

1-1-2013

Afterword

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This volume, in whose writing and production I played no part, is aimed at students pursuing a bachelor's degree. Nevertheless I read it with breathless interest, because it expertly presents a narrative in which I as a professor of historical theology do play a part, one that began with Vatican II. Permit me, then, to approach this afterword autobiographically by relating the narrative of this volume to my own professional theological narrative. Out this experience I conclude with a reflection on the role of history in church and theology and the danger of not learning from it.

I begin with what occurred in my life just at the climax of the Vatican I to Vatican II narrative. I was in my third year of regency as a Jesuit scholastic teaching high school chemistry when newly released council documents appeared (1966). I immediately delved into them and found my imagination lit up with possible implications for both the church and me as a scholastic about to begin four years of theological studies in preparation for ordination. I began the 1967 academic year at the Jesuit theologate at St. Marys, Kansas, with the new course of seminary studies mandated by the council (the theologate moved to St. Louis University the following academic year to change the study environment from the countryside to the city). In the summer vacation times during regency I was also completing a Ph.D. in organic chemistry. In fact, I was just a year away from finishing—my research

project was well in hand, most of my dissertation was written, and I had two more courses to take and sit for my comprehensive exams.

After finishing my first year of theology, I faced the question I could not avoid: do I want to be a part of this future church as an organic chemist or as a theologian?—yes, I became that interested in theology to pose this question. What does the church I am called to serve as a priest need more at this time in history—a priest-organic chemist or a priest-theologian who sees his role as helping the church appropriate what was loaded in the Vatican II documents? Could I do both?—be an organic chemist and a theologian? With some grasp of my limitations, I answered no. To what was God calling me at this point? The answer would come as I posed the question to my provincial superior at my next “account of conscience.” Should I abandon organic chemistry to pursue a Ph.D. in theology? He and I, it turns out, were on the same track. With some regret and not a little grieving, I left chemistry behind and threw myself into the study of theology in the immediate post-Vatican II era.

It was a heady time in more ways than one. The United States had recently passed through the Cuban Missile Crisis and the assassinations of John Kennedy, Martin Luther King Jr., and Robert Kennedy; and the Catholic Church was suffering the effects of Pope Paul VI’s encyclical *Humanae vitae*. Not unconnected with these traumatic events, the country and much of the West were undergoing a cultural revolution. We were in the midst of the Vietnam War with tumultuous protests against it; we were also experiencing sharp tensions provoked by the struggle for civil rights, women’s rights, challenges to traditional authorities, exploration of sexuality and psychedelic drugs, etc. With all this as background, I was facing the question of what to do with the rest of my life: join a movement or continue my vocation as a Jesuit priest with an adjustment that could help prepare for what all the revolutionary energies could mean for the long haul and for the church that would be faced with, in its own way, meeting the religious and social needs of a world population that was increasingly merging across borders. Organic chemistry was no longer in the picture for me. Theology was. Ah, but what kind? That question was now a real one, now that neo-Thomism was no longer the only option for studying philosophy and theology.

My first interest in theological studies was hermeneutics—a perfectly reasonable choice. After all, in those years rife with both religious and cultural revolution, the question of what all this means both now and especially for the future pulled at my innards. I explored hermeneutics with a couple of courses, but in the process I discovered that interpreting what anything means drove me to historical contexts, because at root we humans are historical creatures. Yes, we Christians also have our eternal verities—revelation, Scripture, tradition, and institutional structures to keep alive in us the dynamism of the Christian mythos. But within this framework we encounter new and increasingly complex historical events that daily force the question of what they mean in both the short and long terms. How do we engage these events at the level of meaning and incorporate them into the Christian mythos such that the latter gives them a salvific significance?

So I decided to focus first on historical theology—get the dissertation done quickly, then turn to what I was really interested in, namely, hermeneutics: how to interpret all that we humans encounter, past and present, with a view toward the future. But as I entered into the project that is history, I discovered that I would never exit, at least professionally, into hermeneutics as a concentration; because I discovered that in history, precisely in “doing” history, I found the indispensable method of search for and discovery of meaning.

Let me spell out this discovery by connecting it with the historical narrative that is this volume. First, as I indicated above, I read this volume with breathless interest. Why? Because it not only tells a story—and who doesn't like a story?—but the story it tells is about the great loves of my life—the church, the world, and all its peoples. It's a story about how the church, founded by Jesus Christ on the Apostles, realizes itself historically in the time and place in which we currently live, both in accessible memory of the past (through access to archives) and in the present, in living memory, which tasks us with preparing a future promising for later generations.

