

Lonergan
As Aquinas Scholar:
General Empirical Method
and
Vatican II's Interfaith Dialogue Challenges

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Abstract

Is Bernard Lonergan, S.J. a transcendental Thomist? What is GEM (General Empirical Method) for which he is so famous? What might it offer to Dominicans who remain largely classical Thomists, and who are intent upon responding to the challenges of Vatican II regarding interfaith dialogue? This essay will address these three questions with a view to evaluating the potential of Lonergan's work for engagement in dialogue with other religious traditions, keeping in mind the 800th anniversary of the Dominican Order and its mission to proclaim the word to those at the frontiers of today's culture.

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Content Outline

I. Overview

- A. Why is Philosophy in Crisis Today?
- B. What Kind of Aquinas Scholar is Bernard Lonergan, S.J. ?
- C. How Might Lonergan Enrich Vatican II's Call to Engage in Interfaith Dialogue?

II. Lonergan and the Philosophical Crisis

- A. Toward an Adequate Anthropology
- B. Empirical Cognitive Theory
- C. What Sabotages the Process

III. Aquinas, Lonergan, and General Empirical Method (GEM)

- A. Tracking the Operations of Human Consciousness in Knowing (*Summa*, Q. 85f.): "Is this what we do?"
- B. The Recurrent Pattern of Human Knowing: "Do we always do it this way?"
- C. Objective Truth: "What do I know when I do it?"

IV. GEM and Vatican II's Interfaith Challenges

- A. A New Anthropological Paradigm
- B. The Anatomy of the Human Spirit
- C. Pluralism as Constitutive of Unity

V. A New Paradigm for Answering Vatican II's Call to the Church

- A. The Inner Core
- B. The Outer Manifestations
- C. Religious Love as the Hermeneutic for Transforming Human Consciousness

I. Overview

Why is Philosophy in Crisis Today?

It is no news that philosophy is in crisis¹ Post-modern relativism refuses to consider any age-proven framework as definitive, as standard, including Thomas' carefully crafted and inclusive paradigm. It is revealing that my philosophical colleagues point to real evidence of this crisis in the fact that current dictionaries of philosophy are excluding the term 'philosophy' from their entries. We can ask, are they presupposing that there is no longer any agreement about what philosophy is? Another sign of philosophy's plight is the fact that several schools are taking steps to eliminate philosophy from their curriculums. In April of 2009, the Board of Regents at the University of Louisiana, Lafayette, chose to eliminate their philosophy program. In April of 2010, Middlesex University did the same. The president of Howard University, in October of 2010, proposed to eliminate the university's philosophy department. In March of 2011 the entire administration of the University of Nevada at Las Vegas also proposed eliminating the entire philosophy department. In March of 2012, the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette cited financial difficulties to explain why Indiana University of Philosophy is requiring its philosophy faculty to present reasons why its bachelor program in philosophy should not be eliminated. Again, on the Catholic scene, the University of Notre Dame again reduced the required credit hours in philosophy in its university-wide core curriculum. In light of the prevailing philosophical

¹ See the comprehensive work of Michael H. McCarthy in *Crisis of Philosophy*, (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1990). I am indebted to Edward J. Mahoney and the scholars of the *Journal of Catholic Higher Education* in Washington DC for added resources on how this situation has gone from bad to worse: See Peter Redpath's "The New World Disorder: A Crisis of Philosophical Identity" (1994), Elizabeth Bredeck, "Mixing Metaphors: Contemporary Views on the End of Philosophy" (1995), *Debating the State of Philosophy: Habermas, Rorty, and Kolakowski*, edited by Jozef Niznik and John T. Sanders, (1996), Karen Gloy's "Philosophy in a 'Post-Philosophical' Era, (1999), Mario Bunge's "Philosophy in Crisis: The Need for Reconstruction (2001), Lawrence Cahoon, "The Ends of Philosophy: Pragmatism, Foundationalism and Postmodernism" (2002), Aaron Preston's *Analytic Philosophy: The History of an Illusion* (2007), and Nicholas Capaldi's "Philosophical Amnesia" (2009). For Catholic readers, the work of Alasdair MacIntyre and Charles Taylor also address this issue.

relativism of our time, it is no trivial question to ask if the philosophical framework of Bernard Lonergan, S.J. adds any clarity to this malaise.

What Kind of Aquinas Scholar is Bernard Lonergan, SJ?

To what camp does this contemporary thinker (d. 1984) belong? Does he belong to any camp at all? What is he up to? What is Lonergan doing? Lonergan is doing what is now known as *philosophic interiority*. Trained first in Economics, he preferred to refer to himself as a ‘methologist.’ He was interested in how things worked. For those of us trained in various forms of Thomism, it might be useful to say that Lonergan is interested in how the agent intellect works in getting to knowledge. The ‘method’ he refers to is the recurrent pattern of the human consciousness as it comes to know. He works with this pattern empirically, and this is what distinguishes him from the various schools of Thomism, including the Transcendental Thomism of Otto Muck and Donceel. He will work with *transcendence* indeed, but not theoretically. He works with empirically observable psychological function, and attempts to chart the operations of the intelligence as it comes to an objective judgment of fact. Thus, for Lonergan, objective truth is reached by empirically observable subjective operations.

