

1980 Q&A First Session

Question: The first question has apparently five parts, but really six, because the first has two parts. Could you please relate the law of the cross (a) to the dynamics of limitation and transcendence in the subject (*Insight*, chapter 15) and in history (*Insight*, chapter 7); (b) to problems of structured religious obedience (e.g., blind obedience, levels of ecclesiastical authority); (c) to the consolations and desolations of mystics; (d) to the discernment of spirits; (e) to feelings of guilt.

Lonergan: (a) Well, I looked up ‘tension of limitation and transcendence’ in the index – it’s always a big help, because it’s a very thorough index, unlike the one in *Method in Theology*; the one in *Insight* was done by Fr Crowe; the other one was done by six people who merely wanted early copies of the proofs – in the subject, it’s on moral impotence, pp. 627-30 [in the pre-CWL editions] in *Insight*; and in history, the problem of humanism is heightened by the supernatural, pp. 726-29. On moral impotence: it’s a subject on which I enlarged at considerable length in *Grace and Freedom*, where moral impotence comes up on p. 47 [again in the pre-CWL edition]. Well, St Albert the Great, the teacher of St Thomas, didn’t admit moral impotence. He said that *non posse non peccare*, the impossibility of avoiding sin, was not to be taken too strictly. He didn’t hold that. Bonaventure disagreed with him, and in the commentary on the *Sentences* Thomas agreed with his master Albert. And he has all the arguments for the other side answered fairly well. You say that a sinner can avoid each separate sin, but not all; but if he can avoid each separate sin, he can avoid all. Or to the argument that he can avoid all but not always, the resistance to sin makes one all the stronger against it. In short, freedom of choice pertains to human nature; sin does not destroy nature; therefore, sin does not destroy freedom. The most that can be said is that because of sin it becomes difficult to avoid what once was avoided easily. And that’s all there is to it.

In the *De veritate* there is a complete switch. It’s a model example of the technique of the *quaestio*: question 24, article 12. There are 22 arguments ‘Videtur quod non,’ ‘It doesn’t seem to be so.’ And there are 11 arguments on the other side. And the body of the article runs into nine columns in the Vivès edition. And then he answers all the texts on one side and all the texts on the other. He changes over completely. He escapes from the notion that liberty is a matter of hanging like a pendulum in perfect equilibrium, and the point is that there is such a thing as habits, and if you acquire a virtue it’s all the easier, and if you acquire a vice, it’s all the more difficult. In particular, with regard to sin, if you have God’s love in your heart, you don’t have to argue with yourself ... want to do it; you already are in love with God. And if you’ve rejected God’s love by committing a mortal sin, well, the only thing that can make you change your mind is the fear of hell. You haven’t got any love in your heart; it’s a heart of stone. And while you can argue yourself into it on any particular occasion, you can’t be arguing with yourself from the morning till the night. You finally come to the point, ‘Well, there’s no use trying.’ And there you are. It’s a very simple argument, and it takes a lot of space in the Latin. But that is limitation, the limitation of moral impotence. And the need of transcendence of God’s grace. Grace is necessary for salvation. Scripture tells us, well, you have to keep on praying. And you don’t pray for something you already have. So it’s not just one grace, being in the state of sanctifying grace, but also the other graces too. Thomas is the one who introduced the idea, though not the word, ‘actual grace.’ They thought after they got hold of the habit about 1230 that they had everything.

They tried for years to make that do for everything and they found it wouldn't work (loose transcription of mumbled words).

