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Vatican II and Intellectual Conversion: Engaging the Struggle Within

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In 1980 I took a course with Joseph Komonchak entitled “The History and Theology of Vatican II” at the Catholic University of America. True to the title, Komonchak was doing history and theology together at the same time on a class-by-class basis. He would bring in documents from the Council and from the times leading up to it, often in Latin, and he would talk about how his goals as a theologian required him to work in a historical manner. To understand Vatican II, or the Church itself for that matter, required not just understanding theological concepts but also grasping them in their historical context. Komonchak emphasized how James Gustafson brought out in *Treasure in Earthen Vessels* that the divinely instituted Church is lived out as an historical and social reality.¹ The response of human beings to God’s gracious offer is not only continually empowered by God but also truly free and subject to limitations and sin. The Church is simultaneously holy and always in need of reform and renewal. To study the Church requires that theologians attend to its various dimensions, including both those divinely instituted and those humanly lived out.

Komonchak’s course had a lasting impact on my work as a theologian. Although he rarely mentioned Lonergan in that course, I had heard that he was a “Lonerganian.” It was not until many years later that I read articles by him on Lonergan and ecclesiology.² In retrospect, I can see that the connections between Lonergan and what Komonchak was doing in that course were thick and deep. I had absolutely no idea at that time that ecclesiology would become my own area of theological specialization,

¹ See James Gustafson, *Treasure in Earthen Vessels: The Church as a Human Community* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961).

² See Joseph A. Komonchak, *Foundations in Ecclesiology*, Supplementary Issue of the *Lonergan Workshop Journal*, vol. 11, ed. Fred Lawrence (Boston: Boston College, 1995). Three of the eight essays in this work had initially been published in 1981 and one in 1988. The other four essays stemmed from lectures given in 1975.

nor that Bernard Lonergan would become the subject of my dissertation as well as the great influence on my own intellectual development.

In an “Editorial Note” at the beginning of *Foundations in Ecclesiology*, Fred Lawrence identifies Komonchak as one occupying what Lonergan famously called the “perhaps not numerous center,” that is neither the “solid right that is determined to live in a world that no longer exists” nor the “the scattered left, captured by now this, now that new possibility.”³ The present situation of the Catholic Church in North America and Europe is one of division into intellectual camps, and the interpretation of the Second Vatican Council serves as one of the main battlefields around which we assemble. One of the key issues regards how we deal with change. How do we understand the relationship between continuity and discontinuity? In this essay I draw upon Lonergan in order to understand something of the debate about continuity and change at Vatican II and how that debate plays out across the spectrum of theological stances. My main point of focus is on what Lonergan called intellectual conversion.⁴ A consideration of intellectual conversion will help us to think about precisely this issue of continuity and change in the teaching and reception of Vatican II.⁵ In this essay I am adding my own twist to “intellectual conversion” by the way in which I emphasize how it calls for one to engage in the struggle within.⁶

In 1982 I had a personal encounter with Bernard Lonergan. I was living in Columbus, Ohio at the time. My dissertation involved a comparison between Lonergan and Wilfred Cantwell Smith on the topic of faith, belief, and truth.⁷ Both of them were in Boston in 1982. I wrote to each of them requesting a meeting on a certain day on which I planned to travel to Boston myself. Smith agreed at once. Then one

³ Komonchak, *Foundations*, iii.

⁴ A fuller discussion of “conversion” in Lonergan would explore the threefold dimensions of conversion as religious, moral, and intellectual, as well as the interrelationship among them. See Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Seabury, 1972), 237-44. See also Komonchak’s discussion of conversion in *Foundations*, 43-45; 97-98; 180-81.

⁵ The body of this paper was given as a lecture at the Lonergan Workshop at Boston College, June 15, 2014. It builds upon several contributions made at the 2012 Lonergan Workshop, especially those by Michael Vertin, “‘On Insight: Introductory’”; Richard Liddy, “Vatican II and Intellectual Conversion;” and John Dadosky, “‘A Leap Forward’: Mutuality, Authenticity, Collegiality and the Significance of Vatican II.”

⁶ Komonchak discusses Lonergan’s “existentialist thrust” as well of his focus on “authenticity” in *Foundations*, 98-99.