This philosophical methodology is called ‘general empirical method’ (GEM), and it seeks to explain how the human intelligence concretely processes data. This puzzles most Thomist-trained philosophers, because they begin with metaphysical truth, not the process of arriving at it. Fearing a fall into subjectivism, Thomists suspect Lonergan to be caught in philosophical solipsism, and thus a type of relativism. A careful study, however, reveals that Lonergan was fascinated with Aquinas’ conviction that the human intelligence can be known only in its act. He

set out to explore Question 85's challenge in the *Summa* and used the work of Newman, Piaget, and Karen Horney to seek psychological evidence for the empirical pattern of the human intelligence as it moved toward objective fact. As an Aquinas scholar, Lonergan never veers from Thomas's conviction that truth lies in the *judgment* and not in any of the operations that precede it. He is doing Aquinas study indeed, but doing his theorizing based on empirical evidence. This is not what Otto Muck, Donceel and the transcendental Thomists are doing.² To empirically take note of the operations of your own consciousness as it comes to know anything is making a turn. It is giving an account of subjectivity as it seeks to arrive at objectivity. Lonergan is not doing Aquinas studies to grasp Aquinas' results. He is setting out to understand how Thomas' magnificent mind worked, and to imitate it.³

What did Lonergan discover as he studied Aquinas and, as a good Jesuit, discerned the workings of his own mind? He discovered a pattern so simple that at first glance those who study him think him obtuse. He called this pattern of the human intelligence General Empirical Method. General, because it applies to every human consciousness, regardless of culture or ethnicity.

² See Lonergan's *Method in Theology*, (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1971) where on pages 13 and 14, he distinguishes his work from that of the Transcendental Thomists. In another footnote, this time in Otto Muck's *The Transcendental Method*, Muck misspells Lonergan's name and says in so many words that he thinks Lonergan is doing something similar to what he is proposing, but is really not sure what Lonergan is doing.

³ See *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, (Toronto, Buffalo, London: Toronto University Press, 1992) 768-770, where near the closing of his Epilogue Lonergan declares the thrust of his life's work: "To penetrate to the mind of a medieval thinker is to go beyond his words and phrases. It is to grasp questions as they were grasped. It is to take the *omnia opera* of such a writer as St. Thomas Aquinas and to follow through successive works the variations and developments of his views. ...to arrive at a grasp of their motives and causes. It is to discover for oneself that the intellect of Aquinas...reached a position of dynamic equilibrium without ever ceasing to drive towards a fuller and more nuanced synthesis, without ever halting complacently in some finished mental edifice, as though his mind had become dull, or his brain exhausted, or his judgment had lapsed into the error of those that forget man to be a potency in the realm of intelligence. Nor is this labor of penetration enough... After spending years reaching up to the mind of Aquinas, I came to a twofold conclusion...that reaching had changed me profoundly...(and) that change was the essential benefit...my detailed investigations of the thought of Aquinas...have been followed by the present essay in aid of a personal appropriation of one's own rational self-consciousness.....In the Introduction I stated a program. Thoroughly understand what it is to understand, and not only will you understand the broad lines of all there is to be understood but also you will possess a fixed base, an invariant pattern, opening upon all further developments of understanding."

Empirical, because we can attend to the pattern of our own intelligence by simply intending to do so. By self-appropriation we monitor our own operations. The process is the charting of what is constitutively part of our own human functioning. The *method* is the empirical pattern of our own intelligence.

How Might Lonergan Enrich Vatican II's Call to Engage in Interfaith Dialogue?

If Lonergan is focused on understanding how humans get to truth, to a judgment of fact, he is not just about a Catholic issue, he is about a human issue. If this is what humans do as intelligent beings, then we do it not only in interfaith dialogue, but in economics, politics, the arts, communications, and science. It is not difficult to see the link between understanding how cognition works, with the challenge offered to us by Vatican II to engage in sincere interfaith dialogue with others who hold different viewpoints from our own. Cognition will work with whatever challenge is set before it. What may seem strange to us is to make our own cognitive operations the focus of our attention. Yet it is only when our own subjectivity becomes the object of our inquiry will we be able to face the biases that keep us from a truly objective judgment of fact about what is being said to us in dialogue of any kind.

We need a tool to catch ourselves avoiding the truth the documents invite us to face and explore. It is not enough to claim we understand what is being asked of us. We need to be able to give an account of how we got to that understanding, and why we think it is accurate. Further, we need to ask why that fact *matters*. This will prompt a judgment of *value*. If those involved in dialogue can become aware of how they are processing the data given them, and aware of the biases that will attempt to get in the way, they may not only deal with their dialogue partners with respect,

they will understand why they do so, even while at the same time completely disagreeing with them.

