

The following is a draft of the fifth chapter of *The Trinity in History*.

© Copyright 2009 by Robert M. Doran

## 5 Sacralization and Desacralization in History

### 1 Introduction

The last two chapters have contained developments upon the theory of history that I presented in *Theology and the Dialectics of History*. We continue along those lines in the present chapter before returning explicitly to the divine missions within the context of a theology of history.

In a posthumously published paper entitled ‘Sacralization and Secularization’ Lonergan offers a set of suggestions for discriminating ‘(1) a sacralization to be dropped and (2) a sacralization to be fostered; (3) a secularization to be welcomed and (4) a secularization to be resisted.’<sup>1</sup> The point of the present chapter is to develop these

---

1 Bernard Lonergan, ‘Sacralization and Secularization,’ in *Philosophical and Theological Papers 1965* 264. I wish to call attention to the applications of these categories made by John D. Dadosky in two papers, ‘Sacralization, Secularization, and Religious Fundamentalism,’ *Studies in Religion/Sciences religieuses* 36 (2007) 513-29, and ‘The Church and the Other: Mediation and Friendship in Post-Vatican II Roman Catholic Ecclesiology.’ *Pacifica*, October (2005) 302-322. I hope that the sources that I will identify for discriminating each of these processes can ground Dadosky’s applications.

The present chapter is a development on my paper ‘Lonergan and Girard on Sacralization and Desacralization,’ in *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia* 63 (2007) 1171-1201.

suggestions with the help of René Girard. But before the suggestions can be developed, they have to be specified more precisely, and that is not a particularly easy task.

Lonergan never completed to his satisfaction the paper ‘Sacralization and Secularization’ and did not publish it in his lifetime. Moreover, the suggestions that can be deciphered in ‘Sacralization and Secularization’ must be complemented by considerations that appear in other works of Lonergan.

The conclusions at which I have arrived can be stated at the outset. Before stating them, however, let me indicate that the question as it is addressed here and in Lonergan’s paper has to do with the sacred *in human history*, as contrasted with its manifestations in nature. I have no doubt that creation is a reflection of the glory of God and a source of legitimate sacralizations in worship and prayer, song and dance, liturgy and art, and that the exploits of despoiling the natural environment are a desecration of something sacred. But I am for the moment prescind from the sacred in nature except insofar as history itself is located within the universe created by God. It is in human history that I wish to locate the fourfold set of realities anticipated by Lonergan’s distinctions. In other words, which historical arrangements of human affairs should be sacralized, and which desacralized; and which should be secularized, and which desecularized? It is within the context of providing an answer to that question that the ecological concerns can be fruitfully addressed in theology.

My conclusions, then, are the following.

(1) Setting the standard of sacralizations to be dropped in the conduct of human affairs are any and all attempts to employ the name or word of God or any other sacral trappings to justify persecution, exclusion, and scapegoating both of carriers of the genuine religious word and, given the character of that word itself, of anyone else.

(2) The standard of sacralizations to be fostered in the conduct of human affairs can be spoken of in Christian terms as adherence to what Lonergan calls the just and mysterious Law of the Cross. This standard entails the recognition and celebration of the

transformation of evil into a greater good, indeed a supreme good, precisely through the absorption of evil in love, an absorption that imitates the genuinely sacrificial attitude of the Incarnate Word of God. But the reality of the Law of the Cross, which is revealed progressively in the Israelite scriptures and embodied in the Incarnate Word, is itself a specification of a genuine or authentic religious component that can be found in other religious traditions as well, even if it is more clearly differentiated progressively in the Hebrew Bible and definitively in the New Testament. What is specific to Christianity are the mysteries of the Incarnate Word and the Trinity, but part of what is specific to the Incarnate Word himself as embodying a Trinitarian mission is that in him there is revealed a law of utmost generality affecting the constitution of history. It seems clear from the study of other religions that this law is present there as well, even if not as clearly instantiated as in the anticipations to be found throughout the Hebrew Bible and in the realization of those anticipations in the Passion, death, and Resurrection of the Incarnate Word. It was, after all, the Hindu Gandhi who quotes from the Gujarati didactic stanza, ‘And return with gladness good for evil done.’<sup>2</sup> That *is* the Law of the Cross. This reality, wherever it is found, is determinative of what in my first point I called the genuine religious word, as that word affects historical action or praxis; any word that would purport to be religious but that runs counter to this dimension is fraudulent, a manifestation of what Girard calls deviated transcendence.

(3) Setting the standard of secularizations to be welcomed in the conduct and organization of human affairs are, first, the realities that Lonergan formulates in his transcendental precepts: Be attentive, Be intelligent, Be reasonable, Be responsible – realities that his work enables us to make our own through what he calls self-appropriation; and second, the *Befindlichkeit* dimensions of mood or disposition or

---

2 See Mohandas K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography: The Story of my Experiments with Truth*, trans. Mahadev Desai (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993) 35.

concomitant affect that precede, accompany, and go beyond these realities and that determine the nature of what the Christian tradition has called discernment.<sup>3</sup> The natural orientation of the human spirit to intelligibility, the true and the real, and the good, and to beauty as the splendor of these transcendental objectives, and the concomitant affective dispositions that match this orientation will disclose over time and over the development of human culture which cultural and social arrangements can and should be granted their own autonomy from the mantle of sacral authority, while still encouraging the influence of religious and personal values in the cultural and social spheres. But it should be noted at once that, as Lonergan makes abundantly clear, sustained fidelity to such integrity is possible only by the gift of God's love, and so only by some lived participation in the genuine sacred, and so in the love embodied in the Law of the Cross.

(4) Setting the standard of secularizations to be resisted in the conduct and organization of human affairs are any and all attempts, whether or not grounded in a false sacralization, to condemn or scapegoat carriers of the genuine religious word in whatever tradition, and any consequent efforts to locate human 'coming of age' as a human perfection to be attained exclusively in this life and exclusively on the basis of human resources.

---

3 Here I have learned from my student Ravi Michael Louis, who has argued that the basic 'mood' that Heidegger identifies with 'care' should really be identified with discernment. This argument appears, for instance, in Louis's paper 'The Christian Imagination: Some Operative Symbols' (unpublished). In terms that I borrowed many years ago from Eric Voegelin, that same 'mood' may be described as the search for direction in the movement of life. See Voegelin, 'The Gospel and Culture,' in *Jesus and Man's Hope*, ed. Donald G. Miller and Dikran Y. Hadidian, vol. 2 (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, 1971) passim.

A number of points are clear already. The first is that the issue of sacralization, secularization, and desacralization in history is an embodiment, in the social and cultural fabric of human history, of the classical problem of the relation of human nature to the supernatural, a relation that Lonergan unfolded in terms of a precise understanding of the Scholastic category of obediential potency.

Second, the reader will no doubt have noticed the similarity between sacralizations to be dropped and secularizations to be resisted. The Gospel narrative exposes this similarity, indeed this identity, since we see that sacral authorities turned to secular power to execute Jesus, thereby negating the sacrality of their entire project. But contemporary secularism has removed the sacral trappings from what the Gospel narrative reveals to be a false sacralization of a genuinely profane event, namely, murder. Thus today, in societies where religion and the state are distinguished, these secularizations appear more honestly, in that they are not sanctioned by any appeal to divine authority; but, as Girard has pointed out over and over again, the danger of violence getting out of hand is far greater when religion can no longer be appealed to, however inauthentically, in order to limit the effects of violence. Religion has limited violence precisely by resorting to violence, through what Girard calls the single victim mechanism of scapegoating. Now that this mechanism has been exposed by the Gospel, the danger is even greater that violence will wreak total, indeed apocalyptic, destruction.

Third, perhaps the reader familiar with Lonergan and Girard will also have noticed that Lonergan has provided the positive and Girard the negative marks of identification. Both sacralizations to be fostered and secularizations to be welcomed are understood here in terms drawn from Lonergan. Both sacralizations to be dropped and secularizations to be resisted are understood in terms drawn from Girard.

Finally, perhaps the reader will agree with me that this is no accident. It is Lonergan's notion of the subject, and through that notion his understanding of human nature and its relation to the supernatural order of divine grace, that enables him to

retrieve a primary meaning of such realities as culture, religion, the sacred, and sacrifice, while it is Girard's trenchant analysis of these realities gone wrong that exposes at least some cultural and religious aberrations more profoundly than does any other writer whom I have studied. Still, as we proceed further, we will discover that the two authors complement one another in each of these areas. It must be obvious to any student of current affairs that the issue of sacralization, secularization, and desacralization is crucial for all religious identity at this time in world history, and, precisely because of the importance of religious identity for that history itself, it is crucial for the future of humanity. Lonergan and Girard can help first the Christian churches but then other traditions as well to discriminate the relevant factors.

