

## VATICAN II—CONTINUITY OR DISCONTINUITY? TOWARD AN ONTOLOGY OF MEANING

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*The article argues that the debate over continuity/discontinuity at Vatican II is hindered by the descriptive nature of the categories under consideration. To move beyond description and into explanation one must adopt an “ontology of meaning.” The nature of such a shift is illustrated with reference to the work of John Henry Newman, Alasdair MacIntyre, and Bernard Lonergan.*

IT IS NOW OVER 40 YEARS since the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council. Those of us who lived through its years can attest to the immediate impact it had on our lives. Changes in liturgical and sacramental practice spread rapidly throughout the Catholic Church. For some it was liberating, for some aggravating, and for all disorienting. Change had become the order of the day after centuries of resistance to social and cultural changes within the broader society. We would often hear appeals to the “spirit of the council” as justification for the wide variety of changes that occurred. Few who lived through that period would doubt the epochal significance of the council or the magnitude of its impact on the life of the Church, from the smallest country parish to the Vatican itself.

Yet increasingly the significance of the changes produced by the council has been subject to debate. On one side is the Bologna approach to church history that, while not denying deep continuity, emphasizes the “rupture” of the council, the ways in which the council was discontinuous with what

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went before.<sup>1</sup> The approach is based on a critical historical methodology, examining the debates in detail, the conflicts that emerged, and the evolution of the documents. It highlights the tensions present in the final documents as reflecting the different stances and conflicts of the debates. Its critics claim that it sets the “style” or “spirit” of the council over and against its official texts that are full of “compromises” to appease conservatives.<sup>2</sup> On the other side is a more official interpretation that can so emphasize continuity as to rule out any possibility of discontinuity. As early as 1985, then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger stated that there was no “before” and “after” in relation to the council; more recently Pope John Paul II stated in 2000 that “to read the council as if it marked a break with the past . . . is decidedly unacceptable.”<sup>3</sup>

Then in 2005, Pope Benedict XVI addressed the Roman Curia on the proper interpretation of Vatican II, arguing for a contrast between a “hermeneutic of discontinuity and rupture” and what he called a “hermeneutic of reform.”<sup>4</sup> The hermeneutic of discontinuity “risks ending in a split between the preconciliar and the postconciliar Church,” while the hermeneutic of reform speaks of “renewal in the continuity of the one subject-Church . . . a subject that increases in time and develops, yet always remains the same.”<sup>5</sup> Significantly this approach recognizes that in the process of reform “some kind of discontinuity might emerge” but only in such a way that “the continuity of principles proved not to have been abandoned.” Indeed, “it is precisely in this combination of continuity and discontinuity at different levels that the very nature of true reform consists.”<sup>6</sup> While this recognition of the possibility of some discontinuity may seem a concession

<sup>1</sup> This approach is most commonly associated with the multivolume work *History of Vatican II*, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak, 5 vols., trans. Matthew J. O’Connell (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1995). For a condensed account see Giuseppe Alberigo, *A Brief History of Vatican II*, trans. Matthew Sherry (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> See the introduction by Matthew Lamb and Matthew Levering in *Vatican II: Renewal within Tradition*, ed. Matthew L. Lamb and Matthew Levering (New York: Oxford University, 2008) 3.

<sup>3</sup> Both quoted in John W. O’Malley, “Vatican II: Did Anything Happen?” *Theological Studies* 67 (2006) 3–33, at 5. O’Malley goes on to note, however, that “nowhere in the Alberigo volumes is there the slightest suggestion that the ‘new beginning’ [initiated by the Council] meant in any way a rupture in the faith of the Church. . . . The only person I know who believed and propagated that assessment was Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre” (ibid. 6).

<sup>4</sup> The full text of the talk is available at [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/speeches/2005/december/documents/hf\\_ben\\_xvi\\_spe\\_20051222\\_roman-curia\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2005/december/documents/hf_ben_xvi_spe_20051222_roman-curia_en.html) (accessed April 24, 2010). An edited version focusing on Benedict’s comments on Vatican II can be found in *Vatican II: Renewal within Tradition* ix–xv. I will quote from this version.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. x.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. xiii.

by Benedict, it is clear that he still opposes what he calls a hermeneutic of rupture.<sup>7</sup> These divergent, indeed opposed, interpretations of such a major event may cause us to pause and reflect at a deeper level as to the nature of the debate and the issues underlying it.

A good starting point for my investigation is a consideration of the language of continuity and discontinuity/rupture. What exactly does this particular metaphor seek to express? It would seem that the underlying image for notions of continuity and discontinuity are to some extent mathematical. In a mathematical context, one variable as measured over time either changes smoothly or jumps to a different level. But when we turn to the types of debate around Vatican II, what exactly is changing over time in the situation under consideration? And how do we measure whether what is changing over time is changing “continuously” or jumping “discontinuously”?

Moving out of the religious sphere for a moment to ask ourselves similar questions in relation to other major historical events might help shed light on the difficulties our discussion engenders. If we were to talk about the scientific revolution, would we say it was continuous or discontinuous with the past? Were the scientific principles that drove it the natural progression of principles already in evidence, or were they “new,” a radical departure from previous understandings? What about the industrial revolution with its multiple practical insights into mechanical systems and their application to the production of goods? Were there no similar practical insights prior to that time on which they built, simply extending them through new applications in new contexts? To produce a proper response would require a detailed historical analysis of key turning points in events under question. And even if we were to answer such questions, there would still be a problem as to what might constitute continuity and discontinuity in these settings.

Without laboring the point, these examples may help identify three issues that need further consideration. The first is that large-scale social and cultural changes are extremely complex. To attempt to reduce the complexity through a single metaphor such as continuity versus discontinuity is never going to be adequate to that complexity. More importantly, perhaps, the metaphor itself may be misleading. Human communities, particularly intentional communities such as the Church, are grounded in

<sup>7</sup> That the issue continues to “worry” Benedict is evident in its surprise appearance in the latest encyclical, *Caritas in veritate* no. 12, where he complains of those who suggest “two typologies of social doctrine, one pre-conciliar and one post-conciliar . . . : on the contrary there is a *single teaching consistent and at the same time ever new*” (emphasis original). Unless otherwise indicated, this and all other church documents referred to herein are available at <http://www.vatican.va> and are readily found via an Internet search.

shared meanings and values. The most important changes in the life of any community are shifts in those meanings and values. But such changes cannot be measured; meaning has no “metric” that would allow us to measure its changes as continuous or discontinuous over time. As sociologist Roy Bhaskar notes, “meanings cannot be measured, only understood.”<sup>8</sup> If in fact the metaphor is misleading, then the debate is in principle undecidable, and so we can expect it to continue indefinitely.

The second issue is that we cannot attempt to deal with the question of the nature of the change at Vatican II unless we can place that change within a larger theory of social and cultural change.<sup>9</sup> Unless we have an account of social and cultural change “in general,” any debate about the nature of the change at the council will be building castles in the sand. If we are to be intelligent and responsible in undertaking such a task, then we must delve into the human sciences, such as sociology and cultural studies, to help us understand what happened at Vatican II. We cannot answer such questions on the basis of purely religious categories alone. As Bernard Lonergan argues, theology requires ample use not only of special categories drawn from religious realities but also of general categories drawn from philosophy and the human sciences.<sup>10</sup>

Let me be more explicit by taking the case of the Eucharist. To understand the nature of the eucharistic change, Aquinas employed the Aristotelian categories of substance and accident. He drew from a metaphysics of natural substances to develop an account of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist in terms of transubstantiation. In doing so, he moved from a descriptive to an explanatory account of the change that happens in the eucharistic presence. This use of general metaphysical categories did not detract from his belief in that presence but provided a framework within which the eucharistic change could be understood. Only in this way could the similarities and differences from other instances of change be identified.