II. Lonergan and the Philosophical Crisis

Toward an Adequate Anthropology

As mentioned in the Overview, Lonergan disclaims his identification with the transcendentalist approach to Aquinas studies. He does so by simply stating that he works empirically, in contrast to the transcendentalist school of Thomism that works theoretically. This distinction not only removes him from this school, but from Thomism in its variety of forms. Epistemologies that are not grounded in an empirical cognitional theory abound. The question remains: What are we doing when we are knowing? And why is doing that what knowing is, and nothing else will do? Thomism will speak of the agent intellect, but it does not give an account of its distinct operations. What is its pattern? How does one move from data of sense to understanding? More, in our day it is important to include the data of the consciousness itself along with the data of sense in our inquiry, because psychology has given us access to that data.

Philosophically Thomism begins with metaphysics, the science of being: the real; what is. Indeed, this is the end of all inquiry, for truth is the real as known by the mind. But this objectivity will be reached only by authentic subjectivity, not an intelligence riddled by bias, and so an account must be given of the empirical cognitive operations that underpin one's epistemology by an empirically observable *cognitional theory*. The turn to the subject escapes solipsism when an objective judgment of fact is reached, for the true is true whether the thinker reaches it or not. What if one can intentionally guide the process, thus more accurately assuring a

more true objectivity? Cognition needs to be monitored for bias, or the truth lies open to be ranked with other mere relativistic opinions.

Lonergan, as I understand him, is an Aquinas Scholar. I believe he is doing what Aquinas himself would be doing today because he now has the discipline of psychology at his service. Today we do studies of consciousness itself. I believe Aquinas would be looking into this, innovating as he did in his own day, trying to figure out what insight Lonergan provides to the wonder of the human intelligence as it begets understanding in its human way, imitating the Triune being of the Word.

Even in his own day Aquinas was quite astute to the workings of human psychology. Without a formal discipline, he followed Aristotle's grounded approach to human emotion (passion) and virtue theory, this in contrast to the more detached platonic philosophy also available to him. Aquinas studies need to be able to enter into conversation with the sciences. To do this, an empirically based account of what goes on in consciousness opens common ground for the psychologist, the counsellor, and the therapist, and these in turn are more and more entering into conversation with medicine, astro-physics and neuro-science. The common ground is human consciousness operation and intentionality. We have need of an empirically grounded ethics that hears what psychology and counselling are telling us, that points out possible bias, and that reaches the clearest truth we can about ourselves and our world.

This attention comes about by means of a “turn.” The subject can no longer be neglected.⁴ The “turn to the subject” is viewed by many Thomists as a Kantian trap, confining the thinker to the anarchy of relativism. On the contrary, to neglect an accountability for the cognitive operations of the thinker may poison the well in the search for an accurately formed judgment. Aquinas is most clear: knowledge is reached in the judgment, not in the dynamic process of seeking understanding on the way to that judgment. Understanding can be mistaken. The adequate anthropology we need is one that gives an account of how our greatest power, our intelligence, reaches truth in an unbiased judgment.

We have need of a human anthropology that is grounded in a solid Catholic Christian humanism, plus its grounding in the Divine Mystery, and open to the transformation we see in human life through religious experience. No either/or approach is sufficient. Only an inclusive philosophical approach to human anthropology can address the very real crisis in philosophy. The full human can be addressed in three dimensions: organism, psyche, and spirit. The operations of each of these dimensions needs to be explained *functionally* or *methodologically*. Lonergan will transpose Thomas into a new key, but the melody is the same: the agent intellect is a *dynamic* reality, and can be known only in its act. Lonergan is not interested primarily in the results of Thomas’ thought. He sets about the task of explaining how Thomas’ (and our) intelligence works.

⁴ See Lonergan’s “The Subject” in *A Second Collection: Papers by Bernard J.F. Lonergan*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974) 69-86. Delivered as the Aquinas Lecture in 1968 at Marquette University, Milwaukee, the subject is treated under the titles of *Neglected*, *Truncated*, *Immanentist*, *Existential*, and *Alienated*. Lonergan makes a case for checking out the *thinker* as well as the thought.

Empirical Cognitive Theory

What then is the *method* that Lonergan charts? Why is his work called *interiority analysis*?

Lonergan is calling the intellectual community to attend to the thinker as he or she goes about the task of thinking. To repeat, those familiar with Aquinas might say he seeks to do an anatomy of the agent intellect in its act. He wants to know *what we are doing* when we are knowing. If an empirically observed cognitional pattern can be verified, then not only can we guide it intentionally, we can note when it is not being honored by us or among our dialogue partners, whatever the area of intellectual inquiry.

