On May 7, 1965, Pope Paul VI addressed the thirty-first General Congregation of the Jesuits and, reminding them of their fourth vow of obedience to the Pope, solemnly entrusted to them the mission of confronting the danger of atheism:

[T]he anti-God movement is clearly to be reckoned the most pernicious; . . . There is also philosophical atheism . . . spreading today, openly or covertly, frequently masquerading as cultural, scientific or social progress.

It is the special characteristic of the Society of Jesus to be champion of the Church in adversity.¹

The Congregation formally responded with Decree 3 entitled “The Task of the Society Regarding Atheism.” Its section 11 says that the mandate of resisting atheism should “permeate” all the accepted forms of our apostolate and direct a greater part of our efforts, “more than we have in the past,” to non-believers. Section 14 adds:

The vigorous intellectual efforts of all our scientists, philosophers, and theologians are also called for, and there should be a continuing cooperation among Jesuit scholars in various disciplines, especially the sciences dealing with man.²

2. Ibid. 79-80.
The GC 31 mandate on atheism is reaffirmed by GC 32 in the decree “Our Mission Today”: it reminds us to resist contemporary atheism as a modern expression of our vow of obedience to the Pope.³ Another reaffirmation occurs in GC 33: the decree “Sent into Today’s World” quotes Pope John Paul II reminding us of the papal mandate to confront atheism.⁴ The Pope said: “I wish to recall the mission that my venerable predecessor Paul VI committed to you on May 7, 1965, ‘to resist atheism vigorously with united forces’, a mission which I urgently repropose to you . . .”⁵

PERMEATING ALL APOSTOLATES

Now that preparations are being made for GC 34, an examination of conscience should be made by Jesuit scientists, philosophers, and theologians in our university apostolates, and the question should be asked whether this mandate on atheism does or does not “permeate” all our apostolates as originally intended by the GC 31. One clue emerges in a remark made at a recent panel discussion: “The phenomenon of anti-theism after the collapse of the Communist political systems in Europe, may be limited to a few intellectual circles . . . What is more common is privatization of religion . . .”⁶ Such remarks must not be interpreted to mean that in the capitalist system, atheism is nothing but an incidental feature limited to a marginal minority among the ideologues of a free-market economy. Nor can it be assumed that these “few intellectual circles” cannot exercise oligarchic influence for propagating atheism. There is more to intellectual atheism than that, at least in the mind of Pope Paul VI.

In Ecclesian Suam, Pope Paul VI spoke of atheists who were “men taking pains to work out a scientific explanation of the universe . . . men of great breadth of mind, impatient with the

³. Ibid. 416.
⁴. Documents of the 33rd General Congregation of the Society of Jesus (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1984) 57.
⁵. Ibid. 81.
⁶. “Challenges of Mission Today to Our Minima Societas,” April 1993 (longer version xeroxed in English), Essay 2, p. 8, sec. 2.4.2.3.
mediocrity and self-seeking which infects so much of modern society." The "mediocrity and self-seeking," with which the intellectual atheists were impatient, arose from their observation of ungodly behavior, even among those who accepted Thomistic theology as established by the Quinque Viae. Such empirical ungodliness dialectically evoked the atheistic counter-position: truth is only what can be verified by the "empirical method." In response to the call of Paul VI, GC 31 in its Decree 3 instructs educators to promote "the most accurate understanding of the atheists' arguments and ways of thinking." For these atheists' ways of thinking have permeated the "world of shadows" perceived in a composition of place now being presented for reflection in GC 34. Can these shadows be regarded as consequences of some failure in our fourth vow of obedience to the Pope as regards atheism?

LONERGAN ON ATHEISM

If so, what do we do now? To this question, one answer is to study and propagate the thought of Bernard Lonergan. He had great sympathy for atheists who "may love God in their hearts while not knowing him with their heads." This sympathy must have arisen from his many years of research into the empirical method that scientists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries followed with impressive fidelity. Lonergan's researches were in obedience to the command of Pope Leo XIII in his encyclical Aeterni Patris that called for Thomistic renewal and sparked off a vigorous program of vetera novis augere et perficere.

Reflecting later on his efforts to promote this program, Lonergan says:

After spending years reaching up to the mind of Aquinas, I came to a twofold conclusion. On the one hand, that reaching had changed

8. Documents, 80.
9. "Challenges," Essay 1, pp. 4-6, secs. 1.3 to 1.3.9.
me profoundly. On the other hand, that change was the essential benefit. For not only did it make me capable of grasping what, in the light of my conclusions, the vetera really were, but also opened challenging vistas on what the nova could be.\(^\text{12}\)

To be precise, only the nova that are in harmony with the vetera can lead to the enrichment desired by Leo XIII. For the mind of Aquinas functioned as an organon\(^\text{13}\) searching for harmony. In reaching up to this mind, Lonergan came to the conclusion that atheists who sense this harmony in their hearts will eventually discover God with their minds. Their fidelity to their empirical method will make it easier for them to broaden their scientific knowledge and to extrapolate their immanent knowledge to transcendent knowledge. For their desire to understand their empirical data, if unrestricted by bias, has a momentum that will enable them to transcend the limitations of their immanent knowledge.

