

Religious Experience and Theology: Rahner and Lonergan Compared

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This paper represents another contribution to the process of our interdisciplinary group of Gregorian professors studying the theme: “Ignatian Spirituality and Transcendental Method.” Last year we reflected on the Jesuit, Joseph Maréchal, who can be considered the founder of this tendency, or movement, in theology and this year we reflect on his most famous student, Karl Rahner. As I understand it, a guiding intuition of our studies is threefold: first, to note how many Jesuits in the first half of the twentieth century can be broadly understood as “transcendental Thomists”; second to investigate if a reason for this might not be explained by the compatibility of this transcendental approach to the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius; and, thirdly, to ask if there might not be insights to be gained by this reflection that could promote a renewal of interest in a broadly transcendental Thomist approach to theology and spirituality today. In parenthesis, I might add that studying the links between Ignatian spirituality and theology takes on a new importance now that there is a Jesuit Pope, Francis, who clearly draws on the Ignatian heritage in much of what he says and does.

I approach these (admittedly complex) questions with a limited expertise. I am a specialist in the thought of Bernard Lonergan, and tend toward pastoral-theological interests in applying his thought. Lonergan felt a friendship with and admiration for the many of his fellow Jesuits who could be described as transcendental Thomists. This contributed to his accepting, with some reluctance, to accept the description as applying to him. However, he believed that his thinking differed in some key respects from most other members of this group. Within our study group, my competence lies in comparing Lonergan with whoever we are studying in a given year, and at times stressing the challenge that Lonergan would pose to their positions. Last year my contribution was primarily a philosophical comparison of Maréchal and Lonergan. There, I suggested that while the young Lonergan was significantly influenced by Maréchal, he proceeded to develop these ideas in significantly new directions as well as to correct some of them. In this present paper, I note that Rahner is more influenced by Maréchal than was

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Loneragan and suggest that some key criticisms of Maréchal apply also to him. However, for much of what follows I take a less “corrective” approach and find much to affirm in the thought of Rahner. Also, noting that this article appears in a journal on Ignatian spirituality, I emphasise how a study of both Rahner and Lonergan confirm the hypothesis of our study group that the spirituality of St. Ignatius of Loyola was influential in encouraging them to take this, introspective, approach to Thomist studies.

1. Karl Rahner, Ignatius of Loyola, and Theology

The question posed by our study group converges nicely with themes addressed by the English Jesuit, Philip Endean, in his book, *Karl Rahner and Ignatian Spirituality*. Endean notes that towards the end of his life, Rahner increasingly “claimed that Ignatius was the most significant source of his theology.” Endean submits this claim to hard-headed scrutiny and suggest that, while Rahner’s claim needs to be qualified in various respects, “links between Rahner’s theology and Ignatian spirituality are genuine and distinctive.”¹ He then devotes most of his book to responding to Rahner’s request and studying Rahner’s life’s work though the interpretive key of Ignatian spirituality.

An Interpretation After the Event?

Endean begins his investigation of this theme by conducting a “deconstruction” of Rahner’s claims concerning the importance of Ignatian spirituality in Rahner’s thinking.² He first notes that Rahner did not actually write much about Ignatian spirituality and that he only began to make his claims about the Ignatian aspect of his theology when he was already retired and looking back on his earlier work.³ Endean adds that during Rahner’s years of formation for the priesthood, the manner in which he was introduced to the *Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius* was not an inspiring one, their having been co-opted by the abstract and conceptual mentality of “baroque scholasticism.” He notes that, in the years leading up to Vatican II, thinking about how to direct the *Spiritual Exercises* would undergo development in much the same way as a movement of *nouvelle théologie* would emerge that attempted to renew theology. He suggests that as one of the innovators in both these areas of change, Rahner was by no means drawing exclusively on the thought of Ignatius of Loyola in his early writings.

¹ Philip Endean, *Karl Rahner and Ignatian Spirituality* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001), 4-5.

Amongst other studies of Ignatian spirituality that make reference to Rahner a work by his former doctoral student, Harvey Egan S.J., *The Spiritual Exercises And The Ignatian Mystical Horizon* (St. Louis, The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1976).

² Endean, Chapter 1, “Fragments, Foundations, and Bearings.”

