to become as aware of its dynamics with the precision that Lonergan offers. Lonergan asserts that, while religious conversion and moral conversion are as old as the human race, there is another step possible to the human being today: in *Insight* he refers to this as “the self-affirmation of the knower” and in *Method in theology* he describes the same act in the more existential vocabulary of “intellectual conversion”.¹⁴

So what is this intellectual conversion? Well, the reader who has been following even the argument of this article so far may be well on his or her way to it. Let us recall that in our account of the first level of consciousness above we spoke of how the mind attends to “the data of sense”; in fact, by attending in such detail to the acts of such minds, Lonergan has in fact been inviting the reader to a second and concomitant kind of attentiveness: that of attending the data of one’s own consciousness. So it is that we can attend to, or become more self-consciously aware of “what it feels like” to attend, to gain insight, to judge, and to make a decision. Similarly, however, we can gain insights into what characterises each level and **affirm with certainty that our process of knowing and deciding is indeed structured along these four levels**. This act of affirmation is what Lonergan calls intellectual conversion. He believes that he has made a key contribution to understanding what intellectual involves but he also understands himself as building on the thought of other modern thinkers. Above all he believes that this is a moment in history when cultures are ready to take on the invitation of intellectual conversion:

Such terms [that intellectual conversion alerts us to] refer to a dimension of human reality that has always existed that has always been lived and experienced, that classicist thought standardised but tended to overlook, that modern studies thematized, elaborated, illustrated, documented.¹⁵

Lonergan asserts that it is less important to be intellectually converted than to be religiously and morally converted. However, he adds that it is a matter of the greatest historical significance that our culture would accept the principle that intellectual conversion is desirable and that it should be pursued as a means to assist the wisest possible decision making for our social institutions. We now need to outline his theory of history in order to explain this point.

¹⁴ *Insight*, Chapter 11: “Self-affirmation of the knower”; *Method*, p. 338.

¹⁵ “Theology in its New Context”, in: Lonergan, *A Second Collection* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1996) p. 61 (parenthesis added).

PART 2 A THEORY OF HISTORY AND THE ROLE OF THEOLOGY

Lonergan proceeds by a process of analogy from his analysis of the structure of human consciousness to an analysis of the “heuristic” structure of history. The term heuristic is based on the Greek word, “to discover” and refers to a notion or concept through which one generates other insights. Thus the fundamental heuristic structure is that of our four levels of consciousness. However, based on this structure one can develop an analogous heuristic structure for understanding history. Mathematics and algebra employ many heuristic tools for problem-solving and one of these is the vector analysis employed by algebra. Lonergan’s employs this notion, again analogically, to speak of three idealised “vectors” that constitute the heuristic structure of history. From individual authenticity is he develops a notion of the “vector” of “progress”, from bias he speaks of “decline”, and from religious conversion he speaks of “redemption”. Just as individual consciousness is characterised by its three tendencies always and at the same time, so also any one historical situation always needs these three “vectors” to explain it.¹⁶

PROGRESS AND DECLINE

Lonergan explains **progress** as the product in history of authentic decision-making. It proceeds first through **technological discovery, then through economic and political change made necessary by such discoveries, and then through a change in the cultural superstructure** that is needed to accommodate these changes at the level of infrastructure while still protecting the interests of the common good.¹⁷ We can recall how our account of the scale of values as apprehended in individual consciousness made a careful distinction between social values and cultural values. So also, in Lonergan’s notion of progress the distinction between levels of social structures and the culture which legitimates them is of the greatest importance.¹⁸

Decline, is a consistent deviation from this pattern. It is the product of bias at any of the levels of consciousness, but a common source of it lies at the fourth level, and within that with respect to which values we choose to respond to and which to ignore: most typically, groups within a society opt for self-interest and self-protection instead of a more free commitment to the common good (**group bias**); in terms of the scale of values we can speak of a privileged group banding together and agreeing to pursue their vital and social values together. They will almost always proceed to influence culture with dishonest claims that the common good is being served. Economic theory can be a great ally of group bias. At times the grossest of concessions to special interests can be justified in terms of an economics that insists that: “There is no alternative”.

¹⁶ We can note with care that Lonergan’s philosophy of history is not a “meta-theory” so criticised by post-modernity. A meta-theory of history would involve concepts to be applied to all situations; applying heuristic categories is a very different matter.

¹⁷ Lonergan’s main account of both progress and decline is offered in Chapter 7 of *Insight*.

¹⁸ Important as is the application of intelligence for progress in history, Lonergan insists that attention must never be withdrawn from issues that are more affective and instinctual in nature. A more comprehensive account of his notion of progress would account for his discussion of how intersubjective bonds in a population exist in constant tension with the dictates of change emerging from practical intelligence. See the sub-section “Dialectic of community” *Insight* pp. 242-244.

Another major source of decline when a culture adopts **general bias**. When group bias becomes supported by general bias, then decline becomes entrenched indeed. In fact, Lonergan speaks of a “longer cycle of decline” that can affect whole civilizations. In fact, our understanding of the entrenched quality of moral impotence that we discussed in our analysis of bias in Part I is enriched by reference to this theory of history: now we recognise how difficult it is for individuals to mature into lives of real virtue and authenticity when a whole culture, not to say a civilisation, militates against it.¹⁹

REDEMPTION

While religious conversion is first and foremost an experience of the individual, it is also intimately related to social institutions. The normal way in which one is assisted toward this experience of encounter with a loving God is by being a member of a religion. In our discussion of religious conversion and its effects on individual consciousness we spoke of a metaphor used by Lonergan of “development from above” and how it brings healing to our failed “development from below”. In fact, Lonergan employs this metaphor even more to describe the social and historical phenomenon of redemption than the individual phenomenon of religious conversion.

Development . . . moves. . . from above downwards inasmuch as one belongs to a hierarchy of groups and so owes allegiance to one’s home, to one’s country, to one’s religion. Through the traditions of the group one is socialized, acculturated, educated . . . These two modes of development are interdependent. Both begin from infancy. But only through the second does the first take one beyond the earliest prehistoric stages of human development. Only through the first is there any real assimilation and appropriation of the second.²⁰

So it is that the manner in which a religion exercises a redemptive influence on culture is to enter into a cultural tradition so that it is, so to speak, “imbibed from birth” by a subject who is “socialized, acculturated and educated” into this culture. This can prepare the individual, when the time is right, to undergo his or her own personal encounter with the living God in religious conversion. Once the event of religious conversion has occurred it will normally promote moral conversion in the individual and a desire to participate in the institution that is their religion so as to help others experience the joy that they have known. Of course, this institutional commitment will include a readiness to invite new members to join the religion explicitly and disaffected or lazy members to rediscover the value of it. However, certainly within the Christian tradition, this enthusiasm can also be expressed by trying to contribute to the common good of one’s society—a society that includes those who do not share one’s religion—by influencing the culture and social structures of that society. So it is that religion as a social institution continues to act as a force of a supernaturally instigated tradition in our culture that mediates redemption in history.²¹

¹⁹ *Insight*, pp. 244-259.

