

LONERGAN AND BEING A BISHOP

I would like to express my sincere thanks to Seton Hall and The Maryvale Institute for inviting me to speak today at this prestigious Conference. The title is *Lonergan and Being a Bishop*. The paper is divided into two sections: first, Background, in which I will mention four autobiographical moments, then, Foreground, in which some initiatives currently taking shape in the Diocese of Portsmouth will be discussed.

1. Background

The first autobiographical moment to mention was as a student for the priesthood, studying philosophy at Allen Hall, the Westminster diocesan seminary in Chelsea. It was 1978, the year of the three popes, an exciting time for the Church as many of the post-Vatican II reforms continued to roll in. It was also the era when the original series of *Star Trek* was being superseded by *The Next Generation* and often after a Mass, in which the priest had been experimenting with a liturgical norm, one of my fellow-students would ruefully comment: ‘Well, Phil, that was Mass, but not as we know it!’ In those first years, we studied under two very different lecturers: Fr. Tony O’Sullivan, who delivered the principle tracts (anthropology, epistemology and metaphysics) and Dr. John Kelly, a young family man from the University of London, who taught history of philosophy, logic and ethics but from a decidedly analytical perspective. The two men inhabited parallel universes, and as students we often thought that an intellectual encounter between them would have been fascinating.

In class, Tony O’Sullivan introduced us to *Insight*.¹ He had us read the first chapter on the activity of insight, parts of chapters two and three on empirical method, the notion of judgement in chapters nine and ten, chapter eleven on the self-affirmation of the knower – we spent ages on that – extracts from chapters twelve to fifteen on epistemology and metaphysics, and also parts of chapters nineteen and twenty on ethics and the existence of God. Occasionally, he supplemented this with other articles, including some of Lonergan’s essays in *A Second Collection*.² Lonergan himself was alive at the time – he died in 1984 – and O’Sullivan delighted in trying to communicate to us something of the novelty of what Lonergan was proposing vis-à-vis the Neo-Scholastic tradition. He also suggested possible ways in which Lonergan’s thought might be able to enter into critical dialogue with Kant and post-Kantian thought, notably with Heidegger.

Ours was a big year, twenty-three students, although most were not especially interested in philosophy. As one rather drolly put it, he had not come to seminary to become a philosopher, but a priest; theology would be useful, but not philosophy. Interestingly, two years later, when the cycle of theology began, that same student was saying he had not come to seminary to be a theologian! However, three or four of us,

¹ B. Lonergan *Insight. A Study of Human Understanding* (London, Longmans: 1958). All of Lonergan’s works are currently being published by University of Toronto Press (UTP) in their projected twenty-five volume series *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan* (henceforth referred to as ‘CWL’ with volume number). *Insight* is CWL 3 (UTP: 1992)

² B. Lonergan *A Second Collection. Papers by Bernard J. F. Lonergan SJ*. Edited by W. Ryan and B. Tyrrell (London, Darton, Longman and Todd: 1974).

plus a few others from up the house, caught the ‘bug’ and, on the nights we could, we would troop off to the Kings Head and Eight Bells for a beer and an argument. Two of the group were Marxists and fascinated with liberation theology; another admired Heidegger; one was a traditional Thomist, whereas I was increasingly persuaded by what Tony O’Sullivan was presenting. Unlike what Lonergan once said of teaching theology under impossible conditions in Rome, this in Chelsea was doing philosophy under ideal conditions: with a pint of beer.³ In all those discussions at the Kings Head, I’m not sure how well I understood Lonergan, but I did become an expert on real ale!

Much of the material O’Sullivan offered appeared bewildering, even impenetrable, but, given the need to build up some ammunition for the Kings Head, it seemed a good idea to attend as carefully as possible to what was being said in the lectures. After all, it was a matter of self-defence. Heidegger’s thought, admittedly, seemed quite serviceable for theology and Karl Rahner had moved in that direction. John MacQuarrie’s recently reissued *Principles of Christian Theology* was a good read.⁴ I also found myself at one with the leftist position of the Marxists and their focus on social justice and structural change. This seemed authentic. But more troublesome was the glib application of the Marxist dialectic to theology and to the life of the Church. The Marxist students would sit in the pub dividing the Church, and even the seminary, into left-wingers and right-wingers, combining this with an anarchist and subversive streak that ultimately sought an overthrow of the Christian tradition. Unsurprisingly these students, of their own accord, eventually left the seminary, but they did raise for me perplexing questions: Is it better to be on the left-wing or the right-wing? How far might political categories be applied to theology and to the mystery of the Church? What constitutes the unity of the Church and how much pluralism is possible? How could the Church survive all this without being torn apart?