³ Endean (13), states that, given Rahner’s limited writings on this issue, his main source in emphasizing Rahner’s Ignatian perspective is Rahner’s “1978 testament,” “Ignatius of Loyola Speaks to a Modern Jesuit,” in *Ignatius of Loyola*, ed. Paul Imhof, trans. Rosaleen Ockenden (London, Collins, 1979), 11-38.

As a last step in his biographical study, Endean notes the time of his retirement Rahner was a famous figure and the object of much commentary, both favourable and unfavourable. He suggests that, in some respects, Rahner's claim to be influenced by Ignatius was a response to this commentary. On the side of Rahner's critics, some had suggested that he was too dependent on the transcendental philosophy of Kant. Endean suggests that Rahner's appeal to Ignatius was, at least in part, an effort to explain that his use of Kant was not central to his thought and that his broad intention in inviting a "turn to the subject" was an effort to articulate a confidence in how God works within human experience and how attending to this can help decision-making that promotes the Kingdom of God in history – issues that were far from the concern of Kant. Turning to those commentators who defended Rahner, Endean suggests that some of these helped Rahner to understand his own work better. One such commentator, Karl Lehmann, had suggested that "an 'experience of grace' might be the theme integrating Rahner's bewilderingly diverse theological work," and another, Klaus Peter Fischer, had suggested that that such an experience "first became available – and probably nameable also – for Rahner within the framework an through the method of the Ignatian spirituality, in particular through the Exercises."⁴

Having made all these qualifications, Endean nevertheless devotes his book to suggesting that "a cohesive, unitary explanation of how Rahner's overall achievement can fairly be described as Ignatian." However, he does this by employing a rather strong interpretive hand of his own in what he describes as a "constructive interpretation" that attempts "to make explicit the latent connections between different Rahnerian statements."⁵

The Ignatian Key to Interpreting Rahner

Endean introduces the thought of Rahner by suggesting that Rahner, especially as a young man, was deeply motivated to help theology emerge from an abstract formulations of "baroque neo-scholasticism," which made little appeal to experience and had little attraction for the modern person, who was much influenced by an "existentialist" approach to life. He notes that in a search for a more experiential approach to theology, one part of the strategy of Rahner was to study the thought of philosophers such as Martin Heidegger; however, he notes that another strategy was to follow the principle of *ressourcement* – that would have such an influence on Vatican II – and to engage in a careful study of pre-scholastic theologians.

Among those theologians who Rahner studied most were the Church fathers Gregory of Nyssa and Evagrius, who spoke much of the workings of the Holy Spirit in the human soul. Next, Rahner studied the thought of St. Bonaventure who, while he lived at the same time as Thomas Aquinas, drew on a monastic tradition of theology, different from the university (scholastic) environment and spoke much about the spiritual life. From Bonaventure, Rahner developed a notion of how individuals can enjoy an "imme-

⁴ Endean, 5.

diate experience of God,” an experience described as “a spiritual touch.” However, Rahner noted that, for the most part, Bonaventure resembled the neo-scholastics in suggesting that only an elite few could experience a mystical intimacy with God.⁶ To pursue this matter further, Rahner would have to turn to St. Ignatius of Loyola.

Endean traces how, from the 1930’s onwards, Rahner studied newly published and edited Jesuit documents, many of them produced by his older brother and fellow Jesuit, Hugo. He suggests that both Hugo and Karl noted with fascination the life and writings of Jerónimo Nadal, an assistant of Ignatius who was charged with travelling around Europe and instructing the rapidly expanding number of Jesuits in the identity of their new religious order. Nadal proclaimed principles such as “finding God in all things,” and “being contemplative in action.” However, Endean suggests that, in the end, it was a principle from St. Ignatius himself, stated in the *Spiritual Exercises*, that would form the basis of the theological outlook of Karl: “consolation without previous cause.”

