THE HEYTHROP JOURNAL

HeyJ 00 (2024), PP. 1–14

ORIGINAL SIN IN THE CONTEXT OF LONERGAN'S SOTERIOLOGY

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Any survey of diverse methods applied by Catholic theologians teaching and writing in the twentieth century should include the Canadian theologian Bernard Lonergan, SJ. While Lonergan might best be known for his *Method in Theology*, published originally in English, his work on soteriology was originally in Latin in the context of his teaching Christology, *De Verbo Incarnato*. Only with the publication of his *Collected Works* are the relevant Latin texts now widely available, also with English translation.[1]

Lonergan rarely writes of original sin. He remarks in his Christology that the topic is treated in a different course, *De Deo Creante et Elevante*. The absence of a discussion of sin (including original sin) in Lonergan's theology is bemoaned by a Lonergan scholar at a conference on Lonergan's anthropology.[2] There is one passage from 1964 lecture notes worthy of note, both because of its reference to original sin and also because it seems programmatic in outlining the task for theology. This passage is in note-form:

> In contrast, a philosophy that rejects extrinsicism, that begins from the self-appropriation of the subject = [his] *their* self-mediation with respect to a tradition = mutual self-mediation within a tradition,
>
> begins with [man] *the human* as [he] *one* concretely is, as a member of a community, as a receiver and transmitter of a tradition, as in need of conversion
>
> such a starting point is isomorphic with the starting-point of one that inquires into Christian claims
>
> while there are two formally distinct starting-points, there is only one full solution: when one deals with [man] *the human* in the concrete, one is dealing with [man] *the human* under original sin, in need of grace, receiving it, and either accepting or rejecting it – one is in a theological context.[3]

From the perspective of theological method, the following points in this short note are worthy of attention: the rejection of extrinsicism; the self-appropriation of the subject; the reference to a tradition, a community, suggesting the relevant subject is not the isolated self; the emphasis

[1]Lonergan's texts are cited from the *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran et al (Toronto: University of Toronto Press).

[2]Nicola Rotundo, 'Lonergan, Arnold Toynbee, and the Problem of Historicism', in *Lonergan's Anthropology Revisited: The Next Fifty Years of Vatican II*, ed. Gerard Whelan (Rome: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 2015), 487-489, at 488.

[3]Lonergan, 'Method in Theology. The Problem. External Factors'. Lectures delivered in Georgetown in 1964. 85400DTE060.pdf (bernardlonergan.com) accessed 9 June 2023. Gendered language is replaced with general terms in italics.

on the concrete situation of humans, recognising the problem of evil and the possibility of a solution, and the fact of the solution either accepted or rejected.

Lonergan's soteriology is well summarised in a lecture title: 'Healing and Creating in History'.[4] 'History' identifies the context of 'the concrete situation of humans'; 'creating' locates the dynamic capabilities for generating good; and 'healing' refers to the woundedness of humanity, the extent of which is revealed in the complexity of the solution offered. The woundedness in question includes the reality of sin, both actual and original. There is only a brief mention of original sin in this essay.[5] What is referred to here is *Erbsünde* rather than *Ursünde*, *peccatum originale originatum* and not *peccatum originale originans*. The focus is on inherited original sin, *Erbsünde*.

As an additional introductory note, I should acknowledge Lonergan's distinction from *Method in Theology* between 'Doctrines' and 'Systematics' in the second four of the eight functional specialties.[6] Doctrines indicates the task of establishing what the Church teaches on specific matters, while systematics takes on the task of explaining the teaching and integrating it with other elements of the Christian faith. In the texts dealt with in this paper Lonergan is largely engaged in the work of systematisation, taking doctrine taught by the Church as given. The following points are relevant: the role of history in Lonergan's theology; his replacement of metaphysics by cognitional theory and epistemology; his analysis of progress and decline (dialectic); the theme of healing. Finally, I ask why the offered explanation is an account of inherited original sin.

I. THE ROLE OF HISTORY

Frederick Crowe, SJ, a student of Lonergan and one of his more careful defenders, highlights Lonergan's concentration on history, and his concern with Christ's historical causality, his influence on the healing of the world.[7] Crowe provides a commentary on a supplement added to Lonergan's *De Verbo Incarnato*, where he treats soteriology, the redemption.[8] *De Bono et Malo*, 'Of Good and Evil', is the title of the first of six chapters in this supplement, in total comprising 45 articles. Lonergan's exploration of good and evil in history, what he terms Progress, Decline, and Healing or Recovery, is the context, I suggest, for grasping what he has to offer about original sin.

This topic of Christ's role in history is to be read in the context of Lonergan's own development of the notion of historicism or historical consciousness. An important article is 'The Transition from a Classicist Worldview to Historical Mindedness'.[9] A theme in that article,

[4]Lonergan, 'Healing and Creating in History', in *Collected Works* Vol. 16, *A Third Collection*, ed. Robert M. Doran and John D. Dadosky (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2017), 94-103.

[5]Lonergan, 'Healing and Creating in History', 96.

[6]Lonergan, *Collected Works* Vol. 14, *Method in Theology*, ed. Robert M. Doran and John D. Dadosky (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2017).

[7]Frederick E. Crowe, *Christ and History. The Christology of Bernard Lonergan from 1935 to 1982* (St Paul University, Ottawa, Canada: Novalis, 2005).

