

LONERGAN'S CONTRIBUTION TO ECUMENISM

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[The author suggests that the reception of ecumenical consensus is related to an adequate appreciation of theological method. The functional approach outlined in Bernard Lonergan's Method in Theology provides a framework for reflecting on the role of ecumenical consensus statements and their relation to diverse expressions of the apostolic faith in the past, present, and future. She then proposes that ecumenical dialogues not limit themselves to the elaboration of consensus but make explicit the implications in relation to past judgments and future articulations of faith.]

FORTY YEARS AFTER Pope John XXIII's convocation of the Second Vatican Council, it is seldom recalled that one of his primary motives was to redouble the effort of the Catholic Church to work for the unity of all Christians.¹ Since the close of Vatican II the ecumenical commitment of the Catholic Church has been concretized through the process of formal ecumenical dialogue with other churches through the World Council of Churches' Commission on Faith and Order and through an impressive

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¹ John XXIII, "Opening Speech [October 11, 1962]," in *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbott and Joseph Gallagher (New York: America, 1966) 710–19, at 717. See also: "The restoration of unity among all Christians is one of the principal concerns of the second Vatican synod" (Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis redintegratio* no. 1, in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils: Volume II [Trent—Vatican II]*, ed. Norman P. Tanner [Washington: Georgetown University, 1990] 908). All subsequent references to the documents of Vatican II are taken from the Tanner edition. See also: "It is the intention of this holy council to . . . encourage whatever can contribute to the union of all who believe in Christ" (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum concilium* no. 1); "And since the church is in Christ as a sacrament or instrumental sign of intimate union with God and of the unity of all humanity, the council, continuing the teaching of previous councils, intends to declare with greater clarity . . . the nature of the church and its universal mission . . . so that all people . . . may also attain full unity in Christ" (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium* no. 1).

number of bilateral conversations. The decades of the 1970s and 1980s were marked by a fresh enthusiasm and a high degree of optimism as surprising areas of consensus were discovered. Then, faced with the articulation of agreement that emerged from the dialogues and the suggestion that what were once thought to be significant differences need no longer be considered church dividing, the churches hesitated. Many were not equipped to recognize themselves readily in the language of ecumenical agreed statements. Where new levels of consensus invited a reexamination of existing theological expression and pastoral practice, the churches seemed resistant to the serious renewal that ecumenical engagement requires. By the end of the 20th century it became quite fashionable to speak of the “winter” of the ecumenical movement, and to suggest that the approach of “consensus ecumenism” had failed.² The project of theological dialogue seemed fruitless. The efforts of the theologians had little effect on the lives of those at the grassroots who were impatient to move beyond old boundaries. Some suggested that a new paradigm was needed for the ecumenical movement focused more on practical collaboration and common witness rather than on doctrinal divisions.³

The ecumenical movement has clearly reached a crossroads. However, I do not share the pessimistic diagnosis that consensus ecumenism has failed. Nor do I resign myself to the view that doctrinal ecumenism ought to be set aside. Decades of dialogue have brought us to a critical juncture that ought to be welcomed as an opportunity for new realism and for the maturation of the ecumenical movement. If the achievements of earlier phases of the ecumenical movement have produced limited and somewhat ambivalent results in the life of the churches, future approaches to ecumenical dialogue must not abandon the original goal of visible unity, of communion in faith expressed through communion in sacramental life, ministry, and mission. Today we are discovering that both the task of dialogue and the reception of ecumenical consensus statements are more complex processes than we had first imagined. This is a moment to learn from the methods and achievements of the dialogues to date, to build upon them rather than discard their accomplishments. As part of this effort we must reflect carefully on the role of theological dialogue and ecumenical consensus statements. In my view, our understanding of consensus statements and their reception is directly related to our comprehension of theology and its tasks.

² *Crisis and Challenge of the Ecumenical Movement: Integrity and Indivisibility*. A Statement of the Institute for Ecumenical Research, Strasbourg (Geneva: WCC, 1994) 11.

³ Konrad Raiser, *Ecumenism in Transition: A Paradigm Shift in the Ecumenical Movement?*, trans. Tony Coates (Geneva: WCC, 1991).

In the course of recent investigations I have found it particularly illuminating to employ the framework developed by Bernard Lonergan in *Method in Theology*,⁴ a systematic reflection on the multiple tasks of contemporary theology, to examine the methodology of ecumenical dialogue.⁵ While a number of authors have found it helpful to apply Lonergan's reflection on conversion to the world of ecumenical dialogue, to my knowledge, few have applied Lonergan's framework of method in a systematic way to the task of dialogue and the elaboration of consensus statements.⁶ In what follows I propose such an application in the hope of clarifying the project of ecumenical dialogue and the role of consensus statements in the life of the Church.

