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Why Draw on the Insights of Bernard Lonergan?

At this point, I want to present a justification for turning to the insights of the Catholic Canadian theologian and philosopher, Bernard Lonergan. While Lonergan's works do not specifically concern themselves with religiously motivated violence, his insights nevertheless address the problem of violence by examining the performance of the subject as subject and by providing a philosophical analysis of the self-transcending subject. Lonergan postulates a set of foundational categories for discerning how we come to have religious knowledge, an explanatory account of historical progress and breakdown in human history, and a way forward for recovery in history that is achieved through authentic religious living.

I have also chosen two other conversation partners, namely, René Girard and Charles Taylor, and I provide a selective exposition of their insights. In contrast to the other authors I have chosen in the literature review, I will not subject these writers to any extended critique. Though there are differences in their approaches from that of Lonergan, their insights nevertheless complement his. However, I will argue that Lonergan's insights provide a much more nuanced approach for understanding religion, and for understanding violence and the means to overcoming violence through authentic religion.

A Common Ground

More than any other philosopher and theologian that I know of, Bernard Lonergan seeks "a common ground on which [people] of intelligence might

meet."[1] Lonergan states that "the plain fact is that the world is in pieces before [us] and pleads to be put together again, to be put together not as it stood before on the careless foundation of assumptions that happened to be unquestioned but on the strong possibility of questioning and with full awareness of the range of possible answers."[2] Such a crisis of which Lonergan speaks is a crisis of meaning, and the common ground he proposes is the possibility of questioning in a collaborative manner. In any intellectual culture that is saturated with subjectivism, relativism, historicism, dogmatism, and skepticism, the possibility of a common ground is viewed negatively. But the common ground in Lonergan's work, *Insight*, emerges not as a set philosophical worldview; rather, it is a method founded in a basic set of invariant and normative operations in human consciousness, the transcultural norms of self-transcending inquiry that constitutes all people as knowers and choosers within an explanatory account of insight.[3]

Lonergan's common ground shifts the debate concerning the possibility of objectivity from the priority of language or logic to the priority of method, discovered in the concrete performance of the subject as subject. He thus proposes that a generalized empirical method is able to provide a foundation for intellectual and moral objectivity.[4] The foundation of epistemology is cognitional theory, while the foundation of cognitional theory is the performance of the subject as subject. This foundation is not the same as the foundationalism spoken against by many postmodern thinkers, nor is it just one other method among many methods. Rather, it is the subject's lifting of attention above specific principles and historical models to the methodological criteria by which we judge what is real, choose what is better or worse, and act in love. Genuine objectivity is then the consequence of authentic subjectivity.[5]

All knowledge, whether theological, religious, philosophical, scientific, moral, or practical is grounded in insights or acts of understanding, so that one's normative source of meaning is insight into insight. Robert Doran, in his notes on Lonergan's major work, *Insight*, gives a summary of the multiplicity of insights that we could potentially recognize in our experience.[6]

1. Lonergan, *Insight*, 7.

2. Ibid., 552.

3. Lonergan, *Method*, 4. Lonergan states that a method "is a normative pattern of recurrent and related operations yielding cumulative and progressive results."

4. Ibid., 3–25; Lonergan, *Third Collection*, 140–44.

5. Lonergan, *Method*, 265.

6. Doran, "Introductory Lecture," 3. Doran explains the difference in meaning and the interrelationship between various kinds of insights that Lonergan identifies: direct insights, inverse insights, identifying insights, reflective insights, introspective insights,

Lonergan states that "insight is the source not only of theoretical knowledge but also of all its practical implications, and indeed all its intelligent activity. Insight into insight will reveal what activity is intelligent, and insight into oversights will reveal what activity is unintelligent."[7]

Any historical moment within a community will contain both insight and oversight intertwined. While insight can promote progress, oversight grounded in bias engenders decline. When oversight occurs, Lonergan asserts that

> we reinforce our love of truth with a practicality that is equivalent to obscurantism. We correct old evils with a passion that mars the new good. We are not pure. We compromise. We hope to muddle through. But the very advance of knowledge brings a power over nature and over men too vast and terrifying to be entrusted to the good intentions of unconsciously biased minds. We have to learn to distinguish sharply between progress and decline, learn to encourage progress without putting premiums upon decline . . . learn to remove the tumor of a flight from understanding without destroying the organs of intelligence.[8]

The Differentiation of Consciousness

In *Method in Theology* Lonergan explains acts of meaning and their relation to the various differentiations of human consciousness, concluding that each realm of meaning can mix, blend, and operate in different ways within the subject.[9] Lonergan's examination of the "unfolding of a single thrust, the eros of the human spirit" from undifferentiated to differentiated realms of consciousness reveals a movement of the human mind out of a world in which reality is known directly and immediately to a world in which reality is mediated by meaning.[10] I will give a full account of these realms in chapter 3.