⁷ See Dennis M. Doyle, “The Distinction between Faith and Belief and the Question of Religious Truth: The Contributions of Wilfred Cantwell Smith and Bernard Lonergan,” (PhD diss., Catholic University of America, 1984).

morning when I was in the shower my wife announced that Father Lonergan was on the phone. I went to the phone dripping wet and said, “Hello, Fr. Lonergan.” He replied, “The topic which you have chosen for your dissertation is unworkable for two reasons. First, what Smith means by faith and what I mean by faith are two entirely different things. By “faith” Smith means the faith of the Enlightenment scientists in the eighteenth century. My own meaning of faith is drawn more from Thomas Aquinas. Second, I have not written enough about faith and belief in my own work for anyone to imagine that they could possibly write an entire dissertation about it.” I said, “But Father Lonergan, my committee approved my dissertation topic a year ago and I’ve been working on it all this time.” He said, “Well, that is my opinion.” I replied, “Fr. Lonergan, thank you for your opinion.” He responded, “No charge.”

I called a few of my teachers over the next few days. They all said that I couldn’t let it end that way. So when I arrived in Boston one morning I made my way to St. Mary’s Hall at Boston College and asked if I could speak with Fr. Lonergan, and they gave me his phone number. I called him from a pay phone on the first floor. When I said I was in Boston and asked him if I could meet with him that day, his voice sounded a little relieved, maybe a little repentant. He arranged to meet with me later that evening. He had no idea that I was standing in his building, and I did not tell him.

So, I took the train over to Harvard to meet with Smith, who was very gracious to me, and then went back to St. Mary’s that evening to meet with Lonergan. He was perhaps just slightly gruff at first, but after I explained to him that my main focus was on the question of religious truth, and that perhaps I tended to favor his positions over those of Smith, he warmed up to me. When I told him that some of my own motivations for study arose from doubts I experienced due to my interest in world religions, he said, “Ten thousand difficulties do not make one doubt.” It was not until sometime later that I learned that he was repeating to me a famous quote from John Henry Newman.⁸ Overall Fr. Lonergan was very caring and pastoral to me. He was interested not just in my technical thoughts about faith and belief in relation to truth, but also in the life-world within which my concern for this topic had been generated. In

⁸ See John Henry Newman: *Apologia pro Vita Sua: Being a History of His Religious Opinions* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1909), 264.

retrospect, I can see that he very easily moved back and forth between the realm of theory and the everyday commonsense realm. As I will explain, the ability to do this is indicative of “intellectual conversion.”

Lonergan’s description of the goal of *Insight*, “the appropriation of one’s own intellectual and rational self-consciousness,” can be used as an initial definition of intellectual conversion.⁹ It is a matter of knowing what one is doing when one is knowing. It requires a recognition of the errors associated with a naïve realism. It calls for understanding what the skeptics and relativists understand, but also for detecting the misunderstandings that prevent them from affirming themselves as knowers. Intellectual conversion results in both a theoretical and a practical grasp of how various expressions of human knowing result from the various ways in which human consciousness can be differentiated.

To engage in the struggle within requires an ability to affirm whatever can legitimately be affirmed across a wide spectrum of positions. It involves internalizing a wide range of positions. I am not putting this notion forward as a universal position suitable for all times, but rather as a contextual emphasis suitable to our current situation with its tendency toward polarization. My initial considerations will be focused on the individual, but I intend always to keep the community dimensions in mind.¹⁰

I will focus on two ways in which different forms of knowing can appear at first to be contradictory but which may turn out to be complementary. The first of these concerns the relationship between commonsense and theory.¹¹ The second concerns the relationship between classical procedures of investigation and statistical procedures of investigation. In between I will have some things to say about the subject of bias.

The commonsense realm of meaning expresses how things are related to us. The sun rises in the East. It operates more on the level of description than of explanation, though it does contain some

⁹ See Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, vol. 3, *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992 [1957]), 22.

¹⁰ Komonchak explains how Lonergan’s approach in *Insight*, though it may appear to some to be individualistic, is thoroughly grounded within a communal, social, and political framework. See *Foundations*, 17-27; 136-37.

¹¹ See Lonergan, *Insight*, 196-269 as well as *Method*, 81-85; 114-15; 120; 257-62; 265-66; 272; 304. See also Komonchak’s discussion of common sense and theory in ecclesiology in *Foundations*, 50-56.

explanations that remain rooted in understanding things as they relate to me or to my group.

Commonsense admits of a positive definition and a negative definition. Speaking positively, the commonsense realm consists in the everyday world of meaning in which we all live. It is a world of shared presuppositions, know-how, and values. What operates as commonsense differs in different times and places. Also, there are various types of commonsense connected with various everyday specializations. Not everyone in a particular time and place is privy to every specialized form of commonsense. But virtually everyone does share in a basic world of meaning that offers a common stock of knowledge and that is guided by aphorisms and proverbs. A stitch in time saves nine. Look before you leap. A nod is as good as a wink. There are some people who are said to lack commonsense. These would be people who analyze even the smallest everyday matters in a theoretical way and who can become almost paralyzed over the tiniest type of actions and decisions.