And in history: I found a book the day before yesterday, *Conversations with Eric Voegelin*, published by Thomas More Institute in Montreal. It's a series of talks that Eric Voegelin gave followed by the questions of the group. There on p. 45 he has a clarification of what he calls the Metaxy, the Metaxy being the transliteration of the Greek *metaxu*, which means 'in between.' And the 'in between' is between God and man. Man in this life is not just man. He's *daimonios anēr*, according to Plato, not quite divine and not quite merely human, but in between. He's called to something better. And that's what we call the supernatural. Voegelin finds that in Plato. He's rather good at Plato. So existential tension is in between. It is not quite human and not quite divine but the tension between the two. A man who is in such tension is not quite, in the old Homeric vocabulary, the mortal man, nor is he quite a god, who is immortal, but he is again a man of the type 'in between.' We need a new vocabulary for that kind of man. And the trouble with humanism is that man wants to be just man. The Enlightenment was 'Let's be just men.' And that's a further difficulty, a historical difficulty, that arises from man's call to a divine end. So that's the first question, the illustration of transcendence and limitation: in the subject, moral impotence is the fundamental limitation: Your will is free, but also it has to be liberated. Augustine did a lot of talk: the will is either free from justice, and then it's sinful, or it's free by grace, and then it's liberated. He has some smart sayings on it, but the person who thought the thing through was Thomas.

(b) to problems of structured religious obedience, blind obedience, levels of ecclesiastical authority. Well, I spent 18 years in southern Europe, to wit, Rome, and I discovered what they meant by Mediterranean temperament. They're passionate people, and with passionate people, of course, you have to take a strong line. And a lot of the talk about blind obedience is taking the strong line. After all, you have to cool them down. So a certain amount of the vocabulary is due to more passionate subjects. You have to get them to cool down first of all. However, that's not the whole story. As Polonius said, turning indirections to directions out. Well, divine providence can turn indirections to directions out. I remember when I was working on *Insight*, I had three years done on it, and I was told in a year's time to go to Rome to teach theology. Well, I was working at the time on method in theology. My original proposal was a method in theology, and this was just preliminary exercises. I decided to cut it short, and that's the book *Insight*. But *Method* was delayed 20 years. It didn't get out till '72. But I learned an awful lot of theology in those 20 years that I wouldn't have known if I'd tried to do *Method* right away. So it wasn't pure loss. In other words, God may use instruments despite their imperfections and lack of vision, and so on, to get to something that's pretty sound. So from the viewpoint of divine providence, things mayn't be as bad as they seem.

(c) to consolations and desolations of mystics. Well, the fundamental point is that consolations and desolations have the same cause. Both are due to God's grace, to his presence working in one. But in the desolation you don't see God's hand there at all. 'This is just awful.' And the thing is that if you ambition body-building such as Arnold Schwarzenegger you have to lift heavier and heavier weights. And God is becoming a little too present in desolation. But it isn't bad. It's really good. It's all part of the ...

(d) to the discernment of spirits: Well, the simple rule is, In desolation change nothing, because you do not recognize God's hand and presence in the desolation, and you're not going to see what is God's handiwork. In consolation, well, Voegelin, who knows Plato very well, talks

about Plato's distinction between the gentle golden cord that moves you ever so gently and the hook that gets you with a jerk. That's what the discernment of spirits is. If you're fundamentally on the right track, then what God wants (inaudible), and the opposite throws you for a loop. And that's the discernment.

(e) to feelings of guilt. Well, according to Freud feelings of guilt are the superego, the intersuscepted parent. You can find children, you know, taking the role of the father and the mother and other people as well and ... to themselves too. And this can be confused with conscience, and so you get mistaken guilt feelings. Real guilt is conscious, not any superego, which is merely sensitive feeling. It becomes confused with conscience especially if you are little accustomed to following conscience. You don't recognize it as such. Or if you are given to ways of finding out how to avoid it. In other words, if you play around with conscience, and you're not too familiar with it, you can get it mixed up. And that may perhaps be the answer.

Question from the floor: So guilt feelings are more or less misdirected conscience?

Lonergan: Well, they're feelings. Conscience is a rational act, a moral judgment.

Question: In what way is authenticity in non-Christian religions limited by the apparent thematic absence of the Law of the Cross. What part does the Law of the Cross play in universalist religious dialogue?

