

# Bernard Lonergan's Philosophy of Religion

From Philosophy of God to  
Philosophy of Religious Studies

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## Introduction

Bernard Lonergan (1904–1984) is a thinker many should read but never manage to do so. That he wrote large technical books is doubtless a factor. Scholars are industrious people. If they are going to labor over a work filled with technicalities, it better be short or hugely popular! Lonergan’s books are neither. The mere mention of a projected twenty-two volume *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan* suffices as a demonstration of this. The first major scholarly publication to gain him some notoriety was *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (1957). As the title suggests, the work is largely philosophical, although catalogued as a work of twentieth-century theology. In *Insight* Lonergan unveils what he feels is one of the most significant yet woefully neglected operations of human consciousness: insight. Analysis of it promises to answer the age-old questions that have plagued philosophy since Descartes—one could argue since Plato and Aristotle. *Insight* is a curious work, for it aims to advance or occasion “insight into insight.” It doesn’t aim to impart knowledge of the various fields invoked nor, curiously enough, does it aim to impart knowledge of insight per se. It is a book in aid of self-knowledge, that is, knowledge of one’s own experiencing, understanding, judging, and deciding. If one grasps what insight is but fails to identify and hone the process in oneself, the point has been sadly missed. *Insight* gives a modern twist to the old saying inscribed on the temple of Apollo at Delphi: *gnōthi seauton* (know thyself). We will look at *Insight*’s meaning in greater detail in chapter 2.

The reputable Stephen Toulmin once described *Insight* as “a masterly work, whose importance reaches far beyond the boundaries of theology and Catholic philosophy.”<sup>1</sup> This rings true to anyone who has bothered to read *Insight*. Why many overlook its importance is doubtless because Lonergan

writes as a theologian and as a Catholic. He taught theology in Catholic institutions of higher learning in North America and Europe, interrupted, as it were, by a brief appointment as Stillman Professor at the multid denominational Divinity School at Harvard. Philosopher of religion David Burrell once observed that *Insight* “[r]eminds one of the relentless questioning of Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations* or the polymorphic self-critical inquiry carried on by Kierkegaard.”<sup>2</sup> But whereas Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard command universal interest, Lonergan’s name continues to inspire quizzical looks. I don’t hope to offer an answer as to why this might be. Personally I often wonder whether his being a religious and Jesuit to boot hasn’t something to do with it. Timing is another factor. Lonergan describes his account of cognition as foundational. Today the slightest hint of a foundation makes people nervous. The issue is a complex one, about which I have said a few things.<sup>3</sup> In this study such matters are relegated to an endnote if at all. What concerns me here is how Lonergan, the theologian and methodologist, conceives the task of thinking about religion today. It is a question of philosophy of religion but not in the usual sense. Lonergan’s version is unique, owing to his vocation as a theologian who is deeply philosophical and intensely methodical. However one feels about these issues, one thing is certain: Lonergan’s philosophy of religion demands closer scrutiny than afforded it in the past. What I hope to show is that his ideas stand toe-to-toe with “systems” as elaborate and profound as Wittgenstein’s and Kierkegaard’s. If this book rectifies even minutely the present situation, it has served its purpose.

What *Insight* did for Lonergan’s reputation as a philosopher-theologian, his second great work, *Method in Theology* (1972), did for him as a methodologist. Actually both works establish him in these roles. But *Method in Theology* brings out his methodological intentions more clearly. *Insight* is, or was originally intended as, a prolegomenon for doing theology in the theoretic turn of the scientific revolution and the philosophic turn to the subject. *Method* extends this vision by concentrating on the concerns and expressions of “existential” consciousness; developments in the human sciences are relied on for methodological direction. *Method* is particularly relevant to Lonergan’s philosophy of religion, and much energy has been expended on it in secondary literature. However, neither *Method* nor *Insight* contain Lonergan’s full-blown theory of philosophy of religion. One needs to look at lesser-known writings for that, both early and late. In works contemporaneous with *Method* Lonergan brusquely states what he understands more or less by philosophy of religion. Later, in public talks and published articles, he focuses his attention on developing these ideas more explicitly. The early writings, both pre-*Insight* and pre-*Method*, provide important clues as to this development, incidentally alongside which Lonergan amplifies an earlier form. In fact, this earlier form is a different “philosophy of” altogether. Understanding Lonergan’s philoso-

phy of *God*, and the various adjustments made to it by Lonergan, is crucial for understanding the development and dynamic of his philosophy of religion. And so in this study much time is spent sorting through what I take to be the relevant issues in his philosophy of God. The disclaimer, then, is that this study is not about communicating basic knowledge of Lonergan's philosophy of God. So much has been written on it already.<sup>4</sup> The extent of our discussion of his philosophy of God is limited to ascertaining the general structure of his philosophy of religion as a whole. In a word, this study aims at being comprehensive, not exhaustive nor introductory, which cannot be said without something approximating an apologia.

The question being tackled is, like it or not, a technical one. What does Lonergan conceive philosophy of religion to be? One would think that the introductory issues should be tackled before launching into technical issues in an individual few know. Philosophy of religion also poses certain problems. No one today entertains the view that philosophy of religion is a monolithic field. As Stephen Crites observes, it is more accurately described as "a zoo, with each enclosure exhibiting yet another exotic species."<sup>5</sup> And yet philosophy of religion is still recognized as something of an autonomous field of research. Standard, even if peculiar, means of scrutinizing the religious phenomenon attend its application. Placing the terms "philosophy of religion" and "Lonergan" side by side seems to demand some outline of the field and Lonergan's relation to it. These are valid points I struggled with while preparing this book.