Here, though, I particularly want to focus on an observation by Robert M. Doran, who has done much to expound Lonergan's insights, and who argues that the concrete experience of contemporary life is taking place in a social and cultural milieu permeated by a vast increase in knowledge. Many complex theories have emerged from diverse disciplines, including

philosophic insights, metaphysical insights, genetic insights, dialectical insights, practical insights, limit insights, religious insights and theological insights.

7. Lonergan, *Insight*, 7–8.
8. Ibid., 8.
9. Lonergan, *Method*, 81–86, 227.
10. Ibid., 13.

theology, psychology and sociology, as well as the natural sciences, but such a milieu moves toward greater and greater specialization so that only a small dimension of any one field of study can be mastered.[11] Doran therefore states that unless we find "a ground beyond theory—for it will not do just to fall back on common sense—our situation becomes one of hopeless relativism"; moreover, this "ground beyond theory (and common sense) lies in the self-appropriation of interiority."[12]

Therefore I argue that discovering a better understanding of reality and enacting practical solutions toward the kind of violence justified by a distorted religious imagination will require a shift to take place in the performing subject. It will require that we move to what Lonergan calls "the third stage of meaning," which takes its stand in interiority, and which shifts its concern from the content of meanings to acts of meaning, from products to sources of products, from objects to operations in consciousness.[13] Lonergan states that we must "discover mind" and be able to distinguish "feeling from doing, knowing from deciding."[14]

The Task of Self-Appropriation

Lonergan's writings are not so much concerned to present us with the content of any particular theological topic in order that we might argue authoritatively that "these are Lonergan's ideas on this topic." Rather, his key philosophical and theological insights are more concerned to lead us into a process of self-appropriation: the self-discovery and self-awareness of our knowing, choosing, loving, and religious selves by helping us experience ourselves in the full register of consciousness. Lonergan says "understand understanding and you will understand much of what there is to be understood."[15] All human development begins in the act of wonder, the spontaneous desire to understand.[16] According to Jerome Miller, self-appropriation helps the inquirer discover wonder so that through the experience of wonder, the inquirer and chooser can work from the "heart," where "to be heart is to be precisely this vulnerability, this defenselessness, this being-broken-open to all that is beyond the given. Wonder is, indeed the principle, the arche, of all intentional operations; but far from providing

11. Doran, *Intentionality and Psyche*, 405.
12. Ibid.
13. Lonergan, *Method*, 85.
14. Ibid., 90.
15. Lonergan, *Insight*, xxviii.
16. Ibid., 173, 185, 330.

the heart with an undeconstructible foundation, wonder insures that the heart will be radically and irreparably affected by all that will happen to it by virtue of being caught in its throe."[17]

Any person can be held under the sway of a violent ideology, whether religious or secular. By contrast, self-appropriation is an important process for those wanting to judge what is real, to deliberate on what is valuable, and so to overcome violence, whether in practical living or as academics writing objectively on these matters.[18] This process is not meant to provide the inquirer with a passionless foundation or to lead the inquirer to some impersonal objectivity. Rather, this process helps the inquirer integrate feeling, thought, decision, and action.