The realm of commonsense can also be defined in a negative way. It is a realm that lacks differentiation of consciousness. An initial type of differentiation of consciousness involves the move to the level of theory. The theoretical realm of meaning tries to express how things are related among themselves. It seeks what is true in an overall, more universal sense. The reason why the sun appears to rise in the East is because the earth spins on its axis as it revolves around the sun. People operating within the commonsense realm of meaning might resist or even reject what theory has to offer. Galileo did not have an easy time in garnering full support for the heliocentric understanding of our solar system. The overall tendency to resist or even reject theory is what Lonergan labels commonsense bias, also called general bias. Some people get so stuck in the realm of commonsense meaning that they refuse even to consider perspectives that in some cases represent a relatively higher viewpoint.

One of the capacities that Lonergan explicitly associates with intellectual conversion is being able to recognize commonsense and theory as expressing legitimate modes of knowing and thus being able to grasp them in a complementary fashion. It is true at the same time that the sun rises in the East and that the sun appears to rise in the East because of the spinning of the earth upon its own axis as it revolves around the sun. The sun rising in the East expresses meaning in the commonsense realm regarding things

as they relate to us. The more complex relations between the earth and the sun in a heliocentric solar system represent what we can grasp about the way in which things relate among themselves.

Commonsense bias is never a good thing but one may understand sympathetically many of its individual component causes. Europeans in the seventeenth century had good reasons to doubt Galileo. The heliocentric theory violated commonsense in several ways. This theory seemed to contradict a plain reading of sacred scripture. It offended the sense that not only is our world the center of one planetary system but also of the entire created universe. In addition, it is the case that if one leaps straight up from the ground into the air, one lands in the same place from which one started. The earth does not seem to be spinning rapidly beneath our feet when we are suspended above it.

Still, it turned out that Galileo was basically right. John Paul II even apologized for the Church's role in the Galileo affair.¹² Lonergan, however, points out one major problem with Galileo. Galileo thought that he had discovered the true reality of the relation between the sun and the earth and that the sun rising in the East is a mere appearance. It would be as though you could say to someone, if you think that the sun rises in the East, you are wrong. The sun does not really rise in the East. That is a mere appearance. According to Lonergan, however, the intellectually converted person will understand that commonsense and theory represent two distinct realms of meaning that are complementary. Galileo being right about heliocentrism does not mean that the sun doesn't rise in the East. I can watch it happen any morning that I choose, at least if it isn't too foggy. Knowing that the sun rises in the East can help me to find my way through the forest or navigate my ship. I can write a meaningful poem about it.

Lonergan named and explained four types of bias: commonsense, individual, group, and dramatic. Commonsense bias is one that resists or even rejects the realm of theory. Commonsense bias finds a way to reject systematic and long-term solutions to the problems that we face. Galileo manifested his own type of bias, though it was not one of the four that Lonergan explicitly enumerated. Still, it is

¹² See Luigi Accattoli, *When a Pope Asks Forgiveness: The Mea Culpa's of John Paul II*, trans. Jordan Aumann (New York: Alba, 1998 [1997]), 125-37.

something Lonergan described in his discussion of Galileo and in other places. I do not think he gives it a label at all, though I will call it “theoretical bias.”¹³

Theoretical bias is the use of theory to unnecessarily contradict or to diminish knowledge as it operates in the commonsense realm. It is related to a failure to be aware of the positive meaning of the commonsense realm or to acknowledge the many ways in which the commonsense realm legitimately takes priority over the realm of theory. Although knowledge is in some important ways to be pursued for its own sake, in other important ways knowledge is pursued as it is connected with the common good.¹⁴ In my judgment, theory should in many though not in all cases operate in service to the realm of commonsense. Yes, in an initial manner theory represents an advance over commonsense, a higher viewpoint. In the bigger picture, however, the commonsense realm of meaning in which we live out our everyday lives among each other retains a high level of importance that theory should support rather than detract from. Often such support comes in the form of corrections or of general shaping and molding of the commonsense world. A rationalist looks at commonsense and thinks it is bad theory. Commonsense, however, is not a theory by which we understand the world but rather the common set of understandings according to which we live together in this world.