In exploring this notion, Karl Rahner notes how Ignatius instructs the director of the *Exercises* to help the retreatant to recognize swings in their affective responses to prayer, inviting them to distinguish between “desolation” which represents temptation by the “Enemy of Human Nature” and “consolation” which represents a time when we are securely under the influence of the Holy spirit. Here Ignatius proposes a fundamental doctrine of his spirituality: that God allows the soul to experience such “spiritual warfare” but that by means of a schooling in “discernment of spirits” God allows us to “make transcendence thematic”; he adds that this thematization allows us to recognize when we are in consolation and to have confidence when we are in such a state of mind we can trust the decisions we make are expressions of the will of God.⁷ Endean summarizes Rahner’s understanding of Ignatius as suggesting that the kind of “spiritual touch” to which Bonaventure adverted is now explained as being available to all individuals.

Endean next outlines how Rahner carries this spiritual intuition to the heart of his theology, employing the philosophical tools of transcendental Thomism, based on the example of Joseph Maréchal.⁸ He suggests that an important philosophical guide for Rahner here was the Austrian Jesuit Emerich Coreth who proposed a “transcendental” alternative to the version of Aristotelian metaphysics employed in neo-scholasticism. Coreth notes that neo-scholastics claim to follow Aquinas in employing Aristotelian metaphysics, which seeks to explain being in terms of the permanent causes: efficient, formal, material, and final. He then notes how they exhibit their lack of regard for human experience by speaking of causes strictly in terms of the objects in the world, paying little attention to what Aquinas called the “psychology of the soul.” By contrast,

⁵ Endean, 135.

⁶ Endean, 22-31.

⁷ See Endean, Chapter 5, “Transcendence Becoming Thematic.”

⁸ Rahner’s own account of his overall philosophical and theological vision is expounded *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity* (London, Darton Longman & Todd, 1978 [translation of original German edition of 1976]). This section amplifies Endean’s account of Rahner’s transcendental Thomism with direct reference to that work.

Coreth suggests that a notion of formal causation can open the whole world of subjective experience to philosophical analysis. This could be done by considering the mind as representing a “formal cause” which combines with the material cause and formal causes present in worldly object to produce an act of knowledge. Endean outlines Coreth’s position as follows: “transcendental philosophy ... applies the term (formal cause) not only to what is known but also to the knower... The formal object ... is not merely a reality of what confronts us ... but also of the knower’s ‘outward look.’”⁹

Endean suggests that Rahner next turns to the Belgian Jesuit, Joseph Maréchal, to explore further the nature of this “formal causality” within consciousness. Maréchal employs a certain reading of Aquinas to suggest that all acts of judgment occur by means of an “*a priori* horizon” that accompanies all such acts. He suggests that when we think about this formal structure of our consciousness activities, i.e. that through which we come to know objects, we can recognize that there are some remarkable “conditions of possibility” of such knowing: “To the extent that we recognize every individual as something which is, we are asking about the being of the things which are. We are pursuing metaphysics.”¹⁰ He suggests that such a pursuit of being implies that we naturally employ a “transcendental intending” that is implicit in all acts of knowing.¹¹

Endean next traces how Rahner shifts from philosophy to theology. Rahner suggests that the transcendental intending involved in each act of knowing constitutes an “an inner openness” for a second and more direct revelation of God to us.¹² This revelation is “supernatural” and involves the offer made directly by God within the consciousness of each individual of a loving gift of God’s-self. Rahner calls this experience a “supernatural existential” because, as an offer, it is a constant of human existence, i.e. it is found in all historical ages and all cultures-religions. He next suggests that if accepted, God himself transforms the consciousness of the individual who has accepted his offer of love. Employing the metaphysics of formal causation in subjectivity, he suggests that God himself becomes the “quasi-formal cause” of the subject. He suggests that the term “quasi-” protects two insights: first that only in the incarnation was God, in the form of Jesus of Nazareth, the formal cause of the consciousness of a human being; secondly, nevertheless God’s grace for other human beings is not something abstract or notional but, rather, is experienced as a “true, ontological communication” of God.¹³

Unresolved Questions

Endean explains that, for all the richness of Rahner’s theology, difficulties arise in relating his many comments on the transcendental dimension of human reality with what he wants to claim for the categorical, or historical, claims of Christianity. Indeed, he suggests out that Rahner himself acknowledged that this problem and invited younger theologians to improve on his efforts:

⁹ Endean, 37.

¹⁰ Endean, 51.

¹¹ Endean, 53; see also Rahner, *Foundations*, 33-35.