In our present context, to understand changes in the meanings and values of human communities, including the particular human community we know as the Catholic Church, we will need to develop a metaphysics or

<sup>8</sup> See Roy Bhaskar, “Societies,” in *Critical Realism: Essential Readings*, ed. Margaret Archer et al. (London: Routledge, 1998) 206–57, at 226. We may, of course, measure shifts in meaning statistically in some sense, but we cannot measure meaning itself.

<sup>9</sup> See Neil Ormerod, “‘The Times They Are a’Changin’: A Response to O’Malley and Schloesser,” *Theological Studies* 67 (2006) 834–55, for my efforts to do this.

<sup>10</sup> Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Seabury, 1971) 281–91. For further discussion and development of the question of general and special categories, see Robert M. Doran, *What Is Systematic Theology?* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2006) 47–51.

ontology of meaning, so as to understand the “being of meaning” in historical communities.<sup>11</sup> Of course one may be far from inspired by the present state of social and cultural studies in meeting this challenge. Mostly their categories remain descriptive rather than explanatory, more concerned with gathering data than theoretical constructs that tend to be rejected as “grand narratives.” But such is the goal we need to achieve in order to properly analyze the significance of Vatican II. In the meantime I would suggest that the categories of “continuity/discontinuity” are more descriptive than explanatory, and to do justice to the event of Vatican II, we need to develop a more explicitly explanatory account of change in historical bodies such as the Church.

My third issue poses the question, If the metaphor of continuity/discontinuity is at best descriptive and perhaps misleading, what exactly is the debate really about? As biblical historian Ben Meyer pointed out, members of the early church “did not *acknowledge* development. They overlooked it. They suppressed its novelty, intent on ways of relocating the creative aspects of their own historical experience, safely and objectively, in God’s eschatological saving act.”<sup>12</sup> And so it has been ever since. In its efforts to remain faithful to the unique saving act of God in Jesus Christ, the church has tended to view novelty as deviation from its founding saving truth. To claim rupture or discontinuity is to suggest a departure from God’s saving message. Within such a mindset, discontinuity is code for unauthenticity, at least as the church has generally thought of it. Even if one might grudgingly acknowledge the possibility of some discontinuity that on the basis of the historical evidence is hard to deny and that Benedict XVI seems to concede, I would suggest that the underlying issue is not one of continuity/discontinuity but of authenticity/unauthenticity of the development in relation to God’s saving act. A full response to the issue of change and Vatican II would therefore need to expand upon the categories of authenticity/unauthenticity and their relationship to change and development of meaning.<sup>13</sup>

How then might we begin to approach the issue of an ontology of meaning, as a means to address the questions raised by Vatican II? For an age

<sup>11</sup> The phrase “being of meaning” needs clarification. Simply put, meaning “exists” and as existing can be subject to a metaphysical analysis, for example, in terms of potency, form, and act. In constructing a metaphysics or ontology of meaning, I am exploring the ways in which meaning exists or, summarily, the “being of meaning.”

<sup>12</sup> Ben Meyer, *The Early Christians: Their World Mission and Self-Discovery* (Wilmington: Glazier, 1986) 23.

<sup>13</sup> Authenticity/unauthenticity, including that of a tradition, are key categories for Bernard Lonergan. See Lonergan, *Method in Theology* 80, 162, 299. See also Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1992).

less than metaphysically inclined, this is perhaps a daunting task. To this end I would like to present an account of three authors whose work is illustrative, either implicitly or explicitly, of what might constitute an ontology of meaning. The first is the work of John Henry Newman and his writings on the development of doctrine; the second is Alasdair McIntyre and his notion of a tradition of rationality; finally, Bernard Lonergan who places the question of meaning within his metaphysics of emergent probability. While Newman's work is basically descriptive and McIntyre moves toward explanation, Lonergan seeks to develop a fully explanatory account of meaning, the "being of meaning."

### JOHN HENRY NEWMAN AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF DOCTRINE

It is difficult at this distance to remember just what a remarkable contribution Newman made in his *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*. At a time when the official Roman theology was conceptualist and ahistorical, focusing on the absolute givenness of divine revelation from which conclusions could be deduced in positivist fashion, Newman was proposing a complex process of historical development for Christian doctrine. Unencumbered by Scholastic metaphysical assumptions and trained in historical method, Newman began not with theological a priori's but with historical data. And in that data the evidence of development was patent. It is interesting to note that Newman published his essay in 1845, 14 years before Charles Darwin published his groundbreaking *On the Origin of Species* (1859). If the timing had been different Newman might well have entitled his work "The Evolution of Christian Doctrine" rather than "The Development of Christian Doctrine." His *Essay* was truly ahead of its time, the first mature fruits of the impact of historical consciousness on Christian faith. No wonder it was greeted at the time with suspicion in more traditional circles.

What is especially remarkable is that at a time when his more traditional critics viewed the unchanging stability of the Catholic Church as a sign that it was the one true Church, Newman argued that the developments evident in the Catholic Church were markers that it was the one true church. Only the true church would demonstrate the process of genuine doctrinal development he claimed to find in the life of the Catholic Church. He draws repeated attention to the inconsistent ways in which the Anglican tradition accepted some developments while rejecting others. And in terms of the Reformation generally, Newman asserted, "to be deep in history is to cease to be a Protestant."<sup>14</sup> For Newman, the Reformers failed to understand the

<sup>14</sup> John Henry Newman, *Conscience, Consensus, and the Development of Doctrine*, ed. James Gaffney, 1st ed. (New York: Image, 1992) 50. It is interesting at this distance to notice how unecumenical Newman was; like us all, he was a person of his time.

positive significance of development and so sought to turn the clock back to some supposed form of “pure” Christianity.

Over 100 years later the impact of Newman’s work on the development of doctrine was still being felt at Vatican II. John Courtney Murray argued that the issue of the “‘development of doctrine’ was *the* issue under all issues” faced by the council. And, as John O’Malley has noted, Newman’s work “by 1962 [was] widely accepted as close to the definitive book on the subject.”<sup>15</sup> Nonetheless, its acceptance was fiercely resisted in some circles, in particular among senior curial officials who remained largely untouched by the impact of historical consciousness. As O’Malley reminds us, the motto of Cardinal Alfredo Ottaviani, at the time prefect of the Holy Office, was *Semper Idem*, “always the same.”<sup>16</sup> A small number of Council Fathers were troubled by what they saw as the changes to the Church being introduced by the council. None more so than Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, who declared the changes heretical and moved into schism.

Above I identified three issues around the present debate on the significance and evaluation of Vatican II. The first was the complexity of social and cultural change; the second was the need to investigate change in general, through an ontology of meaning; the third was that the underlying issue was not continuity/discontinuity but rather authenticity/unauthenticity. What does Newman’s work contribute to these three issues?

In relation to the first issue, Newman had a distinct advantage over his opponents. His primary training was as a historian; in particular he was steeped in the early Church Fathers. His text is littered with examples drawn from a wide variety of historical sources, both sacred and profane. He had a feel for the warp and woof of historical processes, the ebb and flow, the development and decline of ideas. Whereas the Scholasticism of the day was metaphysically strong, it had remained immune to the issues raised by an emerging historical consciousness. Its ahistorical conceptualism left it unable to deal with history in any serious sense, a problem that would reach crisis proportions in the era of Modernism at the turn of the century, another 50 years after Newman’s groundbreaking work. For Newman the complexity of historical, social, and cultural change could not be contained in the rigidity of Scholastic theology. It is perhaps ironic that Newman could make this major contribution to Catholic thought precisely because he did not grow up within Catholicism.

