

Prof. Dr. **Frederick G. Lawrence**, Boston College, USA

Frederick G. Lawrence is Professor of systematic theology at Boston College. Having completed his doctoral dissertation in 1975 at the University of Basel on the hermeneutic thought of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Bernard Lonergan, each of whom were outstanding interpreters and theorists of hermeneutics, much of his writing has been centered on both interpreting and on hermeneutics, especially as regards theological issues. Because of (1) Jürgen Habermas's *praxis*-oriented interactions with Gadamer, (2) Johann Baptist Metz's shift from transcendental to political theology, and (3) Leo Strauss (also a colleague and friend of Gadamer) on the "theologico-political problematic," he has also been engaged with theology in a political mode (though not in the vein of Carl Schmitt!).

A number of Lawrence's influential writings on these themes are collected in the volume [*The Fragility of Consciousness: Faith, Reason and the Human Good*](#) (University of Toronto Press, 2017). These essays are the product of a long and interdisciplinary engagement with theology and hermeneutic philosophy, which has spawned over a hundred articles, translations, and edited volumes. Lawrence's writings cover a wide array of topics and concerns and range from close interpretative studies of individual philosophers and theologians to nuanced, systematic treatments of political theology, historical consciousness, trinitarian doctrine, and economic systems.

Lawrence's work has proved particularly influential in two areas. First, his writings have played a prominent role in fostering the study of the thought of Bernard Lonergan, his former teacher and later colleague at Boston College. Lawrence has gained a national and international reputation as among the most insightful and authoritative interpreters of Lonergan's philosophical and theological writings, and his work has helped to cement Lonergan's legacy in twentieth-century Catholic thought. Beyond his own scholarly contributions, Lawrence has engaged in ongoing collaborative efforts throughout his career to helping understand and develop Lonergan's thought through the organization of annual workshops, regular conferences, edited volumes, and teaching initiatives. Second, Lawrence has developed a reputation outside the circles of Lonergan studies as an incisive and discerning reader of twentieth-century continental philosophy and hermeneutics. Beyond his writings on Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Jürgen Habermas, and Paul Ricoeur, he also has written detailed studies on pivotal continental thinkers too often neglected in wider discussions of philosophical hermeneutics, such as Leo Strauss, Eric Voegelin, and René Girard. Furthermore, he has provided standard translations of several significant works by Gadamer, Habermas, and others.

Lawrence's unique approach to philosophical and theological hermeneutics reflects the influences of three distinct academic contexts: Rome, Basel, and Boston. Lawrence studied with

Lonergan at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome from 1963 to 1966, after the publication of Lonergan's *Insight* (1957), and during the time, he was developing many of the ideas that would find mature expression in *Method in Theology* (1972). Lawrence recognized early on the promise of Lonergan's thinking for re-evaluating the Catholic Church's complex relationship to modernity and for meeting the challenge of the emerging historical consciousness within Catholic theology. Following these studies, Lawrence turned his attention to early twentieth-century continental philosophy and to Gadamer's landmark work in philosophical hermeneutics, which would become the focus of his subsequent doctoral studies at the University of Basel, culminating in a dissertation examining the hermeneutic circle in Lonergan and Gadamer. Since beginning his career at Boston College in 1971, Lawrence has worked consistently to bring these two influences together. And indeed, for a time, and partly through Lawrence's invitation, Gadamer and Lonergan worked as colleagues at Boston College. Lonergan taught in Boston College's theology department from 1975 to 1983. Following his retirement from the University of Heidelberg in 1968, Gadamer developed a close association with Boston College and served as a regular visiting faculty from 1974 to 1986.

In his own teaching and scholarship, Lawrence has been both a mainstay of Lonergan studies and an influential voice in Boston College's Departments of Theology and Philosophy. In 1974, he founded and coordinated the annual Lonergan Workshop, now in its fifth decade. Since this time, he has also served as editor of the [*Lonergan Workshop Journal*](#), as well as of several supplemental volumes of essays treating the works of Gadamer, Voegelin, and Johann Baptist Metz. In addition, he has directed dozens of dissertations in theological hermeneutic and systematic and philosophical theology, and he has played a principal role in shaping the curriculum of Boston College's Perspectives Program, an interdisciplinary honors program that introduces undergraduate students to central theological, philosophical, and political writings in the Great Books tradition.

Lawrence continues to teach graduate courses on "Theology as Hermeneutical" and "Theology as Political," along with foundational theology courses such as "On the Trinity." He is now working on a book on political theology that relies heavily on Gadamer's writings on Plato and Aristotle and the implications of Lonergan's theological writings and his work on both the human good and economics.