The recurrent and non-revisable pattern that Lonergan discovered and presents to the philosophical world consists of four empirically observable operations. These operations can be detected by anyone, from about fifth grade up, who can attend to his or her own data of consciousness. Lonergan adds to Aquinas' naming of the 'data of sense' in the term *phantasm*. He points to a second source of data overlooked by us because it is so familiar: that of the operations of consciousness itself. The senses provide data, and so does the consciousness itself, and we can note it and name it. The naming results in this sequence:

- *Experience*: by which we are aware of all reality, physical, social, and spiritual.
- *Understanding*: by which we ask questions to reach an understanding that data.
- *Judging*: by which we assess the correctness of our understanding.
- *Deciding*: by which we evaluate what is worth acting upon from what we know.

Experience the data coming from not one, but two sources: our senses, and the data of our consciousness itself. Then probe, question, examine, and research the data. When we have done

our homework, what will we conclude about the issue? What will our judgment of fact be about the truth of the data, however tentative? Finally, what is this truth *worth* to us? What do we intend to *do* about it?

The pattern is so simple it can be taught to grade school children to help them form not only their conscience (the final operation), but their consciousness. Yet it is so complex that philosophers and methodologists will engage reams of paper explaining what this means for consciousness analysis and its moral implications. Because the human consciousness is fully self-reflexive, we have the ability to experience our experiencing, understand our experiencing, judge the correctness of our understanding, and decide if and how we will act on what we judge to be the truth. This is *philosophical interiority*. With the turn to interiority analysis, to how the intelligence is operating, faculty psychology with its naming of ‘intellect and will’ shifts into the realm of *interiority*, which is concerned with empirical human functioning to form as accurate a cognitional theory as possible. Rather than static language, the ‘turn’ works with the dynamic language of conscious operation. The intelligence’s dynamic activity and the will’s operative evaluative/choice/decision/act dynamism is distinguished and named. This not merely a theory to be accepted (as in Transcendental Thomism) but one to be affirmed by the self-appropriation, “Yes, this is what I do!”

We might ask this important question: “When I make the turn to interiority, and attend to my own subjective intelligent operations, when do I arrive at objectivity and escape the trap of just going around in my own consciousness?” Lonergan will point to his mentor, Aquinas. Knowing is achieved in the judgment, and either we have arrived at the truth or not, evidenced by the fact

that we are *still questioning* the matter under discussion. Arriving at the truth is being in touch with the real, that we have bonded with being, with objective reality. But we have done so critically, not dogmatically, simply because the truth is presumed with no accountability as to how it was reached. Furthermore, what we can know will be not only be the *metaphysical*, it is the *physical* as in science and medicine, the *psychological* as in neuro-science, and the *spiritual* as offered us in religion and mysticism. The real is real whether we come to know it or not. But coming to know it in its truth will occur only through the conscious operations of an authentic unbiased subjectivity. Thus Lonergan opens up the *vetera* of Aquinas to the *nova* of our age.⁵

What Sabotages the Process

Then why aren't we a most intelligent people? Why do we reach such poor judgments and so make such poor decisions? Lonergan present us with four biases that disrupt the entire pattern, and to this date, no one has successfully added a fifth.⁶

To learn these biases is key to monitoring one's own intellectual inquiry, for if they are present, poisoning the well, we will produce judgments that are rash followed by equally rash decisions. In terms of Aquinas' framework, the biases abort the responses prompted by the theological and moral virtues.⁷

⁵ *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, "Epilogue," 769.

⁶ See the index of *Insight* for Lonergan's discussion of dramatic bias, individual egoism, group egoism and general or theoretical bias.

⁷ See Carla Mae Streeter, OP, *Foundations of Spirituality: The Human and the Holy, A Systematic Approach*. (Collegeville, Liturgical Press, 2012) for a treatment of theological and moral virtue in relation to interiority analysis.

Dramatic bias can be called a *scotosis* of the psyche. Lonergan borrows the term from ocular science and applies it to the scarring of the human subconscious through the dramatic trauma of life. Buried in past experience, this wounding (e.g. incest) censors images that are connected with a painful event, thus preventing images at the level of experience. This avoidance effectively shuts down questioning related to an issue. Therapy can bring the trauma up into consciousness and healing. Contemplative prayer and its tears can also release the psyche from this bondage.

Individual egoism is all too familiar. It is reflected in an attitude of “My way or the highway. Why should I listen to you ?.” This close-mindedness locks the person into his/her own ignorance. When individual egoism becomes corporate, we have *group egoism*. The corporate attitude spawns the familiar bigotry we know so well: sexism, racism, nationalism, etc. and its other variants. Finally, *general* or *theoretic* bias has no patience with long-term results. It’s rampant pragmatism dismisses research and study until honest inquiry is silenced by practical short-term results. General bias has no patience with long study or time wasted on the arts. Dramatic bias cripples the image capacity of the psyche. Individual and group egoism, along with general bias stunts the questioning for understanding at the second level of consciousness. The result is rash judgment and the rash decision that follow from such judgments. We are presented with the tension of human intelligence faced with these biases daily in our news media.