In relation to the second issue, though Newman did not seek to develop an explicit ontology of meaning, he did recognize that the starting point for any discussion of the development of doctrine must be an account of “change in general.” Far from beginning with purely religious examples he

<sup>15</sup> John W. O’Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap of Harvard University, 2008) 39.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* 108.

put before his readers a variety of other changes, what he referred to as a general “process of development in ideas.”<sup>17</sup> In fact he identified five distinct forms of such development which he named political, logical, historical, ethical, and metaphysical:

- Political: “when society and its various classes and interests are the subject matter of ideas.”<sup>18</sup>
- Logical: “where the intellectual character is . . . prominent . . . , it is carried out with . . . consistency and minute application.”<sup>19</sup>
- Historical: “being the gradual formation of opinion concerning persons, facts, and events. Judgments which were at one time confined to the few, at length spread through a community.”<sup>20</sup>
- Ethical: “are natural and personal, substituting what is congruous, desirable, pious, appropriate, generous, for strictly logical inference.”<sup>21</sup>
- Metaphysical: “such as are a mere analysis of the idea contemplated, and terminate in its exact and complete delineation.”<sup>22</sup>

What is truly remarkable here is a mind working creatively with historical material to attempt a characterization of “change in general.” And Newman was not afraid to use this account of change in general with respect to the issue of doctrinal development. In fact he cited examples of doctrinal development that fell into each of the five general categories he identified:

Taking the Incarnation as its central doctrine, the Episcopate as taught by St Ignatius, will be an instance of political development, the *Theotokos* of logical, the determination of our Lord’s birth of historical, the Holy Eucharist of moral, and the Athanasian Creed of metaphysical.<sup>23</sup>

This is neither a one-dimensional account of doctrinal development, nor a one-size-fits-all approach. Doctrinal developments will be of different types, and it is only through a detailed historical investigation that we will be able to determine the precise type involved.<sup>24</sup> Newman here demonstrates a level of sophistication beyond most contemporary debates on the matter, at least in my view.

<sup>17</sup> Newman, *Conscience, Consensus, and the Development of Doctrine* 70.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* 76.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* 79.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* 80.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* 84.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* 85.

<sup>24</sup> Bernard Lonergan later adopted this position: “To determine the starting-point, the process, the end-result of any particular development of doctrine calls for an exact historical investigation” (Lonergan, *Method in Theology* 302). Again: “There can be many kinds of developments and . . . to know them, one has to study and analyze concrete historical processes” (*ibid.* 312). And again: “In other words the intelligibility proper to developing doctrines is the intelligibility immanent in historical process. One knows it, not by *a priori* theorizing, but by *a posteriori* research, interpretation, history, dialectic, and the decision of foundations” (*ibid.* 319).



And in relation to the third issue, a recognition that the basic issue is one of authenticity or genuineness rather than continuity, Newman produced seven criteria for determining the authenticity of doctrinal development as opposed to a corruption of the tradition.<sup>25</sup>

1. Preservation of type: a criterion based on an organic metaphor of bodily growth, in which “the basic proportions and relationships existing between the whole and the parts” are preserved.
2. Continuity of principles: as when new insights and judgments arise out of a fixed set of principles; “the different doctrines represent principles existing at a deeper level, even when these are often not recognized until a later stage.”
3. Power of assimilation: an ability to adapt to and embrace new perspectives leading to new developments; “a living idea shows its edge by its ability to get at reality, attract other ideas to itself, stimulate reflection and develop itself further without loss of its internal unity.”
4. Logical sequence: though not a great devotee of logic in itself, Newman acknowledged that it too may play a role in accounting for the development of doctrine.<sup>26</sup>
5. Anticipation of its future: “trends which come to realization and succeed only later may make themselves noticeable early on, even if as isolated phenomena where the outline is still dim.” These trends are likely to be genuine.
6. Conservative action upon its past: where developments go against the grain of earlier positions, they are not likely to be genuine but corruptions; on the other hand “true development conserves and safeguards the developments and formulations that went before.”
7. Chronic vigor: ongoing vigor and duration are themselves signs of genuine development, whereas corruptions either burn out quickly or lose

<sup>25</sup> For a summary and source of the quotations identified below see International Theological Commission (ITC), “The Interpretation of Dogma,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 56 (1990) 275–76. For an interesting application of Newman’s criteria to the theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar see Alyssa Pitstick, “Development of Doctrine, or Denial? Balthasar’s Holy Saturday and Newman’s *Essay*,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 11 (2009) 129–45.

<sup>26</sup> Here I think the commentary by the ITC overstates the case when it says that there “must be logical coherence between the conclusions and the initial data.” Newman’s position is closer to “there must not be logical incoherence between conclusions and the initial data.” More precisely he stated, “The question indeed may be asked whether a development can be other in any case than a logical operation; but, if by this is meant a conscious reasoning from premises to conclusion, of course the answer must be in the negative” (Newman, *Conscience, Consensus, and the Development of Doctrine* 188).

life in the longer term. "Whatever is vital and durable . . . is a sign of authentic development."

Further, Newman illustrated each criterion with multiple historical examples of both genuine developments and corruptions.

The criteria in this list seem fairly eclectic and pragmatic. Again Newman was not a systematic thinker drawing conclusions within a theoretical framework; rather he was a highly intelligent thinker responding to the patterns that arise in the historical data.<sup>27</sup> Yet, even given this limitation, it is significant that when the International Theological Commission (ITC) published its investigation into the nature and development of dogma, in the 1990 text, "The Interpretation of Dogma," they could do no better than recall Newman's criteria on the authenticity of doctrinal development.<sup>28</sup> Such was the power and originality of Newman's stance that 150 years later it could still be referred to as providing one of the best reference points on doctrinal development.

How could Newman be so creative and powerful where others remained stuck within their closed theological systems? I would argue that as well as having a fine historical sense, Newman also demonstrates a remarkable insight into the human heart and mind. As he demonstrates in his masterful *Grammar of Assent*,<sup>29</sup> much as Augustine demonstrates in his *Confessions*, Newman was familiar with his own interiority, with the inner movements of his own heart and mind. And so he views Christianity not as a theory or a collection of documents but as a powerful and great idea inhabiting the human heart and mind.

The increase and expansion of the Christian creed and ritual, and the variations which have attended the process in the case of individual writers and Churches, are the necessary attendants on any philosophy or polity which takes possession of the intellect and heart, and has had any wide or extended dominion; . . . from the nature of the human mind, time is necessary for the full comprehension and perfection of great ideas; and . . . the highest and most wonderful truths . . . have required only the longer time and deeper thought for their full elucidation.<sup>30</sup>

Development, then, is to be expected, and growth in our comprehension, leading to new formulations and doctrines, are a normal part of our life as a church. As perhaps one of his most famous passages from his *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* reminds us, "In a higher world it is

<sup>27</sup> I would disagree with Pitstick's opinion that Newman's works are a "foundational systematic" treatment. Newman is thorough, but not systematic. See Pitstick, "Development of Doctrine, or Denial?" 130.

<sup>28</sup> ITC, "The Interpretation of Dogma" 251-77.

<sup>29</sup> John Henry Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1939).

<sup>30</sup> Newman, *Conscience, Consensus, and the Development of Doctrine* 67.

otherwise; but here below to live is to change, and to be perfect is to change often.”<sup>31</sup> The challenge that Newman’s work puts to us is how to evaluate change, how to discern between genuine development and corruptions that distort and damage the tradition. His list of criteria for such a discernment go beyond the fairly weak metaphor of continuity and discontinuity that dominates our present debate on the significance of Vatican II. And as with any such list of criteria, there is still the question of who applies them.

To explore this issue would require that we consider the other great contribution Newman made to the Second Vatican Council: the notion of the *sensus fidei*.<sup>32</sup> This was most effectively captured by Newman in the following descriptive account:

The body of the faithful is one of the witnesses to the fact of the tradition of revealed doctrine, and . . . their *consensus* through Christendom is the voice of the Infallible Church. I think I am right in saying that the tradition of the Apostles, committed to the whole Church in its various constituents and functions *per modum unius*, manifests itself variously at various times: sometimes by the mouth of the episcopacy, sometimes by the doctors, sometimes by the people, sometimes by liturgies, rites, ceremonies, and customs, by events, disputes, movements, and all other phenomena which are comprised under the name of history. It follows that none of these great channels of tradition may be treated with disrespect; granting at the same time fully, that the gift of discerning, discriminating, defining, promulgating, and enforcing any portion of that tradition resides solely in the *Ecclesia docens*.<sup>33</sup>

Again we can witness the comprehensive nature of Newman’s thought, embracing a whole range of ecclesial phenomena as carriers of the sense of faith of the Church.<sup>34</sup> Each aspect is given its due regard and weight.