The Importance of Authenticity

I have chosen Lonergan's approach in my exploration of the link between religion and violence because I am convinced that his approach necessarily speaks to the drama of human existence as authentic and inauthentic. By authenticity, Lonergan does not mean some form of moral superiority or elitist authority over others. To live an authentic life is the vocation of all people in order to realize their humanity. Lonergan states that persons "achieve authenticity in self-transcendence," that is, one's authenticity as a person does not rely on following abstract propositions but on following the operations of consciousness, living in the concrete and specific circumstances of one's life, and seeking direction to life even as one comes up against the limits of death, suffering, guilt, and struggle.[19] Authenticity involves studying the data of consciousness and discovering the inbuilt precepts that draw us along the path to authenticity. Self-transcendence is always an ongoing activity through conversion in such a way that the subject is committed to the drama of making one's life a work of art while negotiating the gap between the self we are and the inbuilt dynamism of the spirit.[20]

17. Miller, "All Love Is Self-Surrender," 63–64.

18. In a 1942 book review, Lonergan linked the excesses of capitalism, communism, and Nazism, stating that "their consequences are not a matter of abstract deduction. The experiment has been performed and still is being performed *on the quivering body of humanity*. The results are not pleasant" (my italics). Lonergan was reviewing the book, *Is Modern Culture Doomed?* by Andrew Krzensinski (New York: Devin-Adair, 1942) in the *Canadian Register*, September 19, 1949, page 8. Lonergan was subsequently quoted by Lamb, "Social and Political Dimensions," 269–70.

19. Lonergan, *Method*, 104.

20. Ibid., 270.

This dynamism of authenticity contrasts then with the two kinds of inauthenticity that Lonergan identifies: minor and major.[21] Minor inauthenticity pertains to the subject's adhering to a received tradition that has already been distorted yet which is accepted in good faith. The hope is that persons more in tune with an authentic heritage may persuade those who have received a distorted heritage to change. Major inauthenticity pertains to subjects who deliberately distort a tradition and through their own biases suppress questions that might lead to renewal and development. In choosing violence as a response to situations, religious agents not only desire to bring about a pragmatic change to their environment through a destructive venting of anger but they also end up changing themselves into men and women of violence. This change can all too easily result in a distorted understanding of a tradition. It is Lonergan's contention that violence, though seemingly useful to some, curtails self-transcendence and so destroys cultural achievements, sets a civilization into decline, and mutilates societies by "increasing division, incomprehension, suspicion, distrust, hostility, hatred and [further] violence."[22]

To demonstrate how religion might help heal those engaged in violence, we must also understand the content of diverse religious traditions and the manner by which violent religious agents either follow the insights of a distorted tradition handed onto them or intentionally distort and depart from their authentic source tradition. Here again, we come up against the problem not only of a difference in content but in the degree of authenticity within a tradition and among the adherents of the tradition. Differences between the content of religious traditions are explored by both comparative religion scholars and historians of religion by addressing questions for understanding, thus interpreting the data empirically and critically. Yet at the same time, questions of authenticity and inauthenticity within a tradition cannot be put aside. When theologians and academics from other disciplines appropriate the data of religious traditions, their concern should not only be empirical and critical but also dialectical, thus shifting the concern to authentic human existence, values worth preserving, and commitment to the truth. Lonergan asserts the impossibility of grounding any religious argument without understanding the religious horizon of the subject, determining his or her existential stance, and assessing the difference between authentic and inauthentic stances that might ground incompatible horizons.

21. Ibid., 80.
22. Ibid., 244.

The Nature of Religion

Many scholars have questioned the nature of religion. Some academics claim that there is no normative approach to any field of study, proposing a value-free approach to religious phenomena, and understanding religious performances solely from a rigorous historical and sociological narrative perspective. Such a critique yields examples of enormous sanctity within a religious community or, alternatively, examples of violence (persecutions, violent crusades, witch hunts, and ethnic cleansing), all under the banner of religion. These descriptive sociologies often identify religiously motivated violent acts without investigating the broader how and why of their emergence and survival, and without investigating the value-laden presuppositions operative in the mind of the researcher that affect his or her research. These issues raise questions as to the relationship between theology and the social and human sciences that are, however, beyond the scope of this work.[23]

From a descriptive point of view, nevertheless, one could state that there are many examples of religious agents who continue to use violence in dealing with other people or who turn to violent sacred texts to justify the religious claims of their actions. From a normative point of view, I will argue that genuine religion actively works to reduce violence in the world through self-giving love and service. Nor can social scientists simply accept evil as part of the way groups and societies function. Theology draws the problem of evil in both its social and cultural manifestations to the attention of the social and human scientist, and identifies a supernatural solution to evil that goes beyond the knowledge that these sciences can offer. This normative vision can be shown to be internally consistent with the claims of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam and ultimately must be radically contrasted to any violence-riddled descriptive account of religion.