[8]Lonergan, *Collected Works* Vol. 9, *The Redemption: A Supplement*, ed. Robert M. Doran, H. Daniel Monsour, and Jeremy D. Wilkins, trans. Michael G. Shields (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018).

[9]Lonergan, 'The Transition from a Classicist Worldview to Historical Mindedness', in *Collected Works*, Vol. 13, *A Second Collection*, ed. Robert M. Doran and John D. Dadosky (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 3-10.

'Human Nature and Historicity', is also addressed in 'Natural Right and Historical Mindedness'.[10] Lonergan distinguishes between two approaches to understanding the human: a classicist worldview that focuses on a universal human nature, common to all humans, in all places and all times; and a historically minded or modern approach that sees the human as changing and developing over time, framing in different contexts distinctive literatures, cultures, forms of law and language, and institutions. The acknowledgement of the latter has led many moderns to abandon completely all reference to human nature, or to any constant universal. While accepting the importance of recognising the historical dimension, Lonergan, along with other transcendental Thomists, holds that the universal human nature can be recognised in the operations of human subjects. He remarks in a comment on Rahner's article on natural law, '…the more concrete and historical apprehension of man (sic) provides itself with the appropriately concrete foundations in structural features of the conscious, operating subject, by a method that has come to be named transcendental'.[11] Where Rahner had focused on the activities of listening and of questioning, Lonergan elaborates a fourfold structure of human cognitional and volitional operations, from experiencing, understanding, reflecting, and judging, deliberating and deciding. In his article on 'Natural Right' he contrasts a constant, human nature, and a variable, human historicity. 'Nature is given man (sic) at birth. Historicity is what man makes of man (sic).'[12]

Corresponding to the fourfold structure of human consciousness: Experience, Understanding, Judgement, and Decision, are the four transcendental precepts that Lonergan proposes as articulating the common law of this nature: 'be attentive, be intelligent, be rational, be responsible'. The ongoing process of self-transcendence constituted by the dynamic of the corresponding questioning has its completion in the embrace of value, the state of being-in-love.[13] The dynamic of self-transcendence is presented for pedagogical reasons as from below upward, culminating in decision and commitment. However, reality is more complex, and once Lonergan had introduced the explanatory terms he shifted attention to the dynamic in the other direction, from above downward. This is the dynamism beginning with the affective encounter with value (another person, parent, teacher, pastor, partner) leading to the adoption of life-shaping commitments and convictions, thereby framing experience. But whichever the direction of the dynamism in any instance, the account of the human is dynamic, and can be interpreted in line with the transcendental precepts. Accordingly, the notion of natural law is not abandoned, but it is disconnected from a static concept of a universal human nature.

Historicity is contrasted with the constant, human nature, dynamically understood. Historicity is the changeable, variable component of human reality, and in various lists Lonergan indicates that he is referring both to cultural achievements—'religions and art-forms, languages and literatures, sciences, philosophies, the writing of history', and social institutions—'the family, the state, the law, the economy'.[14] All these have a history, they undergo change, sometimes as progress and sometimes as decline. The key to understanding such cultural achievements and

[10]Lonergan, 'Natural Right and Historical Mindedness', in *Collected Works*, Vol. 16, *A Third Collection*, 163-176.

[11]Lonergan, 'The Transition from a Classicist Worldview', 7.

[12]Lonergan, 'Natural Right', 164.

[13]Lonergan, 'Natural Right', 169.

[14]Lonergan, 'Natural Right', 164.

social institutions is to approach them as constructions of the human spirit. I use the word 'construction' in its obvious sense of making, building, producing. And the genitive is deliberately both subjective and objective: the constructing is done by the human spirit, and it is the human spirit which is constructed. In Lonergan's era-conditioned sexist language, it is the 'making of man by man'.[15]

Construction is a making, but what is made and what is changed is meaning. We are dealing with the human world, that mediated by meaning. The natural and cultural world mediated by meaning are to be distinguished from the world of immediacy. The latter is available to us now only in abstraction from our present adult existence, but we can point to it as the world of the infant or of the animal. As adults we orient ourselves in a world which is a rich web of meanings.

II. METAPHYSICS REPLACED BY COGNITIONAL THEORY AND EPISTEMOLOGY

The study of human affairs has been challenged to move from a universalist, abstract discussion of natures to an historically minded account of the particular, the concrete, and the local. The challenge arises also for theology, and Lonergan accepted the challenge, leading to his major work on *Method in Theology* (1972). At the heart of *Method* was a philosophical position that required of theologians a 'personal appropriation of [their] own intelligent, rational, and responsible being'.[16] The achievement of such appropriation presupposes a threefold conversion, religious, moral, and intellectual. Conversions involve replacements, acceptance of divine love replacing existential angst, values replacing satisfactions as guide to decisions, comprehension of the real replacing uncritical reliance on perceptions.[17]

Lonergan's shift of focus from a universal human nature to the historical particular relegates metaphysics to a subordinate position in his hierarchy of disciplines. He replaces Aristotelian style metaphysics with intentionality analysis. It does not follow that Lonergan abandons all questions of metaphysics, but that he no longer sees metaphysics as the comprehensive science providing other sciences with their distinctive formal objects and approaches. Analysis of cognitional structure, and questions of epistemology, precede metaphysics: 'for me, a metaphysics is not first but derived from cognitional theory and epistemology'.[18] These are distinguished as corresponding to three questions: 'Cognitional theory: what are you doing when you are knowing? Epistemology: why is doing that knowing? Metaphysics: What do you know when you do it?'[19]

Intentionality analysis reflects on what one is doing when knowing; what are my conscious operations as I am knowing in different contexts, in interpersonal relationships, in doing science, in using common sense? The answers are in terms of my operations of attending to experience, understanding the observed, checking my understanding and formulating judgement, and deciding if anything is to be done. Especially in philosophy, theology, and

[15]Lonergan, 'Natural Right', 165.

