

“AIMING EXCESSIVELY HIGH AND FAR”: THE EARLY LONERGAN AND THE CHALLENGE OF THEORY IN CATHOLIC SOCIAL THOUGHT

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Bernard Lonergan is not usually associated with the field of Catholic social thought. This article explores Lonergan's efforts to contribute to it in his manuscripts on history and economics from the 1930s and early 1940s, written in response to Quadragesimo anno's call for a reconstruction of the social and economic orders. The article describes Lonergan's early and novel attempts to transpose Catholic social thought into a more contemporary and adequately theoretic context while preserving its basic elements in a higher synthesis.

CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING FAMOUSLY has been called the Church's "best kept secret."¹ It brings a wealth of sustained theological reflection to bear on questions concerning the nature of the human person, human dignity, and human solidarity. It develops principles regarding the common good and conscience, capital and labor, economic order and social justice. It evinces a deep concern for the poor and vulnerable, and it pays special attention to "the harm and injustice which penetrate deeply into social life,"² perpetuating "structures of sin."³ It gradually has begun to address the "new developments in technological, economic, and political

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¹ Peter J. Henriot et al., *Catholic Social Teaching: Our Best Kept Secret*, 4th ed. (New York: Orbis, 2003). I am grateful to an anonymous referee for helpful and detailed comments on an earlier draft of this article.

² *Laborem exercens* no. 1. For Vatican documents I use the English versions available on the Vatican Web site, easily found by inserting the document title in an Internet search engine. This and all other URLs herein cited were accessed on April 23, 2011.

³ *Sollicitudo rei socialis* no. 36.

conditions”⁴ that have wrought rapid and incessant change in the modern and postmodern worlds. It ultimately aspires to nothing less than contributing to “the Christian reconstruction of human society”⁵ and to the “reconstruction and perfection of [the] social order.”⁶

But as each successive commemoration of *Rerum novarum* reveals, the society to be renewed is a moving target,⁷ and the aspiration to reconstruct it along more just and humane lines requires increasingly complex modes of analysis to support its implementation.⁸ Yet the social and economic analyses in Catholic social teachings tend to take their point of departure from a theological and philosophical anthropology based in Scripture and Catholic tradition combined with only very limited forays into economic and social theory. No doubt that is due in part to a legitimate desire not to dictate to the social sciences and to observe a principle of intellectual subsidiarity. But an unintended consequence of that stance, as appropriate and prudent as it is, may be a growing gap between ever more complex social and economic realities and the ability of Catholic social thought to address them effectively.

And so it may be true to say that, for all its depth and richness, Catholic social thought has yet to achieve the kind of sophistication and precision that might flow from a more sustained and serious turn to theory or a more conscious and deliberate shift to method, especially concerning what *Quadragesimo anno* calls “technical matters.”⁹ Without something like that turn or shift, Catholic social thought can still guide the proper formation of a social conscience, and it can still make unique and valuable contributions

⁴ *Laborem exercens* no. 1.

⁵ *Quadragesimo anno* no. 147.

⁶ *Ibid.* no. 97.

⁷ *Ibid.* nos. 99–100; *Octogesima adveniens* nos. 7–9; *Laborem exercens* no. 2; *Centesimus annus* nos. 12–13, 37–39.

⁸ See *Laborem exercens* no. 3 (“the solution—or rather the gradual solution—of the social question . . . keeps coming up and becomes ever more complex”). This dynamic is not surprising. As Bernard Lonergan notes in a different but related context, “The larger and more complex society becomes, the longer and more exacting becomes the training necessary for a fully responsible exercise of freedom to be possible” (*Method in Theology* [New York: Seabury, 1979] 360). (Hereafter references to Lonergan’s texts are cited without author’s name.) The relevant training is both individual and collective, as is the responsible exercise of freedom.

⁹ *Quadragesimo anno* nos. 99–100. Technical economic matters entered that encyclical implicitly, largely through the views of the Jesuit economist Heinrich Pesch. For his influence on *Quadragesimo anno* and also on the young Lonergan, see the “Editors’ Introduction” to *Macroeconomic Dynamics: An Essay in Circulation Analysis*, Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan (hereafter CWBL) 15, ed. Frederick G. Lawrence, Patrick H. Byrne, and Charles C. Hefling (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1999) xxxi–xxxii. See also Lonergan’s notes from the early 1940s on Pesch’s writings, collected in Michael Shute, *Lonergan’s Early Economic Research: Texts and Commentary* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2010) 74–101.

to “social *phronesis*”¹⁰ and civic “deliberative rhetoric.”¹¹ But Catholic social thought also risks becoming stranded in a kind of hortatory vagueness. Without something like that turn or shift, in the limit it may even risk reinforcing what Bernard Lonergan once called “the widespread impression of complacent irrelevance and futility” engendered by church actions that do not manage “to operate on the level of our day.”¹² After all, one of the “signs of the times” is that “intellectual formation is ever increasingly based”¹³ on developments in the natural and human sciences. Whether we like it or not, we have moved from “a rather static concept of reality to a more dynamic, evolutionary one. In consequence, a new series of problems has arisen, a series as important as can be, calling for new efforts of analysis and synthesis.”¹⁴

How might the richness and depth of the tradition of Catholic social thought be transposed to a more contemporary and adequately theoretic context in a new effort of analysis and synthesis? And how might Lonergan’s own theoretic efforts shed light on this question? To my knowledge, these two questions have not received the extensive scholarly attention they need and deserve. Without that attention, I suggest, the potential for Catholic social thought to contribute concrete solutions to the real and pressing problems of the present—to effect what Lonergan once called “resolute and effective intervention in the dialectic of history”¹⁵—may not fully be realized. I propose, then, to make a modest beginning, not indeed by answering these two very large questions, but rather by inviting attention to the early Lonergan’s largely unknown attempts to work out theories of economics, history, and progress in response to the call for a reconstruction of the social order issued by Pius XI.¹⁶

¹⁰ Joshua D. Goldstein, *Hegel’s Idea of the Good Life: From Virtue to Freedom, Early Writings and Mature Political Philosophy* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006) 234–36. See also Oscar L. Brownstein, “Aristotle and the Rhetorical Process,” in *Rhetoric: A Tradition in Transition*, ed. Walter Fisher (Ann Arbor: Michigan State University, 1974) 20–21.

¹¹ Eugene Garver, *Aristotle’s Rhetoric: An Art of Character* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1994) 83–93.

¹² *Method in Theology* 367.

¹³ *Gaudium et spes* no. 5.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Phenomenology and Logic: The Boston College Lectures on Mathematical Logic and Existentialism*, CWBL 18, ed. Philip J. McShane (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2001) 306.

¹⁶ See “Philosophy of History,” a manuscript written by Lonergan ca. 1933–1934, published for the first time in 2010 in Shute, *Lonergan’s Early Economic Research* 16–44; see also 33, referring to “the dialectic of thought” as one of seven dialectics operative in historical process and to “scholastic social theory culminating in the encyclicals of His Holiness, Pius XI.”

I propose to do this not by describing the tenets of Catholic social thought, nor by investigating some aspect of that tradition's history or application, but instead by examining the efforts of the early Lonergan to begin to transpose Catholic social thought to a more modern and more fully theoretic context. My limited purpose is only to call attention to the existence of a large and rather unnoticed field, to put it on the map, so to speak, and thereby "to bracket the locus of future successful inquiry"¹⁷ concerning Lonergan and Catholic social thought.

I will do so first by describing the concrete context that engendered my inquiry; second, by examining the puzzling relation of Lonergan's published work to Catholic social thought; third, by exploring the early Lonergan's turn to theory in manuscripts from the 1930s and early 1940s, a turn inspired in part by his desire to contribute to a renewal of Catholic social thought; fourth, by discussing the early Lonergan's attempts at transposing traditional Catholic social thought to a more refined and theoretic context; and finally by sketching some hints on how the later Lonergan's ideas might be relevant to contemporary Catholic social thought.