²⁰ Lonergan “Questionnaire on Philosophy: Response”, in *Philosophical and Theological Papers 1965-1980*, Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan, volume 17 (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2004), p.361

²¹ Lonergan’s account of redemption in history is offered in Chapter 20 of *Insight* as well as “Healing

What more can we say about the basic anatomy of this process of redemption in history? To explore further just how this redemptive process functions as it seeks to reverse decline and to promote progress we need to, so to speak, enter into a further cycle of understanding these three vectors of history. This is a deepening that Lonergan himself went through in the years after writing *Insight* and has to do with paying careful attention to the manner in which meaning functions in history.²²

MEANING AND HISTORY

Lonergan offers an explanation of the “meaning of meaning” in Chapter 3 of *Method in Theology*.²³ In line with a development from below, characteristic of his book *Insight* he speaks of the “elements of meaning” and relates them to the four levels of consciousness. He explains how meaning is merely “potential” in data before we gain an insight, it is “formal” when the insight arrives (this point appeals also to our common sense: “what we mean” relates to our effort to explain an insight we have had). Next meaning becomes “full” when we affirm to be true an insight that we have had. Meaning is “effective”, or “constitutive” when we decide to live consistently with meanings and values that we have affirmed.

As we have seen above, Lonergan likes to move from an analysis of individual consciousness to one that is more social and historical and then to point out that there is in fact a complex interaction between the individual and the social and that at times the social has priority over the individual in the sense of more or less determining it. Thus, moving to analyse the way meaning functions in society, Lonergan proceeds to speak of “functions of meaning”.

Lonergan asserts that the first function of meaning is the “cognitive”: humans in any one society inhabit a horizon of meaning that they share with each other; what we can call their “world” is not just made up of their physical environment but is in fact, a “world mediated by meaning” The next function of meaning is that it is “effective”; through developments such as science and technical inventions it “vastly increases man’s power of doing”.²⁴ Another immensely important function of meaning is “constitutive” role. We have already noted that in the case of an individual the meanings and values he or she holds and chooses to follow constitute much of their identity. Similarly at the social level, we can speak of communities as that thing where a group of people are constituted by a common set of meanings and values. Finally, maintaining a situation whereby a community is truly constituted by a certain set of meaning and values requires a permanent process of communication.

As we reflect on the constitutive-communicative functions of meaning we can begin to gain insight into the relation of meaning to history. We can become aware that as meaning changes and the effectiveness of its communication changes so the nature of community changes. When we think of this kind of changing “existence” of communities we are in fact thinking about history:

and Creating in History” op. cit.

²² This is a cycle of deepening that Lonergan underwent after the writing of *Insight* involved first a clarification that decision-making involves a fourth level of consciousness and second an increased attention to the reality expressed in the spatial metaphor “development from below” and “development from above” (See, Frederick Crowe “An Exploration of Lonergan’s New Notion of Value” op. cit.)

²³ See *Method*, Chapter 3, “Meaning”, See also “The World Mediated by Meaning” in *Philosophical and Theological Papers 1965-1980*, Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan, Volume 17 (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2004).

²⁴ Lonergan, “World Mediated by Meaning”, p. 109.

The conjunction of both the constitutive and communicative functions of meaning yield the three key notions of community, existence, and history . . . Community coheres or divides, begins or ends, just where the common field of experience, common understanding, common judgment, common commitments begin and end.²⁵

A next key point is to remind ourselves of the phenomenon of bias, already discussed in Part 1. We recall that, given the reality of human freedom, meanings and values can be arrived at authentically or inauthentically. In fact, our analysis of meaning as constitutive of community allows us to arrive at a deeper understanding not only of progress in history but also of decline. Decline is a direction in history produced to the extent that the meanings and values that are constitutive of a group are false and evil. Lonergan calls ideas that have been produced authentically “positions” and those that have been produced inauthentically “counterpositions”. So it is that in our discussion of the relation of meaning and history we have deepened our understanding of progress and decline. We can now assert: **Progress is a situation where positions provide the constitutive meaning for a society, decline is where counterpositions do so.** When proceed to consider the vector of redemption we can assert that **redemption seeks to reverse counterpositions that characterise a culture and to advance positions that characterise it.**

There is also a more complex insight that can occur to us concerning the relationship of redemption to development from above. But to explore this point we need to study also what Lonergan states about “carriers of meaning”.

REDEMPTIVE MEANINGS AND DEVELOPMENT FROM ABOVE

We have identified how communities seek to preserve their identity through consistently communicating their constitutive meaning to their members. However, we need to recognise that meaning is carried in different manners.. Mathematics and sciences may be able to communicate in clear and unambiguous symbols and concepts but most other kinds of communication are more complex than this. Lonergan thus speaks of a whole variety of carriers of meaning in communities: language; intersubjectivity; images, art and incarnate meaning. As we reflect on these more complex carriers of meaning we become aware that what is often at stake here is both development from below as well as development from above. Before a child ever has an original thought many of his or her values and attitudes are determined by the intersubjective environment of childhood and the language that he or she has learned. So also, the images and symbols of one’s culture exercise a powerful influence on one’s world of meaning and value before one ever thinks about the matter.

A next key point is to remind ourselves that while religious conversion is the most intimate and personal of experiences it is also normally experienced within a religious tradition. These traditions will usually have already communicated meanings and values to an individual before that individual takes his or her “leap of faith” with respect to a personal commitment to these ideas and values. The point to grasp next is that for most people this tradition will communicate itself more by intersubjective and symbolic carriers of meaning than by theologies with clear and distinct ideas. So, the

²⁵ *Method*, p. 79.

communicating of redemptive ideas in a society is very much concerned with development from above.

Next, Lonergan speaks of a crisis of modernity and how this crisis is very much related to a crisis between the processes of development from below and those of development above in our society. He asserts that the crisis of modernity is in many respects a problem of values traditionally accepted in society not being able to “catch up” with technological and economic developments. What is at stake, then, is often the need to help values be rearticulated and to be helped “evolve” so as to be appropriate to help guide the forces of progress. This brings us to the question of transposing values and for a “control of meaning” as this is done. This, in turn, raises the question of the need for world cultures to enter a third stage of meaning and for religion to help it do so.

STAGES OF MEANING

We move now to the question of realms and stages of meaning. These two aspects of meaning not so much to how meaning is actually functioning in a society but to how people think it is functioning. Lonergan calls the first realm of meaning the “common sense realm”. Here individuals hardly ever advert to the question of meaning at all. They may be intelligent people and, indeed, considered by their neighbours to be “rocks of common sense”; but, especially if they travel to places where alternative systems of common sense apply they discover with a shock that not everybody means what they mean by given words or actions. The “theoretic realm of meaning” is operating when individuals appreciate the ability of the mind to shift into an intellectual pattern and to produce theories that can be guided by logical thinking and that can have a universal value. One moves beyond this “theoretic realm of meaning” into a “critical realm of meaning” when one begins to attend to the acts of the mind and the will as explained by Lonergan in *Insight* and when one performs the act of self-affirmation he proposes. Beyond even this realm of meaning Lonergan speaks of “the transcendent realm of meaning”. To be open to this realm of meaning one normally needs to have experienced religious conversion.