Near the close of the Second Vatican Council in 1965, a small document was issued that would change the Catholic Church’s relationship with not only the Jewish people, but the religions of the world. Behind the scenes, Cardinal Bea had been working on a draft since 1963, prompted in

part by a doctoral thesis sent to him from St. Louis University in the United States. A Dominican woman religious from the Racine community of Catherine of Siena had done research on the anti-semitic texts of Catholic catechetical materials.⁸ The Jesuit advisors of sister Rose Thering sent her research to Cardinal Bea. With the anti-semitic bias revealed, *Nostrae aetate* was issued on October 28, 1965, and the Church awoke to the challenge of forging new relationships with those we had formerly shunned. Consistent with a more developmental view of revelation in *Dei verbum*, this interfaith document recognized the activity of God active in other traditions as they sought to explore the Divine Mystery on their own cultural and religious terms.

This was no invitation to relativism regarding the Catholic doctrine of God. It was a simple recognition of bias. Theological work began with the possibility of being faithful to one's own tradition while simultaneously respecting the beliefs of another even while not agreeing with them. Dialogue began in earnest, and the rules for it emerged as various communities engaged. After initial bumps, we learned to seek to understand rather than attempt to convert.

Key to this activity on the Catholic side was a new way of understanding the Triune Mystery, especially the Holy Spirit. On the day of Lonergan's death, November 26, 1984, Frederick Crowe, S.J. gave the Convocation Address at Regis College in Toronto. The title of his address was "Son of God, Holy Spirit, and World Religions."⁹ The idea that perhaps we should reverse the divine processions and speak of the activity of the Holy Spirit first as God brings forth the

⁸ This story is told in the Academy Award nominated documentary "Sister Rose's Passion," directed by Oren Jacoby.

⁹ *Appropriating the Lonergan Idea*, Michael Vertin, ed. (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1989) 324-333.

Word was like a new revelation to the audience. Lonergan's favorite passage from Romans 5:5 was clearly behind this suggestion. Could it be that the Spirit overshadows first, and then the Word eventually emerges into history? Listeners were remembering Genesis 1 and the annunciation narrative in Luke. The implications were startling: could it be that this was happening with the religions of the world? Rather than anonymous Christians as Rahner had proposed, could they be anonymous Spiritans? More, what possibilities lie before us as people of the dialogue if we are trained in philosophical interiority to monitor our own truth-seeking process?

III. Aquinas, Lonergan, and General Empirical Method (GEM)

Tracking the Operations of Human Consciousness in Knowing: "Is this what I do?"

Since Lonergan is convinced that GEM is really a very practical process, it might do us well to check it out. I notice (sense perception) that the soles of a favorite pair of shoes are wearing through, so bad are they in fact that my feet get soaked when it rains. I carefully examine the shoes, after all, they are a favorite pair, and the questions (inquiry for understanding) start: "Are they really repairable? Do I need a new pair? Can I afford a new pair? Will I be able to find a pair as comfortable as these?" If I am not biased ("Oh, I can get by with them for a while longer...I'll just avoid puddles...They're so comfortable...") The more I examine them, the more the evidence becomes clear: These shoes have had it, they are so far gone that they can't be repaired (judgment of fact).

As much as it affronts the nostalgia of my memory of the shoes and their service to me, the truth is "You need a new pair of shoes." So my set of questions, resulting in a judgment of fact, are

leading me to a decision. Another type of questioning begins: How much do I want to spend? What style will I search for? Where will I go where I can afford the cost of new shoes? These are questions of *value* and emotion will play a key role in reaching my decision, choice, and finally, action. I decide to go to Payless, get my purse and car keys, go to the garage, unlock the car, get it, start it, and wend my way to Payless for a new pair of shoes. Then the process begins all over again once I arrive at the store, for then I need to choose the size and style of shoe to buy.

So ordinary is this recurring process, that ‘turning’ to pay attention to it, seems silly. But it isn’t silly. This simple case has to do with a personal matter, but the same process (check the data, question it, reach a judgment of fact, a judgment of value and act on it) will be the same, whether I need to choose a retirement plan or whether I choose to be baptized. Lonergan maintains that *the process is the same*. If he is right, we have just objectified our subjective intelligent process, we have done philosophical interiority by attending to our own processing. Once we learn to do this for ourselves, we begin to take note when we, or others are skipping steps. Perhaps we or they don’t really question, but jump to all too quick judgments. (Everyone is doing it!) Or they don’t carefully examine the data before them. (Oops! These jeans are size 18...much too large for me.) Knowledge of the biases (dramatic, individual, group, and general/theoretical) will further clarify the intelligence for a good judgment. It comes down to attending to the process of prudential discernment.