«In his last years, Karl Rahner would often speak of the permanent tension in his theology arising from its two different starting-points: the historical and the transcendental. He did not know how they fit together... Rahner then offers a challenge ... “Given this, I would say to you, ‘go ahead and make all these charges against me. I accept them, if they are understood in the sense I have stated. But you must do more: do the job yourselves, better!’”»¹⁴

I suggest that identifying a philosophical problem of “two starting points” to be present in Rahner’s thought creates problems for Endean’s account of this theologian. By stressing the rootedness of Rahner’s thought in Ignatian spirituality Endean has played down suggestions that that one can interpret Rahner from the basis of the philosophical system he adopts. In fact, he acknowledges that many standard interpretations of Rahner do just this. He suggests that such interpretations tend to employ Rahner’s early works, *Spirit in the World* and *Hearers of the Word* as keys to interpreting his later works, by contrast with his approach, which employs Rahner’s later declarations concerning Ignatian spirituality to interpret his earlier work. He suggests that it is a mistake to employ this philosophical key and that it leads some interpreters to conclude that Rahner’s work is “irredeemably rationalist.”¹⁵ By contrast, he suggests that the approach that uses Ignatian spirituality as key is both more respectful of Rahner’s own wishes and does justice to many of the articles that Rahner wrote that are more spiritual in tone.

However, it seems to me that two problems emerge with Endean’s argument. One is that, as he also acknowledges, many of those who use a philosophical key of interpretation for Rahner do not limit themselves to his early works to interpret the later, but rather claim ample evidence of Rahner’s use of a clear philosophical system in his major work *Foundations of the Faith*, which he wrote at the age of 72. For example, Jack Arthur Bonsor in, *Rahner, Heidegger and Truth*, proposes that Rahner’s use of Heidegger provides an interpretive key to Rahner’s work. While suggesting that criticisms of Rahner should not detract from the depth and brilliance of what he achieved,” he nevertheless concludes, “we have raised some questions of the adequacy of Rahner’s notion of Christian truth resulting from the Heideggerian elements of his thought.”¹⁶

A second problem in Endean’s approach is that he himself acknowledges that interpreting Rahner through the lens of Ignatian spirituality requires the employing of a pronounced “constructive” hand on the part of the interpreter: “in order to make explicit it the latent connections between different Rahnerian statements.”¹⁷ However, when undertaking this exercise, Endean himself makes appeal to philosophers, such as Ludwig Wittgenstein, who represent a British linguistic-philosophical tradition with which Rahner was not familiar.¹⁸

¹² Endean, 50.

¹³ Endean, 45.

¹⁴ Endean, 150.

¹⁵ Endean, 7, footnote 18.

¹⁶ Jack Arthur Bonsor, *Rahner, Heidegger and Truth* (Lanham, MD., University Press of America, 1987).

¹⁷ Endean, 134.

¹⁸ See Endean section, “Experience, Language, and Concepts,” 164-172.

In the end, I cannot claim a sufficient competence in the thought of Rahner to offer a direct judgment on this matter. However, my hunch is that Endean's analysis leaves somewhat unresolved the question of just how philosophy relates to theology, both in Rahner's thought and with regard to his own method. At any rate, I now note that a number of students of Bernard Lonergan who have tried to engage with the thought of Rahner tend to employ Rahner's philosophy as a key to interpreting him and do, just as Endean notes, criticize rationalist tendencies in him. In fact, a considerable literature has emerged that compares Rahner and Lonergan, but I advert to just one author, Louis Roy, to indicate the broad lines of criticism that is common to other Lonergan scholars.

Roy suggests that the disjuncture between the transcendental and categorial dimensions of Rahner's is indeed a problem. He also suggests that Rahnerian studies sometimes exhibit the principle that more subtle inconsistencies in the master become amplified in his students. He finds this principle demonstrated in the manner in which students of Rahner sometimes employ dualistic, or "gnostic" readings of Rahner's spirituality. Louis Roy suggests that Rahner's notion of grace as "quasi-formal causality" is problematic, that it fails to resolve this disjuncture, and that it leads, already in Rahner, to a "moderate anti-intellectualism and anti-dogmatism" that produces weaknesses in theological positions on the doctrine of God, an explanation of the beatific vision, Trinitarian theology, and an understanding of pluralism of theology. Roy then suggests that such ambiguities can result "in the minds of the Rahnerians of the left, a green light for an unbridled creativity accompanied by a more pronounced anti-dogmatism."¹⁹

