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Authenticity as Self-Transcendence: The Enduring Insights of Bernard Lonergan.

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The four essays that compose this volume are welcome additions to the secondary literature on the Canadian Jesuit philosopher, theologian, and methodologist Bernard Lonergan. No other work provides such a comprehensive and historically rooted account of Lonergan's achievement. In a previous work, *The Crisis of Philosophy* (Albany: Suny Press, 1989), also well worth reading, McCarthy argued persuasively that Lonergan's philosophical program is superior to those of the seminal thinkers of the major contemporary Western philosophical traditions, e.g., of Gottlob Frege, Edmund Husserl, and Ludwig Wittgenstein. Here, he develops and expands that argument with a broader, equally well-informed, and very detailed exploration of Lonergan's achievement as a response to the complex cultural crisis—at once epistemic, moral, and spiritual—of our time. McCarthy has undertaken to display “the strategic unfolding of Lonergan's cultural mission” (x–xi) and, in doing so, has exposed clearly and in detail, not only Lonergan's understanding of the demands of his time, but also his self-understanding as a Jesuit called to respond to the crises of his age.

McCarthy describes Lonergan as a critical Christian humanist who sought to raise Christian philosophy and theology to meet the cultural challenges and disciplinary standards of our time. He accurately describes Lonergan's life-long project as a deliberate response to Pope Leo XIII's challenge to Catholic intellectuals to appropriate critically the real intellectual developments of modernity without jettisoning the best of ancient and medieval achievements: *Vetera nova augere et perficere* (Augment and perfect the old with the new). McCarthy amply illustrates what distinguishes Lonergan from most twentieth-century Catholic philosophers and theologians, specifically the temperateness both of his critique of the *vetera* and of his appropriation of the *nova*. But McCarthy is careful and anxious to point out that the significance and relevance of Lonergan's achievement, especially in the areas of philosophy and methodology, are not limited to a Catholic Christian context but extend to humanist culture-at-large.

McCarthy begins with a diagnosis of the present situation which is guided by Lonergan's understanding of the contemporary cultural crisis, but is also heavily augmented by the diagnoses of Charles Taylor, Alasdair MacIntyre, Leszek Kołakowski, and Eric Voegelin—what intellectual, moral, spiritual, and religious predicaments do we commonly face? He proceeds to an explanatory historical narrative in which he draws heavily again upon Taylor, but also upon

Alfred Whitehead, Herbert Butterfield, Alan Richardson, and Hannah Arendt (on whose work McCarthy is also an expert)—how did we arrive at “this tangled cultural impasse”? The diagnosis and genealogy are followed by an account of Lonergan’s remedial prescriptions—what insights does Lonergan bring to bear, and what strategies does he employ, to clarify and address our cultural predicaments? In the fourth and final essay, McCarthy narrows his focus considerably to the challenges posed for Catholic Christianity in particular by the complex cultural crisis and to Lonergan’s specific contributions to critical renewal of the Catholic Church.

The concluding essay on renewal in the Catholic Church is an essential piece of any thorough exposition of Lonergan’s aims and achievements. It is fair to say that it was Lonergan’s lifelong interest to promote the critical assimilation of modern intellectual achievements and socio-political developments by Catholic philosophers and theologians. Lonergan complained somewhat bitterly that Catholic intellectuals, while legitimately wary of the excesses and deficiencies of “modernism,” nevertheless have been too slow to appreciate and appropriate the real achievements of modernity. Such appropriation, provided it is sufficiently critical, would certainly result in a radical renewal of the Catholic Church.

Still, as McCarthy argues especially in the first two essays, the crisis Lonergan discerned and undertook to address is not a crisis of faith afflicting religious consciousness in general or the Catholic Church in particular, but a crisis in the control of meaning afflicting contemporary Western culture in its entirety. It happens that the Catholic Church has been, and continues to be, especially resistant to modern intellectual developments and, consequently, much slower than the culture-at-large to assimilate and adapt to them. Accordingly, while McCarthy’s final essay with its narrow focus is a welcome corrective to the widespread misunderstanding by Catholic intellectuals of Lonergan’s nuanced relations both to the ancient and medieval *vetera* and to the modern and postmodern *nova*, it stands in some tension with his stated ecumenical aim of bringing Lonergan’s remedies and prescriptions for a contemporary cultural crisis of meaning to the notice of the culture-at-large.

McCarthy’s first three essays display vividly the contribution of Lonergan’s philosophical and methodological achievements to the solution of problems afflicting contemporary Western culture. The narrow focus in the culminating essay on renewal in the Catholic Church is somewhat at cross-purposes with his aim to gain a more attentive and sympathetic hearing for Lonergan from not only Catholic intellectuals with a preference for the *vetera*, but also from the wider culture of “reflective humanists.” McCarthy runs a risk here that reflective secular minds bedeviled by problems to which Lonergan offers

thoughtful solutions, upon scanning his Table of Contents and discerning the narrowing trajectory, will assume Lonergan's vision to be less comprehensive, his outlook to be less ecumenical, and his intended audience to be much smaller than they actually were and that they will simply put this book aside without reading it. In short, while it is McCarthy's stated intention to build a bridge between Lonergan and the culture-at-large, while he succeeds admirably at doing this especially in the first two essays, while he provides a fine account of religious authenticity in the third essay, in the culminating essay he speaks only to the Catholic intellectual community about issues with which only the Catholic intellectual community is concerned.

This is a scholarly and erudite book. My criticism is not of McCarthy's diagnosis of the present situation, nor of his genealogy of the current crisis, nor of his account of Lonergan's remedies and prescriptions. On the contrary, the diagnosis masterfully encompasses seemingly diverse cultural phenomena in a single view; the genealogy is an erudite and provocative exploration of the roots of the present crisis; Lonergan's prescriptions and remedies are clearly and accurately exposed without minimizing complexity or sacrificing thoroughness. Moreover, all four essays are, in addition to being examples of insightful scholarship, elegantly crafted. My criticism pertains only to the seeming conflict between McCarthy's self-described ecumenic aim and the strategy he implements to attain it. That said, McCarthy's treatment of Lonergan's contribution to renewal in the Catholic Church should serve as a final corrective to the especially pernicious anti-modernist Catholic misunderstandings of Lonergan's account of human authenticity which are still appealed to by Catholic philosophers and theologians to justify inattention to and dismissal of the extraordinary achievements of one of the foremost Jesuit thinkers of the twentieth century.

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