AN INITIAL CONTEXT

Let me begin by briefly describing the concrete context and setting of the question as it emerged for me. For the past few years I have been teaching a course on "Ethics, Law, and Catholic Social Thought" at a Jesuit law school. Nothing like this course had ever been taught there before, not even in the modicum of courses devoted to philosophy of law or jurisprudence. The course was accepted by the administration as a doubtful but perhaps admirable experiment in infusing some small dose of Jesuit and Catholic thinking into the otherwise relentlessly mundane and relatively dry legal-doctrinal courses offered to law students at a Jesuit law school.

I selected the readings for the course with an eye toward the history of the Catholic intellectual tradition as focused by Catholic social thought, and I used the readings to explore some of its implications for questions of law, justice, legal practice, and the neglected role of ethos in the cultivation of professionalism in the law. I attempted, in other words, to smuggle explicit notions of social ethics and social justice into a legal curriculum that is more or less dominated by individualist, instrumentalist, and truncated notions of justice and ethics.

¹⁷ *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (New York: Longmans, 1957) 590; *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, CWBL 3, 5th ed., rev. and exp., ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1997) 612. Hereafter references to this text will be given by page no. to the 1957 ed., followed by that of the 1997 ed., cited as CWBL 3.

The course has been an education for both me and my law students. I had thought of it, in Lonergan's description of *Insight*, as "a preliminary, exploratory journey into an unfortunately neglected region"¹⁸ of thought relevant to the ways Catholic social thought might enliven and enlighten legal theory and legal practice. The students had thought of it, I suspect, as a rare break from the relatively blasé and prereflective diet of "black letter" courses in legal doctrine concerning such weighty matters as the precise nuances of the sections of the Uniform Commercial Code devoted to sales transactions and what is called "commercial paper," or with the seemingly unending and mind-numbing details of debtor and creditor law.

Researching and then teaching the course reminded me that there is much that is intelligent, reasonable, valuable, honorable, profound, and nuanced in Catholic social thought. For example, it crystallizes core Catholic and Christian teachings about the intrinsic dignity of all human beings, the solidarity of all human beings, and the primacy of the common good over individual interest and advantage. It emphasizes a notion of natural law in light of which it is possible to speak of unjust laws. It emphasizes strategies of subsidiarity that aspire to promote effective community and cooperation over against the massive alienation flowing from the contemporary juggernauts of corporate and governmental bureaucracy.¹⁹ It applies these teachings in areas involving social and economic justice. And both the teachings and their applications in particular and varying contexts can serve as a helpful but partial counterpoise to the collectivism, the hyper-individualism, the consumerism, the relativism, and the power- and status-mongering that characterize far too much of recent history and contemporary U.S. and Western culture.

Working through the course materials and teaching them affected my own gradually developing sense of the problematic of Catholic social thought. I was struck by two realities: first, the tremendous arc of development in Catholic social thought over the last 120 years; and second, the remote but relentlessly practical nature of Lonergan's work. It is sometimes

¹⁸ *Insight* xiii; CWBL 3, p. 7.

¹⁹ I have previously attempted to relate Lonergan's cognitional theory and his critique of bureaucracy to the role and treatment of subsidiarity in Catholic social thought. See Patrick D. Brown, "Overcoming 'Inhumanly Inept' Structures: Catholic Social Thought on 'Subsidiarity' and the Critique of Bureaucracy, Law, and Culture," *Journal of Catholic Social Thought* 2 (2005) 413–30. It is possible that Lonergan's long-running brief against bureaucratic inertia includes some forms of ecclesial bureaucracy as well. See "Prolegomena to the Study of the Emerging Religious Consciousness of Our Time," *A Third Collection*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe (New York: Paulist, 1985) 55–73, at 60–61; see also 70 (giving "a general account of religious consciousness, whether . . . alienated by secular or ecclesiastical bureaucracy").

said, in a paraphrase of Rahner's famous dictum, that Lonergan was forever sharpening his knife, but never cutting anything with it.²⁰ Much evidence, however, refutes that popular but misguided impression, as the continuing publication of Lonergan's Latin works in English translation shows on a rather large scale. But these works are not the only evidence that Lonergan was as capable of *using* the cutting edge as he was of *being* at the cutting edge. Much of his earliest work was inspired by the effort to work out the theoretic structures necessary to implement *Quadragesimo anno's* call for a reconstruction of the social and economic orders. And though little of his later work was conducted under the explicit auspices of contributing to the advancement of Catholic social thought, a great deal of that work is relevant to that goal.

Yet Lonergan's relation to Catholic social thought was complex and, in some ways, uneasy. Frederick Crowe describes a 1935 letter in which Lonergan speaks "of what seems to him the decadent state of Catholic thought and of his hope of contributing to its renewal."²¹ Lonergan was never particularly forgiving, at any point in his life as a relentless and innovative theorist, of what he once called the "sin of backwardness, of the cultures, the authorities, the individuals that fail to live on the level of their times."²² And if Lonergan's self-assessment is true—that "all my work has been introducing history into Catholic theology"²³—then that work began in the mid-1930s when he attempted to formulate a theory of economic and historical dynamics in response to *Quadragesimo anno's* call for a reconstruction of the social and economic orders.

²⁰ Patrick Byrne mentions hearing that remark from "a prominent American theologian" ("The Fabric of Lonergan's Thought," *Lonergan Workshop*, vol. 6, ed. Frederick G. Lawrence [Atlanta: Scholars, 1986] 1–84, at 69). For Rahner's dictum, see Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, vol. 11, trans. David Bourke (New York: Seabury, 1974) 84.

²¹ "Editors' Preface" to "Lonergan's *Pantôn Anakephalaiôsis* [The Restoration of All Things]" (1935), *Method: Journal of Lonergan Studies* 9 (1991) 134–38, at 134. Elsewhere Crowe remarks that "Catholic studies in general were found [by the younger Lonergan] to be in a deplorable state," and Crowe notes that "few other factors were . . . so determinative" for Lonergan's career (Frederick E. Crowe, *Lonergan* [Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 1992] 6).

²² "Dialectic of Authority," in *A Third Collection* 5–12, at 8. Lonergan's contrast between systematic theology conceived as static system on the model of logic, and systematic theology conceived as ongoing process on the model of modern natural and human sciences, is relevant and instructive on the topic of Catholic social thought. See *Method in Theology* 350.

²³ See Frederick E. Crowe, "'All My Work Has Been Introducing History into Catholic Theology,'" in *Developing the Lonergan Legacy: Historical, Theoretical, and Existential Themes*, ed. Michael Vertin (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2004) 78–110.

THE PUZZLE OF LONERGAN AND CATHOLIC SOCIAL THOUGHT

It is difficult to know where to begin the complex story of Lonergan's relation to Catholic social thought. Yet no matter where it begins, any treatment of that relation must eventually confront something of a startling conundrum: Lonergan rarely expressly mentions Catholic social thought—by my count, five or six times in the writings published during his lifetime.²⁴ There are a few references in an obscure newspaper article from the early 1940s,²⁵ a reference in the “Epilogue” to *Insight*,²⁶ and finally a reference in the “Questionnaire on Philosophy” from 1977.²⁷ This count does not include indirect references,²⁸ or references in unpublished manuscripts, but even these are surprisingly few. One early reference, however, is revealing. Around 1933, Lonergan wrote of the

struggle against the inherited capital of injustice which creates such objective situations that men cannot be truly just unless first the objective situation is changed. . . . This then is the virtue of progress, the virtue of *social justice*, by which man directs

²⁴ No doubt there are additional references I have not noticed, but my point is that the number is far less than one might initially expect. There are, in addition, scattered references to “Catholic action,” but they too are far less frequent than one might expect. E.g. *Insight*, 743; CWBL 3, at 764 (mentioning “a long series of social encyclicals” and “calls to Catholic action”); “Moral Theology and the Human Sciences” (1974), *Philosophical and Theological Papers 1965–1980*, CWBL 17, ed. Robert C. Croken and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2004) 302 (referring to “Catholic Action, or, under favorable circumstances, Christian Action”).