In terms, then, of the changes initiated in the aftermath of Vatican II, what would Newman contribute? He would alert us to the many different types of change that can occur. Change is not one-dimensional. With Newman we can ask what the particular trajectories of development the changes might be following. Given the pastoral nature of the council we might focus more on the political, historical, and ethical rather than on the logical and metaphysical trajectories. He would then raise questions about the authenticity of the developments, whether such developments

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* 75.

<sup>32</sup> See John Henry Newman, *On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine* (London: G. Chapman, 1961). On a contemporary analysis of the *sensus fidei* see Ormond Rush, “Sensus Fidei: Faith ‘Making Sense’ of Revelation,” *Theological Studies* 62 (2001) 231–61; John J. Burkhard, “‘Sensus Fidei’: Recent Theological Reflection (1990–2001) Part I”; and “Part II,” *Heythrop Journal* 46 (2005) 450–75; 47 (2006) 38–54.

<sup>33</sup> See Newman, *On Consulting the Faithful* 63.

<sup>34</sup> My discussion below on Lonergan will make the notion of “carriers” of meaning more precise.

are genuine or are corruptions of the traditions. It would then be possible to measure particular changes against the seven criteria for genuine development that he identifies.<sup>35</sup> Finally he would ask how these changes have been received in the Church, what has been the response of the *sensus fidei* to them? Have the changes resonated in the life of the Church and been adopted with some sense of enthusiasm, or have they been resisted at every turn?

At the very least this question takes us beyond the simplistic metaphor of continuity/discontinuity. Newman demonstrates not only the legitimacy and complexity of the processes of historical development but also the importance of shifting our focus to the question of authenticity/unauthenticity (though couched in the language of genuineness). However, as I have indicated above, Newman's approach is not systematic. His categories for both the trajectories of development and the criteria for authenticity remain descriptive rather than explanatory. There is no overarching framework within which these categories might fit, or at least Newman does not provide one. To do so, one must move into a more explanatory and theoretical stance. One finds the beginnings of this shift in the writings of Alasdair MacIntyre.

### ALASDAIR MACINTYRE AND TRADITIONS OF RATIONALITY

Over his long career, Alasdair MacIntyre has made a substantial contribution to our understanding of virtue and the moral life as grounded in communities that promote and sustain those virtues. In his major work, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, MacIntyre argues that reason itself is a "virtue," that is, what counts as reason is bound by the traditions and practices of particular historical communities and debates.<sup>36</sup> Reason itself is a particular practice promoted and sustained by particular communities and, as such, is historically constituted. Different communities thus sustain and promote different understandings of reason itself. As with Newman, MacIntyre's account emerges out of his analysis of a historical narrative that begins with Plato and Aristotle, encompasses Augustine and Aquinas, and culminates in Hume. At the conclusion of this narrative he then develops his more theoretical category of a tradition of rationality. This category allows MacIntyre to give an account of both the internal process of development within a tradition as well as the conflicts that arise between

<sup>35</sup> Questions remain for me as to the application of Newman's seven criteria. It is too tempting to use them like a checklist, and as exclusory (fail one and you are out!). I think Newman's reflections are more generous and open-ended than this.

<sup>36</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame, 1988).

traditions in terms of a dynamic of problems and problem solving. Each of these traditions of rationality is an “elaboration of a mode of social and moral life of which the intellectual enquiry itself was an integral part, and in each of them the forms of that life were embodied with greater or lesser degrees of imperfection in social and political institutions which also draw their life from other sources.” Moreover these traditions have conflicts, both internal and in their relationships with other traditions. “So the narrative history of each of these traditions involves a narrative of enquiry and debate within that tradition and also one of debate and disagreement between it and its rivals.”<sup>37</sup>

MacIntyre draws a significant conclusion from this stance, namely, that reason is historically or tradition-constituted. There is no Archimedean point outside of any particular tradition where one can stand in the process of evaluating the different traditions available. “There is no standing ground, no place for enquiry, no way to engage in the practices of advancing, evaluating, accepting, and rejecting reasoned argument apart from that which is provided by some particular tradition or other.”<sup>38</sup> Does this then leave us with a position of moral and intellectual relativism in relation to competing traditions of rationality? This is certainly not a conclusion MacIntyre wishes to accept. Nor does he accept a perspectivist response, which would understand different traditions of rationality as providing different perspectives on the one truth. MacIntyre describes relativism and perspectivism as the “negative counterpart of the Enlightenment, its inverted mirror image.”<sup>39</sup> It is interesting to note that in seeking to respond to these two challenges, MacIntyre makes clear his “massive debt” to the writings of John Henry Newman, particularly his works, *The Arians of the Fourth Century* and *Development of Christian Doctrine*.<sup>40</sup>

MacIntyre begins his response with a defense of the correspondence theory of truth, which initially manifests itself as a “correspondence theory of falsity.”<sup>41</sup> Traditions of rationality begin to experience problems when their concepts and judgments no longer correspond to the world around us. “One of the great originating insights of tradition-constituted enquiries is that false beliefs and false judgments represent a failure of the mind, not of its objects.”<sup>42</sup> Of course the correspondence MacIntyre is speaking of is not to be thought of in some naïve “picture thinking” sense, as has been attacked in various quarters. Rather it comes down to the

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. 349–350.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. 353.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. 356.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. 357. This focus on false judgments may reflect the influence of Newman’s *Grammar of Assent*.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. 353–4.

sustainability of an argument in the face of the evidence and consideration of counter-arguments.

To claim truth for one's present mindset and the judgments which are its expression is to claim that this kind of inadequacy, this kind of discrepancy, will never appear in any possible future situation, no matter how searching the enquiry, no matter how much evidence is provided, no matter what developments in rational enquiry may occur. The test for truth in the present, therefore, is always to summon up as many questions and as many objections of the greatest strength possible; what can be justifiably claimed as true is what has sufficiently withstood such dialectical questioning and framing of objection.<sup>43</sup>

Within such an understanding of the judgments of traditions of enquiry MacIntyre spells out the standard process of argumentation, moving from an appeal to authority, through the appearance of possible incoherence, to the discovery of a more coherent stance, each time drawing on judgments and beliefs found within the tradition. The tradition moves forward through challenging held positions, questioning alternatives, identifying problems, and working toward their resolution.<sup>44</sup> It is not difficult to identify the type of argumentation found in the *Summa theologiae* as the model for the type of process MacIntyre has in mind here.

Still, over historical periods of time it is possible for such a process to encounter what MacIntyre calls an "epistemological crisis." This occurs around an

agenda of unsolved problems and unresolved issues by reference to which its success or lack of it in making rational progress towards some further stage of development will be evaluated. At any point it may happen . . . that by its own standard of progress it ceases to make progress. Its hitherto trusted methods of enquiry become sterile. Conflicts over rival answers to key questions can no longer be settled rationally. . . . This kind of dissolution of historically founded certitudes is the mark of an epistemological crisis.<sup>45</sup>

Such crises require new concepts and frameworks that enrich the previous tradition in ways that allow for solutions to previously intractable problems, as well as provide insight into what was lacking in the tradition that rendered it sterile or incoherent. Finally, a proposed solution must exhibit "some fundamental continuity of the new conceptual and theoretical structures with the shared beliefs in terms of which the tradition of enquiry had been defined up to this point."<sup>46</sup>

<sup>43</sup> MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* 358. Again Newman's notion of illative sense may lie behind MacIntyre's account of truth claims; at least there are similarities, though Newman's analysis focuses on the individual, whereas MacIntyre is concerned with a living tradition. See Newman, *Grammar of Assent*, chap. 9.

<sup>44</sup> MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* 359.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* 361-2.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.* 362.