With regard to the nature of religion, on one side of the debate, there are scholars such as William T. Cavanaugh who argue against substantive, essentialist, and functionalist understandings of religion, concluding that there is "no transhistorical or transcultural concept of religion" and that all religion must be assessed according to its historical particularity alone.[24] Cavanaugh rightly emphasizes the importance of historical data in any understanding of the link between religion and violence and warns us against totalizing discourses about religion founded in power relations, especially when the discourse is provided by the state.[25]

23. On this relationship, see Ormerod, "Dialectical Engagement"; Baum, "Remarks of a Theologian."

24. Cavanaugh, *Myth of Religious Violence*, 59, 101–18.

25. Ibid., 119–22.

Other scholars have taken an approach that looks for "family resemblances" or dimensions across a range of religious expressions, preferring to ask the question: What categories can be used to systematize our experience of religion across various traditions?[26] This phenomenological approach takes the empirical method of the sciences as its starting point. One example of the latter is the work of Ninian Smart. He examines religion through the lens of seven dimensions: the practical and ritual; the experiential and emotional; the narrative and mythic; the doctrinal and philosophical; the ethical and legal; the social and institutional; and the material.[27] Smart's approach insightfully draws attention to the full scope of these dimensions rather than focus simply on ritual, myths, and doctrines, as is usually the case. The oversight of his approach, however, is a decision not to prioritize the existential dimension that is concerned with religious commitment, thereby not allowing for the possibility of distinguishing authentic and inauthentic religious observance. The attempt to use the empirical methods of the natural sciences in the social and human sciences thus also overlooks the fact that in the human sciences the researcher studies subjects in such a way that meaning and value become operative in both the research and the researcher. As Johnston notes, Smart's scheme could be helped by the further dimension of wisdom, which favors the synthesis of all the dimensions and allows for a greater coherence among them.[28]

Lonergan, by contrast, has a distinctive approach to the nature of genuine religion. For him, authentic religion, which begins in God's love for us, and moves us to love God and others, becomes a God-given fulfillment to the thrust of human consciousness.[29] Lonergan comes from the horizon of a Catholic theologian and philosopher within a Western tradition concerned to explain the manner by which the doctrines of the Catholic Church actually shape both a search for God, values and truth, and pastoral actions for Christian people. Lonergan sees the shift from theology to religious studies as part of a general cultural shift from classicist culture to an historically minded culture; from the first enlightenment, where religion was judged to be superstitious, to the second enlightenment, where religion is purged of inauthenticity, so that subjects may be known not only abstractly by nature,

26. This phrase is used by Ludwig Wittgenstein. See his *Philosophical Investigations*, sections 66 and 67.

27. Smart, *World's Religions*, 10–25.

28. Johnston, "Whatever Happened to Doctrine?," 184.

29. Lonergan, *Method*, 244, and 338: "What sublates goes beyond what is sublated, introducing something new and distinct, yet so far from interfering with the sublated or destroying it, on the contrary needs it, preserves all its proper features and properties, and carries them forward to a fuller realisation within a richer context."

but also concretely by history, not only by what we are but also by what we do.[30] The nature of religion is therefore appropriated by a shift from the realm of theory to the realms of interiority and transcendence (discussed in greater detail in chapter 3) in such a way that the inquirer can distinguish between Cavanaugh's emphasis on the historical context, Smart's phenomenological approach to religion, and Lonergan's theological approach to religion. Within this shift, Lonergan's notion of religion, though coming out of the Catholic Christian tradition, is not explicitly or even necessarily Christian. His notion places the emphasis on religious self-transcendence, being in love in an unrestricted manner, the experience of religious faith, the importance of religious conversion, and the difference between religious faith and belief.