²⁵ “Savings Certificates and Catholic Action,” *Montreal Beacon*, July 2, 1941, in *Shorter Papers*, CWBL 20, ed. Robert C. Croken, Robert M. Doran, and H. Daniel Monsour (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2007) 68–73, at 71–72. Interestingly, he uses the phrase in that article in the context of discussing “the economic machine” and the notion of “surplus income”—a notion discussed in *Quadragesimo anno* nos. 50–51. These ideas would be fleshed out extensively in the first surviving economics manuscript the following year.

²⁶ *Insight* 743; CWBL 3, p. 764.

²⁷ CWBL 17, pp. 352–83, at 370.

²⁸ Though few, they are significant. In 1951, Lonergan wrote of judgments of value that “set the good of order above private advantage, subordinate technology to economics, [and] refer economics to social welfare” (“The Role of a Catholic University in the Modern World,” in *Collection*, CWBL 4, ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran [Toronto: University of Toronto, 1988] 109). In the same article, he referred to the “profound social significance” of faith, hope, and love (112), a central theme that occurs repeatedly in Lonergan's published work but without specific reference to Catholic social thought. See, e.g., *Topics in Education*, CWBL 10, ed. Robert M. Doran and Frederick E. Crowe (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1993) 257, noting that “the possibilities of resisting the mechanisms and the determinisms that can emerge historically are heightened almost to an unlimited extent by Christianity”; “Questionnaire on Philosophy,” CWBL 17, p. 370, referencing “faith, hope, and charity as the principles of recovery from alienation and decline.”

his action so that it will be easier for his neighbors and his posterity to know and to do what is right and just.²⁹

He goes on to say that “the greatest evil in the world is the evil that is concretized in the historic flow, the capital of injustice that hangs like a pall over every brilliant thing.”³⁰

Of the handful of direct references, only the 1977 reference sheds any real light on Lonergan’s attitude toward the present state of Catholic social thought, and the light is not entirely favorable. One might say that he damns it with the faintest of praise. In the course of writing on the nature of what he called “Christian praxis,” Lonergan remarked: “Finally, there is needed up-to-date technical knowledge of economic and political theory and their respective histories; perhaps the greatest weakness of Catholic social thought is its apparent lack of awareness of the need for technical knowledge.”³¹ “Its apparent lack of awareness of the need for technical knowledge” is a curious phrase, analogous to gently chiding the Boeing Company for its apparent lack of awareness of the need for aerodynamic science in designing airplanes.³² Lonergan had made the same point more directly and bluntly two years earlier: “Moral precepts that are not technically specific turn out to be quite ineffectual.”³³

In Lonergan’s view, then, Catholic social thought is not yet fully animated by what in *Method in Theology* Lonergan variously refers to as “the systematic exigence,” “the methodical exigence,” “*die Wendung zur Idee*,” or “the world of theory.”³⁴ There is a stark difference between common sense—even enormously refined or sophisticated common sense—and the

²⁹ “Philosophy of History,” in Shute, *Lonergan’s Early Economic Research* 16–44, at 42–43 (emphasis added). “Philosophy of History” is a section of a larger manuscript, titled “Essay in Fundamental Sociology,” the first 94 pages of which are not extant. An unpublished treatise by Lonergan on justice is included within a 124-page manuscript titled “De bono et malo,” ca. 1963–1964, intended as an addition on the historical causality of Christ to a later edition of Lonergan’s Latin work, *De Verbo Incarnato*. It references “social justice” on a single page in which Lonergan pointedly notes that every form of justice is “social.” Unpublished ms. no. 67900DTLE60, p. 49. Lonergan’s unpublished manuscripts are in the Lonergan Archives, available online at <http://www.bernardlonergan.com>.

³⁰ *Ibid.* 43.

³¹ “Questionnaire on Philosophy” 370.

³² I borrow this image, with a mild updating, from a manuscript stemming from Lonergan’s effort in the 1930s to work out a theory of history by “deducing the forms of historical movement from the inherent laws of human nature,” where human nature is considered “in the laws of its expansion through successive generations” (“A Theory of History” [ca. 1936] unpublished ms. no. 71311DTE030, p. 1). For the passage from which I derive this image, see the quoted text associated with n. 42 below.

³³ “Healing and Creating in History,” in *A Third Collection* 109 n. 14.

³⁴ *Method in Theology* 82–83, 95, 96, 144, 358–59.

world of genuine theory or adequate explanation.³⁵ And that difference has consequences. As Lonergan expressly noted in the sentence before his remark on Catholic social thought, the only alternative to seriously following out the radical implications of the theoretic exigence is “the arrogance of omniscient common sense” as one of “the principles of alienation and decline.”³⁶

By Lonergan’s estimate, then, Catholic social thought is not yet up to the level of the times to the extent that it lacks technical knowledge of economic, social, and political theory, together with the history of these theories. It is also not yet up to the level of the times to the extent that it lacks some way of collaborating in the ongoing generation, refinement, evaluation, and diffusion of such theories and their histories—that is, to the extent that it is the product of a lack of method in theology.

But for Lonergan, it also fails to live on the level of the times to the extent that it lacks any theory of historical process or historical dynamics. As he noted:

It has long been my conviction that if Catholics . . . are to live and operate on the level of the times, they must not only know about theories of history but also must work out their own. . . . To put it bluntly, until we move onto the level of historical dynamics, we shall face our secularist and atheist opponents, as the Red Indians, armed with bows and arrows, faced European muskets.³⁷

Elsewhere he drew a comparison to the Polish cavalry in 1939 riding out to face German Panzer tanks.³⁸

Still, this slice of the story from the end of the story is not the whole story. As we now know, Lonergan had labored at a sustained and serious attempt to bring Catholic social thought up to “the level of the times” in his very early work on historical theory and economics beginning in the 1930s.³⁹

³⁵ As Lonergan insists, “The systematic exigence not merely raises questions that common sense cannot answer but also demands a context for its answers, a context that common sense cannot supply or comprehend. This context is theory, and the objects to which it refers are in the realm of theory. To these objects one can ascend from commonsense starting-points, but they are properly known, not by this ascent, but by their internal relations, their congruences, and differences, the functions they fulfil in their interactions” (*Method in Theology* 82).

³⁶ “Questionnaire,” CWBL 17, p. 370.

³⁷ “Questionnaire,” CWBL 17, p. 366.

³⁸ I recall Lonergan using that image in his “Method in Theology” seminar at Boston College, fall 1979 or 1980.

³⁹ The Lonergan Archives contain eight manuscripts dating from the 1930s that relate to Lonergan’s early attempts to work out a theory of history. For the approximate dates of their composition, see Michael Shute, *The Origins of Lonergan’s Notion of the Dialectic of History: A Study of Lonergan’s Early Writings on History* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1993) 179. Three of them, “Pantôn Anakephalaiôsis,” “Analytic Concept of History,” and “Sketch for a

He had attempted that task in a solitary and painstaking manner, and he believed that the resulting metaphysics of history on Thomistic principles would compare favorably with the efforts of Hegel and Marx.⁴⁰ Still, as we know now, that achievement no more took root at the time than did his early efforts in economic theory, an achievement he rounded off in two stages a few years later, in 1942 and 1944.⁴¹ And so, although Lonergan's career as a theorist began with an effort to shift Catholic social thought onto a more modern theoretic, historical, and dialectical basis, that effort remained an isolated and private achievement. It remained subject to, and in subtle ways subsumed into, his later more extensive and ambitious efforts, as they found expression in *Insight* and *Method in Theology*.

In spite of the paucity of references in his published works, then, Lonergan was not uninterested in Catholic social thought—far from it. He devoted considerable time and energy in his thirties to advancing it through his labors in the fields of economics and philosophy of history. Yet all his express efforts to advance Catholic social thought lay hidden for decades in a cache of manuscripts he generated in the 1930s,

Metaphysic of Human Solidarity,” have been published in *Method: The Journal of Lonergan Studies*. A fourth, “Philosophy of History,” was published for the first time in 2010 (see n. 16 above). The rest remain unpublished, but they are available on the Lonergan Archives Web site. They include a five-page summary of the longer “Pantòn” essay (ms. no. 71303DTE030); “A Theory of History” (ms. no. 71311DTE030); “Outline of an Analytic Conception of History” (ms. no. 71312DTE030); and “Analytic Concept of History, in Blurred Outline” (ms. no. 71307DTE030). My citations will be to the published versions, where available, otherwise to the pagination of individual manuscripts in the Lonergan Archives.