In his later work, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, MacIntyre pushes his argument further to provide an account of the ways one tradition may prove itself “rationally superior” to a rival tradition.<sup>47</sup> Traditions inevitably come into contact and conflict, and those conflicts will revolve around the sort of unsolved problems within one tradition that another claims to be able to solve. This process itself may lead to the development of the present tradition by its incorporation of elements of the rival tradition into itself.

Just as a later stage within [a] tradition is held to be superior to an earlier stage only if and insofar as it is able to transcend the limitations and failures of that earlier stage, limitations and failures by the standards of rationality of that earlier stage itself, so the rational superiority of [a] tradition to rival traditions is held to reside in its capacity not only for identifying and characterizing the limitations and failures of that rival tradition as judged by that rival tradition’s own standards, limitations, and failures, which that rival tradition itself lacks the resources to explain or understand, but also for the explaining and understanding of those limitations and failures in some tolerably precise way.<sup>48</sup>

It is not difficult to identify points of contact between Newman’s account and MacIntyre’s. While Newman gives us five ways in which development occurs “in general,” MacIntyre specifies the ways in which systems of thought consolidate, develop, stagnate, and renew themselves over historical time frames. Perhaps MacIntyre is more attuned to the conflictual nature of the process, both within a tradition and between rival traditions and the issue of intellectual stagnation into which a tradition can fall. Newman provides seven criteria for genuine development, while MacIntyre identifies three by which a solution to an epistemological crisis can be authentically resolved. While Newman speaks of “continuity of principles,”<sup>49</sup> MacIntyre requires “some fundamental continuity of the new conceptual and theoretical structures.”<sup>50</sup> In both cases they are providing an account of how meaning moves forward over historical time frames within tradition-constituted communities such as the Church. In that sense both Newman and MacIntyre contribute to an ontology of meaning.

In seeking to apply MacIntyre’s notion of a tradition of rationality to the Church leading up to Vatican II, we can ask ourselves whether there were signs of the type of epistemological crisis that he speaks of. Was there a major “dissolution of historically founded certitudes”? And if so, what were the causes of this dissolution? Indeed, it is not difficult to identify a number of factors that contributed to the crisis that the Church was facing

<sup>47</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame, 1990).

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.* 180–81.

<sup>49</sup> Newman, *Conscience, Consensus, and the Development of Doctrine* 180.

<sup>50</sup> MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* 362.

at Vatican II. Three readily spring to mind, without seeking to be exhaustive. The first is the emergence of historical consciousness, which began in the 18th and 19th centuries, came to an initial crisis point with Modernism, but which led a subterranean existence until the recognition of the validity of critical historical scholarship in *Divino Afflante Spiritu* and was reaffirmed in *Dei Verbum*.<sup>51</sup> This emergence has caused a major crisis in the understanding of all the Church's historical sources, by insisting on reading all texts within a social and historical context. This has had a profound impact on all theological studies. As then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger identified in 1988, a central problem for theology is the need to find "a better synthesis between historical and theological methods, between higher criticism and church doctrine." Further, "a truly pervasive understanding of this whole problem has yet to be found which takes into account both the undeniable insights uncovered by historical method, while at the same time overcoming its limitations."<sup>52</sup>

A second challenge is the rise of modern science and its impact through technology on all aspects of human living. Modern science posed repeated challenges to the religious cosmology of Christians, from the development of a heliocentric model of the solar system, to Darwinian evolution, to contemporary cosmologies that view the universe as around 15 billion years old. Further, the technological developments that followed the rise of modern science, particularly in food production, travel, medical science, and communications, have transformed human living in an unprecedented way. For many ordinary believers, these challenges have eroded, if not eliminated, the authority of their religious tradition to speak on various matters.<sup>53</sup>

A third cause of major tension is the rise of modern political institutions that are democratic and participatory. Particularly in the West, democratic governments have become the norm, and nondemocratic authoritarian or totalitarian forms of government are viewed as aberrations, particularly after World War II. The Church's attempts in the 19th century to resist democratic movements in society and to model itself on an absolute

<sup>51</sup> Of course Newman's contribution to the emergence of historical consciousness within Catholicism cannot be underestimated.

<sup>52</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, "Foundations and Approaches of Biblical Exegesis," *Origins* 17 (1988) 593, 595–602, at 596. Similarly Lonergan once commented that "the whole problem in modern theology, Protestant and Catholic, is the introduction of historical scholarship"—quoted in Frederick E. Crowe, *Developing the Lonergan Legacy: Historical, Theoretical, and Existential Themes*, ed. Michael Vertin (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2004) 79.

<sup>53</sup> In a similar vein Benedict identifies the relationship between faith and modern science and the rise of historical-critical method as major questions leading up to Vatican II and needing an answer. See Lamb and Levering, *Vatican II: Renewal within Tradition* xii. Benedict also raises the question of church-state relations and the problem of religious tolerance.



monarchy now look completely out of step with contemporary political models; they present something not to be emulated, but to be avoided. The Church has been relatively slow to appreciate the positive role of democracy in society and has struggled to articulate a solid rationale for resisting calls for greater democratic participation in its own life.<sup>54</sup> Again this has had a corrosive effect on the authority of the Church.

If these three challenges (among others) to the Church prior to Vatican II did in fact constitute an epistemological crisis for the Church, then any response to dealing with them would be no trivial matter. I have already noted Ratzinger's comments regarding the impact of historical consciousness. To address them all in a coherent way will require a considerable deepening of the Church's tradition to date. As such, it will require a "leap" in the "being of meaning" in the Church, something new that needs to emerge that can encompass past achievements but go beyond them to point to a resolution of the new challenges we face in a contemporary setting.

MacIntyre's notion of a tradition of rationality helps us understand, at least by analogy, the broader stream of Church tradition and the movements it might experience in its encounter with other traditions and with the problem of intellectual sterility within its own arena. He reminds us of the importance of institutions and practices in the process of the development of tradition. However, in the end the Church is larger than a particular tradition of rationality and may in fact encompass a number of competing (sub-)traditions such as those associated with the names of Augustine, Aquinas, and Bonaventure. To push my analysis further, we need a more fully developed ontology of meaning, such as we find in the writings of Bernard Lonergan.

### LONERGAN AND AN ONTOLOGY OF MEANING

While Newman has given us a descriptive account of the process of the emergence of meaning, and MacIntyre provides a more explanatory framework with his notion of a tradition of rationality, Lonergan deals more explicitly with the problem of meaning and the development of an ontology of meaning. For Lonergan meaning falls under the category of proportionate being, that is, being proportionate to our knowing, and all proportionate

<sup>54</sup> Beyond the slogan "the Church is not a democracy" lies a further question of the type of "political" structure (even if analogous) that the Church actually is. There are other possibilities besides democracy and absolute monarchy. See Andrew Murray, "Leadership in the Church: Aristotelian Ethical Considerations," *Ethics Education: A Journal for Applied Philosophy and Ethics in the Christian Tradition* 12 (2006) 3–11.

being can be understood in terms of his general notion of emergent probability. However, Lonergan has far more to say about meaning than this brief observation.<sup>55</sup>

Lonergan discusses the question of meaning in his two major works, *Insight* and *Method in Theology*. His work is complex, and there are signs of development and enrichment in his thought on the topic of meaning; it will not be possible to give a thorough account here.<sup>56</sup> However, throughout it all, the starting point for Lonergan in this area, as it is for all his work, is human interiority. And so the focus is not on the outer word, utterance, or sentence, but on the word that is uttered interiorly by the speaker. "The inner word is what is meant immediately by the outer."<sup>57</sup> It is an important reminder that meaning exists primarily in persons, in hearts and minds, and only secondarily in what is said, written or otherwise expressed. Indeed far from limiting "expression" to the spoken or written work, Lonergan identifies five distinct "carriers of meaning": intersubjective, artistic, symbolic, literary, and incarnate carriers, all of which in different ways express the "inner word."