The Recurrent Pattern of Human Knowing: “Do we always do it this way?”

Lonergan answers yes. No matter what the subject matter or discipline, the intelligence will *check the data, question it, arrive at a tentative judgment concerning the data, and then choose to act or not act upon it*. Bias may infect the process, but the process will proceed, and the judgment might then be rash, and the decision made from the judgment will be just as rash. The implications for finance, political choice, marriage, career, or religious affiliation are immense. GEM becomes the seminal foundation for conscience formation and moral education. It guides health care and sexuality, scientific research and medicine. If bias prevails, the process becomes the reason for anarchy, the collapse of culture, and the violence perpetrated on the innocent. With an awareness of GEM, the United Nations would need to be restructured, because it is not currently internationally representative. With an honest ownership of GEM, Wall Street could not function with its hidden biases. The turn to interiority offers a return to compassionate ethics and an inclusive social fabric.

Objective Truth: What do I know when I do it?

If our *cognitive theory* is based on empirical observation, then it can be discussed across disciplines. More, we have an empirical grounding for an accurater *epistemology*. We know what knowing really is. It is reaching a careful judgment after sufficient questioning of data, and nothing less will do. What we know when we do it, is truth, being, the real, as known by the mind: the truth of *metaphysics*, the truth of the *natural, psychological, and social sciences*, and truth of *spiritual* reality. The sciences are then respected for the truth about biological, physical, psychological, and social reality that they bring us. At the same time, the human intelligence is not confined within the limits of mere empirical data. The deeper human questions likewise beg

to be addressed. Careful attention to the data of consciousness reveals repeated incidences of transcendence. This opens up the whole world of religion and religious experience. It too, will be addressed by the human intelligence and its recurring pattern of operation, its GEM.

Philosophy takes us to the door of this inquiry, and to close this door will mean humankind is locked within a closed system, a prisoner of its own stifled inquiry, a captive of empiricism.

Only the tip of the iceberg, to expand Lonergan's image of hidden rock (*Method*, p. 19 and footnote) has been addressed. The fuller reality of transcendence lies beneath the surface, and religion opens this door. How and if this is to be addressed will depend on how holistic and authentic the anthropology of the human being is understood.

IV. GEM and Vatican II's Interfaith Challenges

A New Anthropological Paradigm

To pursue the understanding of human anthropology and to answer the question of the significance of religious experience in it, I suggest we need the new anthropological paradigm I hinted of earlier. The popular "body, mind, and spirit" will not do. The absence of any mention of human emotion is early evidence of its ambiguity. With the three-fold structure of *organism*, *psyche*, and *spirit*, the ambiguity fades when the operations of each of these dimensions are identified and explained, not merely described.

The *organism* is most familiar with its physical systems: digestive, circulatory, neurological, lymphatic, etc. They are explained in the disciplines of biology and other physical sciences. The *psyche* is that mysterious energy, the life-force responsible for imaging, and for imagining, which links images; it includes dreaming, fantasizing, and the eleven powerful motors of human

emotion.¹⁰ The human *spirit* is not some ghost in a machine. It is a distinct set of empirically observable operations. These reveal a self-reflective consciousness consisting of contemplative wonder, sense perception, inquiry, judgment, and decision. We recognize here the intelligence and the will, but spoken of in terms of their dynamic operation. Psychic energy, which fuses the spiritual functions with those of the organism, flows from what Lonergan calls the *apex animae*, the height or depths of the soul.¹¹ It is here, in what spiritual literature calls the heart, the center, the innermost room of the castle, the little cell, that the Holy Spirit is poured forth into our hearts (Rom.5:5). In this view of the human being, the Mystery of the God who is Love holds all that is human in a transcendent realm, immanently present yet undetected by sense. The consciousness is grasped by its reality and can experience its presence. This Love as primary efficient cause, orchestrates the life force of existence and the dynamism of knowing and choosing in partnership with the fully active human as instrumental efficient cause. It is from this Mystery that the theological life explored by Aquinas as faith, hope, and charity transforms the intelligence, the emotional longing, and the choices of the human, and where Religious Love becomes the form of the cardinal moral virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance, resulting in the beauty that we call holiness. This anthropological structure is universal. The Spirit blows where it will, and we are finding language to explain how active religious Love functions across religious differences.

¹⁰ Thomas, following Aristotle, groups human emotion (passion) into two groups: irascible and concupiscible. Modern Thomistic psychologists such as Conrad Baar, rename these groups as 'considered' and 'spontaneous'. This renaming clarifies the Thomistic meaning and is more understandable to modern readers. The spontaneous emotions are love/hate, desire/aversion, and joy/sorrow. The considered are fear/courage, hope/despair, and anger. See the index of Streeter, *Foundations of Spirituality*.

¹¹ Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1971) 107.