⁴⁰ Letter of January 22, 1935 to Henry Keane, published in Pierrot Lambert and Philip McShane, *Bernard Lonergan: His Life and Leading Ideas* (Vancouver: Axial, 2010) 144–154, at 149.

⁴¹ See *For a New Political Economy*, CWBL 21, ed. Philip J. McShane (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1998); this volume collects Lonergan's economic manuscripts from 1942 and 1944, which had remained unpublished during Lonergan's lifetime. See also Lonergan, *Macroeconomic Dynamics* CWBL 15 (presenting the 1944 manuscript with significant changes Lonergan made to it from 1978–1983). The lengthy “Editors' Introduction” to CWBL 15 masterfully introduces the context of Lonergan's economic thought. Since the publication of those two volumes in the *Collected Works*, there has been a growing body of literature on Lonergan's economic analysis. See, e.g., Philip J. McShane, *Economics for Everyone* (Halifax: Axial, 1998); McShane, *Pastkeynes, Pastmodern Economics* (Halifax: Axial, 2002); Paul Hoyt-O'Connor, *Bernard Lonergan's Macroeconomic Dynamics* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen, 2004); Stephen L. Martin, *Healing and Creativity in Economic Ethics: The Contribution of Bernard Lonergan's Economic Thought to Catholic Social Teaching* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 2008). The 380-pages of *The Lonergan Review* 2 (2010) are devoted to the proceedings of an international conference on “Forging a New Economic Paradigm: Perspectives from Bernard Lonergan.”

manuscripts that remained unknown and unpublished in his lifetime. About the contents, the shape, and the direction of those efforts, I will say more below, but first I want say something about what is fundamentally distinctive in their orientation.

THE THEORETIC TURN IN THE EARLY LONERGAN

I have just alluded to the role of theory in designing airplanes. The image is Lonergan's own, from the 1930s; he used it in writing about the difficulty of envisioning adequate theory and, by extension, the difficulty of envisioning the remote possibility of designing human institutions and nurturing human history in a manner that would allow history to "fly" rather than plunge into crisis after crisis. "Think of a Greek who heard of Icarus and wished to build an aeroplane that was no myth; could he have thought of the necessity of first discovering higher mathematics and advanced physics?"⁴² And so Lonergan, at the age of 32, had as little doubt about the necessity of theory adequate to the great task of social reconstruction as he later had at the age of 73. Perhaps two years before that, near the age of 30, Lonergan had emphasized the crying need for adequate economic and political theory, just as he would some 40 years later:

But, whether we like it or not, the world has got beyond the stage where concrete problems can be solved merely in the concrete. Economics supplies us with the most palpable example: you have to have some economic theory in conducting the state. . . . Politics supplies us with another example. . . . The sum and substance of the whole issue is that ideas in the concrete will build you a shanty but not a house and still less a skyscraper. The modern situation demands that questions be settled not in the concrete, not by the petty minds of politics.⁴³

Some readers may have recognized the distinctive and suggestive allusion in this article's title concerning the need to aim "excessively high and far." That phrase is from roughly the same period, and it sounds roughly the same theme. It derives from that paean of praise to theory sung by Lonergan in 1942 in the conclusion to the revised version of his doctoral dissertation, *Grace and Freedom*. He was concerned there to criticize "ad hoc solutions" that

profoundly miss the mark for the very reason that they aim too intently at a limited goal. There is a disinterestedness and an objectivity that comes only from aiming excessively high and far, that leaves one free to take each issue on its merits, to proceed by *intrinsic analysis* instead of piling up debater's arguments, to seek no greater achievement than the inspiration of the moment warrants, to await with serenity for the coherence of truth itself to bring to light the underlying harmony of the manifold whose parts successively engage one's attention.

⁴² "A Theory of History," ms. no. 71311DTE030, p. 3.

⁴³ "Philosophy of History," in Shute, *Lonergan's Early Economic Research* 39.

Spontaneously such thought moves towards synthesis, not so much by any single master stroke as by an unnumbered succession of the adaptations that spring continuously from intellectual vitality.⁴⁴

This description of the human calling in its striving toward the adventure and joy of theoretic labor—for the passage is, in part, Lonergan's re-description of the upper reaches of human nature termed "theoria" or "contemplation" in the traditions of Aristotle and Aquinas—cannot be construed to characterize accurately the Catholic social thought of his time, or perhaps of our own.

Lonergan's language is certainly pointed. What does it mean to aim "excessively high and far," especially in view of his own considerable theoretic achievements at the age of 37 when he wrote it? Perhaps Lonergan was thinking, as he wrote those words, of his own prior and difficult struggles with developing an adequate theory of economics, society, and history as a basis for a renewal of Catholic social thought, in addition to his struggles with the notorious theoretic difficulties of reconciling grace and freedom.

That very same year, 1942, Lonergan was singing the same hymn to theory in the different key of economics. For a society to progress toward any goal, he wrote, "it cannot be a titanothore, a beast with a three-ton body and a ten-ounce brain." Instead, "it must lift its eyes more and ever more to the more general and more difficult fields of speculation, for it is from them that it has to derive the delicate compound of unity and freedom in which alone progress can be born, struggle, and win through."⁴⁵

That same year Lonergan wrote of "the enlargement" and the "readaptation of the whole existing structure" that takes place in a scientific generalization.⁴⁶ His attempt to generalize the partial viewpoints of economic theory up until that time into a higher synthesis may be likened, he says, to the way Newton's general theory of motion lifted into a higher synthesis the sequences of partial theories of motion running from Aristotle through Ptolemy to Copernicus, Galileo, and Kepler. Newton's scientific generalization left intact the prior accurate but partial work of Kepler and Galileo, but Newton "also reformulated them and gave them an entirely new interpretation; and integrated with this internal transformation there is the vast enlargement of the theoretical horizon."⁴⁷

⁴⁴ "Concluding Summary," *Grace and Freedom: Operative Grace in the Thought of St. Thomas Aquinas*, CWBL 1, ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2000) 144, emphasis added.

⁴⁵ *For a New Political Economy*, CWBL 21, p. 20.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 6.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* I take that enlargement of the theoretical horizon to be an important clue to what Lonergan thought he was up to in his various efforts, published and unpublished, from 1934 through 1944. It can also be related to his characterization

One may read Lonergan's historical and economic manuscripts as an attempt to introduce a "vast enlargement of the theoretical horizon" into then-contemporary Catholic social thought. That is, at least, a plausible interpretation, and I hope now to render it more plausible by describing in more detail Lonergan's early efforts.

LONERGAN'S EARLY TRANSPOSITION OF CATHOLIC SOCIAL THOUGHT

In 1931, as the crisis unleashed by the worldwide depression was coming to a head, Pius XI published *Quadragesimo anno*, a reflection on, and augmentation of, *Rerum novarum* 40 years after the latter's publication. Whatever the substantive achievements or shortcomings concerning its proposal for a "reconstruction of the social order,"⁴⁸ the encyclical had the singular merit of blessing the earnest "study of social and economic science in accordance with the conditions of our time."⁴⁹ And it expressly encouraged those who were eager to study the ways the "teaching of the Church might be related to the new developments."⁵⁰

One might think of Lonergan's efforts in the 1930s in response to this invitation as an attempted "generalization" of prior Catholic social thought. Or one might just as easily term it an attempted "revolution in Catholic social thought," for his efforts went beyond the tradition as it had developed to that point while preserving its basic elements in a higher synthesis.⁵¹ It is even fair to say that Lonergan's earliest unpublished work attempted to "transpose"⁵² Catholic social thought into a wider and deeper philosophical, technical, and historical context. As Lonergan later noted, a genuine transposition is "a restatement of an earlier position in a new and broader context,"⁵³ and certainly that describes the dialectic of history and the "metaphysics of history" he attempted to work out under the rubrics of a "Summa Sociologica" and a "Fundamental Sociology" in

of empirical and critical human sciences under the guidance of method as moving "toward the enlargement of the attainable human good" ("Moral Theology and the Human Sciences," CWBL 17, p. 302).