*Intersubjective Meaning:* Spontaneous intersubjectivity arises from a vital and functional identification with the other. This identification precedes the distinction of subjects into "I" and "Thou," and even the "We" of mutual love. One aspect of this intersubjectivity is the intersubjective communication of meaning. By illustrating this point with a brief phenomenology of the smile, Lonergan stresses that intersubjective meaning "is not about some object. Rather, it reveals or even betrays the subject, and the revelation is immediate."<sup>58</sup>

*Artistic Meaning:* Following Susanne Langer, Lonergan defines art as "the objectification of a purely experiential pattern." A work of art is a concrete pattern of the internal relations of, say, colors, tones, volumes, movements, and so forth. It is a pure pattern inasmuch as it excludes patterns that instrumentalize experience. The meaning of art is elemental: the meaning and the meant are not distinguished. As art transforms the world, so too the subject who experiences it is transformed. Liberated from

<sup>55</sup> Lonergan, like MacIntyre, acknowledges a debt to Newman. In particular Newman contributed to Lonergan's understanding of the role of judgment through his reading of *The Grammar of Assent*. On Newman's influence on Lonergan see Richard M. Liddy, *Transforming Light: Intellectual Conversion in the Early Lonergan* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 1993) 16–40.

<sup>56</sup> In the succeeding I follow Robert M. Doran, *Theology and the Dialectics of History* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1990) especially chaps. 18 and 19.

<sup>57</sup> Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran, *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan* (hereafter CWBL) 2 (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1997) 14.

<sup>58</sup> Lonergan, *Method in Theology* 59–61.

the routine structuring of existence, the artist “becomes just himself: emergent, ecstatic, originating freedom.”<sup>59</sup>

*Symbolic Meaning:* Lonergan defines a symbol as “an image of a real or imaginary object that evokes a feeling or is evoked by a feeling.” Given the link Lonergan establishes between feelings and values,<sup>60</sup> our developing moral sensitivity (or its distortion) will involve a “transvaluation and transformation of symbols.” Symbols neither obey the laws of logic nor “bow to the principle of excluded middle,” preferring to overwhelm the opponent rather than merely prove a point. Prior to logic and dialectic, symbols can express “what logical discourse abhors: the existence of internal tensions, incompatibilities, conflicts, struggles, destructions.”<sup>61</sup>

*Linguistic Meaning:* In language, Lonergan argues, meaning finds its greatest liberation. The conventional signs of language can be multiplied almost indefinitely. While Lonergan has consistently maintained the prelinguistic nature of the act of understanding, he nonetheless acknowledges the power of language to advance understanding. “So it is that conscious intentionality develops in and is moulded by its mother tongue. It is not merely that we learn the names of what we see but also that we can attend to and talk about the things that we can name.”<sup>62</sup>

*Incarinate meaning:* Lonergan introduces this notion by referring to Newman’s motto, *cor ad cor loquitur*. Incarnate meaning is “the meaning of a person, of his way of life, of his words, or of his deeds.” It can thus combine intersubjective, artistic, symbolic, and linguistic carriers of meaning. Meaning occurs as incarnate in its significance, say, for another person or, more widely, for a group, a nation, or a social, cultural, or religious tradition.<sup>63</sup>

And so Lonergan presents a wide variety of ways meaning is carried forward into human communities. But whatever the form of expression, the sources of meaning “are all conscious acts and all intended contents, whether in the dream state or on any of the four levels of waking consciousness.”<sup>64</sup>

Lonergan’s notion of levels of consciousness then leads to his distinction between different elements of meaning, as potential, formal, full, constitutive, and effective acts of meaning.<sup>65</sup> Potential acts are those where

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. 61–64.

<sup>60</sup> Lonergan speaks of feelings in terms of intentional responses to value. Ibid. 30–34.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. 64–69.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. 71.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. 73.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> While the language has some similarity to metaphysical terms such as potency, form, and act, the parallel is misleading, because each of these is an “act” of meaning and so, as an act, has its own potency, form, and act. This is one Doran’s main points in *Theology and the Dialectics of History*, chap. 19.

meaning and meant are not yet distinct, as in the smile, the symbol, or even in the act of insight itself. Lonergan refers to such meaning as elemental. Formal acts are acts of “conceiving, thinking, considering, defining, supposing, formulating” where meaning and meant are distinguished. Full acts are acts of judging what is or is not the case, while effective and constitutive acts include “judgments of value, decisions, actions.”<sup>66</sup>

Lonergan then speaks of the different “functions of meaning”: meaning as cognitive, effective, constitutive, and communicative. The *cognitive function* of meaning works to take us beyond the child’s world of the immediately given and experienced, into the adult’s world—the world mediated by meaning. This larger world does not lie within anyone’s immediate experience. It is the reality of what is intended in questions. It encompasses a world of objective truth determined not only by experience but also by understanding and judgment.<sup>67</sup>

The *effective function* of meaning relates to the world of human activity: “Men work. But their work is not mindless. What we make, we first intend.” Through the effective function of meaning we enter a world of planning, of investigating possibilities, of weighing pros and cons, of entering into contracts, of orders given and received: “The whole of that added, man-made, artificial world is the cumulative, now planned, now chaotic, product of human acts of meaning.”<sup>68</sup>

The *constitutive function* of meaning is found in the intrinsically meaningful component of social and cultural institutions. Such institutions—religions, art-forms, languages, sciences, philosophies, histories—are “inextricably involved in acts of meaning.” Moreover, changes in such institutions are often brought about by a change in meaning: “a change of idea or concept, a change of judgment or evaluation, a change of the order or request.” An apposite example of such change is the reinterpretation of a national constitution.<sup>69</sup>

The *communicative function* of meaning is shown in the actual communication of one person to another, in any or all of the intersubjective, artistic, symbolic, linguistic, or incarnate modes. Through the communicative function, meaning can become a rich store of common meaning to attain, if successfully communicated, social and historical significance.<sup>70</sup>

Indeed, for Lonergan, the communicative and constitutive functions of meaning taken together give us notions of community, existence, and history. For community is an achievement of common meaning. Such meaning is merely potential in shared experience; it becomes formal in common understandings, and actual in common judgments, to be fully realized

<sup>66</sup> Lonergan, *Method in Theology* 74.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.* 76–77.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.* 78.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.* 77–78.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.* 78–79.

through common decisions and choices. Into such communities people are born, and it is only with respect to a community's common meanings that the individual "grows in experience, understanding, judgment and so comes to find out for himself that he has to decide for himself what to make of himself."<sup>71</sup> Thus there arises the notion of existence, which, in its turn, may be authentic or inauthentic: "There is the minor authenticity or unauthenticity of the subject with respect to the tradition that nourishes him. There is the major authenticity that justifies or condemns the tradition itself."<sup>72</sup> When the tradition itself is unauthentic, one may find that one "can do no more than authentically realize unauthenticity." It is left to history and divine providence to pass judgment on all traditions.<sup>73</sup>

It is not difficult to get lost in the wealth of distinctions, but it might be useful to suggest something of their theological utility through a concrete application. If we adopt the broad outlines of the psychological analogy for the Trinity,<sup>74</sup> then in the first instance the Word can be thought of analogously as the formal and full act of meaning of the Father. As Lonergan notes, while in us conception (formal act) and judgment (full act) are distinct, in the infinite being of God they are identical.<sup>75</sup> Further the Son can also be thought of as analogous to a judgment of value, a *verbum spirans amorem*,<sup>76</sup> in this case a constitutive judgment of value.<sup>77</sup> Similarly the Spirit can be thought of analogously as a decision flowing from the judgment of value, a decisive constitutive act of loving meaning of the Father and Son. These meaning acts of Son and Spirit are then made effective in human history through the two divine missions, of the Son through the Incarnation and the Spirit through sanctifying grace. In the Incarnation the divine formal, full, and constitutive act of meaning that is the Son is given human expression through the diverse carriers of meaning, as intersubjective, artistic, symbolic, literary, and, most importantly, incarnate. Jesus does not simply speak God's Word; his personal identity is that of God's Word incarnate among us (Jn 1:14). The sources of these meanings in history are the conscious intentional acts of the incarnate Word,

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. 79.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. 80.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. 80.