## **2 The Law of the Cross**

Because of the centrality of the Law of the Cross in the conclusions that I have stated at the outset of the paper, I find that I can best proceed by examining first the extent to which Lonergan and Girard are at one in their understanding of this redemptive constituent of history and the extent, if any, to which they differ.<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps we may proceed most expeditiously by reflecting on the following statements of each author and asking whether and to what extent they are saying the same thing. The Lonergan statement is Thesis 17 of *De Verbo incarnato*: '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

---

4 A more complete treatment of the question, drawing on material that we have already spoken of here, may be found in Robert M. Doran, 'The Non-violent Cross: Lonergan and Girard on Redemption,' to appear in *Theological Studies* in 2009.

mysterious Law of the Cross.’<sup>5</sup> The Girard statement reads as follows: ‘If God allowed Satan to reign for a certain period over humankind, it is because God knew beforehand that at the right time Christ would overcome his adversary by dying on the Cross. God in his wisdom had foreseen since the beginning that the victim mechanism would be reversed like a glove, exposed, placed in the open, stripped naked, and dismantled in the Gospel Passion texts, and he knew that neither Satan nor the powers could prevent this revelation ... The divine wisdom knew that thanks to this death the victim mechanism would be neutralized.’<sup>6</sup>

The key to answering these questions lies in identifying what Lonergan means by the ‘supreme good’ into which the evils of the human race are transformed according to the Law of the Cross. Locating this supreme good is very important for three reasons. First, it concretizes that otherwise would be left indeterminate. Second, it names something that is not explicit in Girard’s account as here reported, though it may be claimed to be implicit in all that he says about the matter. And third, despite its importance it tends to be overlooked in studies of the soteriology expressed in Lonergan’s thesis on the Law of the Cross.

It would seem that this ‘supreme good,’ as defined by Lonergan, is more than a reversal or neutralization of the victim mechanism, however much these elements from the Girardian model may help in articulating elements, even the central elements, in the process of transformation. The supreme good is ‘... the whole Christ, Head and members, in this life as well as in the life to come, *in all their concrete determinations and relations*

---

5 Bernard Lonergan, *De Verbo incarnato* (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1964) thesis 17, as translated by Charles C. Hefling. All quotations of this work are from Hefling’s translation.

6 Girard, *I See Satan Fall like Lightning*, trans. James G. Williams (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002) 151.

[including] (1) communicated goods [the grace of the Incarnation, of sanctifying grace, of the habit of charity, and of the light of glory], (2) a good of order in that quasi-organic unity which is Christ and the church, and (3) particular goods both of Christ the Head and of the members.’ Through what Lonergan calls ‘the just and mysterious Law of the Cross,’ then, the ‘evils of the human race’ are transformed into ‘the whole Christ, Head and members, in this life as well as in the life to come,’ in all the concrete determinations and relations of that community. The evils of the human race are transformed into a new community, a community that has a new set of concrete determinations and relations. How does this occur? Through the Law of the Cross. What is the Law of the Cross? A precept of utmost generality that enjoins not overcoming these evils by power but absorbing them in a loving surrender that returns good for evil done.

Again, the Law of the Cross is itself a developmental process. The process begins, in many instances, with a simple refusal to retaliate. That refusal may itself precede forgiveness, precede loving absorption, precede return of good for evil, but it marks the beginning of the process toward these characteristic elements of a response. Beyond these is reconciliation, which, as Desmond Tutu has taught us in our time, demands the recognition of the truth of what has occurred.

Later in the thesis (in the Preliminary Note) this ‘supreme good’ that is ‘the whole Christ, Head and members’ is referred to as the *form* of the economy of salvation, a form that is introduced into the ‘matter’ that is the human race infected with original sin, burdened with actual sins, entangled in the penalties of sin, alienated from God, and divided both within individuals and between them, or socially. The emergence of that form, that ‘supreme good,’ that ‘solution to the problem of evil,’ in the terms of *Insight*, ‘will be in accord with the probabilities ... that regard the occurrence of [our] intelligent

and rational apprehension of the solution and [our] free and responsible consent to it.’<sup>7</sup> That form consists not just of a hierarchically ordered group of people, a ‘good of order’ in the formal sense of an organized institution, but radically of a threefold (or, as I have argued here, fourfold) communication of God to us (in the hypostatic union, in the uncreated gift of the Holy Spirit,<sup>8</sup> and in the beatific vision), and a consequent order of personal relations brought about through both wise apprehension of the divine self-communication and the habit of charity flowing from sanctifying grace. The ‘form’ of this new community obtains both in this life and in the life to come, which is why the community itself in its entirety is called the communion of saints. The supreme good into which the evils of the human race are transformed by the cross of Christ is the

---

7 Lonergan, *Insight* 720. Lonergan continues (ibid.): ‘... there are stages in human development when there is no probability that men will apprehend and consent to a universally accessible and permanent solution that meets the basic problem of human nature. Moreover, all human development has been seen to be compounded with decline, and so it fails to prepare men directly and positively to apprehend and consent to the solution. Accordingly, it seems necessary to distinguish between the realization of the full solution and, on the other hand, the emergent trend in which the full solution becomes effectively probable.’

8 As we have seen, in the four-point hypothesis the consequent conditions required in order that it be true that the gift has been given are twofold, namely, sanctifying grace as the elevation of central form and the habit of charity as a supernatural conjugate form ‘spirated’ from sanctifying grace in a manner analogous to the passive spiration of the Holy Spirit by the Father and the Son together. Thus the ‘fourfold’ character of the divine self-communication: hypostatic union, sanctifying grace, charity, and the beatific vision.

communion of saints, a community of friendship with the three divine persons and among ourselves.

This emphasis in *De Verbo incarnato* on a new community, a new social reality, as the supreme good into which the evils of the human race are transformed corresponds to one of the most startling statements in Lonergan's treatment of the divine missions in *De Deo trino, Pars systematica*. The 'state of grace' for Lonergan is a social, intersubjective situation – in Girardian terms a transformed 'interdividuation' – grounded in the three divine subjects of the one consciousness of God. The threefold (or fourfold) communication of God is explicitly referred to in the Trinitarian systematics as an *imitatio* of the divine relations, which under Girardian emphases we could see as a mimesis that runs counter to the infected mimesis that constitutes or at least affects the evils of the human race from which we are freed by the Law of the Cross. It may be presumed, then, that Lonergan's explicit statement of the supreme good that results from the reversal wrought by the Cross does not run counter to Girardian expectations, even though the latter are not expressed in the same overtly theological terms. In fact, there is no reason to doubt that Girard has named something constitutive of the 'evils of the human race' that are transformed into this new community of human and divine subjects, and perhaps the central element of those evils.

This brings us to our next question. What precisely are the 'evils of the human race' that are transformed into this community that Lonergan calls the whole Christ? In line with Lonergan's definition of the 'supreme good,' it might be best to speak of the evils of the human race as *all defects of the good in the concrete determinations and relations of human life*. If the supreme good into which the evils are transformed is a new community, then it is reasonable to suppose that the evils that are transformed into this new community are precisely the distortions of relations that hinder genuine community from ever being realized. These defects of the good are understood by Lonergan in terms of basic sin and moral evil. Basic sin, which is the category employed in *Insight*, is in *De*

*Verbo incarnato* called ‘the evil of fault.’ And the moral evil (again, the category employed in *Insight*) that follows from basic sin is in *De Verbo incarnato* called ‘the evil of punishment.’ I greatly prefer the terminology of *Insight*, especially since I wish to steer completely away from any connotations of a darkly sacrificial, penal substitution notion of redemption.

Moral evil is the consequence of basic sin. It includes such things as deteriorating relations, systemic injustices, and bias of several kinds. All of these are ‘the evils of the human race’ that in Christ are converted into a new community. And according to Catholic teaching, these evils of the human race (basic sin and moral evil, including bias) are traced ultimately to what has been called original sin.

Perhaps it is time to indicate some questions that would foster integration with the work of Girard.

(1) To what extent may we associate what the Catholic tradition calls ‘original sin’ with the mimetic cycle precisely as a ‘mechanism’? More fully: To what extent may we fruitfully regard ‘peccatum originale originans (originating original sin)’ as an original and originating failure to reject a mimetic cycle (‘You shall be like God’ – Genesis 3.5), and ‘peccatum originale originatum (originated original sin)’ as the mechanism unleashed by that original failing to reject this primordial mimetic cycle?

(2) To what extent would what Lonergan calls ‘basic sin’ or ‘the evil of fault’ be fruitfully understood as a matter of failing to reject the mimetic cycle? Is that failure one instance of basic sin, or is it more than that, perhaps the core of this basic root of irrationality in human rational consciousness?

(3) To what extent are the moral evils that follow upon basic sin (the deterioration of human relations, the systematizing of injustice, and the elevation of various forms of bias to the determining principles of human affairs) the consequences of failing to reject the mimetic cycle?

Let me rephrase the last two questions. To what extent is failing to reject the mimetic cycle the contraction of consciousness that constitutes basic sin, and to what extent is the satanic sequence of events that follows from failing to reject the mimetic cycle coincident with the ‘consequences of basic sins’ that constitute moral evil? And to what extent do the biases that are structural elements in these consequences predispose us to further failures to reject the mimetic cycle?