THE VALUE OF A FUNCTIONAL APPROACH TO METHOD

Bernard Lonergan elaborates a "framework for collaborative creativity" where he describes a series of "clusters of operations" or functional specialties to be carried out by theologians on the basis of the structure of conscious intentionality.⁷ He divides the operations of theology into eight functional specialties according to the four levels of conscious intentional operations: experiencing, understanding, judging, and deciding. These are further subdivided into two phases: the mediating phase which listens to the Word, encounters the past, and assimilates the tradition; and the mediated phase which proclaims the Word, confronts the future, and hands on the tradition.⁸ In the first phase one encounters research, interpretation, history, and dialectic; in the second, foundations, doctrines, systematics, and communications. The second is dependent upon the first, and is rooted in the experience of conversion. In fact, this whole framework reflects a series of operations and tasks that are interdependent and not easily isolated from one another.

⁴ Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1994; orig. ed. 1972).

⁵ "The Groupe des Dombes: A Dialogue of Conversion," Ph.D. dissertation, University of St. Michael's College, University of Toronto, 2002, and also my "The Joint Declaration, Method, and the Hermeneutics of Ecumenical Consensus," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 38 (2001) forthcoming.

⁶ See, e.g., Maurice Schlepers, "Dialogue and Conversion," *Horizons* 25 (1988) 72–83; Eugene Webb, "The Ecumenical Significance of Lonergan's Method," *Ecumenical Trends* 17, no. 4 (1988) 48–52; Edward K. Braxton, "Theological Method, the Joint Declaration on Justification by Faith, and the Work of Ecumenical Theologians," paper presented at the North American Academy of Ecumenists, Saint Louis, Missouri, September 2000.

⁷ *Method in Theology* xi.

⁸ *Ibid.* 133.

Why, one might ask, would an ecumenist appeal to Lonergan's approach? The first advantage of a functional approach to method is that it will help us to avoid the pitfalls of considering "ecumenical theology" as a new theological discipline with methods that set it apart from the wider enterprise of theology in service to the life of the Church. This latter tendency, which might be considered a field or subject approach to theological method, can have the unintended effect of marginalizing the project of ecumenical specialists from other theological undertakings. By employing a functional approach one can ask whether all the resources of theology are being put at the service of ecumenical progress and whether the results of ecumenical dialogue are being received into every dimension of the Church's theological activity. A second attraction is the central place accorded to the reality of conversion in Lonergan's framework. This coincides with a growing consciousness that the ecumenical movement, a movement of renewal and reform, will best be served by a theology that attends to the dynamic of conversion in the life of the churches.⁹ All ecumenical dialogue is fundamentally a "dialogue of conversion."¹⁰ Lonergan's theory can illuminate our appreciation of the manner in which the activity of dialogue and consensus seeking promotes the conversion of the churches. Thirdly, a functional approach has the advantage of attending equally to both the mediating and the mediated phases of theology. It is my contention that if they are to be adequate, ecumenical consensus statements must attend to both phases of method. In this way they will facilitate the dual process of recognition and the reception of ecumenical consensus.

One might argue that, since Lonergan's model of method is based on a highly developed theory of conscious intentionality, it would be impossible for those who do not share his epistemological suppositions to espouse such an approach. Those who engage in ecumenical dialogue come from a broad variety of backgrounds and they can hardly be expected to embrace the whole of Lonergan's approach. Nonetheless, I would argue that for genuine dialogue to take place at all, participants must share to some degree in the critical realism that is basic to Lonergan's theory of knowing. The fundamental hermeneutical principles established by Vatican II and which have enabled Catholics to engage in sincere dialogue, all imply an activity of critical judgment in the knowledge and appropriation of the Christian faith. Among the most significant of these principles I would name the recognition of a legitimate diversity of theology, spirituality, and

⁹ The theme of conversion has played a significant role in the work of the Groupe des Dombes, a Reformed-Lutheran-Catholic conversation. Of particular interest is its study, *For the Conversion of the Churches*, trans. James Greig (Geneva: WCC, 1993); orig. ed. *Pour la conversion des Églises* (Paris: Centurion, 1991).

¹⁰ John Paul II, "Ut Unum Sint,—On Commitment to Ecumenism," *Origins* 25 (June 8, 1995) no. 35.

discipline in the life of the church,¹¹ the acceptance of a hierarchy of truths in doctrinal teaching,¹² and an appreciation of genuine growth and development in our understanding of revelation.¹³ These are principles that apply not only to the context of ecumenical dialogue but also to the whole undertaking of theology. Genuine dialogue is not possible without an adequate appreciation of pluralism and historical mindedness, without the empirical worldview that provides the backdrop for Lonergan's approach to method in theology.

The ecumenical awakening of the 20th century coincides with the shift that Lonergan identified from a classicist worldview to a historically minded worldview in Catholic theology.¹⁴ When discussing doctrines Lonergan notes two ways in which the unity of faith might be conceived that correspond roughly to these two worldviews:

On classicist assumptions there is just one notion of culture. . . . Within this set-up the unity of faith is a matter of everyone subscribing to correct formulae. Such classicism, however, was never more than the shabby shell of Catholicism. The real root and ground of unity is being in love with God—the fact that God's love has flooded our inmost hearts through the Holy Spirit he has given us (Rom. 5,5).¹⁵

