"Intentionality analysis" is the new name given by Lonergan to an old but insufficiently appropriated method of theologizing. Its aim is religious conversion defined as the state of "being in love with God." Its basic terms and relations are derived, not from medieval metaphysics, but from a "critical" metaphysics; the criterion here is that the terms refer to the operations of human cognitional process and the relations link these operations to one another. All other terms and relations not so derived are eliminated, thus avoiding "the vast arid wastes of theological controversy."  

In the study of unfamiliar signs of the times, theologians face the danger of getting lost in arid wastes of controversy and may need to shift from medieval metaphysics to intentionality analysis. As with so many other shifts during the decades after the Second Vatican Council, the process of shifting to intentionality analysis may involve risks of anarchy. But what is anarchy?


Ellul’s booklet is tantalizing and disturbing. But it can be misunderstood. In fact this reviewer often fell in and out of camouflaged traps even in the second reading. The camouflages are literary devices that challenge conventional attitudes with shock techniques. But meticulous re-readings of sentences and paragraphs in a self-correcting circle eventually reveal Ellul’s deeper meanings.

For example, one tantalizing paragraph on p. 5 hints at Christian flirtation with Stalinist communism in 1945 and a similar tendency “in the so-called liberation theologies” of the 1970s. Does he cite these as examples of the anarchy he is endorsing? A reader remains in doubtful suspense unless he initially assumes that Ellul is motivated by love in stirring up comfortable consciences to awareness of the real dangers of a loveless world where dominant ideologies and craven cowardice frustrate Christ’s invitation to freedom. This assumption is subsequently verified in Part I consisting of about 30 pages replete with passages emphasizing love: that “biblically, love is the way,” that “God is love,” that “the being of God is love,” that we were “created to love,” that God “waits to be loved by this creature [man].”

In Part II, Ellul devotes about 40 pages to his personal exegesis of passages from the Old and New Testaments interpreted to refute a belief that the bible is against anarchism: the bible is against an “established” order whose moment for non-violent de-stabilization has come if love is to be the way. This is biblical anarchy.

These two parts are capped by 17 pages entitled “Appendixes” that are presented in support of Ellul’s hermeneutics with excerpts from Karl Barth (1919), Alphonse Maillot (1984), and an obscure priest-anarchist named Adrien Duchosal.

In his 3-page conclusion, Ellul exhorts Christians all over the world to non-violent resistance against today’s dominant ideologies by renouncing the sovereignty of state nationalisms.

Ellul directs this anarchist movement against a great many ideologies. But he ignores one particular ideology spiritually eroding the post-Christian West: this reviewer is disturbed by one particular passage on p. 43 where Ellul, intentionally putting important words in parentheses, says:
Finally, I also reject totally the well-known apparitions (of the Virgin or of angels) which have nothing whatever to do with what the Bible teaches us about God’s action.

WHAT THE BIBLE TEACHES

This is equivalently saying that the well-known Marian messages reported at Medjugorje “have nothing whatever to do with what the Bible teaches us about God’s action.” Does Ellul really believe this? Even without considering documentary evidence? If so, he appears to be in blind conformity with an “established” order. O’Carroll’s report of the messages of Medjugorje may yet disestablish this order and he can thus be called an “anarchist” in Ellul’s precise sense and with great authenticity.

What are the Medjugorje messages? About 170 of them are accurately documented in O’Carroll’s book. They have everything to do with what the bible teaches us about God’s action: love and forgiveness, peace and reconciliation, prayer and penance, faith and hope, joy and praise. They are reminders of biblical teachings, not verbally transliterated but movingly dramatized in the throbs of a maternal heart. O’Carroll testifies (on p. 13) that the apparitions giving these messages “have sparked off a spiritual revolution in the Medjugorje parish.” He also quotes (on p. 147) the observation of Archbishop Franic that “Our Lady is bringing us closer, uniting us with our brothers from the Orthodox Church, Moslems, and even our brothers who are Marxists.” Surely such moving events by themselves must have promoted the sales of the first three editions of the book and now amply justify this fourth edition.

POLEMICS

Unfortunately, the events are not well contextualized theologically. Instead of an intentionality analysis that emphasizes religious conversion, a reader finds too much polemics about matters of lesser relevance. The result is a preponderance of vast arid wastes of controversy. Far too much space is wasted on controversies about people’s juridical authority, good will, credulity, encephalograms, ecstasy, and scientific hypotheses. One
dissenting bishop is suspected of paranoia but this may be a symptom of his frustrated anarchism against the established academe. Statements from psychology are considered as infallibly true or false. Electrical impulses in recording gadgets are presented as valid or invalid proofs of the supernatural. With all due regard for the academic stature of the mariologists and scientists cited, too much academic and controversial speculation can weaken an intentionality towards the state of being in love with God. This is the state that serious readers are seeking.

RECOMMENDATION

Readers who find pleasure in medievalist polemics and who happen to read these two books will fail to integrate their message for theologians. More serious readers would prefer to read only the Marian messages and not the arid wastes of controversy in O’Carroll’s book and would wish that in a future edition, pp. 73 to 157, 200 to 208, and 237 to 253, will not be reprinted unless these are selectively digested in a spirit of love. Or sacrificed in a ritual of anarchy.