It is obvious that I am inclined to find a great deal of complementarity between Lonergan and Girard on these issues. Where I would tend to find the two respective statements not entirely able to be mapped onto one another, at least as explicit statements, lies in the respective identifications of the result of the divinely ordained transformation. With Lonergan, I would have to say that that result is more than a textual revelation that exposes what was hidden. It is that, of course, but only as one constitutive element in the formation of a new set of concrete relations and determinations, a new social situation called ‘the state of grace,’ a new community in history, a new community that also extends beyond history into the state we call eternal life. But Girard enables us to affirm that this community is genuinely new only to the extent that it has been freed from the mimetic cycle, or, if you want, only to the extent that it embodies a new kind of ‘interdividuation,’ one that is constituted by the *imitatio* of the four divine relations in grace. And of course, we are well aware of the extent to which this is ever precarious, ever a withdrawal from mimetic rivalry (to paraphrase Lonergan’s statements about authenticity as ever a withdrawal from unauthenticity).

To this point, then, I want to suggest that Girard, by filling in a heuristic structure provided by Lonergan, helps us specify the evils of the human race that are transformed, and that Lonergan is clearer on the reality into which these evils are transformed. Again, there should be no surprise here: Girard is proceeding anthropologically, and so can be expected to help us gain concrete precision on the human condition; and Lonergan is speaking theologically, and so can be expected to illuminate us as to God’s ultimate

intention and plan. I see no fundamental contradiction, at least to this point, between their respective positions on the Passion and Resurrection of Jesus, simply a difference of emphasis that can be turned into a mutual complementarity.

What, then, is the Law of the Cross, precisely as a determinant not primarily of texts but of events, a reversal not only in meaning but also in the reality meant?

Lonergan answers this question in three steps, corresponding to the way in which the law is embodied in Jesus as an individual human being, the way in which it is embodied in him as the last Adam and Head of the Church, and the way in which it is embodied in his members.

As embodied in Jesus as an individual human being, the Law of the Cross entails three steps. First, from the 'basic sin' responsible for his death (which, we may accept from Girard, was a matter of mob failure to reject the mimetic cycle), there follow the moral evils, the consequences of basic sin, i.e., principally that death itself. Second, there is a transformation of these moral evils, these consequences of basic sin, into good, precisely by his freely submitting to them. Third, God the Father blesses this transformation in the Resurrection. Thus, Jesus (1) suffered and died because of the basic sin, the failure of will, that brought him to this point (again, in Girardian terms, massive mimesis). He (2) transformed the evil of suffering and death, accepted in love and obedience, into a supreme moral good, a new community emergent from these events, the whole Christ, Head and members, in all their concrete relations and determinations, which were entirely different from the relations and determinations that preceded this event. And God the Father (3) raised him from the dead as the first-born into this new community of 'the whole Christ, Head and members.'

The manner in which the Law of the Cross is embodied in Jesus as the last Adam, the Head of the Church, the firstborn into the new and supreme good, is expressed by Lonergan in terms of his subtle but extensive reorientation of the theological tradition regarding satisfaction. I have had to refrain from extensive commentary here on this

issue, since it entails a far more thorough study than I am able to provide at this point. I refer the reader, however, to a very fine paper by Charles Hefling on this matter.<sup>9</sup> Suffice it to say that I believe that Lonergan transcends what Neil Ormerod<sup>10</sup> has called a darkly sacrificial interpretation of the Passion, and that I believe it is possible to integrate with Lonergan's thesis the Girardian insistence that (1) Jesus suffered and died because of the single victim mechanism of the mimetic cycle that affects the entire human race; and (2) his death exposed, placed in the open, revealed once for all at the level of elemental meaning this single victim mechanism, and in so doing neutralized it. Certainly from Lonergan's standpoint, this revelation could be considered a constituent feature of the transformation of evil into good, in terms of the concrete determinations and relations of the new community reality that we call 'the whole Christ, Head and members.' And the Girardian perspective would agree with Lonergan that God the Father raised Jesus from the dead precisely as a manifestation of the 'victory' of the cross. Note, however, that I am attempting to incorporate the Girardian emphases into a theological account of *events*, namely, Jesus' actual death and actual resurrection, and so into a position that transcends the primacy accorded by Girard to the texts in which these events are narrated.

Finally, there is an embodiment of the Law of the Cross in the members as well as in the Head. The members are those 'whom [God] foreknew, and predestined to be conformed with the image of his Son' (Romans 8.29), 'provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him' (Romans 8.17). Lonergan says that 'the Law of the Cross teaches us through both precept and example, by its complete

---

9 Charles C. Hefling, Jr., 'A Perhaps Permanently Valid Achievement: Lonergan on Christ's Satisfaction,' *Method: Journal of Lonergan Studies* 10 (1992) 51-76.

10 See Neil Ormerod, 'The Eucharist as Sacrifice,' in *The Eucharist: Faith and Worship*, ed. M. Press (Homebush: St Pauls, 2001) 42-55, and 'The Dual Language of Sacrifice in Christian Tradition,' *Pacifica* 17 (2004) 159-69.

generality, (1) that *every* evil in human, volitional realities is to be regarded as sin's penalty ... and (2) that *each* person should "daily take up his cross" (Matthew 16.24) and "complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions" (Colossians 1.24), so that (3) "*all* things work together for good to those who love God" (Romans 8.28).<sup>11</sup> The way the Law of the Cross is observed in Christ is different from the way it is observed in the members. It appears in Christ as in the redeeming principle, and in the members as in what is to be redeemed; we have to *learn and believe*, and come *freely to consent* to Christ, living in him, operating through him, being associated with him, so that we may be assimilated and conformed to him dying and rising. If I may quote something that I wrote years ago, 'The church's participation in the specifically paschal dimension of "what Jesus did" is twofold. First – and this is what distinguishes the church's "place" in the economy of redemption from that of Jesus himself – the Christian is invited to acknowledge Jesus' suffering and death as *his or her own* redemption. But, second, the Christian is *then* invited as well to have some share in the historical catalytic agency of *that* suffering and death as its power mediates the transition from a prevailing situation to an alternative one, and to do so precisely by allowing there to become incarnate in his or her own person, as minister of the new covenant in the blood of Jesus, the very pattern or immanent intelligibility of Jesus' own redemptive self-offering: "... in my own body to do what I can to make up all that has still to be undergone by Christ for the sake of his body, the church" (Colossians 1.24).'<sup>11</sup>

Girardian complements and correspondences to this vision of the members would specify the statement that every evil in human volitional realities is to be regarded as sin's penalty, by saying that every defect in the concrete determinations and relationships of human life is due to mimesis gone awry, which is basically Girard's meaning of sin.

---

11 Robert M. Doran, *Theology and the Dialectics of History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990, 2001) 121-22.

Thus the two statements are complementary. Consequently, that each person should ‘daily take up his cross’ (Matthew 16.24) and ‘complete what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions’ (Colossians 1.24), so that ‘all things work together for good to those who love God’ (Romans 8.28), would mean learning the epistemology of love that Girard finds in the New Testament, that is, living from the same stance that enabled Jesus once and for all to expose the victimage mechanism and in exposing it to overcome it. Certainly it is true that for Lonergan the kingdom of God is precisely what Girard says it is: being merciful as Abba is merciful, love of enemies, offering no resistance to injury. The ‘intelligibility of redemption’ is ‘the victory of suffering, of accepting the consequences of sin, the evils of this world, in the spirit that animated Christ. It is the transformation of the world that arises when evil is transformed into good by the Christian spirit. Christ refused the strict justice of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. He imposed upon his followers a command of patience and submission under wrong, because impatience usually creates only more wrong. And the meaning of his own words is fundamentally the transformation of evil into good ... What was Christ doing dying and rising again? He was overcoming in himself, and also through his followers, all the evils in the world, and overcoming them to rise again, that by his resurrection we might know and realize and act upon those words of St Paul in Romans, chapter 8, verse 28, “To those that love God, all things conspire unto the good.”’<sup>12</sup>

The only point at issue, then, is the tension between events and texts that seems to mark the relation of Lonergan and Girard in these matters. In chapter 9 of *I See Satan Fall like Lightning* Girard says that the transformation from the mimetic cycle to what, following Lonergan, we may call the Law of the Cross is like the reversal of a glove, due

---

12 Bernard Lonergan, ‘The Redemption,’ *Philosophical and Theological Papers 1958-1964*, ed. Robert C. Croken and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996) 28.

to the fact that the Law of the Cross is the positive *revelation* of the mimetic cycle, destroying its power precisely by revealing it. I believe that this revelation is only part of the real reversal that took place, that as it stands – and here I draw from Charles Hefling<sup>13</sup> – Girard’s theological contribution is to a theology of the Christian *word*, but that this word tells us something about what *is*, and in the order of what is, loving absorption of the evils that flow from basic sin, loving suffering of the effects of the failure to reject the mimetic cycle, is part of the transformation of that cycle itself into a new set of imitative relationships in which, de facto if not often explicitly, the four divine relations are imitated through a set of receptions of their created consequent conditions: divine paternity is imitated in the ‘secondary act of existence’ of the Incarnate Word that is the consequent condition of that Word being substantially a human being; divine active spiration is imitated in sanctifying grace; divine passive spiration is imitated in the habit of charity; and divine filiation is imitated in the light of glory allowing us all to be led back as adopted children to the eternal Father.