In the twenty-first century the knowledge that the earth spins while it revolves around the sun has become part of our commonsense. Such knowledge has been around for a long time, and we are used to it. Human beings have traveled to the moon and back. All of us have seen pictures taken from outer space of the Earth against the background of other planetary objects. We have adjusted our worldview so that the heliocentric theory no longer rocks our world. What counts as commonsense and what counts as theory are somewhat relative to each other as they change over time. There are today still plenty of

¹³ John Dadosky, in conversation with Robert Doran, independently developed what he calls “intellectualist bias,” which is identical to what I am here labelling “theoretical bias.” See “Desire, Bias, and Love: Revisiting Lonergan’s Philosophical Anthropology,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 77/3: 244-64. Dadosky refers also to a related concept, that of “monomorphic bias,” articulated by Mark D. Morelli in “Common Sense from Below Upwards: Mediating Self-Correcting Folk Psychology,” *Lonergan Workshop* 15 (1999): 117–140, at 129 (available through the website: www.lonerganresource.com).

¹⁴ On page 168 of *Foundations*, Komonchak wrote, “a theology intended to serve the self-realization of the redemptive community must be conceived as a theory about a practice. It is practice and not theory that comes first.”

occasions, however, for the realms of meaning of commonsense and theory to be at odds. Intellectual conversion involves a move to the third realm of meaning, the realm of interiority.¹⁵ Getting to know something about how one's mind works gives one the ability to grasp how the realms of commonsense and theory can be understood as complementary.

One time many, many years ago I was working with a catechumenate group in my parish. One of the participants spoke of how he found the faith of Abraham, who was willing even to sacrifice his own son, to be inspiring. I remember thinking that maybe I should share with him my knowledge that Abraham probably did not exist as one historical person. I possessed the new knowledge of the historical critics, and I felt tempted to share this knowledge in such a way as to crush the commonsense realm of my fellow parishioner. Something—whether we call it the Holy Spirit or in this case maybe just commonsense—stopped me. Something saved me at that moment from what I would now label my “theoretical bias.” I just nodded my head. Yes, Abraham's faith is inspiring.

I have often come across such a theoretical bias in the academic world. The Jesus Seminar is a striking example.¹⁶ They would regularly announce their findings, which remained quite speculative to say the least, with a sensationalist flair. Jesus was a cynic philosopher; Jesus never preached the Sermon on the Mount; there was no Last Supper. Apart from the question of whether or not what they would say is true is the question of whether it is a good thing to unleash an intellectual bombardment on the commonsense world of meaning in which many people of faith dwell in everyday life. This shock and awe approach is an extreme example of what I am labeling “theoretical bias.” Those who operate with a theoretical bias lack a proper distinction between the realms of theory and of commonsense. Somewhat like the way in which one with a commonsense bias believes that everything boils down to commonsense, the person with a theoretical bias thinks that everything boils down to theory.

¹⁵ See Lonergan, *Method*, 83-85; 274-75. Lonergan adds also a fourth realm of meaning, “transcendence.”

¹⁶ See Robert W. Funk, *The Gospel of Jesus, according to the Jesus Seminar* (Salem, OR: Polebridge, 1999); for a critical approach to the work of the Jesus Seminar, see Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Real Jesus: The Misguided Quest for the Historical Jesus and the Truth of the Traditional Gospel* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996).

I came up with this label, “theoretical bias,” several years ago when I served as a theological respondent as the final speaker at a symposium on the role of the historical-critical method in the study of scripture.¹⁷ At this conference there were two camps. One group acknowledged only the most limited role that one could imagine for the historical-critical method. They would concede that there were occasions upon which this method had proved useful, but in the big picture its use tended to supplant other, more faith-filled approaches to understanding scripture. This group stressed that scripture needs to be approached from within a tradition being lived out within the context of a faith-filled community attentive to God’s saving message as expressed throughout the entire canon of scripture. They thought that when the historical-critical method takes over as the fundamental framework for scripture studies, rightful priorities are turned upside down and the result is a host of speculations built upon other speculations and so on in an infinite regress providing a stability that is somewhat like that of a house of cards.

The scholars of the other camp conceded that the historical-critical method can be misused or overused, but mainly they treated it as if it were an important functional specialty in the field of scripture studies, one that does operate as a kind of starting point. Not every scripture scholar has to either begin with or focus on historical-critical methods, but they need at least to be familiar with the results of such methods and thus presuppose them as a kind of starting point. These scholars held that different tasks in scripture studies could be performed somewhat independently of each other. Such tasks include canonical criticism as well as the history of how scripture has been received and interpreted throughout the centuries. These scholars found less of a need to provide direct fodder to theology. They held that in biblical studies, the relative autonomy of various tasks from each other as well as the distance of their discipline from the discipline of theology strengthened what they had to offer.