<sup>74</sup> See, e.g., Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *The Triune God: Systematics*, ed. Robert Doran and Daniel Monsour, trans. Michael Shields, CWBL 12 (Toronto: Toronto University, 2007); and Neil Ormerod, *Trinity: Retrieving the Western Tradition* (Milwaukee: Marquette University, 2005).

<sup>75</sup> Lonergan, *Verbum* 204–8, esp. 208.

<sup>76</sup> See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* (hereafter *ST*) 1, q. 43, a. 5.

<sup>77</sup> Lonergan, *Verbum* 204–8, esp. 208. In fact, for Lonergan the judgment of value becomes the prime analogue for the procession of the Son; see Lonergan, *The Triune God: Systematics* 181–89; Bernard J. F. Lonergan, "Christology Today: Methodological Reflections," in *A Third Collection: Papers*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe (New York: Paulist, 1985) 74–99, at 93.

Jesus Christ, whose own experience of the Father is elemental or potential, that is, where meaning is not distinguished from meant, in the beatific vision.<sup>78</sup> That potential divine meaning is given formal, full, constitutive, and effective expression in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. That divine meaning functions cognitively as an expression of divine meaning and truth through the faith of believers; constitutively through Christ alive in believers (Gal 2:20) and in the Holy Spirit poured into our hearts (Rom 5:5);<sup>79</sup> communicatively in the preaching of Jesus and the Apostles and in the literary documents of the New Testament; and effectively in the ongoing mission of the church prolonging the mission of Jesus and empowered by his Spirit. The constitutive and communicative functions give rise to the community, existence, and history of the church.

Since meaning is prolonged into historical time frames, Lonergan adds to his discussion notions of “realms” and “stages” of meaning. He identifies five realms of meaning as common sense, theory, interiority, transcendence, scholarship, and art.<sup>80</sup> These find their source in corresponding differentiations of consciousness of the human subject. Such differentiations and their corresponding realms are not just given but emerge both individually and historically.<sup>81</sup> Similarly Lonergan’s three stages of meaning are historical “ideal types” for understanding the emergence of different realms in history. The first stage is that of undifferentiated common sense. The second is the emergence of theory, which is then placed in tension with the world of common sense. That tension is resolved in the third stage of meaning with the emergence of an interior realm, which critically relates and differentiates the realms of common sense and theory (and scholarship and art).

Again, this framework of stages of meaning has theological application in a consideration of the topic Newman dealt with, the development of doctrine. There is a process of transposition of meaning as we move from one realm to another, and from one stage of meaning to another. The same truth may be intended in both common sense and theory, but the language may be unrecognizable. And so Nicaea uses the nonscriptural

<sup>78</sup> Hence the content of the beatific vision is ineffable or incommunicable. See Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *De Verbo Incarnato*, 3rd ed. (Rome: Gregorian University, 1964) 332–416.

<sup>79</sup> And so Aquinas speaks of the indwelling of both Word and Spirit; see *ST* 1, q. 43, a. 5, esp. ad. 2.

<sup>80</sup> Initially in *Method in Theology*, Lonergan speaks of four realms: common sense, theory, interiority, and transcendence (81–85). He later adds a realm of scholarship and art (272).

<sup>81</sup> For example, the work of Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1989), can be viewed as mapping out the emergence of the interior realm of meaning in the modern era, from the time of Descartes.

term *homoousious* to express the same truth about Jesus that was expressed in a more commonsense literary form in the New Testament. New differentiations and developments of consciousness may lead to new doctrinal developments. Thus Lonergan suggests “that human psychology and specifically the refinement of human feelings is the area to be explored in coming to understand the development of Marian doctrines.”<sup>82</sup>

As a component of the universe of proportionate being, meaning is subject to analysis in terms of the metaphysical elements of potency, form, and act.<sup>83</sup> As Robert Doran notes, “potency, form, and act become the principles of a historical ontology of meaning.”<sup>84</sup> We can explore the potency, form, and act of the various acts, realms, stages, functions, and carriers of meaning, both in terms of individual subjects and in communities such as the Church. To focus for the time being on the community dimension, the form of meaning is found in the schemes of recurrence of habitual shared insights and shared meanings, which are passed on (tradition) through the various carriers of meaning at a given time. Where new insights and judgments emerge, they have a certain probability of survival depending on the capacity of the community to sustain them. The community requires the “prior presupposed insights” and “techniques for their dissemination and preservation” if the new meanings are to survive.<sup>85</sup> This parallels MacIntyre’s account of a tradition of rationality, which for Lonergan would amount to a scheme of recurrence of meaning with a high probability for survival. And because meanings can also be false, the community will require methods for discerning and judging the validity of the new meanings that emerge.

And so, regarding the question raised by Newman on doctrinal development Lonergan rejects both a position he calls anachronistic, which “attributed to scripture and to the Fathers an implicit grasp of what the Scholastics discovered,” and a position he calls archaist, which “regarded as a corruption any doctrine that was not to be found in the plain meaning

<sup>82</sup> Lonergan, *Method in Theology* 320.

<sup>83</sup> Lonergan transposes the classical Thomistic metaphysics of potency, form, and act into a more fully explanatory context through the use of his cognitional theory. Without going into detail here, while Lonergan’s metaphysical elements are similar to the Thomistic elements, they are not identical, and certainly Lonergan’s account is subject to tighter control of meaning because of its grounding in his cognitional theory. See Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, ed. Crowe Frederick E. and Robert M. Doran, CWBL 3 (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1992), esp. chap. 14.

<sup>84</sup> Doran, *Theology and the Dialectics of History* 623.

<sup>85</sup> Lonergan, *Insight* 537–38.

either of scripture or of scripture and patristic tradition.” In their place he posits a third option:

It would contend that there can be many kinds of developments and that, to know them, one has to study and analyze concrete historical processes while, to know their legitimacy, one has to turn to evaluational history and assign them their place in the dialectic of the presence and absence of intellectual, moral, and religious conversion.<sup>86</sup>

Here we witness a key feature of Newman’s account, that to understand any particular doctrinal development requires an analysis of the “concrete historical processes” that lead to its final proclamation. And as I have argued above, the key question is not one of continuity/discontinuity but of the authenticity/unauthenticity of the development. That authenticity/unauthenticity is a function of “the presence and absence of intellectual, moral, and religious conversion.”<sup>87</sup>

Lonergan’s account of the ontology of meaning is by far the most technical, detailed, and precise of the three I have considered. What is clear is the weakness of any stance that would take as its starting point the metaphor of continuity/discontinuity. For Lonergan, every insight, every conceptualization, every judgment is a leap in the “being of meaning,” whether in the individual or in the schemes of recurrence of meaning constitutive of a tradition.

Lonergan’s analysis of meaning can assist us in several ways in understanding both the lead up to Vatican II and its outcomes. Lonergan often commented on the cultural impact of historical consciousness and the rise of modern science.<sup>88</sup> However, he also noted as of profound significance the emergence of a third stage of meaning, one grounded in the conscious intentionality of the subject. The modern turn to the subject requires a major cultural effort to avoid the problems of “mere” subjectivity, while achieving the needed transposition of a metaphysically conceived tradition into a new realm of meaning. Indeed, Lonergan stated that what we currently face is not a crisis of faith but a crisis of culture, as the culture itself begins to enact the implications of such a shift.<sup>89</sup> This

<sup>86</sup> Lonergan, *Method in Theology* 312.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> I have already quoted Lonergan on the significance of historical consciousness for theology. In relation to the rise of science, he quoted the opinion of Herbert Butterfield, that “it outshines everything since the rise of Christianity and reduces the Renaissance and the Reformation to mere episodes, mere internal displacements, with the system of medieval Christendom” (Bernard J. F. Lonergan, “Theology in Its New Context,” in *A Second Collection: Papers*, ed. William F. J. Ryan and Bernard J. Tyrrell [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974] 55–67, at 56).