Lonergan next speaks of “stages of meaning”. His argument here is simply that different periods of human history have been characterised by cultures that have been characterised by different realms of meaning. He identifies a period around 500BC as a time when many cultures around the world seem to have started moving from the “first stage of meaning” characterised by an attachment to a common sense realm to a “second stage of meaning” characterised by the theoretic realm. He adds that this emergence occurred in its most successful form in ancient Greece. The development there had a particularly rational, and philosophical character. What occurred there revolutionised culture and allowed for a process of discovery and that brought enormous change to the social structures; these changes included, eventually, the discovery of modern science and led to the history of the enormous influence that Europe brought to bear on the rest of the world.

Lonergan develops this analysis by asserting that in recent centuries the signs of the emergence of a new, third stage of meaning have been evident. This is, or will be, characterised by the critical realm of meaning. Early signs of it have included the emphasis on the autonomy of the individual in the European Renaissance and the call for a spirituality of interiority by Martin Luther. Later and more major steps into this stage of meaning occurred with the philosophies of Descartes and Kant and their influence on modern culture. However, according to Lonergan a full entry into the

third stage of meaning requires that cultures clearly advocate intellectual conversion as explained by Lonergan himself:

In the first stage conscious and intentional operations follow the mode of common sense. In a second stage besides the mode of common sense there is also the mode of theory, where the theory is controlled by a logic. In a third stage the modes of common sense and theory remain, science asserts its autonomy from philosophy, and there occur philosophies that leave theory to science and take their stand on interiority.²⁶

Lonergan is convinced that, while modernity has already begun the move into the third stage of meaning, it urgently needs help in completing this move. He notes that in recent centuries scientific and technological discovery has been accelerating and that economic and political changes have been following apace. He acknowledges that great benefits have accrued to mankind in recent years not least as a result of science and technological development. Nevertheless, he is concerned that a number of value-based dimensions of progress in our cultures have been lost sight of in the new social order. Thus, for all of the technological sophistication of modern society he believes that the vector of decline has actually been growing stronger with respect to the vector of progress. One factor in the dimension of decline today, according to Lonergan is the nature of mass communication. It can give such impressions of immediacy that large numbers of people can be made feel that it is sufficient to live in the realm of common sense to neglect the value of the theoretic realm of meaning, not to mention the critical realm of meaning:

In its third stage, then, meaning not merely differentiates into the realms of common sense, theory, and interiority, but also acquires the universal immediacy of the mass media and the moulding power of universal education. Never has adequately differentiated consciousness been more difficult to achieve. Never has the need to speak effectively to undifferentiated consciousness been greater.²⁷

What might it involve to “speak effectively to undifferentiated consciousness” as Lonergan advocates? For this we need to explain his analysis of how in the third stage of meaning it becomes possible to exercise a “control of meaning”.

THE CONTROL OF MEANING

Lonergan insists that the current history is desperate need of intellectuals, artists and even political leaders who, intellectually speaking, “know what they are doing when they are doing it”. In questions of their own functioning they need to be clear what realm of meaning they are functioning in and what realm is demanded by given situations. He adds that when one pursues this point into finer detail one needs to

²⁶ *Method*, p.85. Lonergan adds that sizable parts of any population will always remain in the first, or common sense, stage of meaning. Even today, when we say our stage of history is characterised by the second stage of meaning we are really saying that a good proportion of the population—one that includes our cultural leaders and policy makers—have entered into this second stage. Consequently, if and when culture moves to the third stage of meaning this will still involve a situation where large proportions of the population remain in the first and second stage.

²⁷ *Method*, p. 99.

identify not just the realm of meaning in which one is operating, but also the “differentiations of consciousness” that need to be employed. In the list of differentiations of consciousness Lonergan places: linguistic, religious, literary, systematic, scientific, scholarly, and modern philosophic.²⁸ Next, a key point for those with responsibility for forming the constitutive meaning and communicative meaning of societies is to recognize not only their own realms of meaning and differentiations but also those in which other cultural and political leaders in our society are functioning. When one begins to try to exercise this kind of analysis of the constitutive meanings operative and being communicated in our society one can experience great moments of insight: people are often employing the wrong realm of meaning or the wrong differentiation of consciousness for the tasks they need to be undertaking! What emerges is a powerful tool of “dialectical analysis”.²⁹ Here the individuals who “take their stand on interiority” are able to differentiate between truth and falsity, between good and bad, in the culture of which they are part because they have an ability to trace the production of these ideas to their origins in authentic or inauthentic acts of consciousness.

THEOLOGY AND THE CONTROL OF MEANING

Lonergan reminds us that while religious and moral conversion has never automatically led to intellectual conversion, they do make it more likely that an individual will make this further move. With this in mind, he asserts that religion should play a central role in helping modern culture move from the second to the third stage of meaning. He insists that, **while it may not always be the business of religion to concentrate on helping cultures move from one stage of meaning to another this should be a priority for religion today.**³⁰

The next and obvious question is: **Has the Church itself fact entered into the third stage of meaning?** Alas, the awkward answer to this is: **No!** Or at best the answer is: “Not quite”. Within Catholic Christianity, Lonergan understands the Second Vatican Council as constituting a major step in this direction, however, in all honesty, one cannot characterise it as having made the breakthrough. Nevertheless, Lonergan believes that it is necessary for the unfolding of redemption that human cultures now move into the third stage of meaning and it is an act of faith for him that Christianity should play a catalysing role in this. According to him, therefore, we stand in a moment of epochal significance, where theologians must assist theological method to move into the third stage of meaning so as to stimulating the cultures of the world to do the same.

We have already been quoting from the book, *Method in Theology*, which Lonergan published in 1971. This work attempts the monumental task of pointing the way by which the whole of theology can proceed on the basis of the critical realm of meaning, i.e. of intellectual conversion. Lonergan acknowledges that for two millennia Christianity has been accumulating valuable insights and judgements into its faith. However, he insists that virtually all of these have been expressed in terms of

²⁸ “World Mediated by Meaning”, pp. 112-116.

²⁹ Lonergan introduced this notion in Chapter 17 of *Insight*: “ “.

³⁰ A concern with this issue spanned all of Lonergan’s life, see Michael Shute, *The Origins of Lonergan’s Notion of the Dialectic of History* (Lanham, Maryland, University Press of America, 1993) through Lonergan’s analysis in *Insight* of “Cosmopolis” (pp. 263-267) and “Special Transcendent Knowledge” (Chapter 20). To “Natural Right and Historical Mindedness” published in 1978 (*A third Collectio*, op cit).

either the common sense or theoretical realms of meaning. If theology is to engage effectively with our times an enormous project must begin whereby our insights into our faith must be expressed in terms of a critical realm of meaning.