Genuine dialogue is not possible when ecclesial unity is conceived according to classicist suppositions. For the classicist, unity can only be achieved by returning to the one legitimate culture or by espousing identical expressions of faith. In contrast, the religious principle of God's unconditional gift of love is, according to Lonergan, "the basis of Christian ecumenism."¹⁶ The model of doctrinal unity rooted therein accepts the historically and culturally conditioned aspects of doctrinal expression and expects that the meaning of doctrines will be appropriated differently in varying contexts. In this view the road to unity is understood as the progress of the churches toward Christ and toward the full manifestation of catholicity through renewed fidelity to the gospel. Vatican II embraced a view of ecumenical engagement rooted in the dynamic of personal conversion and institutional

¹¹ *Lumen gentium* no. 13; *Unitatis redintegratio* no. 17. In this regard, Pope John XXIII set the tone for the Second Vatican Council when he affirmed: "The substance of the ancient doctrine of the deposit of faith is one thing, and the way in which it is presented is another" ("Opening Speech" 715).

¹² *Unitatis redintegratio* no. 11.

¹³ Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum* no. 12. See also, Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "In Defense of Catholic Doctrine [*Mysterium ecclesiae*]," *Origins* 3 (July, 1973) 97–100, 110–13.

¹⁴ Bernard Lonergan, "The Transition from a Classicist Worldview to Historical Mindedness," *Second Collection* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1996) 1–9; "Theology in its New Context," *ibid.* 55–67.

¹⁵ *Method in Theology* 326–37.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 360.

renewal.¹⁷ Prayer and conversion of heart are said to constitute the “soul of the ecumenical movement”¹⁸ and to provide the matrix for ecumenical dialogue. Lonergan writes that through the experience of religious conversion “there accrues to man the power of love to enable him to accept the suffering involved in undoing the effects of decline.”¹⁹ The transforming experience of being in love with God, nourished through prayer, strengthens us to ask the hard questions and face the challenge of taking the costly decisions required to undo the effects of ecclesial divisions and move forward toward the reconciliation of the churches.

In recent years we have witnessed a lingering classicist worldview that confuses unity with uniformity, doctrinal unity with an identity of theological formulas.²⁰ A persistent conflict between classicist and empirical approaches to theology extends across confessional boundaries with the result that we sometimes experience ourselves as having more in common with members of another confessional group than we do with adherents of our own church. While no church is immune from certain expressions of classicist bias or confessionalism, they are perhaps most deeply rooted in communities that are distinguished by an uncritical adherence to biblical revelation, as in the fast growing number of Evangelical and Pentecostal groups, or by tendencies toward an ahistorical grasp of tradition, as in the case of some Orthodox churches. Thus, as many mainline churches discover common ground and grow together in communion, Evangelicals and Pentecostals on one hand, and Orthodox Christians on the other, experience a sense of alienation from the wider ecumenical movement.²¹ It is often suggested that such conflicts reside in divergent conceptions of the goal of Christian unity. This view is only partially correct. The root of

¹⁷ “The council calls for personal conversion as well as for communal conversion” (*Ut unum sint* no. 15); “In the teaching of the Second Vatican Council there is a clear connection between conversion, renewal, and reform” (*ibid.* no. 16). See also *Unitatis redintegratio* no. 6.

¹⁸ *Unitatis redintegratio* no. 8.

¹⁹ *Method in Theology* 242.

²⁰ For example, the official Vatican response to the Final Report of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission understood itself as “an official response as to the *identity* of the various statements with the faith of the church” in *Common Witness to the Gospel: Documents on Anglican-Roman Catholic Relations 1983–1995*, ed. Jeffrey Gros, E. Rozanne Elder, and Ellen K. Wondra (Washington: USCC, 1997) no. 33. See also the response of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith to the proposed Lutheran–Catholic Joint Declaration on Justification by Faith which created considerable confusion when it observed that, in spite of the “consensus on basic truths” that had been achieved, “we cannot yet speak of a consensus such as would *eliminate every difference*.” It held that major difficulties persist “preventing an affirmation of *total consensus*” (“Official Catholic Response to Joint Declaration,” *Origins* 28 (July 16, 1998) 130–132, at 130; emphases mine).

²¹ I acknowledge the perils of making broad generalizations concerning any con-

differing notions of unity subsists at the level of worldviews and is reflected in varying understandings of the method and hermeneutic of dialogue itself. Lonergan rightly suggests that “division resides mainly in the cognitive meaning of the Christian message.”²² Dialogue is not possible without a transition from a world of immediacy to a world mediated by meaning. Short of this, ecumenical conversation will stall in a search, consciously or unconsciously, for conformity to and identity with the doctrinal expression of one’s own confession.