Even if Lonergan is relatively unknown this is not due to any sluggishness on the part of Lonergan scholars. There has been a steady stream of introductory works on Lonergan since before the publication of *Method*. The first truly authoritative work of this kind is David Tracy's *The Achievement of Bernard Lonergan* (1970). Of Tracy Lonergan speaks rather glowingly in the forward: "In our many conversations he has let me experience Schleiermacher's paradox, namely, that an intelligent interpreter will know the process of a writer's development better than the writer himself."<sup>6</sup> Many have followed Tracy's lead by producing equally illuminating books of Lonergan's highly specialized thought. Mention might be made of Hugo Meynell's introductions to Lonergan's philosophy and theology, and more recently books by Joseph Flanagan, W. A. Stewart, and Terry Tekippe.<sup>7</sup> Lonergan's long-time friend and disciple Frederick Crowe, affectionately dubbed the "grandfather of Lonergan studies," has also provided a succinct biography of Lonergan.<sup>8</sup> The book is astonishing for its accessibility and the insights it provides into the life and thought of Lonergan. Introductory chapters also appear in numerous books treating Lonergan vis-à-vis some topic in a related field. This book might have fallen into that category, were it not for my quirky writing habits. All authors have their reasons for carrying out research the way they

do, even if finally unknowable. Even so, allow me a meager attempt at an explanation in this particular case.

As I said, this study aims at being comprehensive. As I set out to address the issue of Lonergan's philosophy of religion, I bracketed questions of an introductory nature for strategic reasons. I wanted to avoid reducing what requires careful development to a short chapter or two, owing to meaningful introductory segments. Besides, this ground has been amply covered, and in a far more competent manner than I am capable. Although most of what I say is given a context, the focus throughout remains Lonergan's philosophy of religion. Indeed, even in those places where I discuss points covered thoroughly in the literature, it is always with this aim in view. A trajectory is provided to help the reader decipher the development in Lonergan's philosophizing about God and religion, which requires paying attention to painstaking detail. Part of my claim is that the extant literature on the topic though overwhelming in one way is nonetheless incomplete. This induced me to go beyond introductory matters to make something of a plausible case. Thankfully there is precedence for this. J. Michael Stebbins, for example, in his remarkable study of Lonergan's early writings,<sup>9</sup> bypasses issues of an introductory nature and goes into far greater detail than I in making his case. Far be it from me to compare the present work to Stebbins'; the two couldn't be more different. And yet the point, I trust, is clear. We stand on the shoulders of those on whose work we build our analyses, and must to a certain extent assume.

To reiterate, there has been a steady stream of studies of Lonergan's thought on God and religious experience. However, I have not seen detailed in them its various stages, how, for instance, religious experience in his early thought differs from that in his later thought, giving him a whole new basis for conceiving the relation of philosophy to matters religious in one way or another. The fact that religious experience entered into his philosophizing about God at a particular point in time and that it changed the tenor of his thinking often does receive attention. Concerns like the one I just mentioned, however, are not very high or even on the agenda. It is a question deserving of research not solely for the sake of research, although clarifying some point in paramount thinkers like Lonergan is always a worthwhile endeavor and is usually welcomed. It also furnishes a broader picture of the dynamics of the whole of his philosophizing relevant to the data of religion and its thinking that I, for one, fail to see in the literature.

The issue of religious experience in Lonergan is paramount to answering the question that guides this study, hence, our immediate jump in chapter 1 to the period in Lonergan's thought where he attributes more to its influence in our philosophizing than at any time prior in his career. In this chapter, I pursue some reasons that have been given for the tardiness of his response,

intimating its nature and what it meant for his controversial “proof” for God’s existence. And so I am not concerned with his proof per se. The notion of religious experience, its fabric for the whole of Lonergan’s philosophizing, is central. It is the linchpin binding his early philosophy of God to his late philosophy of religion. And it is the latter and its relation to the former that remains the sole objective of this study. Readers unfamiliar with chapters 19 and 20 of *Insight* might want to review as they read chapter 1 of this book (i.e., the section “Making Room for Religious Experience”). If the issues discussed in that section are not a concern to the reader, he or she is encouraged to proceed to the section “Deliberately Bracketing Religious Experience.” Specialists will doubtless want to make the stop, unwilling, as I was, to grant what needs argument.

Reminiscent of the great debate in Martin Heidegger studies, many describe the transition from Lonergan’s early to late development in terms of a *Kehre* or “turning.” This serves as our point of departure in chapter 1, the significance of which is detailed in chapters 3 and 4. Something of a detour is taken in chapter 2 since any discussion of the concept of religious experience in Lonergan must grapple with what he means by “experience” in general. I have deciphered three senses to the term integral to his concept of consciousness, which I distinguish from a contemporary model, that of philosopher David J. Chalmers. Since Lonergan is emphatic about distinguishing between consciousness and its concept—indeed, that it is possible, necessary even, to do this—I trace this aspect of his philosophical claim against the background of Kant and Hegel. They are Lonergan’s main dialogue partners on the question. This brings out elements that are unique to his concept abridged in his chosen term “self-appropriation.” Self-appropriation has been the focus of much discussion in Lonergan studies—enough to produce a philosophical genre particular to the work of Lonergan scholars. Few discuss Lonergan without some reference to it. My main objective in discussing it is to examine one of its fundamental premises: the relation of concept to experience. Chapter 2 may have just as well been entitled “The Relation of Concept to Experience” with the added qualifier “in Lonergan.” For straightforward expositions of the notion readers are advised to turn to introductory works such as those cited above.

In chapter 3, I return to the specifically religious dimension of the notion of experience in the early Lonergan. The significant pre-*Method* literature is examined in which religious experience receives mention, touching in some way on issues pertinent to his philosophy of God. Here we track the development of his category of religious experience as it moves from the periphery to the explanatory basis of his thought. The transition occurs without collapsing the distinction he wishes to maintain between loving religiously and an explanatory thinking about such loving and its objects. Lonergan’s concept of the differentiations of consciousness, evolving out of his concept of the patterns

of experience, allow for this possibility. It goes without saying that his appreciation for the level of decision, qua level, undergirds this whole process.<sup>10</sup>

In the fourth and final chapter the relevant *Method* and post-*Method* literature is examined in which is seen the emergence of what is technically philosophy of religion to Lonergan. His interest in philosophy of God is overtaken by issues of fundamental theology. This merges with a new-found appreciation for philosophy of religion, “the foundational methodology of religious studies” (*PRP*:128). Among the distinctions I have introduced is the difference between his model of religion and what he calls “philosophy of religion.” They are not equivalent concepts in Lonergan. Conceiving it historically, I see the former, his model of religion, as the point of departure for what in his philosophy of religion he sets out to do. They are related, of course, but not one and the same thing. Also, to avoid confusion with the field of the same name, my recommendation is that we refer to his philosophy of religion as it is literally, as a *philosophy of religious studies*, distinguishing it firstly from his philosophy of God and secondly from his model of religion. I understand the term “philosophy of religion” in Lonergan to encompass all of these elements, whether it is philosophizing about God, God’s existence and attributes, or about religion methodology.