I must confess, however, that these loves, while they may have been germinating in me for many years, did not and could not flower until a measure of maturity caught up with me, that is, until I discovered that all humans (and I as a not disinterested example) are by nature interrelational, just as God, in whose image we are created, is by nature interrelational. And therefore, in some eureka moment—

albeit a very gradual moment—I grasped the existential reality that all human stories are interwoven; that there is no story that is not also in some sense my story as well. I could not avoid the conclusion that if God is love (1 John), and if God loves me, sinner that I am, then God also loves all persons and all created and uncreated beings; indeed creation is the ex-pression (exprimere) of God who is love. In a sense, then, I as a self-and-other-aware image of God, fell in love with history and with all historical personages. Henceforth, I could never get enough experience of the other as expression of God. I graduated into historical dipsomania; context became for me indispensable to knowing the truth of historical personages and events, all of which are expressions of divine-creaturely interrelational love.

Here is how this awakening played itself out in my life—and it is a lesson that I attempt to communicate, whether overtly or covertly, to my students, readers of my writings, spiritual advisees, and hearers of my homilies. Back to the moment when I had to choose a course of studies toward the Ph.D. Once I decided on historical theology, I looked for a dissertation topic that most piqued my imagination. Serendipitously (of course, I interpreted this as another graced moment), I fell upon the soi-disant Modernist George Tyrrell, who lived and worked in a period that seemed much like the one the church was going through in the era of Vatican II and following. (It helped my imagination that he too was a Jesuit.) As I was intensely interested in Vatican II—since it was immediate to me and to the church I was called to serve—I surmised that I could learn something of the inner workings of crises by studying the Modernist Crisis through the eyes of those who lived and interpreted it, Tyrrell and his friends.

Immersing myself in the microhistory of the Modernist period (roughly 1890 to 1914) under the direction of von Hügel scholar Lawrence Barmann, I learned that the Crisis had a considerable ancestry and progeny, all vitally intriguing in their own rights. Here, I can present only the outlines. I begin with the ancestry—and forego the progeny, as they are well described in the pages of this book. By “ancestry” I mean the world- and church-changing historical events that led to the Modernist Crisis. It began with the era of revolutions: American, French, and multiple revolutions throughout Europe during the 19th century, all of which went quite badly from the perspective of the Vatican—and truth to tell, there was much social unrest,

displacement, destruction of property, and loss of life, all of which shook both church and state to the core.

Much has been written about the connections between the American and French Revolutions, but for my purposes here I focus on the French Revolution, because that had the most immediate and profound impact on the Catholic Church. It split "throne and altar" and led throughout the 19th century, along with the propagation of Enlightenment thinking and consequent scientific, industrial, and social/cultural revolutions, to an increasing secularization of both property and mind: the states in various countries of Europe took over many of the services that had been under the aegis of the church, especially education and social services. "Liberalism" was invented in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, and the term, understood primarily as political and with frightening implications for the church, became the shibboleth for all that seemed threatening to the church's life and institutions.

As this volume's narrative makes clear, the destabilization of both state and church from the French Revolution on led local churches to look "beyond the mountains" to Rome as a possible bulwark against the secularizing forces that were encroaching on ecclesial domains. The pope in fact, as head of the universal church, was still a political/religious power to reckon with—no revolutionaries wanted their populations to mount resistance because of religious ties to Rome. Thus ultramontanism became a forceful movement during the 19th century (and to this day), whereby church/political power became increasingly concentrated in the papacy. Concomitantly, of course, this movement weakened the power of local bishops, who increasingly lost courage to govern their dioceses without first checking with Rome.

One of the spinoffs of the church's struggle with liberalism was hierarchical resistance to anything that smacked of liberal thought, including the democratizing tendencies that church leaders feared was spilling over to theological thought as church philosophers and theologians attempted to engage the intellectual developments from the Enlightenment. Kant and then Schleiermacher, with their turns to the subject, were seen as the greatest threats to church order. Along with these threats was the tendency among some schools of philosophy and theology (mostly seminaries at that time) to attempt to

meet the stronger strains of emerging non-Scholastic thought on their own ground; thus the experimenting with philosophical/theological thought that strayed from the traditional Scholasticism methodology. Fearing a splintering of the ecclesiastical thought system, Pope Leo XIII issued *Aeterni Patris* (1879), mandating Thomism as the church's unifying philosophical/theological method.