Lonergan: Well, I don't think there's a total absence of the Law of the Cross in non-Christian religions. They have their asceticism, their mysticism, their monasticism, great praise of compassion, Gandhi's civil disobedience instead of violent revolution. When I was in Rome, someone remarked to me that of course the Italians have been practicing civil disobedience for centuries before Gandhi ever existed. It was their way of handling the foreign domination of the Spaniards and the Austrians and the French and so on who came down and undertook to run the Italians. But things like Gandhi and civil disobedience are not too common in the West, you know. And it's a mild form of the Law of the Cross, refraining from violence. 'What part does the Law of the Cross play in universalist religious dialogue?' Well usually Christian missionaries are prone to confuse their inherited culture with their inherited religion and to inflict their culture as a *conditio sine qua non*, a necessary condition, of the salvation of infidels. That is a part of the Law of the Cross for our missionaries and their stay-at-home superiors. 'Everything that happened in the Chinese rites and the Malabar rites has to be heresy. We know better.'

Question: In what sense is the procession of concepts from understanding a movement of self-transcendence?

Lonergan: Well, it's a step in the process. Sense in act and the sensible in act are one and the same, but in the image or the percept you get something distinct. We fill out the mere sensations and all that goes in our memory and imagination seems to fit it in. You see a person and you see a photo of him, and you say, 'It doesn't look like him at all.' That's the difference between percept and sensation. So just as sense in act and the sensible in act are one and the same, so the intelligible in act and intelligence in act are one and the same. You have an identity. Conception separates off the intelligibility grasped in the act of understanding and adds to it the common matter from the sensible data, and you get the concept. Common matter is distinct from

individual matter. You get your concept of a circle as the locus of coplanar points equidistant from the center. It's not *these* points but *any* points, as long as they're in the same plane, coplanar, and equidistant from the center. So self-transcendence is first achieved with knowledge. But and objective judgment – you have to have an objective judgment to have knowledge – supposes an objectification of one's understanding, and the objectification of understanding occurs with the concept, the definition. What do you grasp when you understand? The function of intelligent conceptualization is objectifying the content of an act of understanding. It's quite distinct from unintelligent verbalization.

Question: Could you please comment on the limits of affirmations about the eternal processions which regard Christ's redemptive reality?

Lonergan: Well, sending: the Son is sent; the Holy Ghost is sent; both are sent. And both proceed: the Son by generation, and the Holy Spirit as Love. These processions are eternal, immanent in God. Sending is not immanent. It's in the creatures. And sending adds a relation of reason, a notional relation, to the notion of procession. The processions involve a real relation, the real relation of the Son to the Father; the relation of the Father to the Son is paternity, and of the Son to the Father is filiation. These are real relations. And the relation of the Father and the Son to the Spirit and of the Spirit to the Father and the Son again are real relations. But the relations involved in being sent are notional, relations of reason. And 'relations of reason' do not mean 'meaningless,' but the superfluity of any added reality. Aquinas in the *De potentia* on the relations in God (about q. 7) asks whether God is related to creatures. And he says God is infinitely intelligent, understands everything about everything, and everything about everyone, and so is related to everything about everyone and everything. But these relations in their infinity are not an infinity of added realities to enable God to run the universe. If God by himself can't run the universe, an infinity of added relations won't help. One act of understanding understands God and everything else. But understanding God is the reality of the divine understanding, and understanding everything else is an implication of it, just as when you say something *is*, you understand what is meant by 'not being,' nothing, although there's only a relation of reason to nothing. You don't have to add something onto it.

Question continues: 'In what sense can one include divine suffering [or some analogous tension] within such affirmations ?'

Lonergan: Well, one sense certainly is in the sense that you find anthropomorphism a necessity, even though not a justified necessity. God has to be like us. Well, he became man to be like us. What more do you want?

Question: Have you some suggestions regarding healing within economic communities? What short-range reforms are possible within present political and economic structures?