Now I should clarify that the people in these two groups were not completely at odds with each other. The presenters had been hand-picked as moderate and open-minded representatives of their respective viewpoints. I found a positive way to speak about their differences: they were guarding against

¹⁷ Dennis M. Doyle, “Systematic Theology’s Response to Biblical Exegesis,” unpublished paper given at a one-day symposium, “The Historical-Critical Method and Scripture, the Soul of Theology,” Mount St. Mary’s, Emmitsburg, June 23, 2006.

different forms of bias. The first group was protecting a kind of scripture-informed commonsense realm against any kind of theoretical bias. The second group was immersed in the world of theory and were guarding against any kind of commonsense bias. I find it not too difficult to turn within and find some sympathy for both of these basic concerns. That is, I can locate the struggle between these two points of view within myself. There is a dialectic taking place within me. I can move toward a higher viewpoint from which I can experience these two approaches as complementary. One group uses theory to protect the commonsense realm against theoretical bias. The other group uses theory as a way to move beyond commonsense bias. These goals, though somewhat contrasting, do not need to be placed in dire opposition.

I do not wish to deny that there are many differences that remain between these two points of view, that there may be some points concerning which their horizons are contradictory rather than complementary, and that each group may be continuing to operate with their own biases. I think, though, that the practice of intellectual conversion by which the realms of commonsense and theory can be read as complementary can provide a framework within which there is some potential for at least some degree of these groups coming to terms with each other. For there is a way in which the commonsense realm is prior to the realm of theory, but there is also a way in which after our explorations in the realm of theory we need to return to live together in the commonsense everyday realm.

Vatican II's *Dei Verbum* can be interpreted as calling for a higher viewpoint that holds together the commonsense realm of meaning with what can be known through academic study. This is not to say that the majority of those who contributed to the authoring and editing of *Dei Verbum* explicitly envisioned such a synthesis. The final text resulted from debates and compromises among groups with different theological agendas. Some of the debates revolved around the tensions between modern biblical scholarship and the historicity of the Gospels.¹⁸ Christophe Theobald reports (1) that Karl Rahner argued

¹⁸ A report of the discussions and debates behind the composition of *Dei Verbum* can be found in Ronald D. Witherup, *Scripture: Dei Verbum*. Series: Rediscovering Vatican II (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2006). See also Christophe Theobald, "The Church under the Word of God," in *History of Vatican II*, 5 volumes, Ed. Giuseppe Alberigo, English language ed. Joseph A. Komonchak (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995—2006) V, 275-362.

for a complementarity between the use of relevance for salvation as a formal criterion of truth and a viewpoint that recognizes that the material elements of the texts are relative to the culture¹⁹ and also (2) that Julius Döpfner explained how Rahner's position does not section off some parts of scripture as truth, but rather gives two points of view from which all of scripture must be interpreted. Theobald then comments, however: "In my opinion, neither the higher authorities of the Council nor a considerable part of the assembly grasped this argument, which presupposed a real conversion of mentalities."²⁰

Still, beyond what may or may not have been intended at the time, *Dei Verbum* presents its interpreters with the challenge of attaining a higher viewpoint in order to reconcile different types of knowing that result from different operations of consciousness. On the one hand, the document expressed a basic openness to contemporary methods of biblical study. It calls for careful investigation of biblical texts with special attention given to literary forms:

For truth is set forth and expressed differently in texts which are variously historical, prophetic, poetic, or of other forms of discourse. The interpreter must investigate what meaning the sacred writer intended to express and actually expressed in particular circumstances by using contemporary literary forms in accordance with the situation of his own time and culture. (#12)

Paying attention to literary forms and particular circumstances of composition, however, puts into question the historicity of various passages. For example, most biblical scholars at the time of the Council accepted that certain things depicted as being said by Jesus, such as negative comments directed toward "the Jews," most likely reflected not something that Jesus actually said but rather reflected a conflict between some Jewish and Christian communities during the times in which the gospels were composed.

On the other hand, *Dei Verbum* also declared:

Holy Mother Church has firmly and with absolute constancy held, and continues to hold, that the four Gospels just named, whose historical character the Church unhesitatingly asserts, faithfully

¹⁹Theobald, *History of Vatican II*, V, 343.

²⁰Theobald, *History of Vatican II*, V, 349.

hand on what Jesus Christ, while living among men, really did and taught for their eternal salvation until the day He was taken up into heaven. (#19)

Both this passage and the previous one are carefully phrased such that, given careful attention, they do not necessarily conflict with one another. The second passage does not say that every word that Jesus is depicted as saying was actually spoken by him. Still, there is at least on the surface some tension between an emphasis on literary forms used in particular circumstances and an emphasis on the trustworthy historical natural of the Gospels. Reconciling the different ways of knowing reflected in such passages calls for intellectual conversion.