I conclude this section by emphasizing the adjective ‘new.’ The Law of the Cross is misinterpreted in destructive ways if it is taken to mean simply submission to the old law of mimetic violence. In simple terms, the alternative is not simply ‘Fight or Flight.’ *Datur tertium*; there is a third possibility. The third possibility, however, is primarily God’s work in founding something far beyond human expectations for community. The Church emerged precisely from Jesus’ submission to the Law of the Cross. The reign of God moved on to a new covenant that did not abrogate the old but definitely sublated it into an entirely new set of human relationships that could not be envisioned as long as people remained within the parameters set by the earlier dispensation. Something similar must occur in other instances. Out of the suffering of submission to the evils of the

---

13 Charles Hefling, ‘About What Might a “Girard-Lonergan” ‘Conversation’ Be?’

*Lonergan Workshop* 17, ed. Fred Lawrence (Boston College, 2002) 122-23.

mimetic cycle, a new community, a new set of possibilities, a new set of relationships emerges. The submission is a step, and only a step, in a far larger process that God is guiding according to the hidden counsels of the divine mystery. This qualification, I believe, is of crucial importance. And meeting it calls on the resources and ingenuity of human creativity and collaboration. But the primary collaboration must be with divine creativity itself.

### **3 Terms, Issue, Criteria**

On this reading, then, (1) what constitutes the genuine sacred in history is the transformation of the evils that affect the human race into a new community of human beings with the three divine subjects and with one another through the very absorption of those evils themselves; and (2) Girard helps us concretize those evils in terms of his mimetic model. With this clarification, let us return to Lonergan's paper 'Sacralization and Secularization.' The paper can be properly understood, I think, only from some such perspective as Lonergan's development of the Law of the Cross. And interpreting the paper will open us onto further complementarities of Lonergan's thought with Girard's.

We begin with the meaning of the principal *terms* in the paper. The words 'secular,' 'secularize,' 'secularization,' 'secularist,' and the words 'sacral,' 'sacralize,' 'sacralization,' 'desacralize,' 'desacralization' are value-neutral terms describing attitudes of persons and communities. Roles, places, times, and objects are sacral when the activity involved is regarded as religious by the participants, and secular when the activity involved is not so regarded. These terms do not refer to what really is sacred and what really is profane, but only to what the participants regard as sacred and what they regard as profane. Similarly, 'desacralize' and 'desacralization' denote a withdrawal of

sacrality from what previously had been regarded as religious.<sup>14</sup> Thus, for example, ‘one may say that meat sacralized by pagans was desacralized by Christians.’<sup>15</sup>

The real issue, then, has to do with the transition from ‘sacral’ to ‘really sacred,’ from ‘secular’ to ‘really profane,’ and, in the case of desacralization, from ‘sacral’ first to ‘secular’ and then to ‘profane’ – that is, from what participants regard as such and such to a true judgment about what really is so. Only by meeting the issue thus defined can we determine which sacralizations are to be dropped and which to be fostered, and which secularizations are to be welcomed and which to be resisted.

It is in terms of what I am calling the genuine religious word, wherever that word is found, that this determination can be made. And because of Girard’s contribution to the theology of the Christian word, he has offered an essential element in this discrimination. In my view, with which I presume both Lonergan and Girard would agree, the Hebrew and Christian scriptures manifest the most articulate process of development toward the formation of the genuine religious word. It is in part a development toward what I have called soteriologically differentiated consciousness.<sup>16</sup> But it is this only because more radically it is a progressive revelation on the part of God. I have wagered that this authentic or genuine religious word is more clearly differentiated in the Hebrew and Christian trajectory than anywhere else, even though I would insist that what it means is present outside this trajectory. And in this particular revelatory trajectory, this word is most apparent first in the Deutero-Isaian vision of the suffering servant, and then in the Paschal narratives of the four Gospels. But we must assume that parallels to this soteriological differentiation of consciousness effected by divine revelation can be found

---

14 ‘Sacralization and Secularization’ 270, 274-75.

15 Ibid. 271.

16 See Robert M. Doran, *Theology and the Dialectics of History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990, 2001) index, Soteriological constitutive meaning, differentiation.

in other traditions, and we must actively search them out, since it is those parallels more than anything else that will disclose what is from God in those traditions, just as the suffering servant and the Paschal narratives disclose what God was revealing progressively in Israelite history and definitively in the Incarnation, life, death, and Resurrection of the Word made flesh.

The real issue, then, the transition from the sacral to the sacred and from the secular to the profane, from what people regard as sacred to what is really sacred and from what they regard as profane to what is really profane, may be reminiscent of the words of Jesus, ‘You have heard it said to you ..., But I say to you ...’ (see Matthew 5.21-48). In these sayings of Jesus, what his listeners had heard said to them from their tradition was what spokespersons for the tradition had purported to be truly sacred, but what Jesus was saying to them was what he claimed to be truly sacred. As we know, there was a vast difference in the respective identifications of the sacred, and that difference led to the murder of Jesus and to the beginning of a new ‘way’ in the very tradition in which he stood, a way which, he himself made clear, was completely continuous with the Israelite revelation as the latter came to its fulfilment in the vision of the suffering servant.<sup>17</sup>

---

17 I cannot resist a personal anecdote from my early years in attempting to bring sacraments of healing and reconciliation to people affected by AIDS. I had the privilege one day of visiting two total strangers, a gay couple, one of whom was very healthy and the other extremely sick. The attention that the healthy partner gave to his beloved was extraordinary, and was something that I witnessed firsthand as the sick person became dramatically ill even while I was there. After I had done what they had asked me to come to do, in prayer and sacrament, and as I was walking away from their apartment, I realized, ‘I have just been standing on holy ground.’ In other words, I realized that that was the genuine holy, the genuine sacred – that self-sacrificing

So much for the terms and the issue. There are, Lonergan says, three *criteria* for the transition from what is sacral, that is, regarded as sacred, to what is really sacred, for the transition from what is secular, that is, regarded as profane, to what is really profane, and for the transition from what has been inappropriately or even incorrectly sacralized to what is first secularized and then truly judged to be profane. One criterion is personal, one communal, and one historical.

The personal criterion is the authenticity of the subject, an authenticity that results cumulatively from one's attentiveness, one's intelligence, one's reasonableness, one's responsibility, and one's affective development. This authenticity, which, generically defined, is a matter of consistent self-transcendence, while it reflects the basic natural law of the human spirit, receives concretely whatever consistency it may have only from the gift of God's love in grace. This is due to the compound reality that Lonergan summarizes under the term 'moral impotence,' a term whose meaning can be understood ultimately only in theological terms having to do with such realities as original sin, basic sin, and moral evil. Complementing this statement of the first criterion with emphases from Girard, we may say that the personal criterion involves a good deal of liberation from mimetic contagion, rivalry, and violence, for, as John Ranieri in particular has argued, these dynamics exposed by Girard are involved in and perhaps even constitutive

---

love. That was the genuine meaning as well of sacrifice. As Charles Hefling indicates in the paper cited above at note 13, the genuine meaning of sacrifice that emerges from the Gospel clarifications can be expressed in such biblical statements as 'Bear one another's burdens.' And I dare say that this same loving relationship embodied what Hefling calls the correspondent in the realm of interiority to the bearing of the burdens of others, namely, forgiveness. How ironic that I would find this in a relationship that we 'have heard it said' is highly suspect, even evil!

of what Lonergan calls dramatic, individual, group, and general bias,<sup>18</sup> and the biases may be regarded as prominent among the moral evils that are consequent upon what Lonergan calls basic sin and that set up the likelihood of further basic sin. Moral impotence is at least partly constituted by the dynamics of what Girard has exposed in his mimetic theory or model.

If the personal criterion is the authenticity of the individual, the communal criterion is the authenticity of the subject's tradition. We may appeal to Girard for help in specifying the communal criterion. For in Girardian terms, the same communal criterion of the tradition might be specified by appeal to the Gospel's meaning of 'the kingdom of God' as opposed to the kingdom of the 'principalities and powers.' In Girard's understanding of both of these kingdoms, we are dealing once again with a radical liberation from mimetic determinants of human relationships.<sup>19</sup>

The historical criterion arises inasmuch as religion and culture themselves develop. Within firm parameters set by the natural law of human interiority, by its supernatural fulfilment, and by the Law of the Cross as constituting the reality of what is genuinely sacred in human history, it may be said that what is perhaps most intelligently regarded as a sacral domain at one stage of religious development can be secularized. There may, for instance, be a quite legitimate point to surrounding economies, politics,

---

18 John Ranieri, 'Individual Bias and Group Bias: A Girardian Reading,' unpublished paper delivered at the 2002 Boston College Lonergan Workshop, and 'Girard, Lonergan, and the Limits of Common Sense,' unpublished paper delivered at the Second International Lonergan Workshop, Regis College, Toronto, 2004.