<sup>89</sup> See Bernard J. F. Lonergan, “Dimensions of Meaning,” in *Collection*, ed. Robert M. Doran and Frederick E. Crowe, CWBL 4 (Toronto: Toronto University, 1988) 232–45, at 244.



is a further factor in the epistemological crisis the Church faced at the time of Vatican II.<sup>90</sup>

However, Lonergan's work also encourages a more dialectical form of questioning.<sup>91</sup> He raises the problem not only of the unauthenticity of the individual but also of the tradition itself. Was the tradition itself promoting religious, moral, and intellectual conversion? In relation to the three major cultural shifts identified above, was the Church simply slow on the uptake or actively resisting movements that were genuine intellectual advances? Were there moral issues, such as questions of anti-Semitism, human rights, and religious freedom where, again, the Church was resisting genuine moral developments?<sup>92</sup> Elsewhere I have suggested a religious failure, a failure in the Church's mission to the world, inasmuch as the Church adopted a more sectarian stance against the world rather than acting as a mediator of salvation for the sake of the world.<sup>93</sup> Benedict XVI himself has acknowledged that one of the key issues faced by the council was the need to "determine in a new way the relationship between the Church and the modern era."<sup>94</sup> It would not be difficult to make the case that a "new way" was needed because the "old way" had become dysfunctional, no longer authentic to the Church's mission.

In terms of the outcomes of the council, we can consider questions in relation to the functions of meaning and the carriers of meaning. In seeking to promote an image of continuity, many will refer to the constancy of doctrine in the Church. And so Benedict in his address to the Roman Curia speaks of "doctrine, pure and integral, without any attenuation or distortion"; "adherence to all the teaching of the Church in its entirety and preciseness"; and "faithful and perfect conformity to the authentic doctrine."<sup>95</sup> What is significant here is the emphasis placed on the cognitional function of meaning (true doctrine). Nonetheless identity questions cannot be reduced to such cognitional meaning alone. One must also take into

<sup>90</sup> While Lonergan and Taylor endorse the contemporary turn to the subject, MacIntyre remains opposed to it. For a response to MacIntyre's objections in terms of his own criteria see Neil Ormerod, "Faith and Reason: Perspectives from MacIntyre and Lonergan," *Heythrop Journal* 46 (2005) 11–22.

<sup>91</sup> This raises more questions than can be dealt with here. The debate invites an analysis along the lines suggested by Lonergan's functional specialty of dialectics. I have done some work in relation to this in my "The Times They Are a'Changin'." More needs to be done in this regard, but it is beyond the scope of this article.

<sup>92</sup> See, for example, Stephen Schloesser, "Against Forgetting: Memory, History, Vatican II," *Theological Studies* 67 (2006) 275–319.

<sup>93</sup> See Ormerod, "'The Times They Are a'Changin'" 846–48.

<sup>94</sup> Quoted in Lamb and Levering, *Vatican II: Renewal within Tradition* xii. Benedict also acknowledges that this issue in itself gave credence to a "hermeneutic of discontinuity."

<sup>95</sup> Quoted in *ibid.* xi. Benedict is here quoting Pope John XXIII.

account the effective, constitutive, and communicative functions. And so John O'Malley's observations about the different style of communication adopted by the council pertain to the communicative function of meaning.<sup>96</sup> There were also major changes in the constitutive meaning as the Church reconceived its identity in terms of its relationships with other Christian churches, with other religions, and with the world at large. Finally there were changes in the ways in which the Church sought to effect changes in the world (effective meaning), by reinvigorating a sense of mission to the world. All these changes can occur without any significant change in the cognitional meaning of the Church. This type of analysis also gives some substance to the attempts by Benedict to speak of a "combination of continuity and discontinuity at different levels" characteristic of true reform.<sup>97</sup>

Taking up O'Malley's point about communicative meaning, the ways in which these new meanings have been carried or communicated into the life of the Church also changed. The Council brought with it in its wake new symbols, new artistic expression, and a renewed focus on the Scriptures (literary carrier) as ways of carrying forward the new effective and constitutive meanings. The greatest impact here was perhaps in the liturgy and in a wide variety of disciplinary and pious practices that went by the wayside. The new wine could not be contained by the old wineskins. Significantly it is in this area that tensions between differing understandings of the council are often most felt. The old practices conveyed a specific set of effective and constitutive meanings that have changed significantly since the council. Efforts to restore these practices can be viewed as an effort to overturn the meanings the council developed in its response to reposition itself in its relationship to the world.

## CONCLUSION

I began this article with reference to debates around the significance of Vatican II. I have argued that the real issue underlying the debates is not that of continuity/discontinuity, a metaphor that is basically just descriptive when talking about communities constituted by meaning; the real issue is that of the authenticity/unauthenticity of the developments that the council either initiated or precipitated. When we consider life on either side of the council we might draw attention to the following communal shifts, which had their origins in the conciliar documents:<sup>98</sup>

- A shift to full and effective participation in the liturgy, particularly through the use of the vernacular (*Sacrosanctum concilium*); with a

<sup>96</sup> O'Malley, "Vatican II" 3–33.

<sup>97</sup> Lamb and Levering, *Vatican II: Renewal within Tradition* xiii.

<sup>98</sup> This list does not claim to be exhaustive, merely illustrative of the argument.

perceived correlative loss of the sense of the sacred that pervaded the pre-Vatican II Latin rites.<sup>99</sup>

- An increased familiarity among Catholics with the language and content of the Scriptures and a more biblically based theology among Catholic theologians (*Dei Verbum*); and a correlative loss of accessibility to and appreciation of the genuine achievements of the Scholastic tradition.
- A growth in genuine respect for persons of other faiths, both Christian and non-Christian, and a recognition of the importance of religious freedom for all people (*Unitatis redintegratio, Dignitatis humanae, Nostra aetate*); and a correlative growth in religious relativism and indifferentism.
- A growth in a sense of the lay apostolate as a genuine participation in the mission of the Church that belongs to the laity in their own capacity, not as foot soldiers of the hierarchy (*Apostolicam actuositatem*); and a correlative loss of a sense of the special place of the committed religious life in the mission and service of the Church.
- A new appreciation of the “priesthood of all believers” with the laity sharing in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly missions of Christ (*Lumen gentium*) by virtue of their baptism; and a correlative confusion about the nature of the distinction between the general priesthood of all believers and ministerial priesthood.

Significantly in each case, the shift is more a matter of effective, constitutive, and communicative meaning rather than cognitive. The shifts are not new doctrines as such. In each shift as it has been enacted in the history of the Church since the council, there are elements of authenticity and unauthenticity that require a dialectical analysis; and in each case it seems to me that the orientation of the shift initiated by the council is authentic, just as the unauthentic overshoot was a relatively predictable outcome in the short term.

If this is the case, then the solution to the problem is one of ecclesial management. The problem with the language of continuity/discontinuity is that the validity of the orientation of the shifts itself is called into question. No one can doubt that these changes have taken place in the life of the Church, and that they found their support in the conciliar documents. Nor should we think that the changes that occurred are sufficient to meet the demands required of our present context. In that sense the most that

<sup>99</sup> Whether real or not is another issue. Certainly the ways the sacred is expressed has changed from pre-Vatican II forms. Whether this change amounts to a loss of the sense of the sacred or a shift in the locus of the sacred and how it is now responded to is a further question.

the council could do was authorize the beginnings of a process whose end point is not yet in sight. The present official stress on continuity would then seem to some people to undermine the validity of the council itself.<sup>100</sup> If, however, the debate were to be focused on the issue of the authenticity of the shifts that have occurred, a more nuanced and fruitful debate can begin.

<sup>100</sup> That the stress on continuity remains even for Benedict is evident in his encyclical *Caritas in veritate* no.12.