The Anatomy of the Human Spirit

At first glance this seems a strange juxtaposition of terms. Anatomy pertains to physicality, and the term spirit, as usually understood, is devoid of physicality. We will not be viewing *spirit* physically, but we will be exploring it empirically. We will be viewing it as the upper part of the *soul* as a dynamic set of functional operations. In contrast, the lower part of the soul is subconscious psychic energy, with its capacities for imaging, imagining, dreaming and emotion. As the functions of the psychic are subconscious, to attend to them they need to be brought up to consciousness, the first level of the spirit, which is experiential awareness and wonder. They need to be made *conscious*.

The human spirit proper consists of the intellectual and volitional operations. Because the human consciousness is self-reflexive, it differs in kind from that of animal consciousness. We know that we know, and to the best of our present knowledge, the animal knows, but does not reflect upon its knowing.

We locate Lonergan's GEM in this anatomy, speaking figuratively. The first level of consciousness is the pure experience of data, both of sense and of reflexive consciousness itself. This pure moment, before any inquiry begins, is the contemplative base of the consciousness itself. Rooted in awe and wonder, the consciousness is still, poised as it were as a "fish in the sea," an image attributed to Catherine of Siena. Nested in this wonder is the dynamism of GEM. Inquiry begins, judgment is reached, and decision is made. All the while the psychic energy of emotion and imagination accompanies this dynamism as the human intelligence is drawn to truth, to goodness, to beauty, to unity, and struggles to fend off the biases that would abort its

journey into dead-end detours. This *anatomy* then consists of conscious wonder at all that consciousness experiences, inquiry into its meaning, judgment of the truth of our understanding, and decision based on the truth we have intelligently comprehended. These operations function authentically and fully only when powered by the Mystery of religious Love which is the ground of their free and authentic operation.

Pluralism as Constitutive of Unity

With this anthropological paradigm on blinking light in our minds, we can more explicitly explore Lonergan's suggestions for engaging in religious dialogue with the "other." Lonergan suggests that this wider dialogue has two dimensions: an Inner Core and Outer Manifestations. The Inner Core consists of two realities: GEM as it functions in the human being, and religious experience or the sense of transcendence the person experiences it. Lonergan asserts that it is this Inner Core and it alone that is *transcultural*. The Outer Manifestations, namely belief formulations, ritual practice, and moral imperatives, are culturally embedded, and thus plural across cultures.

This distinction is significant. It resonates with a holistic view of *being* itself. The Triune Mystery of God is its foundation. The plurality of three Subjects in the single consciousness of the Divine Mystery is the very cause of the unity of God. Without the Divine Subjects as distinct only by relationship, the very notion of the nature of the Oneness of God as it is revealed to us disintegrates. By the very fact that there is a distinction of hidden Love, expressive Love, and active Love in the one consciousness of the Divine, we are shown a fullness that would be missing in the simple revelation of "God is Love" without the relational distinction. It is the

richness of that very plurality that constitutes the unity of God. We are shown the possibility of a distinction *without separation*, a challenge to the logical intelligence.

Creation mirrors this reality. It is present in genus and species and in the richness of race variations within a common humanity. Only recently have we realized that this distinction without separation is evident also in various religious traditions. The possibility of a unity held in tension by a plurality is assisted by distinctions made in philosophical interiority. The turn to interiority enables us to distinguish theological categories by dynamic *function*, not merely in static terms.

V. A New Paradigm for Answering Vatican II's Call to the Church

The Inner Core

Lonergan asks us to distinguish an Inner Core and Outer Manifestations as we grapple with the challenge of diverse faith traditions.¹² If the Inner Core is the dimension that holds us in unity, what explanation might we offer to clarify the role of this Inner Core?

The Inner Core is common to every human being, believer or atheist. It consists of the operations of human consciousness: experiencing, understanding, judging, and deciding. There is no human being that does not experience wonder and sense stimulation, then questions the meaning of what he or she experiences, makes judgements of fact about it, and then chooses to do this or not to do that. Philosophical interiority turns the spotlight on simple human functioning and names its major operations as common. Lonergan also proposes that every human being also experiences the pull toward transcendence, even if fleeting or denied. If he is correct, we have a

¹² *Method*, 284.

common human experiential ground across not only religious traditions, but across cultures and across every discipline that engages human interaction. In thematizing what unifies human beings, Lonergan is careful to limit this dimension carefully. This and this alone is transcultural. Only in this Inner Core do we find the unity that we can depend on in dealing with those whose beliefs and values differ greatly from our own. It is nested in our common humanness.

Outer Manifestations

Outer Manifestations speak to our plurality. No amount of dialogue will make one identical to another. If this plurality is not respected, we falsely try to make common what is distinctive and miss the unity that is present even as we begin to relate with one another.