However, it should be stressed that most Lonergan-based criticisms of Rahner claim to be friendly ones. One commentator compares Rahner to "a top class tennis player who, however, depends too much on a strong serve and is weak on some groundstrokes."²⁰ Such commentators claim that Lonergan can supplement Rahner's account of the transcendental structure of consciousness by attending to the importance of the act of "insight." They suggest that Lonergan's account of intellectual conversion demonstrates how "authentic subjectivity leads to objectivity" and so overcomes dichotomies between "transcendental" and "categorial" starting points. Finally, reflecting on both the similarities and differences of Rahner and Lonergan, I suggest that Lonergan's complimenting and correcting of Rahner can also help a transcendental Thomism be in deeper continuity with the *Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*.

¹⁹ Louis Roy, O.P., "Rahner's Epistemology and its Implications for Theology," in *Lonergan and Loyola: "I will Be Propitious to You in Rome,"* Lonergan Workshop, Volume 22 (Boston, Boston College, 2011), 422-439.

²⁰ Andrew Beards, *Insight and Analysis: Essays in Applying Lonergan's Thought* (London, Continuum, 2010), Introduction.

2. Bernard Lonergan: a Complementary and Corrective Vision

When one compares the life and work of Karl Rahner with that of Bernard Lonergan striking similarities become apparent, as do more subtle contrasts.²¹

Comparisons With Rahner

Similarities between these two Jesuits include the following: both shared the same years of birth and death: 1904, 1984; both reacted against the particular Jesuit version of baroque scholasticism identified with the thought of Francisco Suarez; both made an appeal to experience in theology and employed the thought of Joseph Maréchal; each was aware of and admiring of the work of the other; and, finally, both acknowledged toward the end of their lives that their thought, all along, had been closer to the vision of Ignatius of Loyola than they had always been consciously aware of. In the case of Lonergan, this last point needs explaining.

In the late 1970's Lonergan wrote about how he had recently become aware of how close his thought was to that of St. Ignatius of Loyola, especially as interpreted by Rahner. He describes how when, early in his life he had turned to a variety of wisdom-figures to help develop an alternative to Suarezianism, he had not considered Ignatius of Loyola as one of these. Rather, he turned to figures such as John Henry Newman and, eventually, to Thomas Aquinas, partly under the guidance of Joseph Maréchal. He described an "eleven year apprenticeship to Thomas Aquinas," beginning with a doctoral dissertation on Aquinas's theology of grace and concluding with in a series of articles on the cognitional theory of Aquinas, that would be published as, *Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas*.²² He adds that he employed this study as a platform for articulating his own cognitional theory, epistemology, and metaphysics in *Insight* (1954), and, later, for articulating a proposal for theological method in, *Method in Theology* (1972). He explains that central to his mature work is an invitation to his readers to undertake a series of three conversions: "intellectual conversion," "moral conversion," and "religious conversion." He then explains that it was only after having articulated these notions that he became aware of convergences between his thought and that of Ignatius of Loyola.

Lonergan describes how, in the early 1970's, he listened to a talk given by a Jesuit who had been a doctoral student of Karl Rahner, Harvey Egan, entitled "Consolation Without Cause." He describes his amazement at discovering how many links there were between the *Spiritual Exercises* and his own thought. Referring to the "jargon terms" of Ignatian spirituality he stated:

²¹ Sources for studying Lonergan's intellectual biography include Richard M. Liddy, *Transforming Light: Intellectual Conversion in the Early Lonergan* (Collegeville, MN, The Liturgical Press, 1993); Frederick Crowe, *Lonergan* (Collegeville, MN, The Liturgical Press, 1992); Gerard Whelan, *Redeeming History: Social Concern in Bernard Lonergan and Robert Doran* (Rome, G&B Press, 2013).

²² Bernard Lonergan, *Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas*, edited by Frederick Crowe and Robert M. Doran, Volume Two, *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1997).