Besides providing what I hope is a clear and comprehensive understanding of a very complex thought form, outlining the matter this way also aids in identifying precisely what are the points of contact between Lonergan’s thoughts on God and religion and philosophers of religion as commonly understood today. This brings us full circle to the second factor mentioned earlier originally complicating this endeavor.

In the embryonic stage of this study, I had planned to relate Lonergan’s philosophy of religion to the field of the same name. My task was quickly made more complex by the intricacies that are part and parcel of grasping Lonergan’s philosophy of religion alone. I decided to follow a helpful bit of advice Lonergan often gave researchers; Patrick Byrne of Boston College was kind enough to remind me of it upon hearing an overly ambitious early draft of this project. The advice is to limit research questions simply to “What does *X* have to say about *Y*?” otherwise one would find oneself writing three studies: one on *X*, one on *Y*, and one on the relation of *X* to *Y*. Understood in the present context, a relation of *X* to *Y* question, which is what I set out to do originally, would involve a treatment of Lonergan’s philosophy of religion (*X*), philosophy of religion as a field (*Y*), and the relationship of the two. Now this might be manageable if studies were available detailing each of the components upon which one could rely in relating *X* to *Y*. My research led me to believe, however, that treatments of *X* were incomplete for my purposes or not of a nature that allowed for a comprehensive analysis of the relation question. For instance, some stop, for legitimate reasons, with Lonergan’s



philosophy of God or, when going on to his philosophy of religion, relate it to issues and concerns that I admit are far more exciting than charting the various aspects of his philosophy of religion. My work was cut out for me as I waded through literature that left issues unresolved pertaining to the simple yet enormous question, What does Lonergan say about philosophy of religion? The present represents my answer to this question. Since this book went to press, some preliminary steps were taken to address these other issues, which require a work of equal length to treat adequately. Presently, all I can do is point the reader to my initial efforts.<sup>11</sup>

# Chapter One

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## *The Kehre of Philosophy of God, and Theology*

Like every good philosopher Lonergan never tires of exploiting the meaning of terms for his own purposes, to be his “little self” as he once remarked (*PRP*:126). The term “philosophy of religion” is no exception. If introductory textbooks on the subject are any indication of what philosophy of religion is, then Lonergan’s meaning differs substantially. The fact that his initial etchings of it are traced in a short paper that looks to social ethicist Gibson Winter for inspiration is illustrative of this (*2C*:189–92). In other words, one is not going to find arguments for God’s existence or solutions to the “problem” of evil in Lonergan’s philosophy of religion, technically so-called. Complicating matters somewhat is the fact that Lonergan does offer his own peculiar answer to such questions endemic to philosophy of religion, but under the guise of “philosophy of God,” sometimes called “natural” or “philosophical theology.” Bracketing the larger issue whether Lonergan’s philosophy of God is accurately understood as philosophy of religion in the generic sense, we simply note for the time being that his philosophy of God is not his philosophy of religion. His philosophy of religion seeks to provide a critical ground for the relation of religious studies and theology, both functions of which he treats positively. His philosophy of God, on the other hand, particularly in its late stage, seeks to resituate or reclaim for theology (i.e., systematics) the activity of philosophizing about God. Much more will be said about these different types of philosophizing. Here this particular distinction is mentioned as a basic characteristic of their diverse functioning. It is also a convenient means of indicating the general framework within which Lonergan’s philosophizing takes place.

## MAKING ROOM FOR RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

Prior to the 1980s, scholarly discussion of Lonergan's philosophizing about God and religion is for the most part limited to his proof for the existence of God and his proposed solution to the problem of evil, although the former tends to dominate the discussion.<sup>1</sup> Both aspects are detailed in the last two chapters of his philosophical masterwork *Insight* (1957). Around the mid-1970s attention shifts from Lonergan's proof for the existence of God to his theological method prompted by the publication of *Method in Theology* (1972). Except for scattered contributions on his post-*Insight* emphasis on religious experience, discussion of topics in Lonergan relevant to philosophers of religion begins to peter out.

This doubtless owes itself to the fact that around this time Lonergan shifts his attention from his controversial argument for God's existence to what he came to see as its basis, that is, religious experience or, more generally, the religious phenomenon thought through theologically and analyzed historically through various methods produced by the human sciences. Is it any wonder that the philosophical community accustomed to analyzing truth in propositional terms evidences little interest here? Assigning logic a less perennial role than it has received in the West contributed to Lonergan's cultivation of extra-logical concerns, which some philosophers of religion think legitimate, yet merely assume or ignore in their candid admissions about the limits of logic.

It is tempting to think of Lonergan's mid-1970s shift as representing a radical break in his thinking. To push the issue of logic further, one might make the case that Lonergan freed himself from the alluring benefits of logic, which is so integral to his early work especially.<sup>2</sup> For instance, in his St. Michael's Lectures on *Philosophy of God, and Theology* (1973), Lonergan complains about the treatment of God's existence and attributes in *Insight*—no doubt prodded by the steady stream of criticisms that followed its publication. He notes disapprovingly that God's existence and attributes are treated there “in a purely objective fashion” predicated by an acceptance of intrinsically necessary first principles and a monist view of culture, that there is only one right culture (*PGT*:13). On this basis alone, it is difficult to avoid drawing the conclusion that Lonergan abandoned the rather bloodless categories that adorn his early Latin treatises, vestiges of which may be seen in that notorious chapter on God in *Insight*, chapter 19. Add to this that following *Philosophy of God, and Theology* Lonergan stops writing and lecturing about God's existence altogether as the conclusion to an argument. What he does instead is to develop, among his many other interests, what just a couple of years earlier he announced as the task of philosophy of religion, to “bring to light the conditions of the possibility of the [*sic*] religious studies and their correlative

objects" (2C:191). Little concern is evidenced with regard to establishing the existence of God and removing the obstacle evil poses to religious faith.