Historicity and Dialectic

The notions of historicity and dialectic are crucial to Lonergan and these will be discussed in greater depth in chapter 3. However, for the moment, it is worth noting that any solution to religiously motivated violence demands that the inquirer analyze the historical context and identify the set of conditions that may have influenced the violent decisions of religious agents. History as the ongoing change in human affairs is central to Lonergan's approach since history is what we make of ourselves.[31] The historian's concern is "what was going forward," which may have been "development or . . . the handing on of development and each of these may be . . . complete or . . . incomplete."[32] Such events are the product of religious, personal, cultural, and social influences from the past impacting on the subject's horizon and setting about anticipations for the future. Lonergan is committed to exposing the flaws in an ahistorical orthodoxy within traditions, since the shapers of history must be men and women of authenticity and self-transcendence, whether through the cognitional performance of articulating theology or through the dramatic performance of living a good life.

Lonergan uses two notions of dialectic: the first concerns the historical interplay of drivers of development that underlie the actual moral growth of persons and communities, and the second, more analytic notion, brings out competing and divergent positions. Dialectic in the first sense notes that development is constituted by a tension between linked but opposed

30. Riley, "Theology and/or Religious Studies," 120; Lonergan, *Lonergan Reader*, 562–65.

31. Lonergan, *Third Collection*, 170.

32. Ibid., 180.

principles or drivers of development within persons, cultures, and communities.[33] As Dunne states, "a dialectical model of moral development will anticipate that the community will be a moving, concrete resultant of the mutual conditioning of these . . . drivers."[34] Yet given that any historical community is a mixture of authenticity and inauthenticity, it is only through a mutual disclosure of a person's feelings, questioning, thinking, and valuing that conflicting differences between people can be identified. This process is dialectic in the second sense, functioning to bring to light each person's stance, seeking to articulate conflicts between contrary orientations. These conflicts may be found in research, interpretations, histories, styles of evaluation, and ultimately doctrines, systems, and policies within religious traditions, as well as in conflicts between religious traditions and secular traditions, and in what would constitute an authentic tradition of religious and moral progress.[35]

It is also important to acknowledge a dialectical relation between the mentality of the religious subject and the social and cultural values in society, recognizing that individual development can condition social development, and historical development can condition individual development. Lonergan is committed to exploring historical consciousness and the manner by which persons, cultures, and communities interrelate with one another to provide a solution to the problems of human living.[36] Solutions need to take account of the mutual conditioning between cultural and social influences in such a way that cultures of integrity require a social infrastructure and, at the same time, social infrastructure requires cultural integrity. There is a tension between the "microhorizon of the individual" and the "macrohorizon of the community," and a tension within the community itself between bonds of connection and practical intelligence.[37] Finally, the subject's self-transcendence must negotiate not only a complicated set of conditions within the human situation but also the human situation itself, between finitude and the infinite.[38]

33. Lonergan, *Insight*, 242.
34. Dunne, *Doing Better*, 175.
35. Lonergan, *Method*, 235.
36. Lonergan, *Third Collection*, 169–83.
37. McPartland, *Philosophy of Historical Existence*, 56–64.
38. Ibid., 66.

Dialectic and the Scale of Values

Lonergan asserts that our historical existence is founded on our natural duties to society and one another through a stance of mutual care guided by a hierarchy or scale of values. This hierarchy of values is the basis for a greater explanatory account of history through postulating the dialectic within the subject, culture, and community; the interrelationship between the various levels of the scale; and an acknowledgment of the two vectors, of creativity and of healing, in human history.[39] I will also explore this account of history in greater detail in chapter 3.

Dialectic represents the tension between limitation and transcendence within each level of the scale, where self-transcendence is an ongoing negotiation of this tension to a higher integration. When the tension is broken, the result is a failure to achieve self-transcendence. Robert Doran gives an explanatory account of humankind's making of history by providing a theological theory of history that helps identify progress, decline, and restoration in persons, cultures, and communities. Lonergan and Doran's notion of dialectic will be important to understanding the creative tensions within the dialectic of community, culture, and persons; how violence can give rise to a failure in integrity; and how integrity is restored to human communities through attending to the healing vector in the scale of values.[40]

Conclusion

The insights adumbrated above form my justification for choosing Lonergan's thought to address the questions of how and why violence and religious imagination combine. In the next chapter, I will give a selective literature review that explores religiously motivated violence.

39. Lonergan, *Third Collection*, 100–9; Doran, "Suffering Servant"; Doran, "Analogy of Dialectics" ; Doran, *Dialectics of History*, 93–107; Lonergan, *Method*, 31–32.

40. Lonergan, *Insight*, 269.