At this time, I discovered for myself *Method in Theology*⁵ and later, when more familiar with it and its two phases – we might call them ‘retrieval’ and ‘engagement’ – I came to the conviction that Lonergan was able to offer Catholic theology a sound and more comprehensive alternative. Those who glibly divide the Church along Marxist lines - or historicist lines, such as pre- and post-Vatican II - espouse a ‘football-match’ theology, in which one team plays against another. Lonergan on the other hand envisages theology as a “framework for collaborative creativity”⁶, which suggests to me that a better image for theology would be orienteering or mountaineering. For this, everyone has to collaborate, to contribute their experiences, insights, judgments and skills, to listen and learn as well as to give and advise.

Tony O’Sullivan used to say that the best way into theology was to become apprenticed to a theologian: choose a good one and follow them. It was good advice and when transferred to the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome for theology in the early 1980s I kept reading more and more, and eventually wrote a licentiate dissertation on *Lonergan and Interreligious Dialogue*. Gerald O’Collins was the director. This is the second autobiographical moment to mention, for I began to read secondary literature on Lonergan such as Fred Crowe’s *The Lonergan Enterprise* and a helpful essay by William Van Roo in *Gregorianum* called ‘Lonergan’s Method in

³ “I taught theology for twenty five years under impossible conditions” in answer to Questions after ‘Lecture 1: Philosophy of God’ in CWL 17, 174: cf. ‘Insight Revisited’ in *A Second Collection* 276

⁴ J. MacQuarrie *Principles of Christian Theology. Second Edition* (London, SCM: 1977).

⁵ B. Lonergan *Method in Theology* (London, Darton, Longman and Todd: 1974), henceforth referred to as *Method*.

⁶ *Method* xi.

Theology'.⁷ In Rome, two issues arose. First, how can the Christian faith remain always the same, yet vary, change and develop? What is permanently true and what is changeable? What is the difference between the doctrines of the Church and the systematic theology, which unpacks their meaning for us today? The underlying issue here was about history in theology, a fascinating question, and one, years later I wrote about in a doctoral dissertation on *Newman, Lonergan and Doctrinal Development*. At the Greg, the river generally flowed in the same direction despite a multiplicity of lecturers. Nevertheless each teacher adopted their own method and their own approach. Consequently for some of us, theology began to feel internally fragmented, and in some respects disconnected from the Church's wider pastoral life, as well as her liturgy and spiritual life. How do all the different parts of theology hang together within an overall vision? How does Scripture, which we pursued with the historical-critical methods, relate to the tracts we were being given on sacramental theology? How does theology relate to prayer, spirituality and the liturgy? Again *Method in Theology* seemed to offer a refuge, a way forward, a mechanism for unifying the various specialisms within theology whilst at the same time contextualising theology within religion, spirituality and a morally converted Christian life.

To continue, the third autobiographical moment to mention was after ordination as a priest. I had a number of appointments: parish priest, a full-time hospital chaplain and later university chaplain in Cambridge. In the 1980s and in the '90s, the Decade of Evangelisation, it became clearer on the ground that there was a sharply growing rift between Christian faith and the new secular culture emerging. This is of course now very evident in our society. In the North of England, this was a time of rapid change in traditional family values and decline in religious practice, and as the era of Margaret Thatcher gave way to that of John Major, of increasing affluence and busyness. In all this, Lonergan's account of the cultural shift from classicism to historical-mindedness, particularly some of the principal essays in *A Second Collection*, acted as a kind of hermeneutical key to this newer shift from modernity to postmodernity. God, central to the classical way of life, was now largely absent from contemporary culture: from modern science, the natural sciences and the human and applied sciences, from modern scholarship, from the arts and entertainment, from business and media, and from vast swathes of everyday life. Why was this? How should the relationship between Christian faith and a pluralist, secular culture be structured? Does the Church have its own culture and, if so, how should that be sustained? Were there any remedies? Many of these questions Lonergan considers in the essays of *Collection*, *A Second Collection*, and *A Third Collection*, and also in the more recently published *Philosophical and Theological Papers 1965-80*.⁸ The interrelationship of faith and culture surely remains the key modality in which all contemporary Christian thought must be pursued, if the Church is to carry out her mission to the peoples of 21C.