Other circumstantial evidence, however, confounds a clean break hypothesis. There is Lonergan's now famous statement in *Philosophy of God, and Theology* that while his proof in *Insight* suffers from a kind of scholastic objectivism he has no intention of repudiating it "at all" (PGT:41). There is also his admission that a shift in emphasis from logic to method "does not, by any means, involve an elimination of logic: for it still is logic that cares for the clarity of terms, the coherence of propositions, the rigor of inferences" (3C:139). In fact, one could make a convincing case that Lonergan never attributed more to logic than the role of ordering systematically what understanding grasps commonsensically or intellectually, to borrow a distinction from *Insight*. In his important study of Lonergan's early writings, for instance, J. Michael Stebbins points out that logic in the early Lonergan has both a weak and a strong function. When understanding is said to proceed inferentially, from effects to causes, logic plays an incidental role, similar to that mentioned above. When understanding proceeds deductively, from causes to effects, logic takes on a more commanding role. And yet "even in this latter case," Stebbins quickly interjects, "the controlling element is understanding rather than logic, for only insofar as one understands the principle or starting-point can one grasp its implications. Hence, understanding is a condition of demonstration, and not the other way around."<sup>3</sup> Besides being significant evidence for the relativization of logic in the early Lonergan, this foreshadows the preeminence he later attributes to method. As the seasoned reader of Lonergan knows, understanding is but a basic element of the method one is.

As for Lonergan dropping all references to proofs, one finds something of an analogy in Carl Sandburg's poem "Fog." After he says what he wants to say about the existence of God; after he has surveyed the various complaints against what he has said, Lonergan "moves on" like the fog in Sandburg's poem unperturbed by the contrivances of harbor and city. This idea of moving on captures well what happens to Lonergan in the early 1970s, in the *Kehre* that *Philosophy of God, and Theology* represents. The first thing to note is that it is merely a reorientation of, and not a break with, a traditional concern. One way of interpreting this is to make some imaginary, though pertinent, connections between Lonergan's *Insight, Philosophy of God, and Theology* and part one, question 2, article 3 of Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae*, "Whether God Exists?"

Chapter 19 of *Insight* functions more or less like the main body of Saint Thomas's *respondeo dicendum*, his solution to a series of contrary answers to a particular question. Notions are defined, concepts are invoked to convey a sense of intelligibility to the claim that God exists. While Lonergan's use and development of Aquinas far exceed in ingenuity Aquinas's application of

Aristotle in this instance, the level at which both proceed is almost identical. In *Philosophy of God, and Theology*, Lonergan seeks to include what he excludes in *Insight*. In it he may be seen as latching onto the significance of the cryptic sentences in the *respondeo*, which many think reveal the true ingenuity of Aquinas's Five Ways. I am referring, of course, to the formulaic inclusions that appear at the end of each of the ways: "and this everyone understands to be God," "this all speak of as God," "and this being we call God," and so on.

These little sentences provide insight into the presuppositions that underlie the genius of Aquinas's work. I might abbreviate them as his earthly awareness that belief is wedded to a context. The utilization of the best available systems of thought, then embodied in the widely circulated Peripatetic corpus, is encouraged for understanding systematically what believers hold matter-of-factly. Mark D. Jordan has recently emphasized this, modeling Aquinas's manner of conduct after that of Augustine in *De doctrina Christiana*, where Augustine condones the confiscation of philosophers' goods by theologians.<sup>4</sup> While Jordan overstates his case that Aquinas merely changed philosophical materials into theology, his point that "no single work was written by Aquinas for the sake of setting forth a philosophy" illustrates well the point I am making here.<sup>5</sup> Aquinas enlists categories from Aristotle to render systematically explicit what his contemporaries held implicitly, namely, a notion of God. This lends a different air to the notion of proof in Aquinas, often mitigated by an age that limits itself to observational paradigms of demonstration. It also underlines the foundational role of religious experience, broadly conceived, in supplying philosophical clarity to beliefs. Aquinas was no stranger to such an assumption.

*Insight* is built on the premise that Aquinas has it right concerning experience and rational reflection. The problem, Lonergan has diagnosed, is that Aquinas's perspicacity is couched in metaphysical terms that strike many today, weaned on J. R. R. Tolkien, as a glorified description of life on Middle-earth. Granted, Lonergan is not nearly as irreverent about the archaic form of Aquinas's account of cognition, but the point is clear. Aquinas's insights require translation into terms more apropos in a world, our world, having undergone the theoretic turn of the scientific revolution and the philosophic turn to the subject. The relative approval with which *Insight* has been met bears witness to Lonergan's achievement in carrying this out.<sup>6</sup> His translation comes to a head in chapter 19, the chapter on God, but without any consideration given to that implied in the tiny sentences of Aquinas noted earlier. Since what he does with Aquinas in *Philosophy of God, and Theology* is more discreet than in *Insight*, the fact of his reorientation is, when noticed, usually affirmed but without much in the way of explanation.

Lonergan never questions Aquinas's classic distinction between the truths that reason can know and those that surpass it. The titles of chapters 19 and

20 of *Insight* are in a way his own expression of this distinction. “General Transcendent Knowledge” refers to knowledge of God that lies within reason’s reach, “Special Transcendent Knowledge” to knowledge of God, in the objective genitive sense, that eludes reason as the moon eludes an outstretched hand. In general transcendent knowledge the issue is knowing that God exists. Lonergan builds on the previous chapters of *Insight* to demonstrate the intelligibility of the affirmation of God. In particular he expands on the notion of being, introduced in chapter 12, and involves the reader in an exposition of causality in the context of intelligibility, which is crucial to his argument. The bulk of chapter 19—indeed, one could argue, all the previous chapters—is a prolegomenon for understanding the syllogism: “If the real is completely intelligible, then complete intelligibility exists. If complete intelligibility exists, the idea of being exists. If the idea of being exists, then God exists. Therefore, if the real is completely intelligible, God exists” (*CWL* 3:696). Since our primary concern is the shift in perspective from *Insight* to *Philosophy of God, and Theology*, I will reserve further comment on Lonergan’s proof until chapter 3.