[16]Lonergan, 'Questionnaire on Philosophy: A Response', in *Collected Works* Vol. 17, *Philosophical and Theological Papers 1965-1980*, ed. Robert C. Croken and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 352-383, at 362.

[17]Lonergan, 'Questionnaire', 363.

[18]Lonergan, 'The General Character of the Natural Theology of *Insight*', in *Collected Works* Vol. 17, 3-9, at 6.

[19]Lonergan, 'Lecture 2: The Functional Specialty "Systematics"', in *Collected Works* Vol. 17, 179-198, at 194.

human studies, the empirical approach requires attending to the data of consciousness, and so doing can lead one to awareness of conversions already achieved, and an appreciation of what might yet be possible. The point of this becomes clear when we advert to the fact that we do not stand outside of the 'human affairs' we study, but that defects and dangers we identify in our analysis may apply also to ourselves, our culture, and our scholarly community.

III. THE ANALYSIS OF PROGRESS AND DECLINE (DIALECTIC)

The common humanity of original constructors and subsequent interpreters, so understood, grounds the abstract possibility of a successful interpretative reconstruction. Both the human world of cultural achievement and social institutions, and the interpretative reconstruction of the meaning and value which constitute that world, are products of the same human spirit. The creation in history to which Lonergan refers in the title of his essay appears when all functions well. However, not every architect's dream is realised, many forces are brought to bear before a building is completed, and few are without fault. The original construction may well have been a successful realisation of a well-founded plan, or it may have been flawed in some way. Similarly, the effort at reconstruction may be a fine accomplishment of research and interpretation, or it may be flawed also. Either or both the original construction and the reconstruction may be authentic, or unauthentic. They are authentic in so far as they are cumulatively the result of a process in conformity with the transcendental precepts, 'be attentive, be intelligent, be reasonable, be responsible'. They are unauthentic insofar as they are the product of cumulative inattention, obtuseness, unreasonableness, or irresponsibility.[20]

Authenticity is a fruit of the triple conversion, Intellectual, Moral and Religious. But it is a precarious achievement, because unauthenticity is a constant possibility from a single failure to attend, to understand, to judge reasonably, or to decide responsibly. Authenticity and unauthenticity occur both in the originating construction and in the interpretative reconstruction. The situation is further complicated by the fact that there can be both large- and small-scale authenticity. Lonergan distinguishes between the minor un/authenticity of the subject, and the major un/authenticity of a tradition.[21] As well as the possibility of breakdown for individuals, there is the possibility that whole communities may be sidetracked. Despite the best intentions and efforts of social actors or scientists, the set of meanings they have inherited from their social milieu or from the community of scientists may exhibit distortion owing to some failure to attend, to understand, to judge, and to decide. The bias of some particular perception, some particular interest or group, may be solidified in the conventional wisdom of some culture or scientific community.

In 'Healing and Creating in History', Lonergan refers to the intrinsic limitations of insight which allow us to make sense of failure and breakdown of creativity. He identifies four levels or kinds of bias that may prevent people and groups from identifying problems, or recognising solutions, or moving to act. Neurosis, selfishness, sectional interest, or the self-assurance of common sense can block development and impede progress.[22] In chapters 6 and 7 of *Insight* Lonergan provides a thorough analysis of these four forms of bias distorting human cognition:

[20]Lonergan, 'Dialectic of Authority', in *Collected Works* Vol. 16, *A Third Collection*, 5-12, at 7.

[21]Lonergan, 'Christology Today: Methodological Reflections' in *Collected Works* Vol. 16, *A Third Collection*, 74-99, at 80; cf. also Lonergan, 'Dialectic of Authority', 8.

[22]Lonergan, 'Healing and Creating in History', 99-100.

scotosis, individual bias, group bias, and general bias. The latter includes the anti-intellectual prejudice of common sense.

These brief reflections on the dynamic structure of human consciousness, on the triple conversion, on the precariousness of authenticity and the possibility of unauthenticity, on the plurality of horizons such as those of common sense or science, and on the variety of specialisations within the horizons, highlight the complexity of the reality referred to as construction and reconstruction. If human studies involve the interpretative reconstruction of the constructions of the human spirit, then it must be recognised both that the human world to be understood may be a mixed product of authenticity and unauthenticity, and that the attempt to interpret the human world may be affected by the personal or inherited unauthenticity of the investigators.[23] For instance, in medicine, bias in sampling and research has resulted in an under-representation of women's experience and concerns, with the result that misdiagnoses more often occur for female patients.[24] The discovery of the operative biases identified the objective problem, and the efforts to change in the relevant professions illustrate the recognition that solutions required change in the individuals and communities conducting research.[25] Practitioners are challenged to strive for personal and corporate authenticity.

