

**THE DYNAMICS OF HISTORY IN LONERGAN:
ITS RELEVANCE TO THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL DIMENSIONS OF
THE FILIPINO LIFE**

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by

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ABSTRACT

Man today lives in a global culture permeated by change and diversity. The fact of change, however, does not automatically mean progress, and so there arises the need for man to control and direct the course of history. More than ever, man needs a critical center that is "big enough to be at home in both the old and the new" so as to avoid living in "a world that no longer exists" or in a world "captivated by now this, now that new development." Bernard Lonergan's dynamics of history aims to provide an analysis of the dynamics of progress, decline, and recovery as they work themselves out in society. What is central in this historical process is the role of human intelligence in responding to the demand for the critical center that sets the balance between tradition and modernity.

The role of the authentic subject is of primal importance in this historical dynamics. Authentic subjectivity involves intellectual, moral, and religious conversions. This drama of human existence responds to man's desire for intelligibility, his insistence for truth, his demand for the truly worthwhile, and his longing for love and lifelong restlessness for the Wholly Other. Conversion occurs when man looks at himself, the world, and God in a way that uplifts his person making him fully alive and fully human.

The affirmation of progress over decline is fundamentally at the root of the notion of value, and the person as the originator of value is the engine of historical progress and decline. There remains the fact, however, that while the individual will choose progress over decline, the course of history and society is never simply the result of one person's choice. Hence, Lonergan's dynamics of history depends on the cumulative effect of personal and communal response to the transcendental imperatives of being attentive, being intelligent, being reasonable, being responsible, and being in love. Social and historical progress, in other words, is the cumulative effect of people being true to themselves.

Like any other society, the dynamics of progress, decline, and recovery characterize the Filipino nation. The Filipino strives for a better life and a better future. Collectively, the Filipino people work for a better society. However, bias also pulls them down as shown in the country's appalling mass poverty. The Filipino culture plays a great role in offsetting social decline and generating social progress. In line with the developments of modernity, however, the Filipino has to balance tradition as expressed in his cultural values with modernity as embodied in technological, economic, and political institutions.

Despite all the social crises that beset the Filipino, he remains hopeful and becomes more vigilant to what is happening in the country. The growth of non-government organizations and the active participation of the Church in social issues show the people's growing awareness and movement towards a suitable technology, a better economy, and most of all, a just political system. All these are signs of recovery.

Finally, as the study employs analysis and interpretation, it is open to new insights and new possibilities. As the researcher focuses on the theme in its proper context and critically exposes and deepens it in the light of other authors, his effort to arrive at an objective interpretation of Lonergan's dynamics of history needs to be complemented by the insights of others who have the same concern. After all, development, like the processes of self-transcendence and social transformation, is more of a challenge than an achievement, more of a beginning than an end.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Rationale of the Study

The 20th century has come to an end. Although marked by the two world wars, the Holocaust, the civil wars, and the rise of ideologies, it has also been the time when courageous individuals like Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. resisted authority in order to secure their civil rights. Here in the Philippines the likes of such men from all walks of life have marched down the streets of EDSA to fight for their freedom. This heroic *People Power* that toppled the Marcos dictatorship has come down in Philippine history as the EDSA Revolution.

However, without any doubt, the 20th century would be remembered foremost for its advances in science and technology. It has been the age when man made machines that could fly and machines that could think, when he discovered a mold that conquered infection and a molecule that formed the basis of life.¹

Indeed, the present society has been very much influenced by the explosion of scientific and technical knowledge. The growth of science and the industrialization of life have been two crucial factors affecting every society today.² They have become tools for social progress so much so that to speak of "development" at present almost always invokes scientific, technological, and economic advancements. However, these things have also brought with them the seeds of social decline. They have not only made the

¹ Walter Isaacson, "Who Mattered and Why," *Time*, December 1999, 8-18

² Albert William Levi, *Philosophy and the Modern World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1959), 13-19

world a difficult place to live in due to environmental deterioration but they have also produced a society divided within itself

Today, it is not uncommon to hear of news anywhere in the world about deforestation, soil erosions, floods and other disasters of nature caused by man himself. Other truths to consider are "the loss of values, the worldwide broadening gap between the rich and the poor, the mechanization and secularization of the world"³

The Filipino people have been experiencing the same problems. The social issues that most affect the Filipino life are ecology, graft and corruption, a weak economy, criminality, the population explosion, injustice, and the lack of spirituality. The most tragic aspect of it all is appalling mass poverty, which has been considered as "the social problem"⁴

Thus, in spite of all the fuss about "development", it has been a common observation that many Filipinos have become skeptical about the notion of human progress. However, change is inevitable. Today, just as streets and skyscrapers have replaced the forests and the fields of the physical environment, the primordial institutions around which every society has developed have also been changed. Given those changes, a noted sociology professor asks: Is man going where he wants to go? How does he

³ Heinz Kuluke, SVD, "Preparing for the XXIst Century: Heidegger's Concern," *PHAVISMINDA Journal 1* (May 1996), 20

⁴ *The Second Plenary Council of the Philippines: Acts and Decrees* (Philippines: Daughters of Saint Paul, 1992), 275-76

choose a direction? How can he modify the direction to pave the way for an authentic development?⁵

Bernard Lonergan (1904-84) has this to say, "The challenge of history is for man progressively to restrict the realm of chance or fate or destiny and progressively to enlarge the realm of conscious grasp and deliberate choice."⁶ His concern is not only with knowing history but also with directing it. What he presents is a hermeneutic of the historical process critically grounded in the appropriation of the normative dynamics of one's own consciousness.⁷

Indeed, on the changing face of the world what is needed is a human science that does not only aid man in understanding himself but does also distinguish between the liberty that generates progress and the bias that generates decline.⁸ The purpose of this research then is to delve into Lonergan's dynamics of progress, decline, and recovery as they work themselves out in society. The fundamental issue of this historical process is not force or power but community and understanding. Thus, by studying his insight into the dynamics of history and its relevance to the social and cultural dimensions of the Filipino life, one envisions a community that avoids becoming either "a solid right that is determined to live in a world that no longer exists" (or) a scattered left captivated by now this, now that new development.⁹

⁵ James S. Coleman, *Foundations of Social Theory* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1990), V.

⁶ Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 253-55 (Hereafter referred to as *Insight*).

⁷ Brendan Lovett, *A Dragon not for the Killing* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1998), 76.

⁸ Lonergan, *Insight*, 261.

⁹ Lonergan, "Dimensions of Meaning," in *Collections: Papers by Bernard Lonergan* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967), 267 (Hereafter referred to as "Dimensions of Meaning").