The last autobiographical moment was the twelve years I spent on the staff of the seminary, St. Mary's College Oscott, as Director of Studies, Lecturer in Fundamental Theology and a formator, responsible for assisting students to discern their vocation. Over the last two decades, seminaries have been transformed by the directives of John Paul II's Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, on the formation of priests, which outlines the four dimensions of formation: intellectual, spiritual, pastoral and

⁷ F. Crowe *The Lonergan Enterprise* (Cambridge MA, Cowley Publications: 1980) and W. Van Roo 'Lonergan's Method in Theology' *Gregorianum* (March 1974) 99-150.

⁸ See B. Lonergan *Collection* (CWL 4: 1988), *Philosophical and Theological Papers 1965-1980* (CWL 17: 2004), and *A Third Collection. Papers by Bernard J. F. Lonergan* edited by F. Crowe (London, Geoffrey Chapman: 1985).

human.⁹ In a seminary, Lonergan's thought would prove invaluable. First, his vision of theology as a dynamic, interrelated enterprise clarifies the tasks, resists excessive demands and curbs totalitarian ambitions among teaching staff, who invariably believe their own subject to be the most important.¹⁰ Moreover, having a sense of the whole enables the Director of Studies to structure the curriculum with a view to coherence, meeting the Church's requirements for priestly formation whilst doing so in the light of modern scholarship and the questions of contemporary culture. As Lonergan puts it, "theology mediates between a cultural matrix and the significance and role of a religion in that matrix."¹¹ But secondly, even more important is Lonergan's cognitional and volitional analysis, the four (or five) levels and the three (or four) conversions, his holistic and comprehensive account of the intentional human subject. This not only situates the intellectual programme within a context but, more basically, directs formators to give due consideration to the head, the will and the heart. How should the formation of priests be undertaken today? How does the curriculum fit within a programme for authentic human and Christian development? How do the four areas of formation interrelate? It is hard to imagine a more useful tool for programming a student's progress than Lonergan's account of conversion.

These various autobiographical moments I mention in order to shew how Lonergan's philosophy, his critical realism, his account of human subjectivity and his method in theology has offered a constant 'steer' throughout my life as a seminarian and priest. As with any truly great thinker, his work requires enormous effort and I have yet to explore adequately his early writings, his Christology and Trinitarian theology, and his economics. Lonergan's approach is radical in the original meaning of that word from *radix*, root; he offers a global architecture; his method provides a broad range of tools. Certainly, among other things, I would note his concern with methodology, his sense of a broad, historical sweep, his focus on the totality of the operations of the human subject, his exploration of feelings and their function in judgments of value, his commitment to authenticity and the reversal of counter-positions, his outline of horizon, conversion and breakdown, his differentiation of the realms of meaning, his method for theology as retrieval of Tradition and creative engagement with culture, his proposed restructuring of theology to enter into critical conversation with contemporary science and scholarship, and his thoughts on progress, decline and the redemptive role of religion in human living. I am most grateful to Boston College for two post-doctoral fellowships that have given an opportunity for further studies, to write and publish, and to explore practical applications to an otherwise busy priestly life, involved with people and pastoral concerns.

2. Foreground

I now wish to move from Background to Foreground, to say a word about developments in the Diocese of Portsmouth and in particular the recent reorganisation of our diocesan pastoral administration, the curia.

Because the Diocese had been running at a financial loss, our Trustees under the previous bishop implemented an institutional review. This has enabled me as the new Bishop to redesign the administration and to explore new fields of mission. Dioceses have often imitated business corporations, adopting hierarchical structures that devolve power to departmental heads, who then perform the necessary tasks. A

⁹ John Paul II *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (London, CTS: 1992): see especially 43-59

¹⁰ See *Method* 136-138

¹¹ *Method* xi

diocesan curia can often end up like an ecclesiastical civil service. The intention here, however, is to shift from this mentality of 'devolved authority performing tasks' to small teams discussing and devising policies and strategies. This is why I have taken to calling the new structure - borrowing that phrase from Lonergan's *Method* - a 'Framework for Collaborative Creativity'.