⁴⁸ See *Quadragesimo anno*, subtitle and nos. 76–98.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* no. 19. ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ See "A New Pastoral Theology," CWBL 17 221–39. "The word 'revolution' has many meanings. . . . There is the revolution of the political type that involves a repudiation of the past. There is the revolution of the scientific type that goes beyond the past yet preserves it in a new synthesis" (236).

⁵² As far as I know, Lonergan's first use of this term occurs in "A Theory of History," ca. 1936, ms. no. 71311DTE030. He does not there give it the technical sense it would later acquire. For that sense, see n. 53 below.

⁵³ "Horizons and Transpositions," CWBL 17 409–432, at 410.

the mid-1930s.⁵⁴ The earlier positions of Catholic social teaching on the reconstruction of the social order were restated by his efforts in a new and broader context.

To use a phrase from John Courtney Murray, Lonergan undertook the task not just of discerning “the ‘growing end of the tradition’”⁵⁵ but also of constructing “a synthesis that will be at once new and also traditional.”⁵⁶ There can be no doubt that he was working from within the tradition: his 1935 “Pantôn Anakephalaiôsis” is permeated with Thomist metaphysics; in it he claims to be “speaking as a psychologist of the school of St Augustine and St Thomas,”⁵⁷ and its epigraph is from the *Summa theologiae*. That epigraph relates to the progress of intellect from potency to act through a series of incomplete acts. But there can be no doubt that he was attempting to contribute to development of the tradition as well: the relevant progression of intellect holds not only for individual development but also for historical development.⁵⁸ The essay’s basic contention is that “to write on the Pauline conception of our Blessed Lord as the *anakephalaiôsis* of all things presupposes very definite views on all things, theological, philosophical, historical, social, political, even economic.”⁵⁹ And its fundamental assumption is that a metaphysics of history is the necessary key to interpreting the Pauline position, and “that the Thomist synthesis (pushed, indeed, to a few conclusions which, if they seem new, may be regarded, I trust, as a legitimate development) provides such a key.”⁶⁰

So one can read Lonergan’s early thought as an effort to shift and lift the tradition of Catholic social thought forward into a more adequate theoretic context by developing the virtualities of the tradition while remaining true to the tradition. This is intimated, for example, in two of the subtitles Lonergan gave to his “Pantôn Anakephalaiôsis” manuscript: “A Theology for the Social Order” and “A Theory of Human

⁵⁴ “Pantôn Anakephalaiôsis [The Restoration of All Things]” (1935), *Method: Journal of Lonergan Studies* 9 (1991) 140–62, at 156.

⁵⁵ John Courtney Murray, “The Problem of Religious Freedom,” *Theological Studies* 25 (1964) 503–75, at 569.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ “Pantôn Anakephalaiôsis” 150.

⁵⁸ Once one recognizes that it is not simply an individual process, the progress of intellect from potency to act through a series of incomplete acts is the key to historical process and progress, at least for Lonergan in 1935, for “an incomplete act is imperfect science, through which things are known indistinctly and with a certain confusion,” and the possibility of more complete actuation of intellectual potency is the possibility of progress. “Pantôn” 139 (quoting *Summa theologiae* 1, q. 85, a. 3.) See also “Outline of an Analytic Concept of History,” ms. no. 71312DTE030, p. 11 (noting that “this progress of intellect” is “through thesis, antithesis, and higher synthesis” and noting the possibility of “project[ing] this form of intellectual development upon the historical process”).

⁵⁹ “Pantôn Anakephalaiôsis” 140.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

Solidarity.”⁶¹ These themes are pervasive throughout the manuscripts from the 1930s. The “Theory of History” manuscript speaks of “customs and institutions and objective social forms that constitute the data of experience,” and it proposes definitions of conservatives, radicals, and liberals in terms of a Hegelian-like structure of thesis, antithesis, and new higher synthesis.⁶²

I cannot enter into the interpretative complexities of the manuscripts in any great detail here.⁶³ But I would like to consider briefly, as indexes of his early theoretic achievement relevant to Catholic social thought, the use Lonergan makes of bias in his social and historical analysis, his treatment of merely inertial conservatism, his development of the notion of human solidarity, and his concrete notion of “critical metaphysics.” Finally, I will mention his efforts toward a theory of economics.

First, the manuscripts reveal an acute sense of the mutual acceleration of human bias and social stagnation or decline.⁶⁴ One speaks of “the accumulation of surds in the social situation and structure,”⁶⁵ “the disaster of Realpolitik and liberal economics”⁶⁶ and “the objective and unintelligible chaos” that ensues, “the bankruptcy of intellect,” and “the consequent atomisation of society” as “the terminal phenomena of decline.”⁶⁷ Another manuscript speaks of a “bias of practical thought” that

transforms the distinction of those who govern and those who are governed into a distinction between the privileged and the depressed. The latter distinction in

⁶¹ *Ibid.* 139.

⁶² “The limitations of this first idea become manifest in practice and lead to the discovery of a complementary, opposed principle, an antithesis, which in turn is applied and extended; finally from the simultaneous limitations of both ideas the intellect is led to discover a higher synthesis. Hence, some definitions: A radical is in favor of the antithetical idea. A conservative is afraid of the new higher synthesis. A liberal wishes the new higher synthesis. A compromise is an agreement to let thesis and antithesis both stand; it is imposed by the lack of the higher synthesis” (“A Theory of History,” ms. no. 71311DTE030, p. 3).

⁶³ For greater detail, see Michael Shute, *Lonergan’s Discovery of the Science of Economics* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2010).

⁶⁴ Bias introduces surds into the social and historical process and therefore fosters historical decline. On bias as sin, see, e.g., *Insight* 689–90, CWBL 3, pp. 711–12; “Mission and the Spirit,” *A Third Collection* 23–33, at 31; ms. no. 27890DTE070, p. 1; ms. no. 2844DTE070, p. 9.

⁶⁵ “Outline of an Analytic Concept of History,” ms. no. 71312DTE030, p. 11. A surd is something unintelligible, a “false fact,” as Lonergan elsewhere describes the peculiar status of sin as non-ens (“Ethics and God,” in *Understanding and Being*, CWBL 5, ed. Elizabeth A. Morelli, Mark D. Morelli, Frederick E. Crowe et al. [Toronto: University of Toronto, 1990] 225–46, at 236). For a sample of Lonergan’s treatment of sin as non-ens in the historical manuscripts, see “Pantōn Anakephalaiōsis” 149–50.

⁶⁶ “Outline” 11.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* 13.

time becomes an abyss: its mechanism would seem [to be] as follows. Insensibly the privileged find the solution to the antitheses of their own well-being and progress. Too easily they pronounce nonexistent or insoluble the antitheses that militate against the well-being of the depressed.

Thus it is that with the course of time, the privileged enjoy a rapid but narrowly extended expansion of progress, and meanwhile the depressed are not merely left behind but more or less degraded by the set of palliatives invented and applied to prevent their envy bursting into the flame of anger and revolution. The total result is an objective disorder: both the progress of the few and the backwardness of the many are distorted; the former by its unnatural exclusiveness, the latter by the senseless palliatives. And this distortion is not merely some abstract grievance waiting on mere good will and polite words to be set right: it is the concrete and almost irradicable form of achievements, institutions, habits, customs, mentalities, characters.⁶⁸

This “bias of practical thought” anticipates what Lonergan would later distinguish as group and general bias,⁶⁹ and it is difficult not to notice implications of this analysis of bias for what only much later would come to be called “sinful social structures,” or as Lonergan then named it, the “inherited capital of injustice . . . concretized in the historic flow.”⁷⁰

How and why the Christian message might contribute to the reversal of these large-scale phenomena of objective disorder in the form of social and historical decline—and thereby contribute to a reconstruction of the social order and the restoration or integration of all things in Christ—is a recurring theme in the manuscripts. Here it is worth noting that Lonergan is essentially analyzing social and historical decline in terms of sin. Stated otherwise, he generalizes the traditional Thomist notion of sin as non-ens⁷¹ to encompass social and historical process. It is an early account of what in the 1950s he would term “the sociohistorical surd”⁷² and “the objectification of sin in social process.”⁷³ In fact, it is possible to discern in these manuscripts something like an incipient category of sinful historical structures.