DIALECTIC: A KEY TASK

Within the framework of method developed by Lonergan, much of the energy of ecumenical dialogue will be focused on the operations of dialectic that “finds abundant materials in the history of Christian movements,” especially the conflict between them and “the secondary conflicts in historical accounts and theological interpretations of the movements.”²³ Lonergan describes dialectic as “a generalized apologetic conducted in an ecumenical spirit, aiming ultimately at a comprehensive viewpoint, and proceeding toward the goal by acknowledging differences, seeking their grounds real and apparent, and eliminating superfluous opposition.”²⁴ Through the process of dialogue and mutual listening, participants address the existence of contrary positions. Some of these differences may be overcome through the integration of new data discovered through the operations of research and interpretation. Others may come to be appreciated as variations in perspective that do not exclude the view of the dialogue partner. This experience was clearly recognized in John Paul II’s encyclical letter on ecumenism, *Ut unum sint*, published in 1995:

As far as the formulation of revealed truth is concerned, the declaration *Mysterium Ecclesiae* states: ‘Even though the truths which the Church intends to teach through her dogmatic formulas are distinct from the changeable conceptions of a given epoch and can be expressed without them, nevertheless it can sometimes happen that these truths may be enunciated by the sacred magisterium in terms that bear traces of such conceptions. . . . In this regard, ecumenical dialogue, which prompts the parties involved to question each other, to understand each other, and to explain their positions to each other, makes surprising discoveries possible. Intolerant polemics and controversies have made incompatible assertions out of what was really the result of two different ways of looking at the same reality. Nowadays

fessional group. However, the trends identified here are generally accepted. My purpose is simply to suggest one way of understanding their origin.

²² *Method in Theology* 368; elsewhere Lonergan explained: “A first function of meaning is cognitive. It takes us out of the infant’s world of immediacy and places us in the adult’s world, which is a world mediated by meaning” (ibid. 76).

²³ Ibid. 129.

²⁴ Ibid. 130.

we need to find a formula which, by capturing the reality in its entirety, will enable us to move beyond partial readings and eliminate false interpretations.²⁵

In a first stage of dialogue, one needs to distinguish those differences of horizon that are complementary and genetic from those that are dialectically opposed. After this initial period of clarification that is sometimes characterized as a stage of “comparative method” in ecumenical dialogue, one proceeds to a second stage to address the roots of genuine opposition. Here, Lonergan explains: “The function of dialectic will be to bring such conflicts to light, and to provide a technique that objectifies subjective differences and promotes conversion.”²⁶ The way forward must lie in a movement of conversion toward a new horizon of common understanding, for, he insists, “the presence or absence of intellectual, of moral, of religious conversion gives rise to dialectically opposed horizons.”²⁷ The goal of dialogue, then, will be not only to arrive at a common and comprehensive viewpoint. It involves necessarily the transformation of each ecclesial subject.²⁸ Ultimately, this is the work of divine grace in us, and the fruit of an encounter with the living Word of God.

RERECEIVING THE WORD

The functional specialty of dialectic is the fourth of the operations located in the first phase of method that Lonergan designated as the mediating phase where theology confronts the past and listens to and appropriates the Word revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Ecumenists engaged in dialectic draw necessarily upon the operations of the preceding specialties of research, interpretation, and history. The lived experience of listening together to the Word of God is essential to arriving at a common understanding and articulation of the gospel. Yet the work of exegesis is not accomplished in a vacuum. Lonergan observes: “[E]very investigation is conducted from within some horizon. . . . Whether they are explicitly acknowledged or not, dialectically opposed horizons lead to opposed value judgments, opposed accounts of historical movements, opposed interpre-

²⁵ *Ut unum sint* no. 38.

²⁶ *Method in Theology* 235.

²⁷ *Ibid.* 247.

²⁸ This dimension of ecumenical dialogue is acknowledged clearly by Pope John Paul II: “Dialogue is an indispensable step along the path *towards human self-realization*, the self-realization both of *each individual* and of *every human community*. Although the concept of dialogue might appear to give priority to the cognitive dimension (*dia-logos*), all dialogue implies a global, existential dimension. It involves the human subject in his or her entirety; dialogue between communities involves in a particular way the subjectivity of each” (*Ut unum sint* no. 28).

tations of authors, and different selections of data in special research.²⁹ Scholars from each church approach the data of Scripture and tradition with a set of presuppositions that reflect one's confessional horizon. For this reason, a common rereading of history is indispensable to uncovering the roots of division.³⁰ The task of the functional specialty of history, and in particular, what Lonergan calls "critical history," is not simply the narrative of historical fact, but the discernment of what was going forward at key moments in the history of the Church. Together partners in dialogue needs to ask whether these were moments of progress or decline and whether the judgments and decisions of the past were marked by authenticity or unauthenticity. Were they a faithful reception and interpretation of the Word of God, or were they marked by sin and the distortion that results from bias? Did they foster ecclesial communion or contribute to the breakdown of unity in faith? The judgments of fact and value that result from critical history are enriched by the evaluative interpretation that pertains to the task of dialectic.³¹

In the context of ecumenical dialogue, a common rereading of history allows us to understand more deeply how each tradition has received and interpreted the Word of God throughout the centuries. A critical rereading allows us both to rereceive³² the rich insights of each tradition and to

²⁹ *Method in Theology* 247.