With all the sensitivities that intellectual conversion brings to studying questions of meaning and history Lonergan opens the Introduction to *Method in Theology* with a resounding statement of the function of theology:

A theology mediates between a cultural matrix and the significance and role of a religion in that matrix. . . . When the classicist notion of culture prevails, theology is conceived as a permanent achievement, and then one discourses on its nature. When culture is conceived empirically, theology is known to be an ongoing process, and then one writes on its method.³¹

Thus theology, so to speak, is in the meaning business: it is trying to effect the constitutive meanings both of its own believing community and the wider culture in which it functions. The key insight of Lonergan in *Method* is really one that just carries through consistently the principle of an interiorly differentiated consciousness: that all categories employed in academic methods must be rooted in the realities of consciousness that we, as religiously and morally converted individuals, can affirm in intellectual conversion. Thus, when Lonergan turns to try to bring order to the wide range of topics studied in the discipline of theology, he does not order them “conceptually” in terms of the themes they address but with the kind of mental acts involved in the theologian as he or she engages in different aspects of the theological enterprise. Lonergan proposes that theology needs to proceed in a collaborative exercise with two phases: the first retrieves a religious tradition, the second mediates—or communicates—it to a cultural matrix. This second phase seeks to introduce authentic meanings—redemptive meanings—into a culture and to reverse the influence of meanings that represent inauthentic acts of knowing.³²

Lonergan asserts that in each phase of theology there are four “functional specialties”. He derives his reference to each of the four functional specialties of each phase of theology by analogy with the four levels of consciousness. He asserts with deceptive simplicity that in each functional specialty, one of the levels of consciousness is especially prominent. This point needs careful understanding.

THEOLOGY RETRIEVING A RELIGIOUS TRADITION

In the retrieving phase of theology, the first functional specialty is called “research”. This involves the collection and preliminary study of the primary sources of a religious tradition, written and otherwise. In fact, this activity requires that those involved in it use all their capacities of intelligence with diligence and care. However, the predominant goal of this specialty is analogous to the first level of “experiencing” data. By a similar principle of explaining the different steps in the process of retrieving tradition Lonergan speaks of the second functional specialty, “interpretation” as analogous with the second level of consciousness. The third functional specialty is called “history” and is analogous with the third level of consciousness, judgment.

³¹ *Method*, Introduction.

³² See, *Method* Chapter 5, “Functional Specialties”; see also a careful explanation of the relation of the functional specialties to mental acts in Robert Doran, *What is Systematic Theology?* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2007), pp. 149-156.

The fourth functional specialty is called “dialectic”. It addresses the question of “conflicts centring on Christian movements”.³³ It heads toward a decision about what theological ideas and values the theologian will carry forward into the second phase of theology and so is analogous to the fourth level of consciousness: decision. We already touched on what dialectic method is in our discussion of the “control of meaning” above. Following the process outlined there we now apply this method to the different schools of interpretation of the revealed mysteries of our faith. By analysing them in terms of the realms of meaning and the differentiations of consciousness in which they were expressed many only-apparent conflicts can be reconciled.³⁴ However, some real oppositions and contradictions can also be analysed and in these cases the dialectical theologian takes sides in dialectical arguments by identify counterpositions and refusing to carry them forward into the second phase.³⁵

TRANSPOSING AND COMMUNICATING A TRADITION

As we carry forward theological truths from the first phase of theology a key question is in what realm of meaning are we going to try to communicate them to the wider culture and society in which we find ourselves. Lonergan’s key point here is that doctrines that have been articulated in a common sense or theoretic realm of meaning need to be “transposed” into a critical realm of meaning in order to make sense to the modern person. This process of transposition and communication occurs in four functional specialities. As in the first phase there are four of these, each corresponding to a level of consciousness. However, in this second phase the pattern is one that is analogous to development from above and so higher levels of consciousness are discussed before lower ones.

So it is that the fifth functional specialty is “foundations” and is analogous, as was the functional specialty dialectic of the first phase, to the fourth level of consciousness: decision. In foundations one makes explicit the realm of meaning one is operating from as both being both critical and transcendent. Critical foundations provide “general categories” that are those derived from our natural orientation to self-transcendence appropriated in intellectual conversion, “special categories” are those that can only be known after an experience of religious conversion.³⁶ It is on the basis of being able to use these different categories appropriately that one proceeds to the succeeding functional specialties. The sixth functional specialty is “doctrines” and is where the theologian declares which ideas he or she affirms as certainly true from his or her efforts at retrieving past doctrines in phase 1. Clearly the task of this stage is analogous to that of the third level of consciousness, judgment. The task of seventh functional specialty, “systematics” is analogous to that of the second level of consciousness because it seeks to offer a more complete understanding of the doctrines one has affirmed. The process of taking doctrines that one has retrieved and rearticulating in terms of a critical realm of meaning is one key aspect of systematics

³³ *Method*, p. 129. A brief overview of each of the functional specialties is offered in Chapter 5.

³⁴ Remarkably, the Catholic Church and certain Lutheran Churches have recently come to such a conclusion about the Lutheran doctrine of “Justification by faith” which played a central role in the Reformation.

³⁵ For various reasons the dialectical theologian is confident that doctrines of the Church are not going to be discovered to express counterpositions. One major reason for this is that doctrines limit themselves to they are statements of revealed fact that are often mysteries and so are not aimed at offering complete explanations in any realm of meaning. The issue of position and counterposition arises more on issues of theological opinion that do not have the truth claims of doctrine.

³⁶ On special and general categories see *Method* pp. 281-294.

and is a momentous task. It is an exercise in what Lonergan calls “transposition” where all terms and relations explained must have a point of reference in realities of consciousness affirmed in intellectual conversion.

The eight functional specialty is called “communications” and Lonergan asserts: “It is in this final stage that theological reflection bears fruit”.³⁷ This is where theology tries to influence the constitutive meaning first of the Church itself and then of a culture as a whole. The kind of new reality it seeks to achieve would then become the data for insight of a future generation and so we speak of the goal of the functional specialty of communications by analogy with the first level of consciousness, experience.

This principle of transposing doctrine so as to more effectively communicate it today is so important it is worth offering an example of how Lonergan tried to do himself with respect to the doctrine of grace. Lonergan asserts that when St. Paul speaks of grace in his letter to the Romans he is articulating profound truths in the common sense realm of meaning. Next, he asserts the theology of operative and cooperative grace of St. Thomas Aquinas stands in deep continuity with St. Paul but is expressed within the theoretic realm of meaning. We already have some familiarity with how Lonergan himself has worked at transposing this doctrine. He understands his explanation of the event of religious conversion to be a more adequate explanation of what Aquinas calls operative grace than that offered by Aquinas himself. He then notes how Aquinas proceeds to speak of cooperative grace needing to follow this first reality and how it heals sinful human nature. He offers a transposed account of this phenomenon in his account of the manner in which development from above in human consciousness heals development from below. So it is that operative grace and cooperative grace are explained in terms of the scale of values: something we affirm as constitutive of our fourth level of consciousness in our act of self-appropriation.³⁸

THEOLOGY LEARNING FROM CULTURE

The task we have described for a theology that operates in the critical realm of meaning is already immense. However, what we have described above is not sufficient to fulfil Lonergan’s definition of the function of theology as mediating between a cultural matrix and the significance and role of a religious tradition in that matrix. If theology is really to involve a mediation between these two realities then the process of communication cannot be only in one direction. In addition to communicating truths retrieved from the founding inspiration of a religion, a religion must take into consideration new insights emerging from a culture. Lonergan asserts:

There is not to be overlooked the fact of dependence in the opposite direction. Questions for systematics can arise from communications . . . there is, then, a reciprocal dependence within each of the two phases . . . but care must be taken that this influence from the second phase does not destroy either the proper openness of the first phase to all the relevant data.³⁹

³⁷ Lonergan, *Method* p. 355.