**TRANSCENDENT KNOWLEDGE**

Transcendent knowledge is the topic of the last two chapters of Lonergan’s monumental work *Insight*: The materials needed in these two chapters are meticulously assembled in eighteen preparatory chapters analyzing the insights of scientists and philosophers and bringing out the fundamental features of their cognitional process. Of these, the first five chapters delve deeply into the cognitional processes of eminent mathematicians, physicists, chemists and biologists of modern times to bring out the canons of their empirical method.

Some other scientists allege technical difficulties about standardizing the data of consciousness for use in empirical method, but Lonergan reminds the reader that:

\[\ldots\] the business of the scientist is not to allege difficulties as excuses but to overcome them, and neither objectivity in the sense of

12. Ibid. 769.
verification nor the principle of empiricism can be advanced as reasons for ignoring the data of consciousness . . .

After analyzing difficulties that have arisen in the progress of mathematics and empirical sciences like physics, behaviorist psychology and Durkheiman sociology, and after indicating the critical standpoint adopted by scientists in dropping the nineteenth century outlook on mechanist determinism in favor of emergent probability, this very enriching paragraph continues:

In other words, human science cannot be merely empirical; it has to be critical; to reach a critical standpoint, it has to be normative. But people looking for easy tasks had best renounce any ambition to be scientists . . .¹⁴

For Lonergan, such technical difficulties can be overcome by greater fidelity to the empirical principle consistent with the thinking of “men of great breadth of mind” as said by Paul VI of the atheists that he was entrusting to the Jesuits. These are worthy of the apostolic ministrations of GC 31, GC 32 and GC 33.

IMPATIENCE WITH MEDIOCRITY

And of GC 34. More so than ever. Why? For two reasons. In the first place, the proliferation of technological marvels like computers and space satellites has enshrined science in the hearts of people and downgraded religiosity among influential intellectuals. Even though these constitute only a small circle, their impatience with the mediocrity of popular religiosity is becoming more pronounced.

More serious is the second reason. With the collapse of atheistic communism, atheistic capitalism feels a greater need to confront the mediocrity of outmoded ways of thinking. And in more subtle and more efficient ways. Atheistic capitalism will not repeat the fatal mistake made by communism of openly declaring its atheism and thus inviting opposition. It is more

¹⁴. Ibid. 260-61.
effective when perceived as impartiality between organized religions or when veiled with church attendance and generous alms. It can only be detected in its quiet disregard of ancient taboos like "thou shalt not kill" and "thou shalt not steal." Therein lurks its atheism, systematic yet tactful. It seeks oligarchic influence over the global economy and over the power to determine the world's standard of living. And dying. Its influence over market dynamics and its finely-tuned velocities and accelerations of payments for vital loans lead to starvation of marginal communities in the Third World or rob them of the fruits of earth and human labor while maximizing capital accumulation.

To prioritize capital accumulation over human lives is essentially unjust in theistic morality. The link between capital accumulation and the unjust macroeconomic structure of today is not expressed by Lonergan precisely in those terms, for it is a statistical link in a series of schemes of emergent probability, but it can be read between the mathematical lines in his circulation analysis.15 The debt problems of the Third World today reveal structural flaws, but these are seen by intellectual atheists merely as chance dysfunctions or esthetic imperfections. They are not seen as predictable consequences of human science that tries to be empirical without being normative, consequences that educators have so far failed to communicate effectively to scientists.

EDUCATOR'S ROLE: NO EASY TASK

In turn, this failure in communication is clearly a consequence of the fragmentation and overspecialization of departments in our universities today. From these, there follows the erroneous perception that, since atheists are "limited to a few intellectual circles,"16 therefore their influence is minimal. This perception may flow from the fear that scientific dialogue with intellectual

atheists is not an easy task. The task is not easy mainly for two reasons. First, intellectual atheism is not an “organized unbelief”\(^\text{17}\); it is a presupposition that has not yet been fully examined in the context of scientific cognition. Second, it is no easy task to understand Lonergan’s “Macroeconomics and the Dialectic of History.”\(^\text{18}\) People looking for easy tasks had best renounce any vain ambition to be educators. Educators who fail to come to a critical understanding of intellectual atheism and its predictable consequences will fail to permeate all the accepted forms of our apostolate with this understanding.

PROPOSAL

In the face of this chain of failures of educators regarding our fourth vow of obedience, a remedial response may be initiated by preparing enough lecturers to give university courses in Lonergan’s *Insight* and *Method in Theology*, and by so improving interdepartmental sharing that specializations in the natural and human sciences especially economics will include Lonergan’s contributions to these specialties.

Lonergan’s appropriation of a generalized empirical method not only led to the enrichment of the old with the new but also initiated an enrichment of the new with the old. The horizon of experience of modern intellectuals is largely restricted to the new. But if sharing in this mutual enrichment can be facilitated by broadening horizons of old and new, the sharing can become an esthetic experience for all concerned and can lead to the dialogue that we need to fulfill our fourth vow of obedience.

\(^{17}\) “Challenges,” Essay 4, p. 3, sec. 4.1.8.(a). The atheism of the Soviet and Eastern bloc was structured not intellectually but perhaps politically or socially.

\(^{18}\) This is the title of Lonergan’s lectures in the theology department of Boston College in 1980-83.