Having dealt with the affirmation of God, Lonergan moves on to the issue of special transcendent knowledge in chapter 20 of *Insight*. The issue there is one of acquiescing and enacting God’s revelatory solution to the problem of evil. Basic is the view that humans neither originate nor preserve this solution; it is *specially* transcendent for this reason. Human intelligence and reasonableness, which is required in acknowledging the solution and carrying it out, accounts for the knowledge factor.<sup>7</sup> Little concern is expressed about providing the solution with determinate content. Incidentally, Lonergan believes “many possible solutions” exist. In *Insight*, however, precedence is given to the heuristic structure of these solutions, which means “we must remain content to affirm hope only in a generic fashion” (*CWL* 3:724). Notwithstanding this, metaphoric phrases such as “self-sacrificing love of God” (722, 748), “good news of the solution” (743), “love of God” (*passim*), not to mention simple assertions as “God is a person” (720), quickly mark Lonergan’s generic offering as characteristically Christian. Still, if one reads Part V of Lonergan’s *De Verbo Incarnato* (1964), in which the solution is identified with the redemptive activity of God in Christ and the Law of the Cross, one will doubtless gain a better appreciation of the generic venture of *Insight*. Comparatively, what is offered in chapter 20 is significantly generic, certainly generic enough to include at least the monotheistic traditions. To relate the structure to Asian and other religious traditions would be a trickier matter.<sup>8</sup>

What is significant for us is Lonergan’s discussion of the notion of belief in chapter 20. It is significant not for the reason we may have originally, erroneously surmised, that belief is excluded from knowledge that is humanly attainable. Lonergan is clear that belief, assent to knowledge that is not

immanently generated, is integral to all types of knowing.<sup>9</sup> Belief in the truthfulness of scientific hypotheses is just as much a part of the scientist's life as belief in the truthfulness of doctrines is to the theologian's, unless of course there is reason to bring their "truthfulness" into question. The significance for us of belief in *Insight* hinges on the peculiar species Lonergan reserves for knowledge that transcends reason as if it were of no consequence to the kind immanent in reason.

To be sure, belief in chapter 19 involves what Lonergan calls a "higher integration" of the structure of human consciousness culled through the generalized empirical analysis of the preceding chapters. But there is no mention in it of the still higher integration outlined in chapter 20. This higher integration transcends both the interpersonal collaboration assumed in the first nineteen chapters of *Insight*, concerning the advancement and the dissemination of knowledge, and the horizon within which such collaboration is forged. By contrast, the collaboration outlined in chapter 20 consists principally in that of humankind with God, the former assenting to and incarnating divinely communicated truth—in a word, confronting the surd of evil with the mystery of God. This distinct function of belief explains why Lonergan thought it more fitting to treat the notion in chapter 20 than in chapter 19. It involves a particular understanding of belief to be discriminated from that assumed in previous chapters. A more daring conjecture, inferred from the foregoing, is that Lonergan, at this stage, did not think such belief contributed much if anything to the sort of undertaking he attempts in chapter 19. Belief in that chapter culminates in knowledge at which a general or ordinary collaboration of human beings can arrive (*CWL* 3:742). In chapter 20 belief remains in a sense belief, *special* transcendent knowledge, by virtue of its distinct manner of collaboration. It touches on "truths that man never could discover for himself nor, even when he assented to them, could he understand them in an adequate fashion. For the greater the proper perfection and significance of the higher integration, the more it will lie beyond man's familiar range, and the more it will be grounded in the absolutely transcendent excellence of [God,] the unrestricted act of understanding" (*CWL* 3:746). As Thomas Aquinas taught and Lonergan echoed, knowledge of this kind, fittingly proposed to humans for belief, is in a class of its own way beyond the pale of reason.<sup>10</sup>

Returning now to my earlier comparison of *Insight* with the particular question in the *Summa*, whether God exists (*an Deus sit*). I do not wish to make the absurd claim that the Lonergan of *Insight*, a first-rate interpreter of Aquinas, was unaware of the pithy sentences that appear in probably the most discussed question of the *Summa*. It would be truly remarkable if he were, given that he detected far greater subtleties in Aquinas in a book reputed to be among the most illuminating in the field.<sup>11</sup> In any case, it is in *Philosophy of God, and Theology*, not *Insight* or *Verbum*, where he plays on their significance (*PGT*:41),

that religious experience, very generally conceived here, contributes greatly to the art of formulating proofs and rendering them meaningful. Why he does this in the 1970s and not the 1950s or the 1960s is open to conjecture. I will offer some thoughts on this below. Presently we need only note *that* he does and that he does so in continuity with, while adding to, what he says in *Insight*.

The fact of continuity is seen in Lonergan's candid admission that he has no intention of repudiating what he does in chapter 19 of *Insight*. As far as I know, he never retracted statements like the following, which still found supporters in the 1970s but slowly lost their grip as Nietzschean and Heideggerian critiques of ontotheology became part of the common sense: "I do not think it difficult to establish God's existence" (*PGT*:55). Mindful that what he establishes is not some concept of God, but a notion of the epistemically unattainable God implied in our intending of complete intelligibility, Lonergan states that while *Insight* may not be the best expression of this he nonetheless expressed it there as best as he could.<sup>12</sup> It is similar to what he says about a decade later concerning *Insight* and its terminological affinities to faculty psychology. "Although in *Insight* I am still talking as if it were faculty psychology, what I am doing is not faculty psychology" (*CAMe*:43). Likewise, although in *Insight* he establishes the existence of God scholastically, objectivistically, what he says is still valid, he believes, despite the antiquarian form in which he says it. It is a special case of cognitive dissonance where one's performance is thought to override one's choice of terms.

