



### Catholic Cogitations by Dr. Joseph. J. Plaud, KM



A theoretical physicist whose name you probably know well enough in your travels through life, Albert Einstein, once had a very ambitious goal: to achieve a unified field theory of physics; joining his general theory of relativity with electromagnetism in order to unify the forces of nature and resolve the paradoxes of quantum mechanics and the unification of electromagnetism and gravity. Although he did not ultimately succeed in this grand unification of physical science, Einstein nevertheless established unification as an important if not an overriding goal of physics, and the search for a unified field theory continues. In the Catholic faith Jesuit Father Bernard Joseph Francis Lonergan, one of the great philosophers and theologians of the past century (who lived from 1904 to 1984), had in my judgment a similar goal of unification. But the unification of which I write here in this reflection is in the theological and not physical sense: a unified theory of redemption through Lonergan's development of the *law of the cross*, ultimately a grand exposition on how humanity

overcomes evil. Let us consider Father Lonergan as we experience this Lenten season in 2024.

As noted by David Hammond "the great tradition of Christian faith, contrary to some recent aberrant expressions, understands redemption to be in history, not merely at the end of history. Salvation in Christ has to do with peace and social order, not simply with an individual's afterlife" (*Lonergan and the Theology of the Future: An Invitation*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, an Imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2017). It is the exercise of the Christian faith while one lives, while one interacts with others in Lonergan's view, that provides for salvation. Evil and sin in my reading of Lonergan can lead to what he terms as "biases," namely as Lonergan tells us "the individual bias of egoism, the group bias with its class conflicts, and a general bias that tends to set common sense against science and philosophy" (*Insight: A Study of Human Understanding, Volume 3*. University of Toronto Press, Scholarly Publishing Division, 1997.) The law of the cross, in stark contrast to these evils of individual and group biases which perpetuate evil and sin, starts with the understanding that through His suffering and death on the cross, Jesus Christ gave humanity an entirely new blueprint for life, an entirely changed meaning, a way to replace the biases leading to sin and death with three divine virtues: *faith, hope and love*. It is through love that the egoism of individual bias is addressed, through love that we care for others and counteract group bias. It is through hope that we work for the common good of all humanity in bringing Christian love; and through faith we counteract the general bias that sacrifices common sense for true understanding.

It is the cross of Christ which transforms evil through the perfect intermingling of the human and the divine, and the knowledge gained through Christ's passion that sin and evil will pass away, and that love and communion with God may be achieved in their place. There is therefore reconciliation between God and His creation. It is at this moment, on the cross at a specific time and place in our human history, where sin is replaced by love, as described in the Scriptures by Saint Paul in the often-quoted verses of 1 Corinthians 13:1-7:

*If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*

This is the legacy of the cross of Jesus Christ. And through the reconciliation achieved through the cross, we the Body of Christ through love and hope become participants in our lives of Christ's salvific mission, taking up our own crosses if you will, to work with and for others in the forgiveness of sins. Therefore, through the faith, hope and love achieved by Christ on the cross we become spiritual examples to others, the antidote to Lonergan's three biases. God wills freedom for His creation, thereby allowing sin and evil to exist for all time. Through the cross, evil is transformed into love, thereby allowing us to choose the fruits of salvation, which is the ultimate freedom and return to God. The cross of Christ literally becomes the transformation in this world of evil into good; it is the path to our communication back to and reconciliation with God. As Saint Paul also reminds us in 1 Corinthians 1:22-25:

*For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.*

The law of the cross means returning good for evil, and in so doing the world itself is transformed and the Kingdom of God draws nearer to us on earth, as it is in heaven. A blessed Lent to you all as we await the celebration of the resurrection of our Savior, Jesus Christ!