I have been thinking about commonsense and theory for a number of years. It is just in the past couple of years that I have been thinking quite a bit about what Lonergan calls the complementarity of classical procedures of investigation and statistical procedures of investigation.²¹ The classical procedures of early modern science (Galileo, Newton) seek knowledge that is universal and that issues in iron-clad laws. In economics, there is the law of supply and demand. Markets must be allowed to run their course with as little interference as possible.

Classical procedures of investigation can work together with medieval theory (Aquinas) concerning natural law, which is based on universalizing what is true about the human person based on what we can discern of God's designs. Human beings have reason and freedom but they are also inhibited by sin. It is important that human beings be motivated to work. Social systems that follow the invariable laws of economics provide such motivations. If one is capable of working and one wants to eat, then one must work. Both medieval natural law as well as the laws of economics provided concepts that were considered to be not only accurate descriptions and explanations but also the basis for what is morally normative.

²¹ See Lonergan, *Insight*, 126-162; 327. For an analysis of Lonergan's methodology applied to economics in the context of the early twenty-first century United State, see Stephen Martin, "'Irrational Exuberance' at the Foot of the Cross: Redeeming the Rhythms of Economic Life," in *Finding Salvation in Christ: Essays on Christology and Soteriology in Honor of William P. Loewe*, eds. Christopher D. Denny and Christopher McMahon (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), 238-61.

Statistical procedures of investigation bring with them a worldview with a very different assessment of what is considered normal or normative. Statistical procedures arrive at certain standards and then measure frequencies of variations from those standards. Lonergan used the example of Keynesian economics. During the Great Depression the system guided by so-called invariable laws of economics had broken down. Keynes, using statistical analysis, theorized that some amount of deficit-spending would stimulate the economy and move in the direction of a recovery. Writing in the 1950's, Lonergan had little doubt that this statistically based approach represented a clear advance in economic theory. He compared it with the way in which Quantum Theory represented an advance over Newtonian physics.²²

Lonergan, however, did not abandon classical modes of thought. He did say that in relation to statistical procedures, classical procedures have become something new.²³ The older classical approach with its changeless norms will no longer do. Many elements of what classical procedures put forward can be measured and challenged by statistical procedures. Statistical procedures force the recognition that the results of classical procedures are abstract and that its systematic understandings cannot account for everything.

Statistical procedures involve a different type of abstraction, yet one that remains dependent upon classical procedures. Statistical procedures measure the frequency of occurrence of events and extrapolate probabilities, but these events need to be described and explained as well-formulated problems before the statistician can measure anything. These formulations are provided by classical procedures, though it is classical procedures as themselves corrected and shaped by statistical procedures. And so classical procedures of inquiry and statistical procedures of inquiry need each other. Although they represent different ways of knowing and may yield apparent contractions, in the big picture they are

²² See Lonergan, *Method*, 315.

²³ See Lonergan, *Insight*, 130.

complementary. Lonergan said that they need to be placed in a dialectical relationship that will issue in a higher viewpoint.²⁴

I was teaching *Insight* and *Method* in a course at the University of Augsburg in the 2012-13 academic year and at this point my students were begging me for examples. I want to be clear, however, that my examples represent my own attempts to apply Lonergan, and it is possible that I may be using Lonerganian terms and concepts in an idiosyncratic way.

One example I gave my students is suicide. Classical Christian thought regards suicide to be a great sin. Statistical studies going back to Durkheim reveal that rates of suicide can be correlated with other social factors.²⁵ In a *Catholic Encyclopedia* article from 1911 there is an acknowledgement that statistical studies indicate that suicide is often not simply a free act.²⁶ Still, says the author of the article, it is better not to bury one who commits suicide within the Church. The *New Catholic Encyclopedia* as it appeared after the Council has a similar argument but virtually the opposite conclusion.²⁷ In cases that involve a judgment call, it is usually better that a victim of suicide be given the benefit of the doubt and be buried inside the Church. In my judgment, what we observe in this shift is the result of a dialectic being worked out between a classical view and a more statistically-informed view. An initial stage of this dialectic was present already in 1911. Already at that time the Durkheimian perspective was beginning to be considered. The postconciliar teaching represents a more developed stage of this dialectic. Church teaching in this case is recognizing the complementarity of these two ways of knowing.

²⁴ The theme of holding various positions in a dialectical tension and arriving at a higher viewpoint runs throughout both *Insight* and *Method* as a major theme. Lonergan finds basic forms of dialectical method in Plato, Aristotle, Hegel and Marx (*Insight*, 242). Lonergan's use of the term "dialectical" is not to be confused with David Tracy's use in his well-known distinction between the "analogical" and the "dialectical." See *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981).