Lonergan: Well, it has been argued in *The Economic Journal* by Lord Kaldor, vol. 82, 1972, p. 1240, that economics took a wrong turn in the fourth chapter of the first book of Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, which appeared in the same year as the celebrated 1776 (referring to the centennial). The trouble was that from then on attention concentrated on the allocative, the distributive, so to speak – 'distributive' hasn't got as general a meaning as 'allocative' – who

gets what? the allocative function of the economy. Or what is used for what? As distinct from the creative function. The creative functions are the causes of the crises, the reason why things don't work or the allocative functions don't work. That's been going on for over two centuries. Now what will a short-range reform do to those two centuries of misdirected efforts, well established by all the authorities? It seems like sending a boy on a man's errand. 'Have you any suggestions regarding healing within economic communities?' Well, they're the same as in any community. The whole story of the Law of the Cross is Romans 12.21. 'Do not let evil conquer you, but use good to defeat evil.'

Question: Liberalism seems locked in conditions intrinsically finite. Could you please specify directions of creativity in pedagogy and community activity that might release the undertow to healing?

Lonergan: Well, in pedagogy I gave in 1959 a two-week institute at Xavier University in Cincinnati on education. The lectures were taped. And the brothers Quinn in Toronto have transcribed the tapes and are working with publishers to get the things published. They have all my thoughts in 1959 on creativity in education there. And I can't summarize them now because I haven't got the book! And I haven't got the time to think it all out again after 21 years.

Question continued: Do you envisage novel political platforms and democratic institutions in a developed third stage of meaning?

Lonergan: Well, hopefully the platforms and institutions will be a little less inspired and directed by Madison Avenue. That's an avenue that runs everything as far as the third world is concerned.

Questions: In the light of an analysis of liberalism that reveals its fundamental limitations, to what extent is a truly educated person liable to be alienated from contemporary culture? So, for example, Horney talks of contemporary neurosis and Voegelin has spoken of modernity as paranoiac. The educated person seems liable to correlative afflictions.

Lonergan: Well, I was talking about Voegelin and his knowledge of Plato, and someone said, It would be very difficult today for anyone to acquire that knowledge of Plato. He doesn't quote translations; he quotes the Greek. And the advantage of knowing the Greek, of course, is that any word in English is used in a large variety of different senses, as you can discover by looking up Murray's 13-volume dictionary of the English language. And the same is true of Greek. Look up the big Liddell and Scott, the one about 4 inches thick. And the different meanings of the same Greek word won't correspond to the different meanings of the same English word. But to catch on to Plato's thought or Aristotle's thought you have to know which words he's using in the same – when he's using the same word and when he's using different words. Newman used to translate a paragraph of English into Latin every day. It helped his style, you know. People today can't attempt to do that. The advantage of Latin is, of course, that it brings it down to the bare bones of any language. The advantage of Greek is how far you can get away from the bare bones. And that was the education of Europe for centuries. One of the first fruits of the Enlightenment, of course, was to take over education. Education in France is a terrific thing. It's run by the big schools. L'école normale, l'école polytechnique, and so forth, these are top

schools. They have the very best students in the country at them. These people form the actual aristocracy in France. They run the country, the civil service, and everything else. When I was studying theology in Rome between 1933 and 1937, there was a German I used to walk with between classes to speak German or English. He'd done the university entrance exam. There was very little Greek that he hadn't read in the original. He probably hadn't read the doctors and the astronomers and people like that; but all the poets and all the historians and all the dramatists and so on. And this was before he went to the university. I did my philosophy at Heythrop, and to qualify the place as a teacher's college we had half an hour twice a week of pedagogy, and a man described to us in detail all the education acts in England, and what they implied ... Then he went on to French and German education. And he said, of course on the continent they consider English education all right for forming character, but the boys learn nothing. Well, it didn't seem that way to me, of course. I was asking what we had to do in Canada to have something like Eton or Winchester, where you had 1800 boys and 300 masters all with an M.A. from Oxford and Cambridge, the top degree at the time. And the boys living in houses, not more than ... with a housemaster and his wife, and so on and so forth. When they came out, they won prizes in Latin and Greek and composition. I thought, well in Canada if you had enough money you might attract such teachers, but by the end of the year they'd have better jobs. The advantage of these old countries is that they have a superfluity of cultural capital. And that's the problem in contemporary education, especially when people get turned off on education. 'It's not worthwhile.' And they prevent other people from becoming educated. When I was teaching at the Immaculée Conception, a boy came to me who had finished commercial high school. He said he wanted to become a priest. He said he could do now in three months all he had learned in commercial high school. But he's been persuaded to go to commercial high school. But now it would take him four years to learn the Latin that he'd missed. So you have people influencing others on the way to go.