⁶⁸ “Analytic Concept of History” (1938), *Method: Journal of Lonergan Studies* 11 (1993) 3–35, at 21–22.

⁶⁹ *Insight* 222–26; CWBL 3, pp. 247–51.

⁷⁰ “Philosophy of History” 42–43.

⁷¹ “Evil as such is nonbeing” (*De malo*, q. 2, a. 4; *The De Malo of Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Richard J. Regan, ed. Brian Davies [New York: Oxford University, 2001] 151); evil as “privation of a due perfection” (*De malo*, q. 1, a. 2 co; *De Malo of Thomas Aquinas* 75).

⁷² “Ethics and God” 236.

⁷³ “The Human Good as Object: Differentials and Integration,” in *Topics in Education: The Cincinnati Lectures of 1959 on the Philosophy of Education*, CWBL 10, ed. Robert M. Doran and Frederick E. Crowe (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1993) 64.

Second, the manuscripts harbor little sympathy for merely inertial conservatism or “the sin of backwardness”⁷⁴ in the face of the crises of the times. The early Lonergan has little patience for those “Thomists whose last thought is to imitate St. Thomas in this matter of thinking in pace with the times.”⁷⁵ His attitude toward anti-clericalism is likewise both dialectical and progressive: anti-clericalism is simply the natural dialectical result of the sin of backwardness. “What is called anti-clericalism is at root the antinomy between a merely traditional mentality and a mentality that is thinking in terms of the future and of problems of which the mere traditionalist has not the ghost of a notion, in fact, would flatly deny their existence, or, if they exist, that something should be done about it, or, if that is manifest, then that anything can be done about it.”⁷⁶

This critique of merely inertial conservatism is based on an Aquinas-inspired philosophical anthropology, and consequent ethics, of self-transcendence.

The finality of man’s capacities is their realization: to withdraw oneself from that finality would be to withdraw from life itself. A society that made its ideal to be traditional and self-perpetuating would be inert, for it neglects the greater good, fatalistic for it is indifferent to the evils it suffers, insensitive for it brings no remedy to suffering; psychologically such a society could not fail to be in decay; *le métier de l’homme est de se dépasser*.⁷⁷

These and other remarks—including Lonergan’s wry aside in 1942 that “the inertia coefficient of the human mind is normally rather high”⁷⁸—show the early Lonergan taking a dim view of complacent traditionalism. They represent fragments of his early attempts at a theory of institutional decline based

⁷⁴ “Dialectic of Authority” 8.

⁷⁵ “Philosophy of History” 40.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* The root of that antimony lay in the fact that “you can protect the good either by simply sitting back or by advancing with the good; but to advance with the good you have to have a theory of progress and a will to progress; these were lacking” (*ibid.*). Similarly, the opening toward modern social and economic theory inaugurated in Catholic social thought by *Quadragesimo anno* was a source of great hope that the “reactionary attitude” (*ibid.*) against progress that followed in the wake of the Counter Reformation, however understandable, given the excesses of progressives, might finally be overcome. “It is in the theory of social order, in the re-establishment of all things in Christ . . . that Pope Pius XI has laid the foundations for a triumph over an old, inevitable, and regrettable antinomy” (*ibid.* 41).

⁷⁷ “Outline of an Analytic Concept of History,” ms. no. 71312DTE030, p. 7. The egoistic bias of traditional liberal economics, in turn, ultimately reflects and enshrines a failure of self-transcendence. “As we have already pointed out, self-interest is not enlightened because it is not objective; it centres the world in the ‘ego’ of individual or class and neither is the centre” (*ibid.* 10).

⁷⁸ *For a New Political Economy*, CWBL 21, p. 8.

on inertial resistance to timely and fruitful ideas—even institutional decline in the Church.⁷⁹

Third, the same theoretic drive is evident in Lonergan's efforts in those manuscripts to integrate the notion of "solidarity" into a metaphysics and dialectics of history. That notion forms a kind of center of intellectual gravity in the manuscripts from the 1930s. Their treatment of solidarity is both complex and worthy of extended study, for a theory of solidarity is simultaneously the core of his early philosophy of history and the surest sign that these early efforts were devoted precisely to the development of Catholic social thought along more strictly theoretical lines.

Whatever the complexities, however, it is clear that Lonergan is attempting to take descriptive notions of solidarity and frame them in an explanatory perspective. Perhaps his movement from the descriptive notions of solidarity in then-current Catholic social thought to more explanatory views is best captured by passages such as the following, from 1943. "Now by man is meant not an abstract essence nor a concrete individual but the concrete aggregate of all men of all times. Thus, as in current physics, the viewpoint is four-dimensional."⁸⁰ Again: "The attainment of the human good life is a historical development, a unique process, not repeated for each individual, as is life, but a single thing shared by all individuals according to their position and role in the space-time solidarity of man."⁸¹ Finally: "Human development is a personal function of an objective movement in the space-time solidarity of man."⁸²

Fourth, to glimpse something of the magnitude of the empirical and critical turn in Catholic social thought envisioned, albeit in compact form, by the early Lonergan, one might also consider the breadth of his notion of "critical metaphysics." One may be inclined to interpret abstractly the phrase in the historical manuscripts, "a metaphysics of history." But that would be a mistake. In fragments that survive from an essay on assent in Newman written in 1934, Lonergan speaks of "critical metaphysics." It "takes the explanations arrived at in every field of science—physics, chemistry, biology, psychology, history, ethics, etc.—and frames a unified view of

⁷⁹ Elsewhere Lonergan writes: "The state had a real problem. There was in the philosophy of the spiritual authority no systematic recognition and official encouragement of progress after the counter-reformation" ("Philosophy of History" 30 n. 54). In "Outline of an Analytic Concept of History," ms. no. 71312DTE030, p. 13, Lonergan describes the dialectic of decline in Western history since the Renaissance: "Rome is corrupt and the princes revolt and impose national churches. The monarchy is corrupt and the bourgeois revolt to establish the lay state. The bourgeois are corrupt and the people revolt, anti-God, for religion that did not control the state, that did not prevent their exploitation, is not truth but an opiate merely to soothe the revolutionary nerve."

⁸⁰ "Finality, Love, Marriage" (1943), in *Collection*, CWBL 4, pp. 17–52, at 38.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.* 45.

reality in its totality.”⁸³ This early passage is suggestive of the role the human sciences might play in a heuristic framework adequate for a contemporary Catholic social thought, and it bears comparison to later stages of the same idea in the form of *Insight*'s complex articulation of a metaphysics of development and of the human person.⁸⁴

Finally, perhaps the most conspicuous evidence of Lonergan's early aspirations for a theoretic turn in Catholic social thought lies in the development of his economic theory. Scattered references to economics appear in many of the manuscripts on history from the 1930s.⁸⁵ Though the more explicitly economic portions of his earliest writings may have been lost, we have Lonergan's own testimony in 1935 that what he had “already written . . . takes the ‘objective and inevitable laws’ of economics, of psychology (environment, tradition) and of progress . . . to find the higher synthesis of these laws in the Mystical Body.”⁸⁶ Still, it is likely that his developing economic theory in the 1930s gestated only very slowly. It finally took a systematic and fully-fledged form in 1942 and then a more complex form in 1944,⁸⁷ only to be swept up in subtle ways into the “higher synthesis” and larger context that was his work *Insight*.⁸⁸

My final comment regarding the significance of Lonergan's economics concerns the radical novelty of an explanatory science of economics and its implications for economic morality. I cannot here justify the claim that Lonergan's economics represents a significant and much-needed explanatory breakthrough in the field, although others have attempted to do so at greater length.⁸⁹ But I can point out what Lonergan had to say about it, and what he said relates in part to its implications for Catholic social thought.

⁸³ Fragment of a 1930s essay on assent, ms. no. 16500DTE030, p. 23.