³⁰ My views here are influenced by the methodology of the Groupe des Dombes, a dialogue group that has accorded an increasing role to the common rereading of history in recent documents. In explaining the significance of this converted rereading (*relecture convertie*) the Groupe des Dombes explains: « Nous avons estimé aussi que sans ce passage obligé le recours à l'autorité de l'Écriture risquait de cacher nos présupposés respectifs dans une lecture sélective et une interprétation orientée. Notre tâche est plutôt de relire l'Écriture avec une conscience aussi avérée que possible des enjeux qui nous habitent, afin de recueillir son enseignement en totalité, dans le respect de sa richesse et la complémentarité de ses données diverses» (*Le ministère de communion dans l'Église universelle* [Paris: Centurion, 1986] 16). Here the work of critical history precedes the appeal to the data of Scripture. The same procedure by the Groupe des Dombes is apparent in *For the Conversion of the Churches* and more recently in *Marie dans le dessein de Dieu et la communion des saints*, 2 vols. (Paris: Bayard, 1997–1998), now translated as *Mary in the Plan of God and in the Communion of Saints*, ed. Alain Blancy et al. (New York: Paulist, 2002). A comparable approach is evident in the U.S. Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue's study on *Justification by Faith: Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VII*, ed. H. George Anderson, T. Austin Murphy, and Joseph A. Burgess (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985).

³¹ "Such, then, is a first task of dialectic. It has to add to the interpretation that understands a further interpretation that appreciates. It has to add to the history that grasps what was going forward a history that evaluates achievements, that discerns good and evil. It has to direct the special research needed for such interpretation and for such history" (*Method in Theology* 246).

³² The processes of reception and "rereception" are aptly described in: Anglican-

recognize the limitations or shortcomings of historical judgments and expressions of faith. It goes without saying that a shared rereading of history will produce results that could not possibly be achieved by rehearsing our separate versions of history, marked as they are by confessional bias. A common account of history is an essential component of the purification of memories that must precede genuine reconciliation. Nonetheless, this activity will not be complete if we limit ourselves to the task of developing a common narrative, for this would bring little challenge.

The activity of “encounter” with the past, with the living Word that is spoken in our history, pertains to what Lonergan identifies as the fourth level of intentional consciousness and to the theological task of dialectic. “Encounter,” insists Lonergan “is the one way in which self-understanding and horizon can be put to the test.”³³ By confronting the effects of bias and the limits of our confessional horizon, we are freed to hear the Word of God anew and rereceive it in a new context of shared faith. It is in the light of a shared perspective on history that we can return to the Scriptures in order to reconstruct a common understanding of the apostolic faith. The active and shared encounter with the data of revelation, with the transforming Word revealed in Christ, can lead us from a dialectically opposed horizon to a shared horizon of faith.

CONSENSUS STATEMENTS AND FOUNDATIONS (CONVERSION)

When Lonergan writes of the conversion that moves one beyond dialectic, he describes it as a “movement to a new horizon,” a vertical exercise of freedom that entails “the set of judgments and decisions by which we move from one horizon to another.” Further, he observes that while conversion involves “an about face,” the new horizon “none the less is consonant with the old and a development out of its potentialities.”³⁴ This notion of horizons can help to clarify the role of ecumenical consensus statements and their reception into the life of the Church. While the emergence of new levels of consensus invites renewal and concrete change, the affirmation of consensus stands in a relationship of continuity with the apostolic faith and the spiritual heritage of the respective churches.

Keeping to Lonergan’s framework, the parameters of the new horizon are articulated in the functional specialty of “foundations” where “conversion itself is made thematic and objectified.”³⁵ My contention is that ecu-

Roman Catholic International Commission, *The Gift of Authority. Authority in the Church III* (New York: Church Publishing, 1999) nos. 24–25.

³³ *Method in Theology* 246–47.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 237.

³⁵ *Ibid.* 131.

menically agreed statements are best understood as having a foundational character. This permits us to understand that the affirmation of ecumenical agreement is the affirmation of a new horizon within which each tradition must now discern the effects of bias and purify or complete its doctrines, systematic theology, liturgy, catechesis, and preaching. Ecumenical consensus statements establish the parameters within which each church will carry out all other operations of theology. Lonergan writes of foundations: "It is a fully conscious decision about one's horizon, one's outlook, one's worldview. It deliberately selects the framework, in which doctrines have their meaning, in which systematics reconciles, in which communications are effective."³⁶

Taking such a decision is in his words a "high achievement,"³⁷ yet it is only the beginning of the rigorous work required for the reestablishment of ecclesial communion. When one accepts the consensus statement as a shared horizon of understanding the apostolic faith, the work of reception appears as a much more complex and prolonged task than one might have imagined at first. The new horizon is merely a framework within which each church must now proceed to reexamine and renew its doctrines, systematics, communications, and engage in research, interpretation, and history. Specifying the foundational character of consensus statements invites us to consider their role within the broader scope of theological operations in a more systematic way. Understanding their limited effect may preclude the inevitable disappointment that comes from asking them to bear more than they are made to bear.

When the foundational character of consensus statements is properly understood, an important roadblock to their reception can be removed. Resistance to the affirmation of doctrinal consensus is sometimes couched in the suspicion that despite the carefully crafted language of consensus, the dialogues have failed to address adequately the root of historical divisions. Or, if the language of the agreement is not identical with that of one's tradition, one is tempted to conclude that it represents a concession to the position of the other. These suspicions are more likely to arise when what is unclear is the relationship of the agreed statement to the functional specialty of history, which concerns judgments of the past, or to doctrines, which express judgments of meaning and value. I have argued that one might view such resistance as an example of the persistence of a classicist worldview. At the very least, there is confusion about the function of agreed statements and how they are to be received. Fearing a loss of confessional identity, some presume that the intention of the drafters is to elaborate new ecumenical doctrines that will usurp the place of the confessional formulas. When consensus statements are understood as partici-

³⁶ Ibid. 268.