Human sciences have developed appropriate methods for handling such problems. Ricoeur's distinction of the hermeneutics of recovery and suspicion, Marx's critique of ideology, and Lonergan's own proposal of the functional specialty, dialectics, are relevant examples. Dialectic is defined as the concrete unfolding of linked but opposed principles of change.[26] In the application of dialectic, social events can be retraced to their origin in two related but opposed principles of movement. In the ongoing process of history, dialectical reconstruction can discern either progress or decline. Both are cyclical and cumulative, the one rooted in authenticity, and the other in unauthenticity.[27]

As well as the objective dimensions of problems such as institutionalised bias in medical research, there can be subjective dimensions also, in the failure of researchers to address their own limitations. Interpreters and historians may themselves be rooted in an unauthentic tradition. Both the individual scholar and the community of scientists may be part of the problem which they identify and investigate. In that case it is not possible to solve the problem addressed

[23]Lonergan, 'The Ongoing Genesis of Methods', in *Collected Works* Vol. 16, *A Third Collection*, 140-159. Cf. 'The name of science may be invoked but, as Edmund Husserl has argued, all significant scientific ideals can vanish to be replaced by the conventions of a clique. So the unauthenticity of individuals becomes the unauthenticity infecting a tradition. For a subject to take the tradition uncritically is for him to realize what objectively is unauthentic but for him subjectively is thought authentic.' Lonergan, 'A Post-Hegelian Philosophy of Religion', in *Collected Works* Vol. 16, *A Third Collection*, 205.

[24]Kamram Abbasi, 'Under-representation of women in research: a status quo that is a scandal' in *BMJ* 2023; 382: 2091, https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.p2091 (14 September 2023), accessed 20 December 2023.

[25]As, for instances, in publications such as Carol S. Weisman and Sandra D. Cassard, 'Health Consequences of Exclusion or Underrepresentation of Women in Clinical Studies (I)', *Institute of Medicine (US) Committee on the Ethical and Legal Issues Relating to the Inclusion of Women in Clinical Studies*, ed. A.C. Mastroianni, R. Faden, D. Federman (Washington, DC: National Academies Press [US], 1999). Accessed 20 December 2023.

[26]Lonergan, *Collected Works* Vol. 3, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 242: '… a dialectic is an unfolding of linked but opposed principles of change. Thus there will be a dialectic, if (1) there is an aggregate of events of a determinate character, (2) the events may be traced to either or both of two principles, (3) the principles are opposed yet bound together, and (4) they are modified by the changes that successively result from them.'

[27]Lonergan, 'Healing and Creating in History', 100-9.

without the scholar and perhaps the community of scholarship undergoing change. 'Dialectic describes concrete process in which intelligence and obtuseness, reasonableness and silliness, responsibility and sin, love and hatred commingle and conflict. But the very people that investigate the dialectic of history also are part of that dialectic and even in their investigating represent its contradictories.'[28]

The implication of this reflection is that the answers to certain questions in cultural studies will depend on the personal development of the scientists investigating those questions. To reconstruct the human world, they must reproduce the acts of understanding, judgement, and decision which constitute that world, but the commitment, wisdom, and intelligence required for such an accomplishment is not to be taken for granted.

IV. THE THEME OF HEALING

Healing is required when a dynamic of decline is to be reversed, or blocks to incomplete development are to be overcome. The usual trajectory of development is from below upward, from experience and understanding to decision and action, but that upward thrust can be halted before it reaches its completion. Development can be complete or incomplete. At the same time, achieved development can be passed on, and this occurs in the transmission of tradition, customs, and values. Then the direction of the dynamism is from above downward. The child, or pupil, or youth, in the affectionate relationship with parent, guardian, guru, or teacher, apprehends values on which beliefs are founded. 'On affectivity rests the apprehension of values. On the apprehension of values rests belief. On belief follows the growth in understanding of one who has found a genuine teacher and has been initiated into the study of the masters of the past. Then to confirm one's growth in understanding comes experience made mature and perceptive by one's developed understanding.'[29] However, this transmission of development can also be either complete or incomplete. When incomplete, there is need for healing.

Dialogue and praxis

An adequate understanding of human affairs presupposes the authenticity of communities of scholarship and the authenticity of individual researchers. Lonergan is primarily interested in theologians, but the same holds true for other disciplines.[30] He draws their attention to their practice that flows from a decision and so is guided by a dynamic that moves from above down. The commitment to engage in discussion with others about divisive issues is rooted in an acceptance that their common humanity grounds the possibility of healing and reconciliation. Constitutive of that common humanity is the desire to understand, the capacity to judge reasonably and to evaluate fairly, and the openness to friendship and love.[31] In dialogue in which the partners reveal their humanity to one another there is the possibility of personal development, and therefore the possibility of that healing, change, or conversion in the scientist and the community of scientists, enabling progress.

[28]Lonergan, 'Natural Right', 182.

[29]Lonergan, 'Natural Right', 164.

[30]Lonergan, 'Theology and Praxis' in *Collected Works* Vol. 16, *A Third Collection*, 177-192.

[31]Lonergan, 'Natural Right', 180.

The Law of the Cross

Lonergan in *Insight* proceeds philosophically, sketching what a solution to the problem of evil might look like. He offers a heuristic account of a solution based on the analysis of the problem. Healing in Christian tradition is also known as redemption, and in his theology of redemption Lonergan no longer writes about what the solution might look like, but writes from the standpoint of having recognised and accepted the solution. He concentrates on the Law of the Cross as the paradigm for how good can be brought from evil. Hence, the twin terms of progress and decline are not presented alone, but there is always also the third term of healing. And central to a theological account of healing is his emphasis on the Law of the Cross.