The theological vision that inspires the new Framework seeks to acknowledge the paradigm shift the Church is currently undergoing as Catholicism enters the 21C and 22C. This epochal shift is caused by both external and internal factors: *externally* by the world we are living in, the culture the Church is passing through, and *internally* by developments within the Church herself. Contemporary culture is globalised, pluralist and secular, that is, post-Christian. This new culture, with its scientific, technological and medical advances, is full of potential for human betterment, yet religiously indifferent, and in many ways toxic to both the natural law and to traditional Christian faith and values. Internally within the Church, the renewal that began at the start of 20C, that flourished in the new movements leading to and from the Second Vatican Council, and that was put into place during the pontificates of John Paul II and Benedict XVI, is bringing about a new era. It is the shift from a maintenance-institutional understanding of the Church to a more missionary-minded approach. We might call the new paradigm 'Evangelistic Catholicism.'¹² In history, the Church has passed through different eras and taken a different form in each: the Early Church, the Patristic era, the mediaeval period, High-Scholasticism, and then the Counter-Reformation or Tridentine era leading to Vatican II. Now, in this first half of the Third Millennium, the transition to Evangelistic Catholicism is taking shape, especially among the young.

Central to Evangelistic Catholicism is its focus on evangelisation: the belief that Christ has come to save every person on earth and that the Holy Spirit is already at work in people's hearts wooing them towards Christ and His Church. However, with the emergence of secular culture, the classical methods of evangelisation are failing. For many people, if they request them, Baptism, Confirmation and First Holy Communion, marriages and funerals, have become Rites of Passage. They drift away or they never practise; sacramentalised but unevangelised, they are without, it seems, a life-giving relationship with Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist. What is needed, John Paul II famously said, is a new evangelisation (NE), an evangelisation "new in its ardour, new in its methods and new in its expression."¹³

NE is not a new scheme or a new programme. As JP2 put it:

"We are certainly not seduced by the naive expectation that, faced with the great challenges of our time, we shall find some magic formula. No, we shall not be saved by a formula but by a Person, and the assurance which he gives us: I am with you!"¹⁴

So not a programme but a Person, Jesus Christ. Moreover, like all evangelisation, NE is essentially a two-way movement: *ad intra* and *ad extra*. It means Christians themselves being evangelized, a life-long process; and reaching out to others (*ad extra*) to propose to them the Person of Christ and his Gospel. In speaking of new ardour, new methods and new expressions, JP2 suggests the need to be street-savvy, keenly aware of the new culture going forward and of the Church's countercultural

¹² George Weigel prefers to call it 'evangelical Catholicism': see G. Weigel *Evangelical Catholicism. Deep Reform in the 21st Century Church* (New York, Basic Books: 2013).

¹³ John Paul II *Address to CELAM 9th March 1983*. English trans. in *Origins* 12 (24 March 1983) 659-62, at 661

¹⁴ John Paul II *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (London, CTS: 2001) 29.

presence within it. Moreover, there is a need to shift from an ecclesio-centric to a Christocentric world-view (more on the Lord of the Church and less on the Church of the Lord); and as Christian disciples, the need to be authentic.

The new pastoral administration of the Diocese of Portsmouth seeks to reflect this paradigm-shift from Tridentine Catholicism to Evangelistic Catholicism and the call to New Evangelisation. The Framework is theologically grounded on Christ and his three-fold office as Priest, Prophet and King, the triple *munera* of sanctifying, teaching and shepherding. Consequently, there are now three Vicariates (Vocation, Education and Evangelisation), each divided into two Departments, led by a priest, deacon, religious or layperson: Vocation and Clergy, Schools and Educational Chaplaincies, Finance and New Evangelisation. Each Department incorporates groups of team-activities and the Department of New Evangelisation contains a number of activities that might be deemed 'Lonerganian.' This Department includes the promotion of justice, peace and social responsibility, the charities of the diocese, media communications, the formation of children and adults for mission, and the dialogues with fellow-Christians and with the other religions. It will also include some innovative elements: a Social Policy Unit to study demographic and social trends, a New Evangelisation Think-Tank which will act as the Diocesan Pastoral Council and seek new ways to communicate the Gospel, a Dialogue With The Cultural Sectors Group to network Catholics in the various professions - medicine, media, business, education etc. - for formation and fellowship, and to bring the Catholic Tradition into critical conversation with the thinking of those sectors, and a 'Court of the Gentiles,' a forum in which Christians can dialogue with non-believers and others of good will. I believe common ground for this could be found in the Church's social teaching.

The chief mission of the laity is always to sanctify and transform the world, yet in the new structure, these diocesan teams will be lay-led. Direction and policy will be shaped by the Bishop and clergy, notably the Bishop's Council, and other bodies such as the Deans and Co-ordinating Pastors Meeting, but the teams themselves will be formed of groups of interested, skilled and committed laity. This means that the spiritual, moral and intellectual formation and conversion of team-members is critical for it will be their task to form the people they serve, and to devise authentic policies and strategies for action. As a consequence, it is envisaged that at least a quarter of the time given to a meeting, more in the earlier stages, will be devoted to prayer, to the study of Scripture and an appropriate magisterial document or position-paper, and to discussion of its meaning, value and application to the work of the team.