19 See René Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, index, 'Powers and principalities.' See also René Girard, *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, trans. Stephen Bann and Michael Metteer (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987) 199-205.

family arrangements, and even legal institutions with some sacral trappings when civilizations are in decline or when new civilizations are just beginning to emerge. (I am reminded of what Gandhi said when he was asked what he thought about Western civilization: ‘It would be a good idea.’) But such a sacralization will be challenged as people grow and develop. Sacral domains can also be desacralized, and one wonders whether Jesus himself did not foster that process in many of the things he is reported to have said about the religious priorities of some of the teachers of Israel. Again, what seems to be secular activity can be given a genuine religious significance. ‘As often as you did it for the least of these, you did it for me’ (Matthew 25.40). Finally, one style of religious development may be defective in comparison with another style. ‘When you pray, do not imitate the hypocrites, for they love to say their prayers standing up in the synagogues and at the street corners for people to see them ... But when you pray, go to your private room and, when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in that secret place ...’ (Matthew 6.5-6). That statement itself may be reflective of religious development, particularly if there is some truth, however much it would be amplified in a Christian context, to Whitehead’s definition of religion as ‘what the individual does with his [or her] own solitariness,’ involving ‘the transition from God the void to God the enemy, and from God the enemy to God the companion.’<sup>20</sup>

The criteria, in other words, whether personal, communal, or historical, have to do with issues of development and retardation. Moreover, the key to the second and the third criteria for Lonergan, that is, to the communal and the historical, would be found in the first, the personal, for no matter what the dominance of the dialectic of community over the dialectical emergence of the subject, still, the authenticity of self-transcendence, measured by the standards of cumulative attentiveness, intelligence, reasonableness, and responsibility, with all of these preceded, accompanied, and transcended by a movement

---

20 Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making* (New York: Meridian, 1960) 16.

of life promoted and sustained by the grace that is the gift of God's love, is the key to the authenticity of traditions, to collective as well as individual responsibility, and to both healing and creating in history. Again, since the gift of God's grace is required for sustained fidelity to these standards, the truly sacred is the source of all genuine development, even when genuine development entails a secularization of a domain of life that had previously been sacralized. The relations among the various levels in the scale of values are such that religious values condition personal authenticity, personal authenticity provokes cultural development, cultural development enhances the social good of order, and the social good of order promotes the equitable distribution of vital goods.<sup>21</sup> Thus no genuine secularization is an abandonment, only a refinement, of authentic religion.

Let us get our bearings. We began by discriminating with Lonergan the categories of a sacralization to be dropped, a sacralization to be fostered, a secularization to be welcomed, and a secularization to be resisted. We formulated the position that the discriminant of these four processes will have something to do with the Law of the Cross, and we outlined what that Law entails, drawing not only on Lonergan but also on Girard. Then we returned to the paper in which Lonergan discriminated these four categories, and we commented on his definition of terms, his statement of the issue, and his understanding of the criteria for adjudicating the issue.

Obviously the issue is very complex. But already we may say, in Christian terms, that a sacralization to be fostered would be grounded in fidelity to, appropriation of, and implementation of the radical turnabout that Jesus identified in our understanding of God (outer word) and in our conviction of the truth of that revelation as it is confirmed in the gift of God's love (inner word). The revelation itself is present in the earlier tradition in which Jesus stands, and especially in the Deutero-Isaian vision of the suffering servant.

---

21 See Doran, *Theology and the Dialectics of History*, chapter 4 passim.

And, as I stated above, if we believe in the universal mission of the Holy Spirit, we must assume that some corresponding truth is found in other religious traditions as well.

We may also say that a secularization to be welcomed, that is, any legitimate freeing of a domain of life from the realm of sacrality, would be rooted in fidelity to, appropriation of, and graced implementation of the operations according to which subjects, singly and in community, are faithful to what Lonergan calls the transcendental precepts: Be attentive, Be intelligent, Be reasonable, Be responsible, and to the dispositional *Befindlichkeit* that constitutes the mood of genuine discernment. That secularization would itself be a fruit of grace, since consistent fidelity to the transcendental precepts is impossible without divine grace. But even as a fruit of grace it may entail ‘the liberation of a secular domain from the once but no longer appropriate extension of the sacral.’ If it does, the extension of exclusively or dominantly religious feeling over the domain will be acknowledged as no longer appropriate. On the other hand, if that acknowledgment has not occurred, then what is really a legitimate secularization will be regarded and mourned as nothing but a desacralization of what, it is claimed, should be allowed to remain sacral.<sup>22</sup>

From the same standpoint, both sacralizations to be dropped and secularizations to be resisted – which, we have seen, Girard helps us understand as perhaps more intimately connected than Lonergan may have acknowledged – are a function of the failure of individuals and groups to be faithful first to what, in Christian terms, we may call the Gospel’s radical reversal of the meaning of religion (which, again, we may assume can be found in other traditions as well), and second to the imperatives of authenticity and the grace that sustains such fidelity.

Governing all this is the conviction that, in Lonergan’s terms, the sacralization to be fostered will be found precisely in the dynamics of the redemptive process that is a

---

<sup>22</sup> See Lonergan, ‘Sacralization and Secularization’ 274-75.

constitutive feature of the structure of history, that is, in the Law of the Cross. The Law of the Cross, I have argued in *Theology and the Dialectics of History*, characterizes all genuine and sustained fidelity to the integral scale of values, to the scale that provides the ultimate grid for genuine progress in history, whereas all historical retardation is a function of more or less extensive breakdowns of that same scale of values.<sup>23</sup> Here Girard contributes a great deal, for his model of mimetic desire, contagion, and rivalry contributes to our understanding of the concrete dynamics entailed in the Law of the Cross as well as to our understanding of the breakdown of the scale of values.

#### **4 The Context of Lonergan's Discussion**

With some such clarification of terms, it is possible to return to the beginning of Lonergan's paper and to situate the issue in the context that he finds most appropriate. It is in a discussion of Paul Ricoeur's work on Freudian psychoanalysis that Lonergan finds the appropriate context for giving the terms 'sacralization' and 'secularization' the more precise meaning that he eventually provides. That context, again, is one of development and retardation: personal, cultural, and social. Freud would regard all religion, and so all sacralization, in the course of personal, cultural, and social unfolding as the product of a movement of consciousness that is the source of an illusion, and so of at best a pause and at worst a retardation in development. He would restore to human beings what had been alienated in a false transcendence, and that restoration would amount to a fairly wholesale secularization of everything in life. Ricoeur, on the other hand, would distinguish religious maturity and religious retardation, and would thank Freud for helping him make the distinction. Lonergan applauds Ricoeur's discernment, and relies on it to draw his own correlations: religious maturity is growth in love beyond 'the terrors of guilt,' and

---

<sup>23</sup> Doran, *Theology and the Dialectics of History*, chapters 4 and 5.

growth in hope as confidence in the goodness of God beyond ‘the law,’ which was perhaps a necessary but definitely a temporary pedagogue. For Ricoeur, ‘as in the past Freud has reinforced the faith of unbelievers, so in the future he may be used to reinforce the faith of believers.’<sup>24</sup> But he will do so by challenging believers to avoid, in Lonergan’s terms, ‘mistaking retardation for development and mistaking development for retardation and, most disastrous of all, ... triumphantly living out a mistake as though it were the truth, or living out a truth in the agony of fearing it to be a mistake.’<sup>25</sup>

Lonergan has his own way of expressing this context of development and retardation, and it influences the appropriation he makes of Ricoeur’s notion of a hermeneutics of recovery that would advance genuine developments and a hermeneutics of suspicion that would discern and reverse the sources of retardation. We find Lonergan’s treatment especially in his statements in other writings regarding what he calls minor and major authenticity and unauthenticity, and in the question he asks in one of his most mature papers about how we can gain legitimate assurance regarding the genuineness of our religious convictions.

Thus, in a much-quoted passage repeated with minor variations in several of his works, Lonergan writes the following:

... existing may be authentic or unauthentic, and this may occur in two different ways. There is the minor authenticity or unauthenticity of the subject with respect to the tradition that nourishes him. There is the major authenticity that justifies or

---

24 Lonergan, ‘Sacralization and Secularization’ 262.

25 Ibid. 263. Girard, of course, provides similar assistance, and on firmer grounds, even firmer psychological grounds, than those of Freud. It could be said that Girard pushes what Ricoeur calls the hermeneutics of suspicion so far that it turns into the hermeneutics of recovery. See below, pp. xx-xx.

condemns the tradition itself. In the first case there is passed a human judgment on subjects. In the second case history and, ultimately, divine providence pass judgment on traditions.