Among his treatment of the redemption, thesis 17 is central to Lonergan's explanation of the healing achieved in the death and resurrection of Jesus: 'This is why the Son of God became man, suffered, died, and was raised again: because divine wisdom has ordained and divine goodness has willed, not to do away with the evils of the human race through power, but to convert those evils into a supreme good according to the just and mysterious Law of the Cross.'[32] The evils that require transformation are the distortions of relations of human beings with one another and with God that hinder genuine community from being realised. Evil is to be replaced by good, and according to the thesis, by a supreme good. Lonergan specifies that supreme good as 'the whole Christ, Head and members, in this life as well as in the life to come, in all their concrete determinations and relations'.[33]

Ligita Ryliskyte has devoted an extensive monograph to elucidating the Law of the Cross in Lonergan's theology.[34] On her reading, Lonergan maintains that, out of love, God has chosen not to do away with the evils of humankind through power but to convert them into a supreme good. There is a dual purpose: the advancement of good, and the elimination of evil. She writes: 'In respect to each end, the Law of the Cross does not violate human freedom but works by way of transforming and healing our free rationality through faith, hope, and love.'[35] We speak of the cross of Christ, but in fact the cross is ours. Christ has taken on our cross of suffering and death, and so made it possible for us to live with the reality of inevitable suffering in the face of inevitable death. This possibility is grounded in the transformation effected by Christ, taking something really evil and making it into something good. His act of love, renouncing any retribution against his murderers that might only add more evil and harm, shows humankind a way of dealing with injustice that opens the way to reconciliation.

Ryliskyte identifies three steps or transitions in the Law of the Cross: 'evil from evil, good from evil, and good from good'. The first step is the familiar story of the evils arising from the originating evil of sin, including the fate of an all-destroying death. The second step is Christ's act of love in accepting that death and turning it into a possible source of good. The third step is the fecundity of good, the benefits that follow from love expressed and accepted. She proceeds to elaborate on how these three steps are realised in Christ and his members. Those who accept his example and are bonded with him in the Church are the body of Christ, and are charged to offer the same love, forgiveness, and reconciliation to others. 'The Justice

[32]Lonergan, *Collected Works* Vol. 9, *The Redemption*, 197.

[33]Robert Doran, 'The Nonviolent Cross: Lonergan and Girard on Redemption', in *Theological Studies* 71, no. 1 (2010): 46-61, at 55-6, https://doi.org/10.1177/004056391007100104.

[34]Ligita Ryliskyte, *Why the Cross? Divine Friendship and the Power of Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 282.

[35]Ryliskyte, *Why the Cross?*, 70.

of the cross, hence, is redemptive rather than retributive.'[36] Faithful to Lonergan's emphasis on Christ as historical agent, she explores how the third step is played out through history as Christians motivated by love live from their faith convictions and persevere in hope.

Lonergan devotes an extra article 42 to discussing Christ as historical agent, to illustrate some of the ways in which the claim of thesis 17 is realised.[37] He builds on his analysis of the intelligibility of the good, cultural goods, and the good of order in elaborating how the healing in history is achieved, and as noted, Christ himself as a historical figure is given prominence. Lonergan notes both the historical effect directly intended by Christ and the effect indirectly intended by him. His historical effectiveness is not only his influence on individual members but on the social and institutional body. 'Christ's action is directly aimed at ordering human life on earth to the future life in heaven. Since, however, this ordering liberates us from evils and turns us towards true good with the result that the human good of order in itself is greatly improved, this improvement itself is necessarily intended indirectly by Christ as historical agent.'[38]

V. WHY IS THIS AN ACCOUNT OF INHERITED ORIGINAL SIN?

The 1964 passage quoted at the beginning of this essay might easily mislead.[39] The danger arises from a template of 'problem—solution', thinking that the solution only appears once the problem has been recognised and addressed. The application of the 'problem—solution' template reads the problem as 'the human in the concrete, … the human under original sin, in need of grace'. The template then reads the solution as 'grace'. This template would fit with the familiar way of presenting the gospel that outlines the need for salvation, and then shows how the offered salvation meets that need. Reliance on this template often implies a temporal order—first comes the problem, and then afterwards the solution. Such a reading of the passage would be untrue to what Lonergan actually says.

The humans as they are, are not simply 'under original sin', but are at the same time 'receiving grace, and either accepting or rejecting it'. The concrete human reality to be grasped is one in which the solution is available, and is received by some and rejected by others. Needing grace and accepting or rejecting it is the human reality. This is a reality that Lonergan strove to comprehend, with all the resources of theology, philosophy, human sciences, and human wisdom. Hence, we can see the complexity intended in that short sentence from his 1964 lecture notes: '… there is only one full solution: when one deals with the human in the concrete, one is dealing with the human under original sin, in need of grace, receiving it, and either accepting or rejecting it—one is in a theological context.'

I do not address the long tradition of biblical commentary on Genesis, theological reflection on the Fall, especially by Augustine, and the Church's elaboration of doctrine notably at Trent. But I cannot simply ignore this context, and so I remark on some programmatic dynamics.

First, I note the accepted reconstruction of the story of Adam's sin and the punishment of his progeny as an aitiology, an attempt to explain the prevalence of evil in a creation that is

[36]Ryliskyte, *Why the Cross?*, 70-71.