The most challenging aspect of this cultural change in the Diocese, is to communicate the spirit of the new structure, which is not a set of devolved responsibilities in the civil service, but rather collaborative and creative team-work to encourage reflection and discussion, to devise projects and strategies, and to facilitate practical action. The model envisages the Church as a band of disciples, of committed support-groups. Teams will need to be formed of people able effectively to work together, with orthodox team-players, rather than dialectically opposed lone-rangers. Those who serve must have a deep commitment to Christ, with a desire to make the new Framework work, for the good of the mission of the Diocese.

Four features from Lonergan are being presented to the teams: first, a simplified presentation of Lonergan's analysis of the human subject as a knower (oriented towards truth), a do-er (oriented towards the good), and a lover (oriented towards happiness and ultimately towards God). This brings out the four levels of

consciousness, and the fact that authentic judgments and decisions can only be made if all the data is taken into account and all possible hypotheses aired.

Secondly: the three conversions, in their single and multiple combinations, from below up and from above down. In policy-making, due attention must be given to each. Thus, for instance, adult formation must attend to doctrinal formation and catechesis (intellectual), to the way the Gospel is lived out personally and socially (moral), and to the expression of the love for God in prayer and worship (spiritual).

Thirdly, dialectics. In teamwork, differences often arise: complimentary viewpoints or different ways of looking at the same thing, genetic differences representing earlier and later positions along the same line of development, and dialectical differences, radically opposed fundamental positions about what constitutes truth, goodness and love. In the Church, differences can arise over doctrine, life and worship: for instance, about the nature of authority, the demands of sexual morality, or the celebration of the sacred liturgy. Most of these differences tend to be complimentary or genetic and team-leaders have the delicate task of maintaining good feelings, proposing data and hypotheses that opposing sides may not have taken into account, and creating strategies that enable the team to move forward. Dialectical differences are, of course, more problematic since these can be resolved only by conversion, God's grace working leading to an often-painful reversal of a counter-position. This is why prayer, a context of willing change, and the study of Scripture and Church doctrine are integral to team-meetings.

And fourthly, a template for problem-solving and decision-making has been devised based on the four levels of human desire. This will be issued to each Vicariate, Department and team. Phase One is called 'Exploring the Data, Interpreting the Situation, Coming up with Ideas' in which the team is invited to discuss how to deal with an issue, the time-frame for a decision, who needs to be involved and who will be affected, the context and range of factors, all the possible ideas and solutions, and how to measure and evaluate an application. Phase Two is called 'Judging What is Best, Deciding on a Plan, Implementing a Strategy' and teams are invited to explore what options might be available, their pros and cons, the best plan, the people and processes involved in enactment, how to communicate the decision, the support of anyone negatively affected and the review processes further down the line (when and who). Between the two Phases is a time for prayer and reflection, with the aim of discerning the Lord's will.

This new diocesan Framework, its elements, its processes, its spirit, will take a long time to establish. It seeks to provide the Diocese with the flexibility needed to respond to the new cultural context and the call to NE. It is our hope that over the next years, the clergy and people of the Diocese will be able to undertake the conversions needed, as Lonergan put it in the first Preface to *Insight*, to "mount to the level of the times".¹⁵

Conclusion

So to conclude. In an essay he wrote in 1965, Lonergan once said: "Our time is a time for profound and far-reaching creativity. The Lord be with us all"¹⁶. To sum up what Lonergan means for a Bishop, I would say he offers an *organon*, a mental, practical

¹⁵ For reference, see F. Crowe *Lonergan* (London, Geoffrey Chapman: 1992) 30.

¹⁶ B. Lonergan 'Existenz and Aggiornamento' in *Collection* (CWL 4) 231

and spiritual organising-tool that fosters authenticity and creativity. These are qualities, I would argue, everyone needs for human flourishing. They are surely qualities needed too if the Diocese of Portsmouth is to face the exciting challenges ahead. May the Lord be with us all. Indeed, may the prayers of our diocesan patrons, Mary Immaculate and St. Edmund, obtain for us the gifts of the Holy Spirit. And as we reflect on the call to new evangelisation, I pray that each one of us here may come to a deeper knowledge, service and love of Jesus Christ, finding *in Corde Iesu*, that true, genuine, lasting human happiness and fulfilment for which we long.