This mandate led to tensions among some theologians who found that the ahistorical approach of neo-Thomism was ineffective for dealing with the new philosophies and theologies emerging from the Enlightenment, particularly among influential Protestant thinkers. This tension led to extramural experimentation by a number of Catholic philosophers and theologians, mostly in Europe and mostly not following a common program—contrary to the impression given by Pius X's *Lamentabili sane exitu* and *Pascendi dominici gregis* (1907) defining Modernism and then condemning what they defined)—except that these thinkers were working outside the lines of Thomism or attempting to adapt Thomism to the new strains of philosophical/theological thought. This led, then, to the Vatican's draconian measures to root out Modernism. These measures, which included the establishment of secret vigilance committees in dioceses throughout the world, resulted in the delation—often with insufficient cause—of suspected Modernists to the Holy Office of the Inquisition and their dismissal from ecclesiastical faculties and/or in their excommunication or departure from the church without awaiting formal excommunication.

How many philosophers and theologians this involved—probably all were ordained priests—is unknown, and it would take a great deal of sifting through records in the Vatican archives to come up with a reasonably accurate figure. My own estimate from archival research is fewer than fifty. Contrast this with the number who were investigated by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith after Vatican II: by one estimate, over 230. Of course, by this time the number of theologians worldwide was much larger than during the Modernist period. Let me conclude by reflecting on learning from history.

To learn from history, one must be able to read it with at least a good-faith attempt at objectivity and not selectively according to one's self-interests. This is enormously difficult. It takes courageous indifference to remove one's self from desires driven by venal motives

or fear of threats to one's position of power. In the Ignatian tradition of striving for indifference, one must be liberated from disordered desires and fears (e.g., of threats to one's security that rests on real or imagined riches, honors, pride), so that one can sincerely ask and desire to know God's will in a particular time and place as over and against one's own will. For the spiritually indifferent, well-ordered person, one's own will is conformed to God's. For the disordered person, one's own will is taken as God's will.

While anti-Modernists conflated political liberalism with theological modernism, those the Vatican identified as "modernists" did not. In fact Tyrrell was roundly critical of theological liberalism and of how the Vatican construed "modernism" as an internally coherent and organized movement. If the so-called "Modernists" were united in any one program at all, it was to engage with post-Enlightenment thought, and not in any organized fashion; this over and against those who did philosophy and theology only within the framework of neo-Scholasticism. Tyrrell, who studied the texts of Thomas themselves, knew how Thomas's thought differed markedly from thought of his neo-Scholastic interpreters, and he saw the latter, as did Bernard Lonergan subsequently, as ahistorical, static "classicism" (Lonergan's term for neo-Scholastic method).

Among Lonergan's invaluable contributions to philosophical-theological method was the incorporation of historical-mindedness into Scholastic philosophy and theology as the only way to bring it up to date and make it serviceable in the post-19th-century academy that sees historical consciousness as a *sine qua non* for discussing this-worldly realities recognized as historical and historically contingent. This does not mean relative. Certainly relativism is a danger to be avoided, but to incorporate historical consciousness into the attempt to engage and elucidate human realities is merely and quite obviously to engage them on their own terms, i.e., as profoundly historical realities.

In 1966, the year the Vatican II documents were released, Lonergan was asked to address the Canon Law Society of America on the question of "how a community of love [the church] adapts and directs itself for effective mission and witness."¹ This is precisely the question that Pope John XXIII posed to the Council Fathers, albeit not in so many words; it is the question of *aggiornamento* for the Church of Jesus Christ as a profoundly historical reality. Lonergan proceeded

to engage this question in “a roundabout fashion” by first reminding his audience that his book *Insight* analyzed “the dynamic structure of human history,” and that his *De Verbo Incarnato* argued “a thesis on the lex crucis that provides . . . [the] strictly theological complement” to history’s structure. He then proceeded to answer the question and in astonishingly few words.

First, however, he had to address “the elephant in the room,” that is, what everyone witnessed who followed the concurrent reports from the council and/or who read scholarly assessments of the proceedings both on the floor of the council and behind the scenes as these became available, namely, that two broad mentalities among the Fathers were in contest from beginning to end, mentalities that this book tracks from Vatican I through the eras of Modernism and la nouvelle théologie, through Vatican II and the postconciliar period, to the very end of Benedict XVI’s papacy. These mentalities Lonergan described as “classicist and historicist.” Though “not immediately theological,” these mentalities, Lonergan averred, were “differences in horizon, in total mentality” that led to differences in theological conclusions. Given such “differences in horizon,” Lonergan said, it would be “a major achievement” “for either side really to understand the other.” But without that understanding, “the interpretation of Scripture or of other theological sources is most likely to be at cross-purposes.”²

Lonergan went on to describe how the two mentalities differ first of all by departing from the classical to the modern languages and literature—thus by reason of different linguistic structures; then by departing from classical modes of investigation to modern (Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment) methods of learning and application that have resulted in today’s world of stunning diversity and technological achievement. “In every case” of development, Lonergan said, “modernity means the desertion, if not the repudiation, of the old models and methods, and the exercise of freedom, initiative, creativity.”³ For church leaders facing the destabilization of church and society from the French Revolution to our own time, such an assessment could be and was terrifying.