«I had been hearing those words since 1922 at the annual retreats made by Jesuits preparing for the priesthood. They occur in St. Ignatius's 'Rules for the Discernment in the Second Week of the Exercises.' But now, after fifty-three years, I began for the first time to grasp what they meant. What had intervened was what Rahner describes as the anthropological turn, the turn from metaphysical objects to conscious subjects... I was seeing that "consolation" and "desolation" named opposite answers to the question, How do you feel when you pray? ... I was hearing that my own work on operative grace in St. Thomas ... brought to light a positive expression of what was meant by Ignatius when [he] spoke of "consolation without a previous cause."»²³

Unlike Rahner, Lonergan did not invite students of his thought to interpret the writings of his previous years to interpret his work through the lens of Ignatian spirituality. Nevertheless, the parallels with Rahner's late emphasis on the convergences of his thought with that of St. Ignatius are striking.²⁴

Having explained convergences, I now identify some key differences. One difference is that from a young age Lonergan exhibited a concern with social-ethics and the academic discipline of economics. This social concern was provoked by the sense of scandal that the young Rahner had felt when he witnessed the poverty caused by the Great Depression in his home-city of Montreal from 1930 onwards. This gave birth to a life-long concern in Lonergan to help the Church think-through how it could become an actor in modern history in such a way as to help relieve the lot of the poor. This concern took on two immediate expressions: the first was to develop an epistemological and metaphysics that could produce a "heuristic theory of history"; the second, was to work at developing an improve economic theory so as to help economists and governments avoid the mistakes that had led to the Wall Street crash of 1929.

If these concerns seem to be distant from the spiritual and transcendental interests of Rahner, other developments in Lonergan's thought exhibit convergence. Increasingly, Lonergan recognized that what he wanted to propose in the realm of applied, social-ethical, ideas would never be accepted unless people could be persuaded to distance themselves from certain biased philosophical notions that prevailed in both modern

²³ Written by Lonergan in a letter of recommendation for academic promotion for Harvey Egan, reproduced in "Bernard Lonergan to Thomas O'Malley," in *Method: Journal of Lonergan Studies*, Volume 20, Number 1, 2002, page 81-2. This locating of the insight into Ignatian spirituality to 1975 seems somewhat over-stated, because already in 1972 Lonergan had written "(Religious conversion) corresponds to St. Ignatius Loyola's consolation that has no cause, as expounded by Rahner" (*Method in Theology* [Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1972], 106). See also, "An Interview with Fr. Bernard Lonergan S.J.," in Bernard Lonergan, *A Second Collection* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1974), 209-230.

²⁴ This retrospective acknowledgment of links to themes from Ignatian spirituality encourages the suggestion that interpreters should not take at face-value the sharp criticism levelled by both Lonergan and Rahner on their Jesuit spiritual "formators." One can suggest that was some kind of "osmosis" at work whereby the genuine spirit of St. Ignatius was being communicated to both of these young men in spite of the obscuring influence of neo-scholastic abstractions (C.f. Endean, 3-4; and an interview with Lonergan in *Caring about meaning: Patterns in the Life of Bernard Lonergan*, editors, Pierrot Lambert, et al. [Montreal, Thomas More Institute, 1982], 42, 144-49).

secular and ecclesiastical culture. This conviction led him to make a decision, related to a kind of mid-life crisis, to devote his life to foundational questions in philosophy and theological method.²⁵ This decision would result in him becoming well-known for *Insight* (1954) and *Method in Theology* (1972). A number of Lonergan scholars have compared the thought of Lonergan and Rahner and most of these suggests that already in his early work on Aquinas, key differences were emerging.

A Less “Transcendental” Interpretation of Aquinas

Lonergan’s interest in Aquinas was partly prompted by his encounter with Joseph Maréchal who helped him to recognize that “the current interpretation of St. Thomas is a consistent misinterpretation.” However, unlike Rahner who remained dependent on Maréchal for a good deal of his understanding of Aquinas, Lonergan pursued an independent path of enquiry

In Lonergan’s *Verbum* articles he suggests that Aquinas, in fact, holds a cognitional theory that is different in major respects from that which the neo-scholastics understood and in significant respects from the interpretation of Maréchal. Like Maréchal, and unlike the neo-scholastics, Lonergan recognizes in Aquinas an account of the knowing process that is a gradual process that culminates in an act of judgment. However, unlike Maréchal, Lonergan suggests that Aquinas offers a nuanced account of this process that involves three main steps: first the senses attend to objects in the world and form phantasms of them in the intellect; secondly, the mind attends to these phantasms and, in an act of insight (*intelligere*), grasps the answer to the question “what is it?” and then produces a concept (*emanatio intelligibilis*) of what it has understood; thirdly, the mind is drawn to investigate this concept further with the question: “Is it so?”, reaching a moment of “reflective insight” (a second instance of *Intelligere*) and proceeding to an act of judgment (a second *emanatio intelligibilis*).