³⁷ Ibid. 269.

pating in the functional specialty of foundations, however, this confusion is avoided.

Admittedly, it is not easy to draw a hard and fast line between foundations and doctrines. Lonergan recognizes that “conversion, formulated as horizon in foundations, will possess not only personal but also social and doctrinal dimensions.”³⁸ Nonetheless, he distinguishes between the function of doctrines, which express judgments of fact and value, and foundations, which establish “the horizon within which the meaning of doctrines can be apprehended.”³⁹ Ecumenical consensus statements propose elements of doctrine: language, perspectives, and categories that might later be received into church doctrines. Yet consensus statements do not replace confessional statements. Rather, they stand in continuity with the apostolic faith and the heritage of each tradition, to establish a horizon within which confessional expressions of faith are to be interpreted and their adequacy evaluated. They suggest the parameters within which future doctrines will be developed. The restatement of doctrines is but one aspect of the process of reception.

An adequate appreciation of the foundational character of the ecumenical consensus statement allows us to apprehend the significance of the elaboration of a differentiated consensus that respects a genuine pluralism in the expression of faith. Perhaps the most notable case of such an approach in recent years is found in the Lutheran-Roman Catholic *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*.⁴⁰ The *Joint Declaration* affirms “a consensus on basic truths of the doctrine of justification and shows that the remaining differences of explication are no longer the occasion for doctrinal condemnations.”⁴¹ The document sets out seven points of common understanding that have been arrived at, and in the light of which different Lutheran and Catholic articulations of faith are to be properly interpreted.⁴² While ecclesial unity requires agreement on the inner mean-

³⁸ Ibid. 142. I am indebted to Robert M. Doran for clarification on this point.

³⁹ Ibid. 131.

⁴⁰ Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church, *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000).

⁴¹ Ibid. no. 5.

⁴² To take but one example, the *Joint Declaration* affirms that Lutherans and Catholics “confess together that all persons depend completely on the saving grace of God for their salvation” (19). It then notes that Catholics speak of “cooperation” with divine grace (20), while Lutherans continue to hold that “human beings are incapable of cooperating in their salvation” (21). On the surface, one might easily conclude that these two assertions reflect irreconcilable differences. But the *Joint Declaration* calls us to understand the significance of each position within the horizon of our common confession of the primacy of God’s grace and initiative. Catholics see “cooperation,” the personal consent to the gift of justifying grace, “as itself an effect of grace, not as an action arising from innate human abilities” (20). When Lutherans emphasize the human person’s passive reception of justifying

ing of Christian revelation, its outer manifestation will vary. Many variations in the explication of Christian faith can be seen in relation to the use of diverse categories or the differentiation of consciousness.⁴³ The persistence of such differences does not diminish the achievement of consensus, for the articulation of a consensus in basic truths represents a shared horizon of meaning, and common meaning is constitutive of community. It is the foundation of communion in faith upon which ecclesial communion will be rebuilt. An affirmation of theological consensus is not, therefore, a doctrine to be uniformly appropriated in the theology of each church, but serves as a measure for the renewal of the doctrinal formulas of each church. Ecumenical consensus statements invite the churches to engage in the task of renewal mandated by the Second Vatican Council's *Decree on Ecumenism*: "In its pilgrimage on earth Christ summons the Church to continual reformation, of which it is always in need, in so far as it is an institution of human beings here on earth. Thus if, in various times and circumstances, there have been deficiencies . . . even in the way that church teaching has been formulated—to be carefully distinguished from the deposit of faith itself—these should be set right in the proper way at the opportune moment."⁴⁴ Those articulations of faith not in harmony with the horizon of consensus established through ecumenical dialogue will need to be reexamined, and perhaps reformulated to reflect a new context.

ECUMENICAL CONSENSUS AND THE TWO PHASES OF METHOD

Thus far, we have seen that the primary activity of ecumenical dialogue and the articulation of consensus relates to Lonergan's fourth level of intentional consciousness and to the operations of dialectic and foundations. However, if the work of dialogue and consensus seeking were seen in isolation from the other functional specialties of theology, we would fail to see their significance for the whole of theology in the life of the Church. In

grace "they mean thereby to exclude the possibility of contributing to one's own justification, but do not deny that believers are fully involved in their personal faith" (21). While approaching the divine-human relationship from different perspectives, both Lutheran and Catholic positions respect the utter dependency of sinners on the gratuitous initiative of God (17).

⁴³ "While conversion manifests itself in deeds and words, still the manifestation will vary with the presence and absence of differentiated consciousness. There results a pluralism in the expression of the same fundamental stance and, once theology develops, a multiplicity of the theologies that express the same faith. Such a pluralism or multiplicity is of fundamental importance, both for the understanding of the development of religious traditions, and for an understanding of the impasses that may result from such development" (*Method in Theology* 272).