Lonergan goes on to say the following about minor authenticity and unauthenticity:

As Kierkegaard asked whether he was a Christian, so divers men can ask themselves whether or not they are genuine Catholics or Protestants, Muslims or Buddhists, Platonists or Aristotelians, Kantians or Hegelians, artists or scientists, and so forth. Now they may answer that they are, and their answers may be correct. But they can also answer affirmatively and still be mistaken. In that case there will exist a series of points in which they are what the ideals of the tradition demand, but there will be another series in which there is a greater or less divergence. These points of divergence are overlooked from a selective inattention, or from a failure to understand, or from an undetected rationalization. What I am is one thing, what a genuine Christian or Buddhist is, is another, and I am unaware of the difference. My unawareness is unexpressed. I have no language to express what I am, so I use the language of the tradition I unauthentically appropriate, and thereby I devalue, distort, water down, corrupt that language.

Finally, Lonergan relates minor and major authenticity and unauthenticity to one another.

Such devaluation, distortion, corruption may occur only in scattered individuals. But it may occur on a more massive scale, and then the words are repeated, but the meaning is gone. The chair was still the chair of Moses, but it was occupied by the scribes and Pharisees. The theology was still scholastic, but the scholasticism was decadent. The religious order still read out the rules, but one wonders whether the

home fires were still burning. The sacred name of science may still 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 of a tradition. Then, in the measure a subject takes the tradition, as it exists, for his standard, in that measure he can do no more than authentically realize unauthenticity.<sup>26</sup>

In a later paper, Lonergan asks about the source of genuine religious conviction. More precisely, he asks, How can one tell whether one's appropriation of religion is genuine or unauthentic and, more radically, how can one tell one is not appropriating a religious tradition that has become unauthentic?<sup>27</sup> His answer to that question, and by extension to the dilemma offered by the possibility that one may be participating in major unauthenticity, or may be mistaking development for retardation and retardation for development, appeals to his position on the subject. Ultimately, then, one's recourse must be to the inner conviction of authenticity generated by the self-transcendence that is promoted and sustained by the gift of divine love; and so the intentionality analysis that differentiates precisely what self-transcendence is, in operations and in correlative affective states, assumes paramount importance. Thus, in the total context of Lonergan's work the position on the subject mediates the resolution of the questions raised by Freud and further refined by Ricoeur, questions that have to do with religious development and retardation.

We turn now to the development of our understanding of the same context, that of retardation and development, made possible by the work of René Girard.

---

26 Lonergan, *Method in Theology* 79-80.

27 See Lonergan, 'Religious Knowledge,' in *A Third Collection*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1985) 144.

## 5 Girard's Contribution to Clarifying the Context

Girard provides a more convincing maieutic of the dramatic bias that is associated with psychogenic disease than did Freud, and on that basis he is an exponent of a ruthless hermeneutic of suspicion regarding what people revere as genuinely sacred. His understanding of the dynamics of what, following Lonergan, we may call dramatic bias, the bias of 'unconscious,' that is, unacknowledged motivation, exposes its mechanism in a manner that is almost epochal in its cultural implications. In *Insight*, Lonergan relied on a modified Freudianism to expound what he meant by dramatic bias. But Girard goes far more directly to the source and root both of a specifically psychogenic departure from coherence and of religious aberration. And he also helps us understand why it is that liberation from psychic bias is given only through the grace that enables one to live by what we are calling the Law of the Cross. Not only is that grace what frees human intelligence, reasonableness, and responsibility for their tasks precisely in this world: that is, for the advance of scientific knowledge, for gaining intelligent control over what otherwise would approximate various forms of historical determinism, for conducting human affairs on the basis of what Jürgen Habermas calls communicative competence, and in so doing for secularizing domains of human living that previous ages had sacralized. That grace also liberates the intersubjective psyche from mimetic violence and rivalry, and that liberation is itself, among other things, freedom for development in attentiveness, intelligence, reasonableness, and responsibility, that is, precisely in the habits and operations that Lonergan regards as crucial to the determination of the genuineness of cultural and religious traditions and convictions. Girard's hermeneutic of suspicion can be put in aid of Lonergan's hermeneutic of recovery, analogously to the manner in which Ricoeur sublated the Freudian hermeneutic of suspicion into his own hermeneutic of recovery.

## 6 A Debate (Still Very Much Alive)

After setting a context of development and retardation by appealing to Ricoeur's work on Freud, Lonergan turned in 'Sacralization and Secularization' to a debate current at the time that he wrote the paper, and implicitly locates the debate within the context of development and retardation. The particular debate that Lonergan summarizes was between Marie-Dominique Chenu, O.P., and Jean Daniélou, S.J., on 'the tension between the inner life of prayer and the secular, desacralized world in which we live.'<sup>28</sup> It is easy to see how little the debate has been settled some thirty-plus years later. It is still very much alive in the Catholic Church.

Chenu and Daniélou both

... want faith to penetrate social and political life and ... both reject an oversimplified separation of the spiritual and the temporal, the sacred and the profane, the Christian and the political element. Again, both are haunted by the evangelization of the world, by a realistic presence of the church in the world. Where they differ is in their view of man in his concrete situation. Chenu would have progress in Christian life promote the natural processes and inherent freedom of this world. Daniélou, while he has abandoned the dream of a Christendom as it existed in the Middle Ages, wants the faith to have other securities than God's word alone. He wants some kind of sociological preparation for the faith, certain zones where sacred and religious elements are preserved so that the faith of the poor is not left without cultural and social foundations.<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> Lonergan, 'Sacralization and Secularization' 263.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. 265-66.

These summaries by Lonergan are purely descriptive of the debate, and they display little more than contrasting judgments on the mental and institutional complex known as Christendom. Chenu expects the church to abandon this complex, while Daniélou begs the church to reconsider and to come up with something that would replace the medieval form of Christendom. Daniélou is quoted as saying such things as, ‘There can be no Christianity for the masses without a Christendom,’ and ‘... in a world threatened by atheism, we must defend the substance of the sacred wherever it is found.’<sup>30</sup>

If we may move to a more explanatory analysis of the debate, it would seem that for Lonergan the debate reduces to a contemporary variation on the theme that was played out in the Aristotelian-Augustinian debates in the Middle Ages. Chenu is ‘a Thomist, ... a disciple of the thinker who broke with the symbolic thought of his medieval predecessors and contemporaries, who acknowledged the reality of human nature and the legitimacy of its proper sphere of activity.’ It is from this basis that Chenu “gladly supports the progress of natural and profane forces all through history, and he is of the opinion that this support, far from jeopardizing the domain of grace, ensures its transcendence and richness.”<sup>31</sup> Lonergan expresses a basic agreement, but with an important proviso. ‘I wholeheartedly share Chenu’s acceptance of progress in all its forms; but I would refer back to chapter 7 of my little book *Insight* for an account of the many ways in which progress is corrupted by bias and turned into decline; and I would refer to chapter 20 of the same book for an indication of the redemptive role of religion in

---

30 Quoted in *ibid.* 265.

31 Quoted in *ibid.* 264. The quotations in this and the preceding note appear in a summary by Claude Geffré, O.P., in ‘Desacralization and the Spiritual Life,’ *Concilium* 19 (1966) 111-31. Geffré’s paper is the source of Lonergan’s information on the debate.

overcoming bias and restoring progress.’<sup>32</sup> The quotation is important, as it provides perhaps the first key in the paper ‘Sacralization and Secularization’ to what Lonergan would regard as the genuine domains of both sacralization and secularization. The legitimate domain of sacralization, the genuine sacred, lies in the redemptive religion that overcomes bias and restores progress. The legitimate domain of secularization, the genuine profane, lies in the progress that results from human beings being consistently attentive, intelligent, reasonable, and responsible.

Daniélou, on the other hand, represents a contemporary variant of the symbolic mentality from which Aquinas broke free. Still, Lonergan expresses a basic but qualified agreement with him as well. ‘... while all sane men need symbols, only a small minority ever seriously get beyond the limitations of symbolic thinking. Hence, in a developed culture, religion has to be pluralist: it needs some measure of symbolization for all; it needs only a limited measure for the few that get beyond symbolic thinking; and it needs a bounteous dose for the many that do not.’<sup>33</sup> Education in the genuine sacred is required even if people are to respond in a balanced manner to processes of secularization, and appropriate symbolization is crucial in that education. But there are no easy solutions as to what constitutes such appropriate symbolization, and it is important that in the last analysis Lonergan rejects as inadequate what he calls ‘lines of solution ... [only] in terms of intersubjectivity ... [that] seem to offer no more than a sacralization of an infrastructure.’<sup>34</sup> For not only is there a false sacred; there is also religious development, and this development indicates that much secularization is long overdue. For example, Daniélou speaks of providing cultural and social foundations for the faith of the poor, but, writes Lonergan, ‘the basic step in aiding [the poor] in a notable manner is a matter of

---

32 Lonergan, ‘Sacralization and Desacralization’ 280.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.

spending one's nights and days in a deep and prolonged study of economic analysis.'<sup>35</sup> In the midst of this and other secularizations, the appropriate symbolization will be found for Lonergan primarily in the incarnate meaning of persons and of communities that, gathering in the name of Jesus, radiate peace and joy.<sup>36</sup> But that symbolization is no substitute for the hard work of understanding, judgment, and decision, indeed of collective responsibility.<sup>37</sup>

## 7 Complementary Solutions

We are now in a position to examine the contributions that Lonergan would present to a more complete diagnostic of sacralizations and secularizations to be accepted and rejected, and as well to complement these contributions with Girardian reflections.