By contrast with this cognitional theory, Lonergan points to the cognitional theory of Duns Scotus, a contemporary of Aquinas: “Scotus posits concepts first, then the apprehension of nexus between concepts” and suggests that this constitutes a “rejection of insight into phantasm”²⁶ in favour of a “conceptualism” which considers that a real object impresses a universal concept of itself on the mind of a knower, more or less, when the knower simply takes a good look at it. Lonergan would parody Scotist cognitional theory as simplistic, suggesting that it treated knowing as if it involved simply, “taking a good look”; he also quipped (being himself a heavy smoker) that Scotism treated the mind as if it were a machine that produces match boxes: “Put in a penny, pull the trigger and the transition to box of matches is spontaneous, immediate and necessary.”²⁷

²⁵ See Crowe, *Lonergan*, 23-4, Whelan, 39-62.

²⁶ Lonergan, *Verbum*, 39, footnote 126.

²⁷ Quoted in Liddy, 22.

Lonergan next employed the work of the historian of theology, Yves Congar, to explain a strange development that occurred in the years subsequent to Aquinas's death. He notes that in the thirteenth century, controversy broke out between Thomists and Scotists in which the main insights of Aquinas began to get lost by both sides. Consequently, when, in the fourteenth century, the official Church decided in favour of what it considered to be the Thomistic side of this argument, it was in fact affirming a Scotist position. Lonergan suggests that it is for this reason for the paradox that current forms of "Neo-Thomism" were, in fact, Scotism in disguise.²⁸

Lonergan suggests that the story of the history of philosophy next takes a further complicated turn. The founder of modern philosophy, Descartes, had studied Suarezian neo-scholasticism closely, and while he believed himself to be substantially rejecting it, he in fact incorporated some of its Scotist understandings of cognition. Lonergan suggests that that this occurred, above all, in the manner in which Descartes proposed a notion of a "turn to the subject" as a basis for his philosophical foundation: "Cogito ergo sum." Lonergan suggests that there is a paradox here, instead of attending to the structure of cognition in this turn to the subject, Descartes employed abstract metaphysical categories to deduce what must be happening in subjectivity in order for knowing to be possible. According to Lonergan, this "oversight of insight" led virtually all subsequent philosophers, at least on continental Europe, to exhibit a contradiction: they spoke about a "turn to the subject," but they did not perform it convincingly.

It is at this point that Lonergan turns to politely criticise his Jesuit colleagues who were the mainstream "transcendental Thomists." In an interview given in 1982, he speaks of the importance in philosophy of breaking out of the kind of "metaphysical framework" that blocks a more empirical attentiveness to the actual experiences of consciousness. When asked, "You have written that Rahner and Coreth remain in the line of metaphysical accounts of what knowing is (could you say more?)" Lonergan answers: "Yes, and to Maréchal too, you see. Maréchal's answer to Kant was basically a metaphysical one, transposed in terms of knowledge." Elsewhere, Lonergan states: "Kant does not know about insight, neither does Maréchal. Rahner has the same problem. They do not understand the action of intelligence."²⁹

²⁸ The overview of the history of philosophy proposed by Lonergan is found in "Questionnaire on Philosophy," *Philosophical and Theological Papers, 1965-1980*, Collected works of Bernard Lonergan, Volume 17, edited by Robert Croken and Robert M. Doran (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2004). Lonergan "Letter to Fr. Keane" January 22, 1935; quoted in Liddy 109-110. See also, Crowe, Lonergan, 22-24.