Alienation: 'Is an educated person liable to be alienated from contemporary culture? I don't think that's altogether accurate. It's not alienation from a culture. Alienation is always alienation from one's own humanity. It arises for the most part inasmuch as one is not encouraged or even allowed to discover it. For Aristotle, a nature is an immanent principle of movement and rest. And our ability to ask questions gives us principles of movement and rest: to ask questions for intelligence – What? Why? How? What for? and so on – and if you ask the question, you start to inquire. And when you discover the answer, well, you've got that. At least you understand something. But is that understanding correct? Then you get another question, Is that so? And you ask, Is there sufficient evidence? And when you determine whether or not you have sufficient evidence, you're in a position to say Yes or No. And then you make a judgment. The principle of movement is also the principle of rest, because the question sets the conditions to be met. And the third level: Questions about the good. There are several levels of what is called good: sensitive satisfaction is good, but that's not a moral good; questions of legality: what will the law do about it? Well, if you can square it with the law, that doesn't mean it's necessarily good; the most you can say is that it's tolerated. Is it really worthwhile? That's the question. That's when you move to the top of the scale of morality in Kohlberg's scale of moral development. Is it truly good? And when you get a right answer there, your conscience is at peace. And when you don't get a right answer, the question keeps coming back. Is this really good? You're not happy about it. You have an uneasy conscience. Those criteria are immanent in one, the questions and the criterion for the right answers. Of course, you have to ask the questions in the right order. Children are always asking why and what and parents have to say,

Well, you can't understand that yet. And it's true they can't understand it yet. There are other questions that have to be solved first, and when you have the answers you move on to further questions. There's a logic to intellectual development, or at least a seriation.

Question: I wonder if you would clarify a little more, on the first question, part (d) regarding the discernment of spirits. I heard you talk about a soft and gentle urging and about something that throws you for a loop. Could you explain a little more the meaning you have here.

Lonergan: Well, it's about what Heidegger calls your *Befindlichkeit*, how you feel. The word 'conscientia' in Latin, coscienza in Italian, *conscience* in French, means two things: conscience and consciousness. The statement 'examen conscientiae,' 'examen di coscienza,' 'examen de conscience,' is ambiguous in those languages. In English, for a very long time, it was translated 'examination of conscience.' In the last four or five years spiritual writers have been calling it 'examination of consciousness.' 'How do you feel about it?' And what's good doesn't take you by storm. It wants you to cooperate. It's gentle. It doesn't force you. It doesn't blame you ... If you have a bad conscience, the effects are opposite. If you have a bad conscience, you're going from bad to worse. Our fathers are worse than our grandfathers, and we're worse than our fathers, and our children are worse than us, and so on. In that ..., a person doesn't worry about conscience at all. Well in that case, what really upsets him is really a changeover, a radical change. A call for a radical changeover is upsetting. And for a person who's doing his best, well, a bad proposal is what upsets him, throws him off. But a good proposal is just leading him on, ever so gently. A good conscience isn't a scold.

Question: A further question: What would be some signs for the individual to discern that he in fact has a bad conscience and that what's disrupting his life is a movement to the good?

Lonergan: Has he got any memories? Can he compare himself today and the way he was five years ago, or one year ago? These things come up, eh? We all have histories, even if we haven't written a diary. However, there are people, spiritual writers and even people like Progoff, that want people to have a spiritual journal.