---

35 Ibid. 280.

36 If the principal medieval protagonists of the Aristotelian and symbolic mentalities were respectively Aquinas and Bonaventure, it may be argued that the principal more or less contemporary protagonists are respectively Lonergan and Hans Urs von Balthasar and their disciples and students. What is crucial today, I believe, is to avoid the kind of dispute that plagued the late Middle Ages. Aquinas and Bonaventure were both saints and are both Doctors of the Church. It is not at all impossible that both Lonergan and von Balthasar will also be canonized and named Doctors of the Church. What matters is not deciding between them but integrating their emphases as much as possible. Perhaps I may refer to my article, 'Lonergan and Balthasar: Methodological Considerations,' in *Theological Studies* 58:1 (1997) 61-84, where I argue that each of them needs the contribution of the other.

37 Collective responsibility sets the context for one of Lonergan's most important papers, 'Natural Right and Historical Mindedness,' in *A Third Collection* 169-83.

First, we must address Daniélou's support of 'the substance of the sacred,' for this remark would set off alarms in anyone coming from a Girardian perspective, and rightly so. Although Lonergan was not writing with Girard's work in mind, I find that his efforts are helpful especially in determining what meanings can be given to the expression 'the substance of the sacred' and in distinguishing a 'genuine sacred' from a 'false and mendacious, indeed Satanic, sacred.' That distinction, in turn, will be crucial to the discernment of which sacralizations are to be dropped and which fostered, and of which secularizations are to be welcomed and which resisted.

Lonergan first makes a distinction that I find, precisely as it is here expressed, only in this paper, between religions of the infrastructure and religions of the suprastructure, or, what amounts to the same thing, religions governed by primordial intersubjectivity and religions whose directive principles are found in what may be called the word, and principally in an outer word that claims, rightly or wrongly, to name the inner word that God speaks in our hearts, and so itself to be directly or indirectly from God. While it is primarily the inner word that constitutes the authentic religious disposition, nonetheless the advantages that accrue to the religious community from having an outer word that articulates and to a certain extent codifies the inner word should not be underestimated, especially if that outer word is itself not simply a product of human ingenuity.

Thus to the social infrastructure that at its most basic intersubjective level is a matter of simple prolongations of prehuman achievement – and both Lonergan and Girard would so identify primordial intersubjectivity – there corresponds a religious infrastructure, one that clings to the world of immediacy and fixates on sacred objects, acknowledges sacred places, hallows sacred times, celebrates sacred rites, consecrates sacred persons. Lonergan is, by and large, a generous if cautious observer of human social constructions, just as he is of texts. And so of such religions of the infrastructure he writes that they 'can, in principle, be as authentic and genuine as any, for I do not

suppose that the grace of God is refused to certain stages in the unfolding of human culture yet granted to other stages.’ Still, they are human, and not only are they subject to the dialectic of progress and decline like all things human, but also, precisely because they have as yet no guiding and directing outer word, the statistical probabilities of aberration are even higher than they would be in religions of the word. ‘More than other religions, the religions of the infrastructure are open to palpable idolatry and superstition, to orgiastic and cruel cults, even to the ritual murder of human sacrifice.’<sup>38</sup> Or, in terms of the issue that Lonergan is addressing in his paper and that we are addressing here, the probability is far greater that religions of the infrastructure will misplace, misidentify, misconstrue precisely what constitutes ‘the substance of the sacred.’ We may presume that it is for this reason, or something like it, that Lonergan regards as inadequate to the present crisis intersubjective solutions that would simply resacralize some infrastructure of human living.

This presumes, of course, that there is some primary meaning of ‘the sacred’ that in principle can be found in religions of the infrastructure but that is distorted by the aberrations to which cultures of the infrastructure are particularly prone. For Lonergan it is this primary meaning of the sacred that comes progressively to light in the biblical revelation. This understanding of progressive revelation corresponds very closely to Girard’s understanding, even while the language concerning ‘the sacred’ is different.<sup>39</sup> Thus Lonergan writes:

---

38 Ibid. 269.

39 See, for example, Girard, *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, Book II, ‘The Judaeo-Christian Scriptures.’ This entire section begins with the quotation from John 1.1, ‘In principio erat Verbum.’

So it was with reason that Abraham was called to leave the land of his fathers and to sojourn in a strange land, that Moses was ordered to lead the people of Israel away from the fleshpots of Egypt and into the desert, that the book of Deuteronomy in its most solemn manner commanded: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord, and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might' ... It was a momentous command, spelt out positively in the many ways in which the Old Testament makes known the transcendence of God and, more practically, negatively by the prohibition of any sharing in the cults of neighboring peoples. It was a difficult command, as witnessed by the repeated backsliding of the people of God; and, if one would understand that difficulty today, I can only suggest that one think of it as an epochal transition in which religious experience of transcendence began to express itself in the style, not of the infrastructure but of the suprastructure. For if Hebrew religion had its sacred objects, its sacred places and times, its sacred recitals and rituals, still its God was hidden, powerful above all, creator of heaven and earth, one sole Lord God brooking no strange gods before him despite all the diversity of creation and despite the contradictions in which man implicated himself.<sup>40</sup>

---

40 Ibid. 269. It must of course be said that this notion of God was only progressively revealed in Hebrew religion itself. And Lonergan's brief account of the progressive revelation does not contain explicitly the anthropological precision that Girard finds in the exposure of the victimage mechanism. The latter, I wager, is part of the divine revelation, as I think Girard would insist. Religions of the superstructure, that is, of the explicit word, are authentic only to the extent that their word is a progressive revelation of the genuine, non-violent, sacred.

The word of Hebrew revelation, then, provides progressively ever clearer indications of precisely what does and does not qualify as the ‘genuine sacred.’ As Girard has argued, that progressive revelation discloses that God is not in the least bit interested, except negatively, not only in human sacrifice but also in animal sacrifices (which, by the way, even Mary and Joseph offered in the temple at the time of the presentation of Jesus), and that what God wants is a humble heart ready to come to the need of the poor and the oppressed, of victims everywhere. For Girard, as for Eric Voegelin, the high point of that progressive revelation in the history of Israel is in the Deutero-Isaian vision of the suffering servant. Christians would move on from here. For them the clearest revelation of the genuine sacred is in the mind and heart, the human consciousness and knowledge, of Jesus of Nazareth, where, as Charles Hefling has argued, with firm backing in Lonergan’s own writings, revelation itself finds its central locus and primary meaning.<sup>41</sup> And there, in that revelation, we are told, as Girard insists, that the kingdom of God is a mimesis of the one Jesus called Abba, who ‘causes his sun to rise on the bad as well as the good, and his rain to fall on the honest and dishonest alike.’ Imitating Abba means: ‘love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you; in this way you will be children of your Father in Heaven.’<sup>42</sup> This orientation is correctly regarded by Girard as central to the very revelation itself that comes through God’s word and that is progressively disclosed through the course of the biblical writings.

The same orientation is moved by Lonergan into an explicitly theological framework in the four-point hypothesis regarding the divine missions, where, among other things, sanctifying grace and the habit of charity are created external imitations, mimetic, respectively, of the active spiration of Father and Son breathing the Spirit of

---

41 Charles Hefling, ‘Revelation and/as Insight,’ in *The Importance of Insight*, ed. John J. Liptay, Jr., and David S. Liptay (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007) 97-115.

42 See Matthew 5.43-48.

Love and of the passive spiration of the Holy Spirit being breathed. These emphases of Lonergan transcend the principal weakness in the Girardian account, namely, the almost exclusive attention to texts. Revelation takes place not primarily in texts but in minds and hearts engaged in deeds in history. And it takes place first and foremost in the human consciousness of the Incarnate Word himself. ‘... the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees the Father doing; and whatever the Father does the Son does too’ (John 5.19).

Thus, again, if there are any conflicts or tensions to be identified and negotiated between Girard and Lonergan, they would seem to be rooted in the relative priority given to texts in Girard and to events in Lonergan. It is on this basis that we can understand (1) Lonergan’s perhaps more generous acknowledgment of the possibility of authenticity in religions of the infrastructure, which do not have the advantage of the progressive biblical revelation of both false and genuine transcendence, and where there is a minimum of the revealing word in general – the possibility of authenticity there, despite the high probability of precisely those acts of savage violence that Girard has identified with ‘the primitive sacred,’<sup>43</sup> and (2) the related and implicit claim in Lonergan’s analysis that there is a primary meaning of ‘the sacred’ that is progressively revealed in the history of Israel, that has nothing to do with violence, and that is to be preserved.