Still, this positive reassessment applies to the argument as an argument and not to the context it presupposes. The argument's context, Lonergan obliged his critics, does require some rethinking. To put it in the terms of our earlier analysis, general transcendent knowledge includes something of the collaboration at work in special transcendent knowledge. Even if what is achieved by general transcendent knowledge comes about without the aid of beliefs that feed special transcendent knowledge, usually those who hold such beliefs are the ones who can affirm what general transcendent knowledge concludes. Bernard Tyrrell, who has written a definitive study of Lonergan's philosophy of God, observes similarly that "for Lonergan such things as 'proofs' for the existence of God are not generally worked out by the unconverted but by those who are already believers and are seeking a deeper understanding of what they believe and an intelligent grasp of the meaningfulness, reasonableness and worthwhileness of their religious conversion."<sup>13</sup> However, this was not always the case. Despite his pre-1970s appreciation of religious experience, which I discuss in chapter 3, Lonergan did effect a genuine transformation in his thought at this stage. While it did not involve a complete ideational overhaul, it did involve a change in emphasis and direction.

His desire in *Philosophy of God, and Theology* to reclaim for systematics the activity of thinking philosophically about God accounts for the change in



emphasis: “[W]e should put an end to the practice of isolating from each other the philosophy of God and the functional specialty, systematics” (PGT:55), a practice rooted in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Elaborating on this by contrasting it with what he says in *Insight*, not only would it seem that the problem of evil demands “the transformation of self-reliant intelligence into an *intellectus quaerens fidem*” (CWL 3:753), but affirming the existence of God seems to as well. Not that believing in God’s existence is solely a matter of faith for Lonergan. He never veered from Aquinas’s position that we can *know* that, not what, God is. Nevertheless he did come to emphasize the “believing” that finally grounds the “knowing” that God is or, melding his terms with the punch line in Aquinas, that the intelligible term of our unrestricted intending is what we mean by God. It is a shift from the proleptic answer his proof provides to the prepredicative question driving it: *an Deus sit*. “Proof” gives the impression that the question coercing it is fundamentally philosophic, which Lonergan rejects. Answers to the question of God, subsequently developed into proofs and, incidentally, disproofs, begin at a far more basic level and touch on matters that are religious. “One cannot claim that their religion has been based on some philosophy of God. One can easily argue that their religious concern,” of which proofs are an important aspect, “arose out of their religious experience” (PGT:55). Hence, his wish is to see theologians, who commonly have firsthand knowledge of religious experience, sharing again in this particular form of proof making.

What accounts for the change in direction in Lonergan, besides detaining himself from further addressing matters of proof, is his growing preoccupation with philosophy of religion, forging one that is. In *Insight* he had expressed, among many other things, his understanding of how reflection on cognitional theory irons out the many wrinkles of classical proofs for God’s existence. *Insight* furnishes us with one based on their hidden premise, namely, that the world is intelligible.<sup>14</sup> Incidentally, in Lonergan’s scheme of things, God is glimpsed in every Archimedean cry of discovery (CWL 3:706).

*Insight*’s proof attracted disproportionate reactions bounded by the usual extremes of uncritical acceptance and uncritical rejection. Lonergan did address himself to many of these concerns but stopped suddenly with the publication of *Philosophy of God, and Theology*.<sup>15</sup> He did so unannounced, there being nothing in the record to suggest it was a momentous event. A few years earlier he began speaking about a different “philosophy of” that would bring some nuances to his understanding of religious experience. At first it bore many of the marks of his philosophy of God—indeed, in certain respects it was indistinguishable from it. But by 1975/6 it had developed into the full-blown program he made intimations toward in 1970, its purpose being to bring to light the conditions of the possibility of religious studies. In *Philosophy of God, and Theology*, Lonergan turns the page on that aspect of his

philosophical theology that argues for the existence of God implied in the intelligibility of the universe and our continual intending of it. The time had come for him to “move on,” to treat other relevant issues capturing the imagination of his contemporaries. In the future his philosophy of God would consist in theological reflection on religious experience and its contents, which his emerging philosophy of religion would approach more differently still.

#### DELIBERATELY BRACKETING RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE<sup>16</sup>

Many have been led to believe that Lonergan’s underscoring religious experience in the 1970s marks its debut in his thought. More careful readers might point to the early 1960s, say, to a paper entitled “Openness and Religious Experience” (1961), which he submitted in absentia to a congress in Italy.<sup>17</sup> Others might want to opt for the early 1950s as the more likely date, with chapter 17 of *Insight*, for instance, in which Lonergan makes clear references to the dynamics of religious experience in his analysis of myth and mystery. Indeed, one could go as far back as 1943, to a paper entitled “Finality, Love, Marriage” where he provides an extended treatment of love, later to become his signature term for religious experience. *Method* itself does not parallel in breadth the treatment of love in “Finality, Love, Marriage.”<sup>18</sup> The fact is that Lonergan as a religious was always preoccupied in one way or another with religious experience. We may note a high degree of hyperbole on his part when he says in *Insight* that he does not know what a mystic experiences (*CWL* 3:348). This is quite out of character with one who in 1977 could speak of “twenty-four years of aridity in the religious life” that were canceled out by over thirty-one years of spiritual joy in it, that is, since before 1946.<sup>19</sup>

The view that Lonergan began his treatment of religious experience in the early 1970s is simply an error in judgment. In addition to the works cited above, one could also invoke as evidence to the contrary his 1946 course on grace, in which he deals with the question under the cognate term “awareness of the supernatural,” or “mystical experience” as in *Verbum*.<sup>20</sup> In any case, this leaves intact the widespread assumption that religious experience in Lonergan receives considerably more attention in the early 1970s than at any time prior in his career. Except the minor alteration it introduced into his philosophy of God (i.e., general transcendent knowledge), the function of religious experience in his thought remained relatively unchanged up to this point. It is abbreviated in *Insight* in a way stripped of, while remaining faithful to, the Aristotelian language governing the little he does say about the topic in his early work: “a dimension to human experience that takes man beyond the domesticated, familiar, common sphere, in which a spade is just a spade”

(*CWL* 3:557). The interesting question is why Lonergan waited almost three decades to acknowledge the centrality of this dimension in fundamental theology.