³⁸ In his book *The Trinity: Retrieving the Western Tradition* (New York, Paulist Press, 2005), Neil Ormerod, offers an accessible account of how Lonergan transposes the theology of the Trinity of St. Augustine and St. Aquinas.

³⁹ *Method*, pp.142-143. At the end of last sentence quoted here Lonergan adds a footnote to elaborate on the dangers of imposing latter day concerns on first phase activities. He refers to a controversy of

Clearly, what Lonergan is calling for is a “feedback” process whereby insights that are true and good may emerge in a culture in a way that, in a certain sense, are “in danger of leaving the Church behind”. The Church must have the humility to recognize that God’s grace is working outside the visible boundaries of the Church and that Christian theology will at times be challenged to “catch up” with insights that are perhaps more widely accepted outside the official borders of the Church than within it. This having been said, as Lonergan implies at the end of the quote above, theologians will always need to maintain a careful dialectical disposition in choosing what aspects of modern culture to consider and to relate to theological understanding and what to reject. Once such new ideas are processed within a renewed systematic theology they become part of what proceeds back to communications and the effort of theologians to have a practical effect on influencing the constitutive meaning of communities.

Now, while it is clear that Lonergan wanted to propose a method where such a two-way mediation was occurring, he does not do much in *Method in Theology* to demonstrate how it might actually occur. One needs to turn to students of Lonergan to find discussions of how his method can be used in relation to modern movements on contextual themes in theology such as liberation, feminism and inculturation.⁴⁰ And to be honest, at least in the opinion of one student of Lonergan, Robert Doran, there has been a tendency amongst many of those employing Lonergan’s thought to neglect this aspect.⁴¹ Doran builds on terminology Lonergan develops of “mediation”, “mutual mediation”, “self-mediation” and “mutual self-mediation”. He stresses that while theology today should always be a “mutual self-mediation” between tradition and culture it more often attempts only a process of “self-mediation” where apparently theology limits itself to recommunicating apparently “tried and true” ideas from the past.

The functional specialty ‘communications’ (the operations of theologians vis-à-vis pastoral situations, dialogue with other sciences, communication with other religions, ecumenical contacts within Christianity itself, use of the diverse media of communication) entails a process of mutual self-mediation that takes theology back through the functional specialties, at times to the articulation of new doctrines and their understanding in systematics, and at times to the modification and even abandonment of former items that the church had been teaching. The mediation of faith and culture that characterizes theology in its entirety is a mutual self-mediation.⁴²

This quotation helps us move on from the feedback function of communications to a study of its other functions as it seeks to effect “reality on the ground” that is the constitutive meaning of communities.

this nature that occurred in New Testament studies.

⁴⁰ See Frederick Crowe, “Lonergan and liberation theology”, Cynthia Crysdale, “Lonergan and Feminism”, and Ivan Coelho “Lonergan and a method for inculturation”.

⁴¹ Robert M. Doran, *What is Systematic Theology?* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2007), see Chapter 3 “Mediation”.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 58.

WHAT IS COMMUNICATIONS?

Lonergan did not develop a systematic analysis of the content of the functional specialty of communications and this has not been an area to which Lonergan scholars have devoted a lot of attention.⁴³ We might call this the second “awkward fact” that we have needed to acknowledge in this article. Clearly, Catholic Social Doctrine forms part of the functional specialty of communications, if we want to look towards Lonergan’s theological method to give us guidance in how to help CSD go forward we are left with the requirement to “work things out for ourselves” to a considerable extent about how to do this.⁴⁴

I believe that a major distinction to be made within communications is whether the theologian is trying to communicate *ad intra* or *ad extra* of the Church. When reflecting *ad intra*, communications is dealing with what Doran lists above as: “the operations of theologians vis-à-vis pastoral situations”. In this area, I believe there are powerful resources to be found in Lonergan’s notions of the scale of values and of development from above. In evaluating the work of a Christian institution, one can fruitfully check to what extent it is facilitating religious and moral conversion and to what extent these transformations at the level of religious and personal values are being helped to “work their way down”, as it were, through cultural and social values. Next, within every Christian and pastoral institution the question needs to be asked about whether they are aware that the Church does not exist for itself but has a mission *ad extra*. Consequently, at every local level of the Church questions need to be asked about whether and how a Christian community is trying to communicate redemptive values to the society around it.⁴⁵

In Doran’s list of activities that should be included in communications he mentions: “communication with other religions” and “ecumenical contacts within Christianity itself”. These exercises share, to one degree and another, the privileges of communicating with others in whom religious and moral conversion can be presumed. In a sense, then, the category of communicating meanings *ad intra* refers also to these exercises in fraternal communication. We have mentioned how a concern for communication *ad extra* should characterise every local Christian community such as a parish etc. However, we can address this question at a more formal level of how the

⁴³ Lonergan recommends that readers of *Method in Theology* advert to the 5 volume work produced during 1964-1969 *Handbuch der Pastoral Theologie: Praktische Theologie der Kirche in ihrer Gegenwart*,. Editors: F.X. Arnold, Ferdinand Klosterman, Karl Rahner, Victor Schurr and Leonhard M. Weber in order to understand the direction he is pointing in. However, this publication is no longer widely read in practical theological circles.

⁴⁴ We will acknowledge below how Lonergan did devote a great deal of time to the study of economics and the producing of a manuscript on a theory of economic growth. Clearly, this was an exercise within the functional specialty of communications and directly related to CSD, however, it is not the same thing as offering a systematic development of what is the functional specialty of communications. If we recall Robert Doran’s assertion that most of *Method in Theology* is concerned, in fact, more with theology as “self-mediating” than as “mutually self-mediating” with culture then we can recognize that there is something of a paradigm shift needed in how we employ Lonergan’s method as we try to locate CSD within a wider theological project.

⁴⁵ I have attempted to develop these ideas in “Robert Doran And Pastoral Theology: Reflections From Nairobi, Kenya” paper delivered to the 34th Lonergan Workshop, Boston College “In Search of the Not Numerous Centre,” June 2007 (awaiting publication). In applying a notion of development from above to pastoral ministry I have found helpful Neil Ormerod “A Theology of Ministry” in *Theological Studies* 61(2000), 432-446. Also, Frederick Crow offers an programme for practical theology based on the functions of community building of “socialisation, acculturation and education” in “Lonergans “The Expansion of Lonergan’s Notion of Value” in *Appropriating the Lonergan Idea*, pp. 344-359 op. cit.

universal Church, or at least the official Church as represented by dioceses and Episcopal conferences. When we come to this question an important switch needs to occur in our thinking, now we do not presuppose at least explicit religious and moral conversion. We cannot advert to the explicitly religious dimension of development from above in society assuming that we are speaking to others who participate in this aspect of a culture. This is where we involve ourselves in what Doran refers to as “dialogue with other sciences” and perhaps also “use of the diverse media of communication”. At last, in this article we have arrived at the question Catholic Social Doctrine, what it is and what it should be. And to this question we now address ourselves.