A firm Girardian might respond that at least to this point no critical standpoint has been identified in Lonergan’s paper from which to adjudicate the authenticity of religions of the suprastructure, that is, of their outer word, and that it is precisely the texts of the Hebrew and especially Gospel scriptures that provide this set of criteria. To this I would

---

43 One might think here of the film ‘Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner,’ which portrays an ancient Inuit story in which the principal protagonist comes to a realization that nonviolent and unequivocally expressed forgiveness of injury alone will heal his community.

respond, first, that for Lonergan the original meaningfulness of one's own insights, judgments, and decisions is always at play in the acceptance, rejection, or qualification of the ordinary meaningfulness of any tradition, religious or cultural or both, and second that Lonergan's presentation of the Law of the Cross represents his understanding of the culmination of the progressive revelation in outer word that has made religions of the suprastructure (at least Israel and Christianity) possible in the first place.

Girard's positive contribution to the discussion of sacralization, secularization, and desacralization would lie (1) in the model he provides for exposing the dynamics of religious infrastructures, (2) in the help he provides, precisely because of his awareness of these dynamics, in disengaging the anthropological moment in the stages of development of the outer word that articulates and interprets the inner word that is the gift of God's love, and (3) in the concrete specification in terms of mimetic rivalry of the embodiment of the 'evils of the human race' that resulted in the murder of Jesus and that through the Law of the Cross are transformed or converted into an entirely new social reality, a new interindividuation, in the supreme good of the whole Christ, Head and members, in all their concrete determinations and relations. I would submit that the relationship between Lonergan and Girard on this issue, then, is basically complementary, with Lonergan providing a heuristic structure that Girard enriches and fills in, and with very little if any serious dispute between the two. In fact, I think ultimately that Lonergan could ask of Girard only that he transcend the emphasis on texts to focus on the events that the texts narrate and the history in which those events occurred.

We should make a more complete application of these considerations to our theme of sacralization and desacralization. On the basis of the foregoing analysis Lonergan concludes his discussion of religious infrastructure and religious suprastructure with some hints from Christian revelation itself regarding what would constitute a sacralization that is to be accepted and fostered and a secularization that is to be resisted,

and so regarding two of the four sets of anticipatory categories that we have adopted to guide our inquiry. For, he says, ‘it was sacralization for Christ according to the flesh to be esteemed, revered, listened to, followed,’ and ‘it was a new and far superior sacralization for him to rise again according to the flesh, to sit at the right hand of the Father, to rule in a kingdom that has no end.’ And ‘it was secularization for the secular power to condemn him to suffering and death.’<sup>44</sup>

Thus, if there is a sacralization that is to be fostered, then on this account it lies in adherence to the mystery of the Incarnate Word in his life, passion, death, and resurrection, that is, in what Lonergan calls ‘the Law of the Cross.’ This sacralization, this adherence to the mystery of the Incarnate Word, extends for us, as it did for Jesus, beyond the confines of this earthly life. ‘... as Christ attained his full stature when he entered into the glory of his Father, so too for Christian hope “coming of age” is not some human perfection attained in this life but being received by Christ in the kingdom of his Father.’<sup>45</sup>

Again, if there is a secularization that is to be resisted, it would consist at its base in any and all attempts to condemn or scapegoat carriers of the genuine religious word, of whom Jesus as revealing the Law of the Cross is, as it were, the prime analogate: every genuine religious word would be compatible with the revelation that comes through him. By implication from this base, secularizations to be resisted would consist in attempts whether explicit or implicit to locate human ‘coming of age’ as a human perfection to be attained exclusively in this life.

Now it is precisely at this point, I would suggest, that Girard adds something very important that is not to be found as clearly in Lonergan, namely, that at least the basic instance of a ‘secularization to be resisted,’ as it is portrayed in the Passion narrative, is

---

44 Lonergan, ‘Sacralization and Secularization’ 269-70.

45 Ibid. 270.

itself tied to a false sacralization, a sacralization to be dropped, perhaps the prime instance of such a reality. For the murder of Jesus in which religious authorities appealed to the secular power to complete a scapegoating mechanism that they did not themselves have the wherewithal to bring off is the revelation of the satanic sacralization that drives out violence by violence. In this case at least, Lonergan's 'secularization to be resisted' is also a result of a 'sacralization to be dropped' or desacralized. From a Girardian perspective, this is precisely what happened. As this false sacralization is disclosed for what it is, it is also desacralized.

Today, of course, precisely because the Christian revelation has unveiled the religious subterfuges that often enough are involved in the justification of violence, the sacral base of such scapegoating will often not be prominent, unless the scapegoating is being done by so-called 'religious' people for so-called 'religious' reasons; but the dynamic remains the same. A sacralization that would condemn *in God's name* the carriers of a genuine religious word in a scapegoating fashion is very close to what Jesus called the 'blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.' Certainly it is the case that Jesus' own remark about the sin against the Holy Spirit occurs precisely in the context of the accusation that he casts out devils by Beelzebul.<sup>46</sup> But the secular identification of 'coming of age' as a purely this-worldly development is a natural evolution of this false transcendence. This is what it means to call all purely secular humanism a form of idolatry. This is what happens to false transcendence when it is exposed by the Law of the Cross but refuses to acknowledge the truth. It becomes a form of mimetic violence that is without the overt sacral trappings of earlier religious forms of scapegoating. It is even closer to the primordial temptation, 'You shall be like God,' than are the overtly sacrificial religions. Arguments may be made in this direction, I believe, and they expose the element of truth in the Daniélou position, with its horror of secularist exaggerations.

---

46 See Matthew 12.22-32.

They also confirm the observations that Girard makes at the very end of *I See Satan Fall like Lightning*, where secularism is seen to be ‘the most powerful mimetic force,’ ‘the most powerful anti-Christian movement.’<sup>47</sup> In secular societies human sacrifice is now engaged in without appealing to any sacral justification. It can only be said that the church’s insistence on the inviolable dignity of every human being from conception to and beyond death acknowledges the spiritual antidote to such secularized sacrality.

## 8 Summary

Our analysis has brought us to the following conclusions, which were listed at the very beginning of the paper as my first, second, and fourth conclusions. What I listed there as my first conclusion is that what sets the standard for sacralizations to be dropped are any and all attempts to employ the name or the word of God or any other sacral trappings to justify persecution, exclusion, and scapegoating, first, of carriers of the genuine religious word and, second, precisely because that word itself exposes all scapegoating and replaces it with the Law of the Cross, of anyone else. What I indicated as my second conclusion is that what sets the standard for sacralizations to be fostered is adherence to and symbolic celebration of what Lonergan calls the Law of the Cross. And what I listed as my fourth conclusion is that what sets the standard for secularizations to be resisted are any and all attempts, whether or not grounded in a false sacralization, to condemn or scapegoat carriers of the genuine religious word, and any consequent efforts to locate human ‘coming of age’ as a human perfection to be attained exclusively in this life and exclusively on the basis of human resources. Predominant among the latter efforts would be any and all instrumentalizations of human life in the pursuit of an illusory ‘coming of age’ in this life.

---

47 Girard, *I See Satan Fall like Lightning* 180.

What remains to be determined is the nature or quality of the prime or basic instance of the third category specified by Lonergan, namely, a secularization to be welcomed. On this we must be brief, and indicate that Lonergan eventually returns to the merits of Ricoeur's work on Freud as providing an example of an answer to this problem. 'There do arise new developments that cast a searching light on human affairs but present their findings in an unsatisfactory manner. They are not to be rejected outright. They are not to be swallowed whole. They are to be met with a distinction ... that presupposes a basis in long and patient study and that can be formulated only when the ... oversight has been pinpointed and the relevant insight has uncovered the appropriate correction.'<sup>48</sup> Thus Ricoeur, after much work, was able to announce that if, in the past, Freud had reinforced the unbelief of many, he now could be used to reinforce the belief of many. Ricoeur sets an example, one that illustrates that when secularization becomes secularism, the secularism can be overcome by an analysis that includes the genuine secularization of what can be understood by the natural and human sciences and a concomitant resacralization of what should never have been secularized. Growth in fidelity to the transcendental precepts would seem to be the key to, or set the standard for, secularizations to be welcomed. But Lonergan's words regarding them in the paper that has been our primary source to this point in the argument may be complemented with his more famous words at the end of 'Dimensions of Meaning': 'There is bound to be formed a solid right that is determined to live in a world that no longer exists. There is bound to be formed a scattered left, captivated by now this, now that new development, exploring now this and now that new possibility. But what will count is a perhaps not numerous center, big enough to be at home in both the old and the new, painstaking enough to work

---

48 Lonergan, 'Sacralization and Secularization' 275.

out one by one the transitions to be made, strong enough to refuse half measures and insist on complete solutions even though it has to wait.<sup>49</sup>

---

49 Bernard Lonergan, 'Dimensions of Meaning,' in *Collection*, vol. 4 of *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988) 245.