The reasons are predominately political. As the editors of the *Collected Works* state: “the concentration on doctrine that characterized the Roman Catholic Church during the modernist scare inhibited development on religious experience, and Lonergan got round late to the question.”<sup>21</sup> During and following that crisis the notion of experience was approached with extreme reserve under the threat of excommunication. Ironically, it would be this very crisis that demanded critical reflection *with recourse to experience*. Under the leadership of Pope Paul VI (1963–1978), Roman Catholic theology rediscovered the existential dimension without which it dries out into theological rationalism or else becomes diluted into a piety of ill-repute.<sup>22</sup>

At the turn of the century Pope Pius X (d. 1914) summarized and condemned the opinions of Catholic intellectuals, commonly called “modernists,” who were attempting to reconcile the Catholic faith with modern rationality. Running through these opinions, thought to be particularly damnable, was an immanentism. Immanentism rendered superfluous so-called objective philosophical inquiry into the supernatural and, because the supernatural was rejected, led to the denigration of Roman Catholic dogma, said to derive solely from religious experience. Many Catholic theologians are of the opinion that the encyclical *Pascendi* (1907), in which Pius X categorically rejects modernism, was something of a pastoral and, needless to say, political necessity. The developments that followed in its wake, however, are usually regarded by these same theologians to be theologically stultifying and detrimental to the many legitimate concerns of a Church that John XXIII later described as constantly in need of renewal (*aggiornamento*).

The picture is a bleak one. Clerics, for example, were required to take what was popularly known as an oath against modernism. At an event surrounded by pomp and circumstance, ordinands were expected to affirm certain anti-modernist propositions and to assent to the relevant official Church documents on the matter, that is, to the formerly mentioned *Pascendi* and the *Lamentabili* (1907), a decree listing some sixty-five modernist errors. The practice lasted fifty-seven years and was brought to a felicitous close in 1967, one of the expeditious effects of the Second Vatican Council. More serious was the alarmist tendency to brand as modernist Catholics whose ideas bore the slightest hint of concord, real or imagined, with those condemned by the Holy See. For a time theologians now considered pillars of the Church such as Yves Congar (1904–1995) and Karl Rahner (1904–1984) suffered an unsure fate as such at the hands of Vatican officials. Held in the balance, too, were the works of Henri de Lubac (1896–1991) and Jean Daniélou (d. 1974) whose later appointments as cardinals is another admirable if embarrassing

piece of church history to add to a growing list. Also thought unhelpful, though well intentioned, was the creation of an unofficial group of zealous theologians known as Integralists or *Sodalitium pianum* (Solidarity of Pius) whose job it was to report to Monsignor Benigni, its director in Italy, those whose teachings smacked of modernist conviction. J. J. Heaney well describes the aftermath of *Pascendi* as a period in which “[t]hinking and nuance were rejected in favor of polemics. Modernism became a slogan to be applied to whatever was disliked in liberal Catholic thought, theology, literature, and politics.”<sup>23</sup>

Lonergan’s theology can hardly be pegged “liberal,” even by the standards of early twentieth-century Catholic thinking. His method in theology, on the other hand, deemed radical by some,<sup>24</sup> might be viewed this way, however misguidedly. Were he in the 1940s and 1950s to have given the place he did in the 1970s to taboo subjects like religious experience—a pivotal element of his method in theology—it is more than likely that Lonergan would have undergone the strain of cross-examination. For someone whose mission was to provide Catholics with the needed background for understanding the modern world (*CAMe*:262) this could only be seen as counterproductive.

There would have been no grounds to discredit Lonergan as a modernist. We already saw that he openly declared, even in his so-called *Kehre* stage, that reason could attain to knowledge of God and that such pursuits, despite growing distaste for them, were entirely in keeping with the demands of historical consciousness, thought by “modernists” to have flattened such philosophical concerns. It would be difficult to imagine *Insight* receiving its imprimatur had Lonergan reasoned otherwise, had his conclusion in chapter 19, for instance, been equivocal or made contingent upon the type of self-validating exercise of the previous chapters—precisely what Lonergan later admitted it should be. Even so, a scare is a scare. Underscoring something as touchy as religious experience came at a price, one that a noncontroversialist like Lonergan would rather avoid paying. When asked late in his career if he was deliberately careful treating sensitive issues in the modernist crisis, he responded: “Well, you never want to be stupid. . . . In other words, you don’t deliberately mislead people who are not bright, or allow them to mislead themselves” (*CAMe*:123), especially if they hold positions of power. Lonergan was in no hurry, it seems, to suffer the professionally turbulent fate of some of his colleagues whose “new theology” Pius XII condemned in *Humani Generis* (1950) for its supposed ideational links to modernism.

Are we to limit Lonergan’s cunningness to the level of the strategic, a case of political know-how pure and simple? We could, of course, but that would give us a very skewed picture of him: a conniving individual who is both disingenuous and lacking in courage. An early autobiographical remark to the effect that he is orthodox but thinks a lot sums up his disposition more adequately.<sup>25</sup> Lonergan saw no reason to sacrifice shrewdness or

intelligence on the altar of orthodoxy and vice versa. As Qoheleth would counsel (Eccles. 7:16b), Why destroy oneself and others along with one? If the witness of consciousness is to be trusted, Lonergan could be heard saying, the two can be mutually compatible, though it is a life's work of self-transcendence to strike a serviceable balance. What this means in the present context is that he doubted partisan support of either side of the modernist issue led one very far in this direction. While he could side with many on the Right that modernists had several philosophical and theological blind spots, he could not condone the Right's ignorance of history and what it is (*CAMe*:123). Not unlike the wiser among us, he was not prepared to put his career on the line for the sake of ignorance. "You never want to be stupid."

What probably gained Lonergan some immunity from needless interrogation is that he lived and moved, especially in his earlier work, in the language praised by Pius X, Scholasticism. That "much of Lonergan's creative genius lies doubly buried in his Latin Scholastic works"<sup>26</sup> worked, in this instance, to his advantage. Genius the Roman Curia of pre-Vatican II could accept. Creativity, genius' bedfellow, was another matter entirely. It pinched a very sensitive nerve. While their lying "doubly buried" in Lonergan's work does not serve the average reader, it did Lonergan at a time of crisis. Scholasticism was a powerful instrument in his hands. With it he could reform the Catholicism that gave him the intellectual tools with which to think but had itself forgotten how to think.<sup>27</sup> The catch is that he could do this without pulling the rug from under him, thinking in a language from which he could not escape but to which he refused to be shackled. Thought could be had in and by a language that threatened thoughtlessness.