⁸⁴ Consider, e.g., notes by Lonergan on the problem of integrating the natural and human sciences and history into theology as he was writing *Insight*, and see the context below at n. 102. He writes: “There is a radically new method of answering the old question, What is man? Biologists, palaeontologists, anthropologists are concerned with his origins. Economists are concerned with the material conditions of his life. Psychologists and sociologists are busy with the inner and outer manifestations of his mind. Historians are busy with everything that is past, and historical theorists collect and analyze the facts relevant to the origins, developments, crises, break-downs, and disintegrations of man's cultural patterns, his religions, and his civilizations” (“A Note on Integration,” ms. no. 32400DTEL40, pp. 11–12).

⁸⁵ See, e.g., “Pantôn Anakephalaiôsis,” 150; Shute, *Lonergan's Discovery of the Science of Economics* chaps. 1–3.

⁸⁶ Letter to Henry Keane, published in Lambert and McShane, *Bernard Lonergan* 149.

⁸⁷ See the two manuscripts collected in *For a New Political Economy*.

⁸⁸ I have sketched the traces of the economic manuscripts in that later work in “*Insight* as Palimpsest: The Economic Manuscripts in *Insight*,” *Lonergan Review* 2 (2010) 130–49.

⁸⁹ See nn. 9, 41, 63 above.

“Catholic social thought affirms obedience to function: things have to be used as their nature dictates.”⁹⁰ But this principle holds also for the nature of economic process. This in turn means that “what you have to do is to rule the economy by the intrinsic requirements of the economy.”⁹¹ Just what those requirements are, is the subject of his economic theory.

For Lonergan, then, the formulation of economic morality derives from an accurate and explanatory economic theory; the economic theory is not a deduction from moral precepts. The economic analysis grounds economic ethics, not vice versa. That means, for example, that appeals to economic morality based on “the family wage,” as in *Quadragesimo anno*, fall into the category of “moral precepts that are not technically specific” and so turn out to be “quite ineffectual.”⁹² This position puts Lonergan at odds with many moralists. At the same time, genuine moral precepts can be derived from the intrinsic requirements of the economy. This position puts Lonergan at odds with many economists.

Lonergan, at least, realized that the originality of his approach meant that his theory would initially fall on deaf ears.

This I feel is an extremely novel project completely beyond the comprehension both of moralists (who commonly do not fancy there is any relevance of economic analysis to economic morality) and the comprehension of economists (who conceive their science not as an instrument to be put at the disposal of human freedom but as a means of predicting what men will do whether or not they are free).⁹³

But he was confident that over time it would gradually penetrate the thick walls of contemporary economic orthodoxy.⁹⁴

RELEVANCE OF THE LATER LONERGAN FOR CATHOLIC SOCIAL THOUGHT

So where did all the theoretic efforts and accomplishments in the service of a Christianity that would assist in a reconstruction of the social order go,

⁹⁰ “Savings Certificates and Catholic Action” 72.

⁹¹ “Questions with Regard to Method: History and Economics,” an interview in *Dialogues in Celebration*, ed. Cathleen M. Going (Montreal: Thomas More Institutes Papers, 1980) 304.

⁹² See *ibid.* and also n. 33 above. Technical economic matters are not unimportant, for they are the key to being effective rather than ineffectual. As Lonergan once wrote, helping the poor “in a notable manner is a matter of spending one’s nights and days in a deep and prolonged study of economic analysis” (“Sacralization and Secularization,” *CWBL* 17, pp. 259–81, at 280).

⁹³ Ms. no. 27929DTE070, p. 6.

⁹⁴ In a conversation with Philip McShane in 1977, Lonergan estimated that it would take 150 years; see McShane, “Work in Redress: The Value of Lonergan’s Economics for Lonergan Students,” chap. 1 of “The Redress of Poise: The End of Lonergan’s Work” 4 (unpublished ms. at <http://www.philipmcshane.ca>).

after this early flowering in Lonergan's thinking? The short answer is that they seem to have streamed slowly but steadily into his larger attempts to bring method, historical scholarship, the developing human sciences, and historical process itself into philosophy and theology as empirical, critical, and normative disciplines. The theory of emergent probability, the dialectic of history, the structure of the human good, the critiques of conceptualism and classicism, the discovery of structures for methodic, functional collaboration and functional specialization—all these themes from the later Lonergan represent so many fruits of the early direction of his quest for an empirical and critical theoretical framework for the “reconstruction of the social order.”

Any exploration of these larger fields in their relevance to Catholic social thought is beyond the scope of this article. But among the many zones of Lonergan's later thought generally relevant to contemporary Catholic social thought I would here mention three: his theory of history articulated in *Insight*, his proposed solution to the problem of integrating the empirical human sciences, historical scholarship, and critical philosophy in *Insight* and in *Method in Theology* (together with his articulation of a method of functional collaboration in *Method*), and his critique of the continuing effects of classicism in Catholic thought.

First, his theory of history. I have already mentioned Lonergan's conviction that unless Catholic thought incorporates modern theories of history, or thinks out its own, we will be in the position of using bows and arrows against opponents armed with guns and tanks.⁹⁵ As my account of the early historical manuscripts indicates, he had held that conviction for quite some time before he mentioned it publicly in 1977. But the same idea, implicit as a guiding inspiration in the historical manuscripts, found a much more elaborate form in *Insight*. There he notes that the longer wave of decline in Western civilization “has been drawing attention repeatedly to the notion of a practical theory of history.”⁹⁶ And he asserts that to avert the decline stemming from the inherent limitations of commonsense knowing, common sense itself has to be subordinated to “a human science that is concerned, to adapt a phrase from Marx, not only with knowing history but also with directing it. For common sense is unequal to the task of thinking on the level of history.”⁹⁷

“Thinking on the level of history” is precisely what Lonergan had been attempting to introduce into Catholic thought and—in the historical manuscripts—into Catholic social thought. Lonergan's theory of the dialectic of history in *Insight* is too complex to go into here, but it is worth noticing that his dialectical theory of history is in continuity with the

⁹⁵ See nn. 37–38 above.

⁹⁶ *Insight* 233; CWBL 3, p. 258.

⁹⁷ *Insight* 227; CWBL 3, p. 253.

thrust of his historical manuscripts from the 1930s.⁹⁸ It also dovetails with his remarks in 1977 on the relative weakness of the theoretic component of Catholic social thought, as well as with the task of, in some manner, directing history. Whatever “directing” history amounts to for Lonergan,⁹⁹ it is connected not only to the thrust of the historical manuscripts but also to his assertion that in historical process increasingly “man becomes for man the executor of the emergent probability of human affairs.”¹⁰⁰ It is also related to the problem of developing critical human science, integrating it with the kind of methodic philosophy envisioned in *Insight*, and extending it into the critical cultural community he there calls “cosmopolis.”¹⁰¹

Next is the problem of integrating the human sciences into contemporary philosophy and theology. This problem concerns the role of philosophy as the “handmaid” to theology, the queen of the sciences, and by extension the role of classical philosophy and its correlative philosophical anthropology in the development of Catholic social thought. Philosophy as a handmaid remains essential. But for Lonergan it must take the form of an empirical and critical philosophy in continuity with the tradition, yet also on the level of the times—something like what Lonergan attempted on a grand scale in *Insight*. In addition, the “ladies-in-waiting” have grown in number since the medieval period. Developments in the empirical natural and human sciences, as well as in historical studies, have produced “a new and distinct problem of integration,”¹⁰² and the new situation brings with it the new problem of integrating those developments and of constructing heuristic structures adequate to the integration. It is no longer the human being as “pure nature” but the human being as concretely developing and declining in historical process that forms the subject of modern investigations.¹⁰³

This problem of integration is not wholly without precedent—one need think only of Aquinas’s use of Aristotelian philosophy as an integrating instrument—but the magnitude and sheer difficulty of the contemporary

⁹⁸ See n. 39 above.

⁹⁹ I have explored this topic in “System and History in Lonergan’s Early Manuscripts,” *Journal of Macrodynamical Analysis* 1 (2001) 32–76, at 54–67.

¹⁰⁰ *Insight* 227; CWBL 3, p. 252. On emergent probability in economic process, see CWBL 15, pp. 3–4.