These differences flow from the Inner Core. They may be beliefs that are the result of unbiased judgments of revealed fact, or beliefs that are riddled with bias. The values held by a tradition likewise may be just and true to the dignity of humanness, or poisoned by the biases that keep certain people, certain classes of people, certain colors of people, oppressed. These values will be expressed in religious ritual. Moral directives will be put in place flowing from the Inner Core. They too will be influenced by unbiased value judgments and choices, or will be destructive and violent, revealing the bias that controls them.

Outer Manifestations will be modified, refined, transformed, or abandoned when the Inner Core judges that the verbal formulations, the ritual practice, or the moral prescriptions are no longer enhancing the beauty and dignity of the human being adequately. The call to this kind of change, a religious conversion, might come from within the faith tradition itself, or as a result of dialogue

with others which opens up possibility that was hidden or denied within the tradition. It is dialogue itself that can be the catalyst for this change. Blaming or shaming, condemning or accusing, merely encourages entrenchment. The Inner Core is to be kept in view, and from this unity and common humanity the call issued by Vatican II has the pragmatic possibility of unity in the midst of the reality of plurality. GEM clarifies what authentic evangelization brings about.

Religious Love as the Hermeneutic for Transforming Human Consciousness

As the end of his life approached, Lonergan's writings turned more and more to the theme of religious Love and its possibility of piercing through to the Inner Core of the 'other.' Lonergan was profoundly moved by Romans 5:5: "...the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us." This love, welling up in every human heart, becomes a 'hermeneutic', a tool for interpretation, for authentic religious response. This one Spirit provides a lens to read not only our own texts, but that of the 'other.' It is this personified Love that enables us to detect the Love moving in the tradition of another, while we remain firmly committed in faithfulness to our own. It is this Love that empowers us to monitor our own conscious operations to seek understanding rather than settle for the stereotypes we have been taught, to judge reasonably the values held in the tradition of the other, and to honor the practices that enhance remarkable holiness in the other. Finally, this Presence in the depth of human consciousness prompts us to respond to the other as another myself, as kin, thus bringing about signs of that Reign of God that reorders human relationship, driving out the demons of exclusion, disrespect, injustice, violence, and oppression. This is the agenda for the progress of culture, and for the reversal of its decline. It is not only a vision, but a vision grounded in the tactics, the maneuvers, of human intelligence and choice.

Active religious Love not only prompts us to engage GEM authentically, it enables us to detect when it is not being engaged elsewhere and to call for it. Basic awareness of interiority analysis makes this possible in the family as well as at the United Nations. Lonergan's gift to Aquinas scholarship is to link the vision of Aquinas about active virtue to the psychological operations of human consciousness that we have access to in our day.

The religious Love that grasps us provides a welcoming that no differences can block. It begins with a hospitality of the heart that the 'other' simply feels. No amount of education can substitute for it, and it will be instinctively felt by the other, provided the same Love possesses him or her. It is here that religious Love acts as interpreter; it recognizes a like love in the speech or writings of the dialogue partner and senses like-meaning. From this recognized common base, common human values can be reconized, and distinctive religious rites, formulas, and moral behavior be explained and understood. This does not mean they are agreed upon. They are part of the Outer Manifestation. But it is in the Inner Core of understanding and judgment that one's choices are forged. Here is the font of authentic evangelization. Unless the understanding has been allowed to question, and the judgment has grasped a greater truth, and the value judgment of the will motivates the person to a new choice, conversion remains tainted with manipulation or threat. The time of oppressive and compulsive conversion is over. True fidelity comes from the heart through the knowing that comes from loving that is faith. Genuine faith will seek more and more understanding, and religion and theology might be called upon to come to its aid.

Conclusion

We have set ourselves a task. We have sought to clarify how the Jesuit methodologist, Bernard Lonergan, S.J., contributes to Aquinas scholarship. Because Lonergan works empirically with an analysis of human consciousness and its psychological operations, he differs from the more theoretical approach of various Thomistic schools. His General Empirical Method (GEM) gives us access to our own functioning intelligence, enabling us to monitor its operations for bias and sharpening the possibility of a more critical and compassionate intentionality.

This basic method can be useful in interfaith dialogue, a challenge offered to the Church in the Documents of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). Using the distinction of Inner Core and Outer Manifestations offered by Lonergan, theologians doing interfaith dialogue can find a new base from which to respond to the call of the Council to engage with those of other faith traditions.

As the Dominican Family celebrates its 800th Anniversary, it renews its awareness of the frontiers of exploration calling to us today. Among these frontiers are the limitations a secular culture of materialism would impose on the human spirit, confining it to the prison of naturalistic scientism. As Aquinas did in his day, Lonergan beckons us to enter into the psychological and scientific explorations of our own day, and to point to the Divine at work there. Neuroscience and psychology can reveal the very God the materialist denies. The Dominican is being challenged not only to go to frontiers geographical, but to frontiers philosophical and intellectual. It is my hope that this paper has spoken to this challenge in some small way.

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