Did this insure Lonergan's good standing with those in the upper echelons of the Roman Church? It did not guarantee it, but it did not hurt either. Few would doubt that his career would have taken a different turn had he interpreted Aquinas in, say, the language of Martin Heidegger, whose thought he could appreciate but had certain reservations toward (*LoE*:2, 13, 32, 69, 70–71; *CWL* 6:242). But Lonergan did not do his doctoral studies in Freiburg, where he would have had a chance to participate in the seminars of Heidegger and thus fall under his direct influence. He did them in Rome, where taking Heidegger seriously meant flirting with the dangers of idealism. In certain respects Lonergan never outgrew this kind of suspicious evaluation of philosophers, many of whom, chiefly modern philosophers, he admits to not having a direct or thorough knowledge of.<sup>28</sup> Thus, some sympathizers such as Francis Schüssler Fiorenza have been led to ask "whether major authors and positions in the history of philosophy (Hume, Kant, or Hegel) or in the history of theology (Tertullian, Origen, Athanasius) can be reduced to abstract epistemological categories such as materialistic empiricism, idealism, or critical realism, as Lonergan has often done."<sup>29</sup> The simplest answer is: prob-

ably not. Yet despite what he held in private or confided to students and colleagues, he did temper these kinds of claims in his public lectures and later writings. To contextualize one of his comments he made in an interview, he wrote “positive stuff” in which he referred people back to argue with the author whose views he was outlining or quoting.<sup>30</sup> His primary task was, in his own words, “to provide Catholics with the background for understanding something about the modern world—without giving up their Catholicity” (*CAMe*:262). He could do this effectively by appropriating the insights of others without sacrificing his early center of meaning, scholasticism, or capitulating to the views he personally found unacceptable both within and without that center. In *Insight* and *Method in Theology*, Lonergan emphasizes the importance of beginning what he would regard as the source of personal and corporate reform where one is. After all, that is where one is. Not only, then, did he have to begin with the mind he wanted to reform just where it was with its own presuppositions, as Quentin Quesnell rightly observes. But he himself could only do this where he was with his own presuppositions. Because he was there.<sup>31</sup> It may not have been where someone like Karl Rahner was, but it is where Lonergan was.

Implied, too, in Lonergan’s deliberate bracketing of religious experience is his dissatisfaction with the move to make religious experience all-important. The philosophical issues of truth could not be so easily pushed aside, particularly in the Christian tradition where they have commanded such serious attention since the second century. Hence, he is made exceedingly uncomfortable by what he recognizes as the modernist tendency (in the above sense) of devaluing truth by valuing it merely as symbolically worthwhile. In the first of a series of discussions that followed each of his 1958 Halifax lectures on *Insight*, Lonergan, after making the Catholic’s case clear, according to which truth is decisive, satirically articulates the modernist position as follows:

[I]f you want to be a modernist, you will say that what counts is religious experience. Truth, well, it has a certain symbolic value, and the propositions—such as the two natures in one person in Christ—no doubt helped the Greeks of the fifth and sixth centuries in their religious experience, but they aren’t very helpful today, and so we can forget about them. Truth is not the decisive thing in the modernist, it is religious experience—intense religious life—and you adapt these propositional symbols to the exigencies of the age. (*CWL* 5:279)

He saw this as a principal failure of pragmatist and existentialist approaches to religion as well, whether the religious phenomenon was targeted as something worthy of cultivation or not. Whatever their many insights, he doubted

that they could make a positive contribution to the task of faithfully translating into modern terms ancient truths of faith and to do so congruent with the whole of church history and not just a part of it. So, for example, he could spot an equivalence between the existentialist pattern of thinking and that of Christ in the Gospels, arguing in his 1957 lectures on existentialism that the former serves as a good basis for biblical theology.<sup>32</sup> But he is hard-pressed to find any equivalence between existentialist thought and conciliar-type thinking. Actually he is quite adamant that with an existentialist basis one cannot go on to Nicea and Chalcedon, Trent and the other councils. Conciliar thinking grapples with the propositional nature of the truths held in faith, not ontologically or experientially fundamental issues like “being a man,” time, and liberty. In a fashion typical of the times, that is to say before the Second Vatican Council, he pinpoints as one of its main objectives the ability to clearly decipher the opposition between Catholics and Protestants on the nature of faith. The former, he states, cannot bring themselves to agree with the latter that faith is simply confidence in God (*fides fiducialis*). Faith also involves assent of the intellect to truth (*intellectus in verum*) (*LoE*:13–14). Faith, in other words, has a basis in our experience; it must correspond in some way to the truths attained via insight into presentations. For Lonergan, reliance on existentialism alone could never bring the good Catholic existentialist this far.

*Insight* presupposes this context. One might express its overarching aim as seeking an answer to the question: How can a thinking individual, a Catholic no less, hold truth to be decisive in an age where temptation rages high to view it as an outmoded idea (a relic of the past) or as the sole possession of endeavors bearing directly on the objectively verifiable or, lastly, as the unattainable reward and/or punishment of the solipsistic wayfarer? Looking at the structure of the work alone, the whole of *Insight* may be seen as pivoting on this truth theme expressed in the middle chapters on judgment and objectivity. To them the initial eight chapters lead; on them the last seven chapters hang. But rather than minimize that which seemingly threatens truth in its propositional form, Lonergan grants it (the reader’s experience) such a high function in *Insight* that it becomes the linchpin of the book’s argument. Unique to his position is the way he does this without making truth our captive or contributing to the widespread illusion that our concepts of truth can be so objective that they are independent of the mind that thinks it. His is a phenomenological case for truth minus the need for absolute certainty or apodicticity, the cradle, he believes, of skepticism (*LoE*:50–51, 54).