[37]Lonergan, 'Christ, the Historical Agent', in *Collected Works* Vol. 9, *The Redemption: A Supplement*, 609–621.

[38]Lonergan, 'Christ, the Historical Agent', 613.

[39]Lonergan, 'Method in Theology. The Problem. External Factors' 85400DTE060.pdf (bernardlonergan.com), accessed 9 June 2023.

God-given and held to be good.[40] As noted above, Lonergan avoids extrinsicism, the search for external causes, and seeks explanation in terms of the operations of human subjects. In referring to Genesis, Lonergan considers the whole human race as facing the existential choice between good and evil. From the short article on original sin in his volume on *The Redemption*, the English translation misses Lonergan's emphasis. The published translation has: 'The whole human race, in the person of the first human being as its head', translating the Latin: '*in primo homine quasi in capite genus humanum*'.[41] That '*quasi*' qualifies significantly the meaning of what the translator renders as 'in the person of the first human being as its head', by adding an 'as if'. This is not an affirmation of an historical fact but an invoking of the traditional story to make sense of the common human reality that all are charged with responsibility and all equally are burdened with the intrinsic difficulties of exercising that responsibility. This should be read in conjunction with Lonergan's warning about seeking intelligibility where none is to be found.

Second, I note the dynamic of theological reflection which could argue from knowledge of the solution to knowledge of the problem: (1) baptism conveys the forgiveness of all sin; (2) infants who are without personal sin are also in need of baptism, as is shown in the practice of the Church in baptising them; (3) it follows that there is sin for which individuals including infants are not personally culpable which must also be forgiven; (4) this is the inherited *peccatum originale originatum*, in all humans from the ancestral sin, *peccatum originale originans*.

Third, formalised doctrine from the Council of Trent (1546) repeating the Council of Orange (529) that had been confirmed by Pope Boniface II, reaffirms that individuals are not morally culpable for inherited original sin; and that their falling under the pain of punishment for inherited original sin is not due to their own evil actions but to their belonging to humankind. The six canons of Trent's decree address various themes: canon 3 affirms that original sin in Adam's descendants, transmitted by generation, is removed by baptism; canon 4 repeats earlier teaching that the baptism of infants is appropriate for the remission of original sin, even though they have no personal guilt, and even though their parents were baptised; canon 5 explains that baptism takes away the 'guilt' of original sin, but not its effects such as concupiscence; canon 6 intends to prevent any interpretation of the decree on original sin which might be prejudicial to the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of Mary.[42] Implicit in Trent's treatment is a concept of sin that is used analogously. The common aspect between actual sin and inherited original sin is that a state of 'alienation from God' obtains in the human being. Trent's canon 5 affirms that inherited original sin has the nature of sin. Canon 4 affirms that there really is sin in the infant who has so far been unable to act herself.

As remarked several times, Lonergan does not directly discuss inherited original sin, but it is nonetheless present in his thought as contributing to the problems for which the offer of grace is the solution. The question I address is whether we can reliably reconstruct an account of inherited original sin from his writings. As noted above, his work on healing in history belongs to the functional specialty of systematics. He accepts the Church's teaching, and in the

[40]Jack Mahoney, *Christianity in Evolution: An Exploration* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2011), 60.

[41]Lonergan, 'Original Sin', in *Collected Works* Vol. 9, *The Redemption: A Supplement*, 344-345.

[42]*The Christian Faith*, 7th edition, ed. J. Neuner and J. Dupuis (Bangalore: Theological Publication in India, 2001), 202-203.

material discussed here he is not concerned with establishing the relevant doctrines, as would be appropriate to the functional specialty of doctrines. His approach in systematics draws on his distinctive philosophical approach that has many elements in common with other transcendental Thomists such as Rahner. As noted above he begins with cognitional theory instead of metaphysics. This distinction becomes clear when we see his remarks on evil as surd, the unintelligible and irrational.

A relevant and essential part of Lonergan's treatment is his understanding of evil as privation. Evil is not merely the absence of a good, but the absence of a good that should be present. Blindness is the absence of sight from the eye, an absence of something good that is expected to be present in a healthy eye. Similarly, moral culpability is the absence of a decision to act or not to act in accord with a judgement of conscience, saying what ought to be (or not to be) done.

Evil as such, in Lonergan's terms, is a surd. It is unintelligible. There is no intelligible explanation for it. Yet, the human mind strives for intelligibility, it wants to find meaning and explanation for what it experiences. Hence, given the encounter with evil, with the experience of decline in history, the questioner seeks for answers, for causes, that explain the phenomena that shock. Aitiology is the search for causes, the generation of stories that provide causal explanations, as for instance, the story of Adam's sin in *Genesis*.