¹⁰¹ *Insight* 238–42; CWBL 3, pp. 263–67. One notable feature of cosmopolis is that “it is the higher synthesis of the liberal thesis and the Marxist antithesis,” for these prior views “have taught man to think historically.” *Insight* 241; CWBL 3, p. 266. The search for a higher synthesis between that thesis and that antithesis has animated Catholic social teaching since the days of *Rerum novarum*.

¹⁰² CWBL 4, p. 113; see also “Theology and Understanding,” CWBL 4, pp. 114–32, at 130–31.

¹⁰³ See n. 84 above.

version of the problem surely is. Its dimensions are the dimensions of the problem of method in theology and, by extension, the problem of method in Catholic social thought.

Third, the critique of classicism. Lonergan once recounted how his own shift from the classicist context began when he read Christopher Dawson in the early 1930s,¹⁰⁴ and this surely accords with the tone and character of the historical manuscripts. Classicism was for Lonergan “the dominant form of western culture from the fifth century B.C. to the eighteenth century.”¹⁰⁵ The classicist mentality took universally valid rules to be the norm of behavior, logic to be the form of knowledge, and timeless verities to be the vehicle of truth.¹⁰⁶ Its basic assumptions were stability, fixity, and immutability.¹⁰⁷

Lonergan did not think classicism to be simply wrong, but he did suspect that it harbored within it a systematic blind-spot concerning the development of doctrines and, more generally, the development of meaning in history. It also tended to aid and abet a certain conceptualism, and with it, what he called “an anti-historical immobilism.”¹⁰⁸ It is possible, indeed probable, that Catholic social teaching and thought have been from time to time a product of the classicist mentality, and therefore subject to its limitations. This is not to say that its core doctrines are wrong, but only that, like all doctrines, they in some manner develop. It is also to say that the mentality in which those core doctrines were couched had a tendency to obscure the development in those very doctrines that is so conspicuous over the 120-year span since *Rerum novarum*. It is finally to say that what develops was once less developed. On this score, Lonergan appears to agree with the criticisms advanced by Christian Duquoc.¹⁰⁹ Duquoc criticized the social encyclicals prior to John XXIII as tending to assume a preindustrial, agricultural society. He judged *Gaudium et spes* to break decisively with this shortcoming, but even that conciliar document, for Duquoc, was the product of insufficient technical

¹⁰⁴ “*Insight Revisited*,” *A Second Collection*, ed. William F. J. Ryan and Bernard J. Tyrrell (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974) 263–78, at 264 (referencing Dawson’s *The Age of the Gods: A Study of the Origins of Culture in Prehistoric Europe and the Ancient Near East* [London: John Murray, 1928]).

¹⁰⁵ Ms. no. 86600DTE060, p. 5.

¹⁰⁶ See *Method in Theology* 301. ¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ “Theories of Inquiry,” *A Second Collection* 33–42, at 39; “The Subject,” *A Second Collection* 69–86, at 74–75.

¹⁰⁹ Christian Duquoc, *Ambiguïté des théologies de la sécularisation: Essai critique* (Gembloux: Duculot, 1972). Lonergan cites this work in “Healing and Creating in History” 109 n. 14, and in “Moral Theology and the Human Sciences” 370 in the very passages where he speaks of the need for increased “technical knowledge” in Catholic social thought.

knowledge of the current situation—a judgment with which Lonergan agreed.¹¹⁰

In addition to these three areas, there are various *topoi* in Catholic social thought on which Lonergan had something to say—usually by way of a transposition from the traditional context to a context constituted by his own thinking. There is, for example, his assertion that the transcendental precepts—be attentive, be intelligent, be reasonable, be responsible—are modern versions of Aquinas’s primary precepts of the natural law.¹¹¹ In addition, Lonergan developed and transposed the descriptive notion of “the common good” into an explanatory heuristic framework of 18 terms and relations comprising what he called “the human good.”¹¹² In the context of this framework he wrote: “My idea of the common good is a conception of human interdependence in terms of the emergent probability of schemes of recurrence.”¹¹³ Of that conception he observed, “I am not aware that moralists, liberals, or the social encyclicals formulated such a view,” but, he surmised, “I should say that the later encyclicals come closer than the earlier.”¹¹⁴ Finally, I have already mentioned his attempt to transpose the notion of solidarity into a more explanatory context.

These are merely a few illustrative and rather brusque hints at possible areas of further and future inquiry into Lonergan’s relevance to Catholic social thought. Yet I hope they help dispel the impression—easily generated by this article’s concentration on the early Lonergan—that Lonergan’s contribution to the advancement of Catholic social thought ended with his early work in the manuscripts on history and economics.

CONCLUSION

The period between Lonergan’s historical and economic manuscripts, on the one hand, and the publication of *Method in Theology*, on the other, brackets a whole series of significant developments in Catholic social thought and theology. One might take as an index the difference between the quasi-classicist context of *Quadragesimo anno* and the more modern context represented by *Gaudium et spes*:

The circumstances of the life of modern man have been so profoundly changed in their social and cultural aspects, that we can speak of a new age of human history. New ways are open, therefore, for the perfection and the further extension of

¹¹⁰ Ms. no. 813A0ATE070, p. 4. For that matter, Lonergan held that many theologies of liberation were compromised by a lack of technical knowledge of economics. See *ibid.*

¹¹¹ Ms. no. 27890DTE070, p. 2.

¹¹² *Method in Theology* 48; see also *ibid.*, chap. 2, “The Human Good.”

¹¹³ Ms. no. 27920DTE070, p. 6. Compare *Method in Theology* 49, esp. n. 16.

¹¹⁴ Ms. no. 27920DTE070, p. 6.

culture. These ways have been prepared by the enormous growth of natural, human, and social sciences. . . . historical studies make it much easier to see things in their mutable and evolutionary aspects. . . . Thus we are witnesses of the birth of a new humanism, one in which man is defined first of all by this responsibility to his brothers and to history.¹¹⁵

Perhaps there will be parallel indications of progress toward a theoretic or methodic turn in Catholic social thought in the not-too-distant future. The required turn may indeed ultimately assist at “the birth of a new humanism,” one that finds fuller form in “new ways . . . for the perfection and the further extension of culture.” But if so, the new humanism and culture will be mediated by a transposition of Catholic social thought to a new context consonant with up-to-date technical knowledge of economic, political, social, and historical process—a context that will increasingly make human responsibility toward one another and toward history more effectively probable.

Rerum novarum was issued on May 15, 1891. Over the course of the intervening 120 years, Catholic social teaching and Catholic social thought have grown to face and embrace issues that could not possibly have been imagined by Leo XIII. The world since *Rerum novarum* has seen extraordinary progress in many realms, but it has also seen “a trail of appalling destruction.”¹¹⁶ That combination of enormous progress and appalling destruction has confronted Catholic social teaching and Catholic social thought with fundamental questions about the very nature of progress¹¹⁷ and the means required to attain it. And so “every generation has the task of engaging anew in the arduous search for the right way to order human affairs; this task is never simply completed.”¹¹⁸ This never fully completed task includes, I would suggest, the demanding and challenging task of ‘aiming excessively high and far,’ the task of theory on the level of the times.

Perhaps, in that light, it is well to bear in mind what Lonergan wrote in 1977. “There does remain a larger problem. It is our unfinished *aggiornamento*. The scientific revolution of the seventeenth century and the historical revolution of the nineteenth constitute exigences for a remodeling of philosophy and for new methods in theology.”¹¹⁹ Unfinished it is, and perhaps always will be. But a great deal of Lonergan’s life’s work was devoted to constructing the theoretic and methodic structures that would respond to the scientific and historical revolutions, further the task of *aggiornamento*, and “set the church on a course of continual renewal”¹²⁰—and with it, one hopes, a renewal of Catholic social thought.

¹¹⁵ *Gaudium et spes* nos. 54–55.

¹¹⁷ *Spe salvi* no. 22.

¹¹⁹ Ms. no. 16230DTE070, p. 2.

¹²⁰ *Method in Theology* 367.

¹¹⁶ *Spe salvi* no. 21.

¹¹⁸ *Spe salvi* no. 25.