What Lonergan is describing is the historical process that is not itself theological, but that is the reality into which divine revelation comes: that is, not abstractly, not into unchanging forms and

structures, but into the concrete, changing forms and structures of historical living that results in changing meanings. To be sure, there are constants within changing meanings—constants such as virtues like love, truth-telling, doing the good, and loving interrelationality—but these constants are always being realized in historical persons and cultures that develop over time, and so the constants change in their cultural, historical expression and therefore in how meaning is conveyed. Revelation enters into history, and so it is up to historical meaning-makers to make history theological. For Christians, this means it is up to those who in baptism and in their diverse baptismal realities “put on Christ” and therefore “Christify” daily living as interrelational persons.

In this Christic context, what does it mean to learn from history? First of all, it means to learn from revelation, from God who has entered history both in the very act of creation but also concretely and intimately by becoming human in Jesus of Nazareth who thus knows intimately all things human but sin (Heb. 2:17, 4:15); but even here and especially here for the sake of communication of God’s love, Paul tells us, God “made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21 RSV). Therefore, we humans exist within a Christic horizon, wherein we are enabled to interpret in truth all of reality theologically, as sacrament of God’s love, as sacrament of God’s presence in history.

Second, it means that as historical persons, we can and must—if we will be wise and obedient (in the etymological sense of “listen carefully”)—honor and reverence our ancestors who communed with God as did Adam and Eve “in the garden in the cool of the day” (Gen. 3:8), and learn from them what they learned of God and how they applied that learning to their historical living. This learning is to be done both on the level of content but also and more importantly perhaps on the level of method: how did they and how are we to discern what is and what is not of God? How are we to walk and talk with God in the cool of the day? To attend only to the what of faith, the *fides quae*, the “deposit,” without attending also to the *fides qua* is to get ourselves stuck in classicism and so to ignore, or perhaps even flee from, the presence of the living God and the movement of God’s Spirit in history.

Third, to continue to draw on Lonergan, reading the signs of the times, as we are all called to do, requires two modes of learning from the past: (1) learning the content of what worked and did not work for our ancestors; and (2) learning from them the method of discerning the movement of the Holy Spirit in our lives today, who is attempting to direct us on the way of salvation, toward wholeness. Given how we have developed, that is, with historical consciousness as endemic to post-Enlightenment cultures, reality and the traces of God therein can no longer be interpreted merely through what has been handed down in the classical manuals of philosophy and theology. Rather theological interpretation must also arise out of historical understanding. That is, theology must also be historical theology; it must limn the workings of God's Spirit in the concrete and changing realities of history. For a "community of love," this means that, in the vagaries of history, we must lovingly attend to the working of God who is love and who, as such, labors to form a community of love, but only with our cooperation, with our lively reading of the signs of the times and in them the signs of God's traces in our space-time continuum.

Not to turn theology into historical theology is to flee from the theological (and every other kind of useful) understanding that is available to us today by reason of historical consciousness. To flee from such understanding is, I would argue, a dereliction of human possibility and results, as Lonergan puts it, "in a . . . cumulative process of decline"; this over and against progress that results from a process of insights building cumulatively on previous insights and leading to a body of knowledge that builds historically. In Lonergan's words:

"Flight from understanding blocks the insights that concrete situations demand. There follow unintelligent policies and inept courses of action. The situation deteriorates to demand still further insights and, as they are blocked, policies become more unintelligent and action more inept. What is worse, the deteriorating situation seems to provide the uncritical, biased mind with factual evidence in which the bias is claimed to be verified. So in ever increasing measure intelligence comes to be regarded as irrelevant to practical living. Human activity settles down to a decadent routine, and initiative becomes the privilege of violence."⁴

This is what played itself out in the Modernist Crisis and in the draconian measures mandated by Pius X to deal with the so-called "Modernists." It is also what played itself out in the investigations of theologians and the US women religious in the post-Vatican II era. These unfortunate contretemps are what happens when we do not learn from history; when we do not grasp what we are as inherently historical beings and what the church is as an inherently historical "community of love."

The question mark in this book's title, *Aggiornamento?*, is well placed. The jury remains out on the church's appropriation of Vatican II.

References

¹Bernard J. F. Lonergan, "The Transition from a Classicist World-View to Historical-Mindedness," *A Second Collection*, ed. William F. J. Ryan, S.J., and Bernard J. Tyrrell, S.J., *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan* 13 (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1996) 1–9, at 7.

¹ Ibid. 2.

¹ Ibid. 5

⁴*Insight*, *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan* 3 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992)