Lonergan devotes an excursus to the topic 'the cause of sin', underlying the fact that sin is a surd, an absence of intelligibility. To grasp this requires what he calls an 'inverse insight'.[43] The human mind expects intelligibility, it does not easily cope with the surd or the absurd. People spontaneously seek reasons, and in practical contexts in which there is breakdown, they commonly seek someone to blame. Hence, questions that ask why people sin, why Adam sinned, why the angels sinned, can have no adequate answer. As Lonergan summarily puts it, 'although excuses may possibly be found for sinners, no true reason can be given. Had there been a true reason, they would not have been acting contrary to reason; and if they had not been acting contrary to reason, they would have performed a voluntary act that was not evil but good.'[44] Lonergan persists in emphasising the lack of intrinsic and extrinsic causes for sin. There is a negative answer that can be given, pointing 'to its end insofar as it is not intended, to its exemplar insofar as it is not represented, to its agent by which it is not made or done'.[45] Lonergan comments on the consistent seeking for causes where none are to be found: 'by what right, what entitlement, what reason, would you reduce non-intelligible and irrational privations of being and good to an end, an exemplar, or an agent? I find no other cause—I do not say reason—than blind habit. We are, of course, accustomed to reducing intelligible beings to their causes; therefore we likewise reduce to their causes even what in themselves are not intelligible!'[46]

Lonergan's exasperation with this habitual seeking for causes, both intrinsic and extrinsic, is evident in his final remarks in this excursus on 'the cause of sin', reflecting perhaps reactions of students to his material: 'Still, it seems to me I hear someone saying that this is all too abstruse. Well, those who cannot grasp arguments can learn from stories. Let them therefore go to the scriptures, which teach that sin and the punishments for sin came from the serpent … In all these (stories) it is clear that it is not God but the devil who is the author of sin, and so it was

[43]Lonergan, *Insight*, 45-46.

[44]Lonergan, 'The Cause of Sin', in *Collected Works* Vol. 9, *The Redemption: Thesis 17*, 257.

[45]Lonergan, 'The Cause of Sin', 259.

[46]Lonergan, 'The Cause of Sin', 259.

quite right and fitting that the Fathers were not silent about the part the devil played in the passion and death of Christ.'[47]

With this conclusion that evil and sin are unintelligible and irrational we can approach the topic of inherited original sin, to which the same premiss must apply. If inherited original sin is properly sin, though analogically called such, it too will be unintelligible. I have been reconstructing Lonergan's views on inherited original sin in terms of his analysis of decline and healing in history based on his cognitional theory. And so the question is sharpened to the following: is the human failure to be what by its nature it is capable of being, to be counted as sin? If sin is only associated with moral culpability due to the deliberate act of the one to be held responsible, then the answer is no. But in the absence of deliberate moral fault, (either not doing what it is acknowledged ought to be done, or deliberately doing what it is acknowledged ought not to be done), can the failure to attend, to understand, to judge correctly, and decide responsibly be considered sin?

Considering that the real, the true, and the good, are the objectives of the human dynamisms of knowing, deciding, and loving, it can be affirmed that the ultimate end of the operations of the human subject is God. To know and love God as the source of all that is and the ground of all that is good is the orientation of the human spirit. However, those dynamisms that move the subject towards its proper object and end can be frustrated, not only by extrinsic forces, but also by intrinsic failures and inadequacies that typically are not recognised as such. These are the occasions of inattention or distraction, of bias and partiality that seem totally reasonable to the acting subject, as Lonergan spells out in his discussion of the various kinds of bias. What is missed when the human mind fails to attain the real and the true and the good is God; and given that the human subject is gifted with capacity to attain the real and the true and the good, its failure has something of the quality of sin as turning away from God, rejection of God, or option for another reality or truth than that of God. Similarly, when choosers are guided less by value and more by personal pleasure and gratification they substitute their own goods, which may well be genuine goods, for the ultimate Good that is the ground of all goods. Again, this will not be experienced as rejection of God or rebellion against God's will, but essentially is a distortion that has the quality of sin.

That Lonergan can be read in this way is shown from his reflection on Christ's achievement in the chapter considering Christ as historical agent, affecting the cultural good of order. 'But cultural good above all has to do with the natural desire to see God in his essence, the natural desire for moral rectitude, and the natural desire for beatitude and immortality (article 2); and all these are attained to the extent that the effect directly intended by Christ is actually realised.'[48] When communities and individuals exhibit inattention, stupidity, irrationality, or irresponsibility, they are failing to be what of their nature they are capable of being, and to that extent are not in accord with the divine truth and goodness. This arises from the effects of inherited original sin in them.

Nicholas Olkovich reads Lonergan in a similar way, and uses this approach to integrate perspectives from evolutionary theory and from Schoonenberg's 'Sin of the World' account. Olkovich applies Lonergan's understanding of dialectic in beginning from 'two contradictory but nonetheless natural orientations of the human spirit'.[49] On the one hand, there is 'an unre-

[47]Lonergan, 'The Cause of Sin', 261-263.

[48]Lonergan, 'Christ, the Historical Agent', 613.

[49]Nicholas Olkovich, 'Reinterpreting Original Sin: Integrating Insights from Sociology and the Evolutionary Sciences', *The Heythrop Journal* 54, no .5 (2013): 715-731, at 715, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2265.2012.00792.x.

stricted desire for cognitive and moral self-transcendence whose ultimate satisfaction, in Christian terms, is linked to knowledge of, and communion with God and neighbour'. On the other hand, there is 'a prevolitional predisposition to seek satisfaction in limited goods—traditionally termed concupiscence or "moral impotence"—that impedes the realisation of humankind's proper telos'.[50] The former corresponds to the dynamisms addressed in Lonergan's transcendental precepts to 'be attentive, be intelligent, be rational, and be responsible'. The latter corresponds to what Lonergan has analysed as the various biases, individual, group, and general, that distort the good functioning of the natural capacities, and lead them away from fulfilment in the true, the real, and the good, ultimately in God. Olkovich explicitly links this analysis from Lonergan with the traditional doctrine of original sin. The analysis points to an alienation, a being torn between unrestricted desires for intelligibility, reality, and value, and inborn tendencies to self and group preference, prior to all choice. 'The doctrine of original sin testifies to this existential conflict, to humankind's inability to commit wholeheartedly to the demands of authentic living, and to humankind's universal need for the healing effects of grace.'[51]