⁴⁴ *Unitatis redintegratio* no. 6; John Paul II states further that: "No Christian community can exempt itself from this call" (*Ut unum sint* no. 16).

many cases ecumenical consensus statements have been presented in precisely such a manner, thus limiting their effectiveness. Through dialogue, the churches are being led to recognize the limitations of the judgments of the past. As well, they are being challenged to take new decisions based on a common and renewed understanding of the Christian faith that will orient the churches toward the reestablishment of ecclesial communion. When we consider the interdependence of dialectic, conversion, and the other functional specialties, it becomes evident that the elaboration of consensus requires serious engagement in all the operations of both the mediating and the mediated phases of theology, in listening to the Word and in speaking it, in encountering our past and facing the future. By indicating this engagement in an explicit manner, the dialogues will reflect more clearly the relation of ecumenical consensus statements to the historical positions as well as to the present and future theology and practice of each church.

Ecumenical consensus statements stand at the fulcrum between the two phases of theology. From the vantage of a shared horizon of faith, each church must now look back to reinterpret or recognize the inadequacies of past expressions of faith, and look forward to the reformulation of doctrine, the renewal of ministerial structures, of liturgy, catechesis, preaching, and service to the world. This double orientation in the role of ecumenical consensus statements is implied though not developed adequately in the work of the Faith and Order Commission.⁴⁵ Using new language and recovering aspects of the tradition that had been lost from view in the polemics of the past, the Lima document and other ecumenical texts strive to rearticulate the faith received from the Apostles. As such, they now function as a kind of litmus test for the faith of the churches. This supports our contention regarding the foundational character of consensus statements, for foundations, writes Lonergan, “discriminates between truth and error by appealing to the foundational reality of intellectual, religious, and moral conversion.”⁴⁶ Through the lens of this consensus the churches are invited to recognize the presence of the apostolic faith in the doctrinal, ministerial,

⁴⁵ The Faith and Order Commission invited the churches to respond to the Lima document by indicating: “The extent to which your church can recognize in this text the faith of the Church throughout the ages; the consequences your church can draw from this text for its relations and dialogues with other churches, particularly with those churches which also recognize the text as an expression of the apostolic faith; the guidance your church can take from this text for its worship, educational, ethical, and spiritual life and witness. . . .” (*Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper No. 111 [Geneva: WCC, 1982] x).

⁴⁶ *Method in Theology* 299. One might also include here the affective dimension of conversion or psychic conversion developed by Robert Doran in order to complement Lonergan’s theory. See Doran, *Theology and the Dialectics of History* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1990). In the future, dialogue partners may find

and liturgical expression of other churches as well as the shortcomings of both past and present articulations of faith in one's own community. To be received, such recognition will require new decisions and the establishment of new relationships to signify growth in communion of faith and life.

Full engagement in the operations of both the mediating and the mediated phases of theology is needed to reevaluate past judgments and take new decisions, and corresponds roughly to the complementary themes of recognition and reception that have emerged in the work of Faith and Order.⁴⁷ According to Jean-Marie Tillard, there are two aspects of ecclesial recognition: "On the one side, faced with the reminder of the data of revelation and its authentic meaning as presented by certain authorities, we look at ourselves in order to judge whether our own church life can be recognized, either in its entirety or to a greater or lesser extent, in what has been proposed as a faithful expression of the *mind of Christ* or the *mind of the church*. On the other side, we turn towards other churches to see if this authentic expression *is recognized* in what they confess as their Christian conviction, and this becomes a challenge for us."⁴⁸ In the process of recognition, consensus statements function as the horizon within which we must now undertake the operations of theology's first phase to interpret and understand the confessional statements, ministries, and prayer of both our own church and our partner in dialogue. Recognition is an evaluative judgment concerning the ways we have received the faith of the Apostles through history.

As I have attempted to indicate, the evaluative judgment that the Faith and Order Commission and the participants of many dialogues have left to the churches requires a vital engagement in the operations of critical history. This work is only implied by the Lima document and is presupposed by many other consensus statements.⁴⁹ It would be an onerous task for a multilateral dialogue to make such judgments explicit. In his careful study of recognition in the work of Faith and Order, Gerard Kelly observes, "it

themselves attending more to the "non-theological factors" that have contributed to ecclesial division.

⁴⁷ These were described succinctly by Jean-Marie R. Tillard in his preface to Gerard Kelly, *Recognition: Advancing Ecumenical Thinking* (New York: P. Lang, 1995) xv-xxx, at xxiii-xxx; original French version, xv-xxii.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* xxv.

⁴⁹ By way of example, in explaining its methods, the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission has stated: "From the beginning we were determined, in accordance with our mandate, and in the spirit of Phil. 3. 13, 'forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead', to discover each other's faith as it is today and to appeal to history only for enlightenment, not as a way of perpetuating past controversy" (*The Final Report* [Washington: USCC, 1982] 1).

is the churches alone who can engage in the process of recognition.”⁵⁰ Nonetheless, he concludes that the idea of recognition has not been sufficiently understood by the churches.