PART 3 “EVANGELIZING CULTURE AND SOCIAL STRUCTURES”

For an article that claimed to concern itself with Catholic Social Doctrine (CSD) we have taken a long time to arrive at it. With the purpose of demonstrating that our time has not been wasted, let us now retrieve what we can already assert about CSD based on Part 1 and Part 2. CSD plays part of a broader mission of the Church to communicate redemptive meanings to history. It is a sub-set of theology, which aims to mediate between a religious tradition and the significance and role of a religious tradition in a cultural matrix. Theology seeks to do this first of all to the religious community of which it is part in the understanding that such constitutive meanings will guide its praxis. Theological reflection on authentic religion will always have a concern for the community of human beings as a whole and so, as a second step, it will seek to communicate constitutive meanings and values to society as a whole in a manner which serves the common good. Communicating to this more diverse community requires that we have conducted well the functional specialty of foundations and know the difference between special and general categories—i.e. those that rely on religious conversion and those that limit themselves to a strictly philosophical intellectual conversion. These categories allow us to exercise a careful control of meaning and to recognise that CSD will confine itself almost entirely to general categories.⁴⁶ Last and not least, we have been stating that one of the services that religion can best render to modernity and post-modernity is to assist it progress more completely into a third stage of meaning. This we propose is a task first and foremost that we need to set for CSD today.

A clarification by contrast can also be of assistance here. When we recognise that all theology should be a mutual self-mediation between culture and a religious tradition we recognise that issues of responsiveness to context in theology are not confined to CSD. Rather, all of the functional specialties can be influenced by the feedback process provided by communications. CSD, as part of communications, can contribute to this feedback process but is not the only contributor and does not try to perform the work of those who are competent in the other functional specialisations. Similarly, I would even add that a careful distinction should be made between a more academic task of which CSD takes part and the more popular and pastoral exercises of encouraging non-specialist Christian communities and individuals in their mission *ad*

⁴⁶ I qualify this statement with “almost always” in the light of a point I make below under “The Abiding Need For Theological Reflection On Cultural And Social Realities”.

extra. This mission will often require a familiarity with CSD but in the choices made may not always actually employ it. This is the context in which we now turn to a more direct discussion of CSD, such as it is.

WHAT IS CSD?

What is CSD and where is one to locate it? This is, in fact, not entirely an easy question to answer. In some respects CSD is an amorphous tradition composed of Papal documents, documents of Vatican II, and letters and declarations produced by bishops' conferences and even by individual bishops. There is a general agreement that it is a tradition of commentary on and proposals for social, political and economic realities of the modern era. It is usually assumed to have begun with the Papal encyclical *Rerum novarum* of 1892 and to have been developed through a series of "social encyclicals" of Popes and by certain documents of Vatican II. However, there can be a vague area where different writers and teachers of CSD include a wider or narrower range of additional material provided by the official Church at different levels. However, for the sake of brevity and of making a few clear points I answer this question in this article by simply adverting to the book produced by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace: *The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*.⁴⁷

The Compendium is an impressive document. From the point of view of this article, we can appreciate that it not only gathers together Church teachings on specific social issues but also seeks to integrate and explain these teachings within a broader theological framework. Part 1 of *The Compendium* has four chapters that seek to outline broad foundational issues in theology relevant to CSD and Part 2 contains seven chapters and go into specific areas of concern in social life. Part 3 is comprised of just one chapter which returns to the more foundational issue of the ecclesiological context of CSD and is entitled: "Social Doctrine and Ecclesial Action". So it is that five out of the twelve chapters of *The Compendium* can be described as broadly foundational.

The route we have travelled in this article bears close similarities to Part 1 and Part 3. This having been said, I consider that, in many respects ***The Compendium* is a work of the second stage of meaning and stands in need of transposing to an articulation grounded in a third stage of meaning.** In Part 3 I seek to indicate the broad lines of how this exercise might be performed. In doing this I follow the logic of a dialectic analysis of the ideas of an author. I seek to advance the position and to reverse any counterposition that is to be identified.

A DIALECTICAL ANALYSIS OF *THE COMPENDIUM*

I have mentioned that five of the twelve Chapters in *The Compendium* are broadly foundational. Within these chapters two sections come closest to addressing the kind of epistemological questions we have been raising in this article. This chapter first points out:

⁴⁷ *The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (PCJP, Pauline Publications, 2004). We note that this book does not include the contribution of Pope Benedict XVI who became Pope after its publication. Still, this Pope has taken care to ally himself with the tradition of CSD in the second half of *Deus Caritas Est* and elsewhere.

The Church's social doctrine was not initially thought of as an organic system but was formed over the course of time, through the numerous interventions of the Magisterium on social issues (#72).

It then points out how Pope John Paul II performed a service to CSD by clarifying some foundational issues. It records how that Pope asserted that CSD is an extension of Catholic moral theology that is primarily philosophical because it seeks to engage with and persuade people of good will of all religious persuasions or lack thereof. The Pope, himself a philosopher, continues:

Philosophy is a suitable and indispensable instrument for arriving at a correct understanding of the basic concepts of the Church's social doctrine, concepts such as the person, society, freedom, conscience, ethics, law, justice, the common good, solidarity, subsidiarity, the State.⁴⁸

A dialectical analysis of this section can recognize a valuable distinction between special and general categories and the importance of CSD confining itself, for the most part anyway, to general categories. However, the question remains: What kind of philosophy are we talking about here? Is it a philosophy grounded in intellectual conversion?

We get some impression of how *The Compendium* answers this question in Chapter 4, "The Principles of the Church's Social Doctrine". It states:

The permanent principles of the Church's social doctrine constitute the very heart of Catholic social teaching. These are the principles of: the dignity of the human person; . . . the common good; subsidiarity; and solidarity.⁴⁹

It then develops this point in a subsection entitled: "The Relationship Between Principles And Values":

Besides the principles that must guide the building of a society worthy of man, the Church's social doctrine also indicates fundamental values. The relationship between principles and values is undoubtedly one of reciprocity, in that social values are an expression of appreciation to be attributed to those specific aspects of moral good that these principles foster. . . . essentially, these values are: truth, freedom, justice, love.⁵⁰

Here we recognise a statement that principles as foundational beliefs and when we apply these principles to decision-making we build a society characterised by the values listed.

In these quotations from Chapter 4 we recognise that the foundations being offered for CSD in *The Compendium* are within the theoretic realm of meaning and not the critical realm. From a point of view of dialectical analysis, what is operative here is **clearly a conceptualistic philosophy**. Foundations here operate like mere premises in an argument from which one must deduce conclusions. By contrast, foundations for an intellectually converted individual would be the basic structure of

⁴⁸ *The Compendium*, paragraph 77.

⁴⁹ *The Compendium*, paragraph 160.