²⁵ See Emile Durkheim, *Suicide: a Study in Sociology*, trans. John A. Spaulding and George Simpson (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1951 [1897]).

²⁶ See Achille Vander Heeren, "Suicide," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 14 (New York: Robert Appleton, 1912). Accessed at <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14326b.htm>.

²⁷ See T.C. Kane, "Suicide," *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 13 (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), 781-83. See also the article as updated by F. Tuohey in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed. (Detroit: Thomson-Gale, 2003), 598-99.

A second example I gave my students is homosexuality. Aquinas thought that homosexual acts are not found even among animals and therefore represent an unnatural behavior lower than that of the beasts.²⁸ I am told that contemporary biology does find some examples of same-sex relation taking place among animals. My main point, here, though, is that statistics show that homosexual orientation—a complex subject with its own variations—exists as a percentage within any sizable human population. The definitions as well as the numbers are contested. But it is well-accepted that within a population of any size, a considerable percentage will have a homosexual orientation. From a statistical viewpoint, it would not be normal not to have a certain number of people with a homosexual orientation. Now what is statistically probable does not necessarily constitute what should be morally normative. No matter how many people commit suicide, most of us are not prepared to see suicide when committed as a free act as morally acceptable. In the case of homosexuality, however, it seems to me that there is being worked out a dialectic that has implications regarding moral norms. Aquinas’ natural law dismissal of homosexual acts is based upon a judgment that reflects a one-size fits all classical theory without the type of statistical perspective that might yield a more empathetic understanding of those with a homosexual orientation. A dialectic has already been working out in contemporary Catholic teaching, with the acceptance of homosexual orientation, even though labeled a disorder, as not in itself sinful, as a first step.²⁹ To begin a Catholic consideration of homosexuality with a focus on all of us being made in the image and likeness of God, all of us having a fundamental dignity as an object of God’s love, represents a radically new emphasis, the theological and moral implications of which have yet to be fully worked out.³⁰

A new development calls for a dialectic, and there is a tremendous amount of wisdom in classical approaches to the understanding of the human person and of sexuality and of moral responsibility that

²⁸ See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, Q94a3, accessed at http://www.ccel.org/ccel/aquinas/summa.FS_Q94_A3.html.

²⁹ See the letter of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons,” October 1, 1986, accessed at http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19861001_homosexual-persons_en.html.

³⁰ Such a focus can be found in the document of the United States Conference of Catholic of Bishops, “Always Our Children: A Pastoral Message to Parents of Homosexual Children and Suggestions for Pastoral Ministers.” accessed at <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/homosexuality/always-our-children.cfm>.

continue as part of this dialectic. When change takes place in Catholic teaching and practice, it is important to explain in an honest and intellectually responsible manner how important and true elements of continuity can be found.

Gaudium et spes develops as a major theme the need to fit together, on the one hand, Christian faith with its classical modes of thinking and, on the other hand, the methods and findings of the contemporary sciences, with frequent mention of the social sciences. In comparison with *Dei Verbum*, *Gaudium et spes* is more conscious and explicit in calling forth the various elements that make up what we are here labelling “intellectual conversion.” The document assigns to the Church “the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel” (#4). It proclaims that “Today, the human race is involved in a new stage of history” (#4), one in great need of “artisans of a new humanity” (#30). The reader is told that “Advances in biology, psychology, and the social sciences not only bring men hope of improved self-knowledge; in conjunction with technical methods, they are helping men exert direct influence on the life of social groups” (#5). The sciences possess a legitimate autonomy such that, “if methodical investigation within every branch of learning is carried out in a genuinely scientific manner and in accord with moral norms, it never truly conflicts with faith, for earthly matters and the concerns of faith derive from the same God” (#36)

Some passages in *Gaudium et spes* might lead a reader who did not know better to suspect that Lonergan himself had been working on the writing committee:

How is the dynamism and expansion of a new culture to be fostered without losing a living fidelity to the heritage of tradition? This question is of particular urgency when a culture which arises from the enormous progress of science and technology must be harmonized with a culture nourished by classical studies according to various traditions.

How can we quickly and progressively harmonize the proliferation of particular branches of study with the necessity of forming a synthesis of them, and of preserving among men the faculties of contemplation and observation which lead to wisdom? (#56)

Such Lonerganian-sounding quotations from *Gaudium et spes* could easily be multiplied. The artisans of a new humanity must know how to synthesize the methods and results of the contemporary sciences with traditional forms of wisdom and virtue. This is a job that requires intellectual conversion.