How, then, we might ask, can the dialogues assist the churches in coming to a better understanding of and engagement in this evaluative activity? I submit that the dialogues themselves must make explicit their own engagement in the task of critical history. Recent documents of the Groupe des Dombes exhibit a growing attention to common historical study. As well, through careful historical research, Lutherans and Roman Catholics came to see that instead of being mutually exclusive, Lutheran and Catholic positions on justification reflected “different sets of concerns” and “contrasting perspectives.”⁵¹ In today’s context the dialogue has succeeded in inviting the churches to share in its judgment that the condemnations of the Lutheran confessional statements and the condemnations of the Council of Trent concerning justification do not apply to today’s partner in dialogue. It is not likely that the churches would have come to such a conclusion on their own. The dialogue took an important step toward demonstrating the necessary connection between the affirmation of consensus and the functional specialties of the first phase.⁵² This enabled Lutherans and Catholics to recognize actively the presence of the apostolic faith in one another’s approach to the doctrine of justification by faith.

Following the act of recognition, which is facilitated by the statement of ecumenical consensus, the churches must receive what they have recognized and make the horizon of consensus operative in the mediated phase of theology. Tillard describes two moments in the process reception. The first, he says, is “an act of faith, an act of adherence to what is *recognized* as the authentic expression of what God has revealed.”⁵³ The second is a moment of conversion. He insists:

It is impossible that whoever understands the meaning of the truth of faith, once its presence has been *recognized*, would not give up anything standing in the way of complete conformity to it. Today this is the difficult challenge which the last de-

⁵⁰ *Recognition* 226.

⁵¹ *Justification by Faith: Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VII* 57.

⁵² The Joint Declaration stops short of endorsing the conclusions of many important historical studies which have shown that in the context of the 16th-century Catholic and Lutheran theologies often misrepresented or misunderstood one another’s positions. Otto Hermann Pesch makes a notable contribution to this discussion. See his “Existential and Sapiential Theology—the Theological Confrontation between Luther and Thomas Aquinas,” in *Catholic Scholars Dialogue with Luther*, ed. Jared Wicks (Chicago: Loyola University, 1970) 61–81; “Rechtfertigung” in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, 3rd ed. vol. 8 (1999) cols. 882 ff. Such work is an essential element in undoing the effects of decline.

⁵³ *Recognition* xxviii.

acades of the ecumenical movement present to confessional families. Do they agree to change, even in their traditional *Confession of Faith*, what the common research of all the churches has revealed as insufficient or even erroneous?⁵⁴

By receiving the horizon of consensus reflected in the affirmation of ecumenical consensus the churches necessarily enter into the dynamic of religious and intellectual conversion that is objectified there. This conversion would be incomplete if it were limited to a shift in horizon. It must take flesh in the living faith of each church.

Today it is commonly recognized that the churches themselves are ill equipped for engaging in this activity. Here again, the dialogues may be of assistance to the churches by noting some of the practical implications of new levels of consensus and by making concrete recommendations for the implementation of ecumenical agreement in the life of each church. Such an approach is exemplified in the work of the Groupe des Dombes that consistently complements the affirmation of consensus with proposals for conversion in the attitudes, doctrines, theologies, prayer, and catechesis of the churches. The establishment of joint commissions for the implementation of ecumenical agreements can also facilitate this process. Viewed within Lonergan's framework of method, their work must be appreciated as an engagement in an activity that is properly theological, as it links new levels of consensus to the reformulation of doctrines, the reflection of systematics, and diverse forms of communications. The functional specialty of communications is especially important here, for as Lonergan observes, the process of communication is the "genesis of common meaning"⁵⁵ and such meaning is constitutive of community. The transposition of common understanding into the field of common experience in language, education, and gesture is essential to the reconstruction of an intersubjective context that will nourish new relationships of communion.

CONCLUSION

I have attempted to reflect on the role of ecumenical dialogue and consensus statements within the life of the Church with the help of Bernard Lonergan's functional approach to method in theology. His functional approach to method invites us to consider how all the operations of theology can be brought to bear upon both the elaboration and reception of ecumenical agreement. While the principal operations of the dialogues can be understood in relation to functional specialties of dialectic and foundations,

⁵⁴ Ibid. xxix.

⁵⁵ *Method in Theology* 357. I am grateful to John Dool for elucidating the importance of Lonergan's discussion of the ontology of meaning and communications as a vital application of reception and a means to the restoration of communion.

it becomes apparent that restricting the work of the dialogues to these two will severely limit their impact on the theology and life of the churches. The processes of both ecclesial recognition and the reception of ecumenical agreement will be enhanced to the extent that the dialogues engage explicitly in the operations of all eight functional specialties identified by Lonergan. The weakness of many recent consensus statements is that they have been articulated in such a way that their relation to the broader scope of theological operations remains unclear. This has left the churches unsure of how the ecumenical consensus statements are related to positions that have historically been judged to be divisive, or how they relate to the concrete practice of the Christian faith today. Future progress will require a more intentional engagement in the whole spectrum of the interdependent operations identified by Lonergan.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ This is a revised version of a paper presented to the Lonergan Research Seminar, Regis College, Toronto, April 4, 2002.