⁵⁰ *The Compendium*, paragraph 197.

self-transcendence and all other categories in CSD—by all means including the principles stated by *The Compendium*—should be derived from this base.

In these statements we can recognize how conceptualistic philosophy—in the realm of ethics—stands in need of transposition. Where do the principles come from and why is it these four values they produce and not, for example a few more? If we answer that the principles come from the Gospel we are no longer conducting a philosophical argument. In the end of the day, it is not clear anyway that there is a great deal of difference between the principles and the values as stated in this section. Surely, at least, the common good and solidarity are not only principles but also values that we expect to find expressed in social institutions?

TRANSPOSING *THE COMPENDIUM*

Following the method we have clarified in Part 2 we can now ask the question: How might we help to transpose the argument of *The Compendium* to a critical realm of meaning? From the standpoint of intellectual conversion, it is clear that the distinction made between principles and values in this section is an effort at attending to the subjective pole of decision-making and the objective pole of the real results in the constitutive meaning of communities and therefore in history. From the standpoint of an interiorly differentiated consciousness we can recognize that what is being reached toward in the discussion of “**principles**” would be **better achieved by reference to self-transcending authenticity**. What is being reached toward by the discussion of “**values**” is **better achieved by reference to our heuristic category of progress in history**.

Clearly, what we have identified here is an example of the need for Catholic theology to progress into a critical realm of meaning. So, while the work of Pope John Paul II and, indeed, that of *The Compendium* itself, is admirable in trying to clarify what is CSD and what are its foundational presuppositions its work remains incomplete. In what remains of this article I make some tentative suggestions regarding the root such a transposing of CSD might follow.

SOME SPECIFIC PROPOSALS: 1. LET CSD CHANGE ITS NAME

A first suggestion is that **Catholic Social Doctrine should change its name to Catholic Cultural and Social Teaching**.

My point about using the term teaching instead of doctrine can be stated briefly: **the term doctrine sounds conceptualist**. For some reason, during the pontificate of John Paul II the custom of referring to this tradition as Catholic Social Teaching changed to one of referring to Catholic Social Doctrine. We should recognise also that it could appear to non-Catholics that lurking not far behind this shift of terminology is the logical fallacy of “argument from authority”. We should recall that doctrinal statements are associated with the pronouncements of Church councils or infallible Papal pronouncements and are directed toward believers. Consequently, they carry with them the power of pronouncing anathema and of excommunication. No such power exists in the kind of debates to which CSD contributes. At any rate, the impression given by the switch to the term “doctrine” is not true to the general tone of *The Compendium* where there are repeated statement that the tradition it represents is a “work in progress” and that there are many “new things” such as in the economy and the world of work where its pronouncements can be, as yet, only tentative.

A more substantial proposal is that we shift to using the phrase Catholic “cultural and social” instead of merely Catholic “social” teaching. To explain this point, we need to reflect for a moment, not on CSD but on the discipline of moral theology of which it forms part. In what functional specialty does Moral Theology find itself? The answer to this must be that forms part of the functional specialty of communications. After all, in trying to identify correct moral beliefs and behaviour it is trying to influence constitutive meaning. This point is clearly stated in what follows:

Social doctrine reflects three levels of theological-moral teaching: the foundational level of motivations; the directive level of norms for life in society; the deliberative level of consciences called to mediate objective and general norms in concrete and particular social situations. These three levels implicitly define also the proper method and specific epistemological structure of the social doctrine of the Church.⁵¹

We do not need to repeat here how the categories provided here are expressions of a theoretic and not a critical realm of meaning. The point I do want to stress, however, is that a statement like this still leaves the question rather vague as to what exactly is the relationship of CSD to the rest of the body of moral theology. When we consider the issues that are actually addressed in CSD as it is constituted at present they focus primarily on issues of economic and social structure. However, from the definition given above they could as easily address more bio-ethical issues addressed under the rubric of an “integral ethic of life” and “a culture of life” so emphasised in Papal encyclicals. And yet encyclicals of this kind are not considered to be part of CSD. After all, these comments on “a culture of life” primarily use general categories and not special categories. Are they not central to what the Church is doing as it tries to influence the constitutive meaning of modern history?

I suspect that this question will be best worked out within a context of an effort to transpose the whole of moral theology into a critical realm of meaning. My guess is that what we consider the tradition of CSD today still has something of the character of an *ad hoc* collection of statements on social and economic issues. I acknowledge that Pope John Paul II served this process of reflection well by trying to clarify foundational issues. However, I suspect that the progress he made was limited by the realm of meaning in which he was functioning.

It seems to me that a major distinction for a transposed moral theology will have to be whether it is employing special categories (known only to the religiously converted and so aimed primarily at Catholics) or general categories (the fruit of intellectual conversion and aimed at “all people of good will”). We can recall from our analysis in Part 2 that even within an analysis of history using only general categories we identified an all-important link between cultural questions of meaning and value and the social structures that are constituted by these. We added that a major source of decline in modern history is the neglect of reflection on the cultural superstructure and the belief in a determinism of social structures over culture. I wonder if the present configuration of CSD is not implicitly sharing in something of this biased separation of issues that should rather be held as distinct but intimately interrelated. Thus, it seems to me that **we should unite in one tradition what we have to say to culture and what we have to say about social structures.** I would

⁵¹ *The Compendium*, paragraph 73.

encapsulate this proposal by suggesting that we change the title “Catholic Social Doctrine” to Catholic Social and Cultural Teaching”.

PROPOSAL 2: MORAL THEOLOGY AND ECONOMIC THEORY

In a section entitled “Service in the Economy” *The Compendium* appeals to economists concerning “**the urgency of rethinking the economy**” (#564). My next proposal is that for this to be done **economists need to be functioning within the third stage of meaning** and that it should be primary aim of CCST to help them do so.

In theory, an invitation to intellectual conversion can be extended to social scientists at a purely philosophical level; in practice, however, this is unlikely to appeal to them. Consequently, it could be of immense value to try to demonstrate the fruit of intellectual conversion within a social science itself. By this means one could invite other practitioners of that discipline to recognize the value of the foundations in intellectual conversion from which one is operating. Lonergan devoted many years of his life to doing just this in the field of economics.⁵² His work was complex and has not been much received within the discipline. However, it is worth studying for more than one reason: it may well yet have a contribution to make to the science of economics, and, at any rate, we witness here a model of an intellectually converted Christian trying to exercise a ministry of redeeming a social science.

In Lonergan’s writings on economics, he returns to the complex but profound metaphysics of “emergent probability” worked out in *Insight*. His account of progress, decline and redemption in human history is in fact just an application at the human level of being of his more general metaphysics of the dynamics of “proportionate being” in terms of “emergent probability. Lonergan had a considerable competence in mathematics and understood that an economic system to be just one instance the manner in which emergent probability functions in the universe. This more general methodological approach allowed him both to reflect on how the predictive power of economic science could be improved and then to on how economics should blend into ethics. On the first of these pursuits, Lonergan was convinced that **economic systems are seldom studied with mathematical tools adequate to their dynamic character** and proceeded to work on the theory of economic growth for many years to try to improve this situation.