²⁹ Interview quotations found in: *Caring about meaning: Patterns in the Life of Bernard Lonergan*, editors, Pierrot Lambert, Charlotte Tansey, Cathleen Going (Montreal, Thomas More Institute, 1982) 42; Beards, 224. Already in the account of Rahner's epistemology outlined by Endean, above, one can notice that a visual metaphor for knowing (as "taking a good look") is being employed by Rahner: "The formal object ... is not merely a reality of what confronts us ... but also of the knower's 'outward look'" (Endean, 37). Roy adds other examples, including: "The intellect gives conceptual form to this material (sense impression), and so makes it that which is intelligible *in actu*, that which is known at the conceptual level and emerges as a synthesis of the sensory material and the a priori of the intellect" (Karl Rahner, "Thomas Aquinas on Truth," *Theological Investigations*, 13: 24; quoted in Roy, 425).

Applying Lonergan's Breakthrough

In this brief treatment of complex matters, I now suggest that Lonergan is able to give a more adequate account of religious experience, and consequently of Ignatian spirituality than is Rahner.

Students of Lonergan suggest that what he explains about the act of insight is of the highest importance for an account of the discernment of spirits that is central to the *Spiritual Exercises*. They note that Ignatius, in his description of discernment, was deeply concerned about how we gain insight into our experience, a point to which Maréchal and Rahner are not able to do justice. Similarly, they recall Lonergan's warning, "insights are a dime a dozen" in recalling that insight must be tested at a subsequent level consciousness, that culminates in judgment. Here they point to the subtleties of Ignatius's Rules for Discernment of the Second Week and suggest this involves the double-checking of ideas that one is in consolation when one is in fact experiencing a disguised form of desolation.

One Lonergan-based commentary on the *Spiritual Exercises* entitled, *The Dynamism of Desire*, devotes a chapter to "Lonergan and Discernment" which includes an account of how discernment employs each level of what Lonergan explains as a level of consciousness. Explaining that discernment is oriented toward decision-making, the book includes a sequence of sections entitled, "Discernment at the level of Experience," "Discernment at the Level of Understanding: Inquiry, Insight, and Formulation," and "Discernment at the Level of Judgment of Fact."³⁰

Other commentators suggest that Lonergan's approach to religious experience is of value for a theology of religions. They suggest that his account of experience based on intellectual conversion helps to avoid gnostic tendencies in spirituality and consequent anti-dogmatic attitudes in theology. They point to articles that Lonergan wrote at the end of his life on a theology of religions. They suggest that Lonergan's attentiveness to pre-conceptual aspects of consciousness allows him to distinguish the "infrastructure of religious experience" from the "superstructure of theological interpretation," suggesting that all religions share this infrastructure. They agree with critics of Rahner's notion of "anonymous Christian" by suggesting that his incomplete cognitional theory compels him to impose superstructural interpretations that are broadly Christian on the religious experiences of others in an analysis that should better remain at the level of religious infrastructure.³¹

³⁰ *The Dynamism of Desire: Bernard J. F. Lonergan, S.J. on the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola*, James L. Connor et al. (St. Louis, The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2006).

³¹ See, Lonergan, "Prolegomena to the Study of the Emerging Religious Consciousness of Our Time," in *A Third Collection* (London, Geoffrey Chapman, 1985), 55-73. See also the comments of Roy and Beards on the differences between Lonergan and Rahner.

3. Conclusion

I conclude with a comment that relates to the broad lines of enquiry explored by the study group of Gregorian professors exploring the theme of “Ignatian Spirituality and Transcendental Method,” of which this article forms part. To start with, I suggest that the explicit comments of Rahner, and the related, if less emphatic, comments of Lonergan, support the hypothesis that the option for transcendental Thomism on the part of many Jesuits in the first half of the twentieth century was related to a sensibility formed by the *Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*. However, addressing a further hypothesis that a retrieval of transcendental Thomist insights is warranted today, I recommend caution. I suggest that a retrieval of these authors should be performed employing the corrective lens provided by Lonergan.

In conclusion, I note how the current reality of a Jesuit Pope brings a new relevance to the question of links between Ignatian spirituality and theology. In his interview with the editor of *La Civiltà Cattolica* in August, 2013, Pope Francis spoke of how a notion of discernment, derived from St. Ignatius of Loyola, is central to his notion of how to exercise his papacy.