This account is consistent with Christian tradition and church doctrine (Trent) to this extent: it describes something that is not in accord with divine will and hence sin; that is not explained by extrinsic causes such as environmental or social influences; that is an inherent risk in the structure of human knowing, willing, and doing. Also, while linked to the analysis of human nature as God-willed and God-given, it does not attribute the breakdowns to the creator. And finally, it accounts for inherited original sin without having to abandon a conviction of the goodness of human nature as essentially oriented to the real, the true, and the good. This account is also consistent with the metaphysical understanding of evil as privation, not merely the absence of a good, but the absence of a good that should be present. Evil as privation is unintelligible. Hence, in Lonergan's wider theology of progress, decline, and healing, the intelligibility to be sought and provided is in the understanding of the good. Where evil, sin, and decline are investigated, the only explanation on offer is in terms of goods that are lacking, absent, or deficient.

There is a further aspect to be considered. In one sense, Lonergan's account is helpful for explaining the effects of inherited original sin: 'the intellect is darkened, the will is weakened, our passions incline us to evil (concupiscence), and we are subject to suffering and death'.[52] These effects remain, even after baptism. What then does baptism achieve in relation to inherited original sin if the familiar effects remain? The traditional language speaks of the forgiveness of sin, and the doctrine emphasises that the individual (possibly an infant) to be forgiven is not held personally culpable for wrongdoing. The analogical use of the language must be taken seriously. 'Sin' is properly used here to refer to alienation from God, and the doctrine suggests that all of humankind (lacking grace) is alienated from God. However, this reality of alienation is only known because God's offer of reconciliation is communicated to us. The sacrament of baptism both symbolises the overcoming of the alienation and provides for effective healing countering the destructive powers of the remaining effects. Introduction into the community of believers establishes relationships in which love can shape a life, the faith can be taught, and supportive resources for faithful discipleship can be provided. The good news is the offer of grace. Appreciating the

[50]Olkovich, 'Reinterpreting Original Sin', 715.

[51]Olkovich, 'Reinterpreting Original Sin', 716.

[52]*Catechism of Catholic Doctrine* (Dublin: Gill and Sons, 1951), 22.

dimensions of the grace offered and received leads to the realisation of an alienation from God that has been overcome. This alienation is not experienced or otherwise known except from the perspective of its overcoming in the acceptance of the offered grace of faith. Just as group bias or the general bias of common sense cannot be recognised from the standpoint of a subject whose attention and questioning are constrained by the relevant bias, so also must the reality of humankind's alienation from God be unknowable to anyone who lacks the relevant judgement of faith, that 'God wills all people to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth', and who is unaware of how that divine will is being implemented by Christ and his followers. Still, even from the perspective of the believer, the knowledge available to them is limited to the affirmation of alienation that is contrary to God's will, and that the alienation is overcome by a reconciliation offered by God.

VI. CONCLUSION

We might agree with the critic who complained that Lonergan had too little to say about sin and original sin. But what he does have to say is situated in the context of his profound analysis of redemption understood in terms of healing in history. Theologically, from our understanding of the solution in redemption we can appreciate the dimensions of the problem to be resolved. And the form of the solution above all in the Law of the Cross, which enjoins returning good for evil, meets the deficiencies of human operations, which, without the grace offered, would be unable to achieve the completion and fulfilment to which they are naturally oriented.

To appreciate the full significance of Lonergan's distinctive approach we should recall his fundamental premiss that humans live in a world mediated by meaning. Meaning is multilayered, corresponding to the various operations constructing and reconstructing that meaning: observing and attending, questioning and understanding, affirming and judging, valuing and deciding. Theology is critical reflection on the meanings that for Christian believers mediate their existence in the world. Those responding to the invitation given by Christ long ago, and continually reissued through the preaching and teaching and good example of church members, live in a world in which the hope of resurrection replaces the threat of annihilation in inevitable death, and in which the encounter with evil in the myriad forms of injustice and hatred and violence is always an opportunity for bringing good even out of evil. Their awareness of being graced in having these values and convictions allows some awareness of what otherwise might have been their fate: alienation from God. This is the context for their affirmation of the universal need of humans for what Christ offers, a need found even in the innocent infants unable to do wrong. Limited by what meaningfully can be said about what is intrinsically unintelligible, the main emphasis in their proclamation must be on the forms that healing in history might take.

Lonergan repeatedly invokes Romans 5, the love of God poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit given to us, indicating thereby the constitutive reality that shapes all other meaning. This is the typical top-down dynamism of values encountered in love shaping beliefs and convictions, motivating the drive for understanding, and the shaping of experience consistent with those values and convictions. Lonergan is not alone in attempting to express the same reality beginning with the actual situation of the human as graced. The primordial (in the sense of authentic and real) condition of the human is 'created to be in Christ'. Without faith and apart from faith, being a creature is identical with 'being alienated from God'. On the other hand, from the standpoint of faith, to be baptised is to be delivered from that alienation by God's grace, so being redeemed and having community with God.