Within this work, Lonergan locates where ethical questions begin to emerge from more strictly empirical ones such as the circulation of money in an economy. His interior differentiation of consciousness gives him the methodological competence to be able to switch to this kind of discourse when occasion demands. He asserts that governments (supported by institutions such as religion) need to call on certain moral virtues from their populations at different stages of the cycle of economic growth: at earlier stages they need to call forth the virtue of thrift; at later stages the virtue of generosity is called for as redistribution of wealth becomes a real possibility.⁵³ He adds that great harm has been done by advocating a certain virtue at the wrong moment. From this insight we can recognise an issue of the greatest

⁵² See, Lonergan, *Macroeconomic Dynamics: An Essay in Circulation Analysis*, Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan, Volume 15, (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2005) and *For a New Political Economy*, Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan, Volume 21 (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2005). For an introduction to Lonergan’s thought in this area the editor’s introduction to Volume 15, written by Frederick Lawrence, is especially recommended

⁵³ 000000000000”how to pay for the war?”

importance for Catholic Cultural and Social Teaching: all people of authenticity must recognise that society stands in need of an improved influence of values; however those who appeal to **value-based decisions** must do so **within the limits of the possible**. Lonergan has harsh words for how stupidity can do as much harm as selfishness and malice in history. Among those who receive the sharp end of his wit are unintelligent idealistic types how propose impossible solutions for genuine social ills.

PROPOSAL 3: THE ABIDING NEED FOR THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON CULTURAL AND SOCIAL REALITY

Before we leave this deep and complex issue of how the Catholic Cultural and Social teaching needs to communicate with social scientists we need to touch on one further point. We need to clarify that there will always a need to carefully insist on a certain use of special theological categories and not just general theological categories when the Church is in dialogue with the wider processes of culture forming and social and economic decision making.

We need to recall that general categories can only every alert us to the dimensions of progress and decline in history. We need to advert to religious conversion to explain the equally real phenomenon of redemption in history. Consequently, **history can never be fully understood by means of the human and social sciences alone**: there is always already present in situations a “vector” of redemption, where against the odds, new energy is breaking into history ready to pay the price of reversing decline and promoting progress. One of the tasks of theology is simply to recognize and name this phenomenon in history for what it is. So it is that there will be a constant need for social scientist to collaborate with theologians in the pursuit of a comprehensive understanding of cultural and social realities.⁵⁴

REVERSING SOME COUNTERPOSITIONS

In concluding our analysis, I would like to move beyond an analysis of *The Compendium* and make some very general points about where I believe that counterpositions exist in the Church today that are related to Catholic Social Doctrine.

Let us return to the quotation offered in the introduction of this article. There Lonergan calls on the intellectually converted individual to inhabit a “not numerous centre” and to distinguish himself or herself from a “solid right” and a “scattered left”. Any number of commentators on the Catholic Church today in one way or other point to polarisation in the Church that Lonergan’s comments seem to describe well.⁵⁵ Indeed the quotation offered above from *The Compendium* about the need to avoid “both an intimist spiritualism and a social activism”⁵⁶ would seem to be speaking about much the same thing.

What few words might we say about how these two poles and how they relate to CSD? Briefly, I would say that **the solid right tends to neglect CSD and the scattered left tends to embrace it in a manner that is unintelligent**. Another point is that both these positions are more similar to each other than they think: both, in

⁵⁴ The student of Lonergan who expands on this point most is Robert Doran, see *What is Systematic Theology* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2005) especially in Chapter 10, “System and History”.

⁵⁵ See Nicholas Ian Kerr 9999999999

⁵⁶ *The Compendium*, paragraph 545.

fact, share in the counterposition that thinks that knowing is achieved by taking a good look.

Regarding those who can broadly be called the solid right and who adopt an intimist spirituality, there seems to be at root a resistance to adopt historical consciousness; as Lonergan puts it: They seem “determined to live in a world that no longer exists”.⁵⁷ The praxis that results from this is essentially a defensive one that holds little hope for dialogue with non-Christians and perhaps, even with non-Catholics. The intimist spiritualism criticised by *The Compendium* can be understood a variation on the theme of knowing as looking. Now, the “good look” is purported to occur by a kind of mystical turn within consciousness of the individual. In an act of introspection that is not to be confused with intellectual conversion, the individual claims to experience a kind of “instant illumination” by turning within and all at once “knowing God”. A result can be an inability to shift to the kind of philosophical mode—i.e. using general theological categories—of thinking needed for dialogue with non-Catholics for the purpose of promoting progress in history.⁵⁸

What is to be said about those who inhabit the “fragmented left” and display a spirituality of “social activism”? Let us recall that in Part 2 we outlined how a theology that has entered into the third stage of meaning would be an exercise in mutual self-mediation between culture and a religious tradition and so would engage with its historical context in different ways of which CSD is only one. Perhaps a first criticism to be made of the fragmented left is that it does not observe these distinctions. A reason for this would seem to be that a simplistic counterposition on knowing is at work. Unlike that of intimist spirituality, the social activist seems to apply an extroverted notion of knowing as looking. We can grant that this individual is often confronting social situations that are, in reality, unjust. However, this seems to be taken as justification for a process where feelings righteous anger seems to substitute for careful empirical and ethical and theological analysis. Results can be that individuals with little qualification in social sciences form superficial opinions about complex realities and propose solutions that would be inoperable. A related tendency seems to be a distancing from the mainstream of pastoral ministry of the Church. A bifurcation is created between the pursuit of holiness and action for justice. Finally, a careful analysis of the role of contextual theology seems to be absent in social justice activism: an appeal to “Catholic social teaching” becomes approximately the same as an appeal to “liberation theology”.

CONCLUSION

In this article, I have attempted to address the question: “Where next for Catholic Social Doctrine?” I have propose an answer: “It should proceed in the context of a Church that is moving into the third stage of meaning and is trying to promote a similar move on the part of the cultures of the world”.

In Part 1 I introduce the reader to some basic positions taken by Bernard Lonergan, above all the invitation to intellectual conversion that he extends to his readers. In Part 2 I proceed to outline a theological theory of history that Lonergan develops and I then explain how religion today needs to help the cultures of the world

⁵⁷ “Dimensions of Meaning,” p. 245, op. cit.

⁵⁸ We can note that this counterposition may well be based on an authentic religious conversion. However, one has to ask if it proceeds to a moral conversion that falls short of an option for the poor.

move into a third stage of meaning. I acknowledge the awkward question that Christian theology has itself not clearly entered into the third stage of meaning but I express the hope that it will do so. Finally, in Part 3 I address the question of what might become of CSD in a context of a Church moving into the third stage of meaning and comment on obstacles that lie in the way of this path.

The argument made in this article will no doubt seem obscure to some. It certainly involves what Lonergan describes as “**a withdrawal from practicality to save practicality**”.⁵⁹ However, it is based on the conviction that what CSD needs most today is clearer reflection on its own foundations and that this in turn requires a discovery that the deepest of foundations are laid on realms of meaning that combine a transcendent differentiation of consciousness with a critical differentiation of consciousness.

⁵⁹ *Insight*, p. 266.