Many disagreements over the meaning of Vatican II have often revolved around this question of continuity. Neil Ormerod draws upon Lonergan in order to develop a suitable framework for addressing this matter. He argues that focusing on continuity/discontinuity for understanding change in the Church constitutes a weak starting point. Although John Henry Newman offered an intelligent and still influential version of this approach, it stays mainly on the level of description and thus remains mired in the realm of commonsense. Ormerod then examines Alasdair McIntyre's more explanatory approach that moves to the realm of theory. Finally he articulates a Lonergan-based "ontology of meaning" in order to provide the most suitable framework. For addressing understanding change in the Church.

An ontology of meaning requires a turn to the realm of interiority and is explicitly linked with intellectual conversion.³¹ Deeper than questions about continuity and discontinuity lie questions about the authenticity or inauthenticity of the identifiable changes that have taken place. Ormerod addresses how continuity remains an important concern as new contexts and frames of reference emerge. Earlier meanings need to be transposed within new frames of reference. Grasping new meanings depends upon the ability of a community to upon the ability to integrate them with "prior presupposed insights."³² Ormerod makes use of Lonergan's discussion of the various function of meaning to argue that even as the constitutive, communicative and effective functions of the meanings of "Church" change, the cognitive meaning can remain stable.³³

Ormerod's treatment of the continuity/discontinuity debate can serve as a model for how intellectual conversion opens up common ground within which the concerns associated with both the left and the right can be given fair treatment. The move to interiority with a focus on questions of authenticity

³¹ Neil Ormerod, "Vatican II—Continuity or Discontinuity? Toward an Ontology of Meaning," *Theological Studies* 71 (2010): 609-36. This article is reprinted as a postscript in Ormerod's *Re-Visioning the Church: An Experiment in Systematic Historical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), 367-95.

³² Ormerod, "Vatican II," 631. Ormerod cites Lonergan, *Insight*, 537-38.

³³ Ormerod, "Vatican II," 628-29; 635.

emphasizes both the needed changes that are taking place as well as the importance of continuity in the Church. Basic questions about change and continuity arise for people who are living out their faith in the commonsense realm. Is the post-Vatican II Church somehow the same entity as the pre-Vatican II Church? Is there a tradition that is being handed down in a lived manner through the generations and down through the centuries? Is the Jesus Christ whom I receive in the Eucharist somehow the same Jesus Christ who walked the earth two thousand years ago? Is there a continuous link between the Church that Christ founded and the Catholic Church? Can we say, along with Vatican II's Decree on Ecumenism, that unity belongs to the Catholic Church as a gift that it can never lose? Do we live in Christian solidarity with voices in our past who have called the Church our Mother?³⁴

I have sometimes heard my own friends and colleagues speaking of the pre- and post-Vatican II Churches as if they were so entirely different as to have nothing to do with each other. It is my impression that in the academic world, we often strive to overcome what Lonergan called "commonsense bias" so that we can develop and implement solutions to social problems based more on good theory than on individual and group self-centeredness. Lonergan himself devoted much attention to the overcoming of commonsense bias. When it came to speaking about "intellectual conversion," however, Lonergan had more to say about being able to understand how the realms of commonsense and theory need to be grasped as complementary ways of knowing. In my judgment, we need to pay great attention to this task today.

Intellectual conversion involves taking a turn inside, an examination of what one is doing when one is understanding and knowing. It is an ongoing process, not something that one completes and for which one then receives a degree. One of the things intellectual conversion permits you to do is to understand that there are different ways of knowing, and that, sometimes, positions that at first may appear to be contradictory can be understood as complementary. I am suggesting further that in the current situation, in which there are tendencies toward polarization, it would be a good thing if many

³⁴ See the discussion of the "Church as Mother" in Joseph A. Komonchak, *Who Are the Church?* The Pere Marquette Lecture in Theology (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1998), 47-52.

people would consciously strive to make the legitimate concerns of conflicting parties their own, if they would engage the tensions within themselves, and if they would, in collaboration with others, try to achieve a higher viewpoint, even if for no other reason than for the sake of the unity of the Church. It may be that in some cases one side is right and the other wrong, or more likely one side is much more right and the other side is much more wrong. Lonergan explains that some differences reflect horizons that are contradictory. Other differences may be traced to various forms of human inauthenticity.³⁵ It is my belief, though, that it is worth taking the risk that many of the divisions that we face today will turn out to be about viewpoints that differ in potentially complementary ways. We need more theologians who, like Komonchak, represent the “perhaps not numerous center.”

³⁵ See Lonergan, *Method*, 236-37, 326.