THE THEOLOGICAL PROBLEM OF GRACE AND EXPERIENCE: A LONERGANIAN PERSPECTIVE

L. Matthew Petillo

For Bernard Lonergan and Karl Rahner, grace is a reality that can be not only professed in worship or inferred through metaphysical analysis but also experienced in the depths of consciousness. Here the author uses a Lonerganian hermeneutic to study the evolution of the theology of grace from the writings of Augustine through the Scholastic work of Aquinas to the theology of Lonergan. His analysis demonstrates that the transition to an account that expresses grace in terms of human experience represents a development in the Catholic theology of grace.

Two major watersheds are evident in the history of the theology of grace. The first occurred during the 13th century when the collaborative efforts of Scholastic thinkers yielded a theorem of the supernatural. The second occurred in the Roman Catholic Church during the 20th century when theologians such as Karl Rahner and Bernard Lonergan, in what was no less than a kind of Copernican revolution, transposed this medieval theology of grace from the abstract and object-based framework of Scholastic ontology to the phenomenological and subject-based context of interior experience. This article compares the transitions from Augustine to Aquinas and from Aquinas to Lonergan in order to demonstrate an analogy of proportion, and thus to establish the insights of Lonergan as part of a cumulative series of achievements in Catholic theology.

In some sense, the theology of grace had its dawn in the mind of Augustine. Therefore, any account of the development of the concept of grace requires a consideration of Augustinian theology. Since theoretical differentiation was only partial in Augustine, his theology of grace remained limited. But what was in its inchoate phases in the meditations of Augustine came to fruition in the thought of Aquinas; and so, while Augustine worked out a position of grace and liberty to which the Scholastics were indebted, the metaphysical perspective achieved by Aquinas's theology of grace transcended the limitations of Augustinian speculation.

L. Matthew Petillo received his Ph.D. from Boston College and is currently visiting assistant professor at D'Youville College, Buffalo, New York. His areas of special competence are Catholic systematic theology and comparative theology. In progress is an article entitled "The Universal Experience of Grace and the Challenges of Postmodernism."

In a similar fashion, the viewpoint attained by Lonergan and other contemporary thinkers reflected an even further development that transcended the restrictions of medieval *scientia*. I contend that the interior differentiation of Christian consciousness, by which contemporary Catholic thinkers such as Lonergan and Rahner made explicit an "experience of grace," marks an explanatory breakthrough of a magnitude at least equal to the theoretical advance of Aquinas. In terms of theological progress, the theorem of the supernatural stands to the Augustinian theology of grace as an experiential account of grace stands to the theorem of the supernatural.

THE "EXPERIENCE OF GRACE" AND THE CONTEMPORARY CHURCH

The idea of "an experience of grace," though endorsed by some contemporary Thomistic thinkers, has raised red flags in the minds of magisterial authorities. In one of the more recent versions of the *Catholic Catechism*, the following statement regarding "grace" and "experience" appears: "Since it belongs to the supernatural order, grace escapes our experience and cannot be known except by faith."[1] In the official and relatively recent catechetical teaching, the magisterium seems uncomfortable with expressing grace in the language of human experience. But while the *Catechism* and its proponents quite correctly recognize the supernatural character of grace, the contention that we have no consciousness of grace has, in recent years, elicited reproach for reflecting an excessive abstractness and perhaps a certain extrinsicism that does not cohere with the personalist turn in 20th-century theology.

The magisterium seems to be worried that describing "grace" in the language of human experience will secularize the divine mystery and reduce its majesty; and so it insists that grace "escapes our experience and cannot be known except by faith." To allay these fears and thereby embrace more fully the movement initiated at Vatican II, I intend to show that a description of grace in terms of human experience does not compromise, but in fact preserves and enriches, the deepest insights of our Catholic heritage.

THE NOTION OF DEVELOPMENT

Scholastic thinking did not grasp and formulate a notion of development, in part because it failed to achieve a complete understanding of human understanding—a failure that can be attributed to a lack of historical consciousness. Now it is evident that questions regarding the nature of human understanding are methodologically prior to questions regarding the extent to which and the precise manner in which one theological understanding

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[1] *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1994) 540.

surpasses another. The answers to these prior and more basic[2] cognitional questions can be established in and through a careful study and articulation of human understanding and can serve the function of critically grounding[3] an evaluative history of ideas. In other words, a complete comprehension of human understanding in its causes, conditions, limitations, and pathways of development will yield a critical and normative set of criteria for measuring, relating, and appraising systematic theological positions on grace.

The Differentiation of Human Consciousness

Generally, understanding is reached by asking questions and grasping intelligible patterns or forms immanent in the data. But the *truth* of understanding is reached by *correctly* answering *all* the questions relevant to understanding the immanent intelligibility of the data. But how does one determine relevance in the context of theological reflection? The criterion for relevance varies in relation to variations in the stage of meaning in which the theologian operates. Lonergan explains that

in the first stage [of meaning] the subject, in his pursuit of the concrete good, also attends, understands, judges. But he does not make a specialty of these activities. He does not formulate a theoretical ideal in terms of knowledge, truth, reality, causality. . . . But in the second stage of meaning the subject continues to operate in the commonsense manner in all his dealings with the particular and concrete, but along with this mode of operation he also has another, the theoretical.[4]

In other words, it is not as if an interest in a true understanding of things was absent from the first stage of meaning, but what was meant by "true understanding" evolved from the first to the second stage. In the first stage one understands things in relation to oneself; in the second stage one understands things in their relations to one another. With respect to the first stage of meaning, Lonergan says that "later notions of truth had not yet been developed. The Hebrew thought of truth in terms of fidelity, and when he spoke of doing the truth he meant doing what was right."[5] The transition to the second stage of meaning required what Lonergan calls a "theoretical differentiation" of human consciousness. In this stage, the theoretical mode of thinking became adequately distinguished, in its

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[2] "Basic" is not to be understood in the sense of simplistic but in the sense of primordial.

[3] "Critically grounding" is to be distinguished from Kant's use of the concept. To "critically ground" statements does not mean to adumbrate a set *of a priori* concepts but to bring to light the methodical set of operations that give rise to judgments.

[4] Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1971) 93–94.

[5] Ibid. 306

canons, procedures, questions, and insights, from a kind of mythic consciousness.[6] One can even see an embryonic stage of this process in Christian thinking as early as the second century when Clement of Alexandria began to distinguish a philosophic conception of God from the anthropomorphisms of Scripture.[7] The third stage of meaning requires an additional differentiation. In this stage, questions still seek intelligible patterns in data, and methods are devised and employed to apprehend these intelligible patterns; but the data about which questions inquire are not the data of sense but the data of consciousness. A focus on interiority gave rise to a whole new set of questions and methods that intended a set of answers beyond the scope of the second and first stages of meaning.

Development in theological understanding has to do with *widening the scope of relevant questions*. Correct understanding involves asking and answering *all* the relevant questions. As the horizon of Christian thinking becomes increasingly differentiated, more questions become relevant and the insights that respond to them have to become more penetrating. A more differentiated horizon expands the radius of what is considered a *relevant* question and insight in theology. What appears to be a totality of relevant questions from one viewpoint remains, when considered from a higher viewpoint, a limited set. Development in theology, making progress in understanding the mystery of God and everything in relation to the mystery of God, has meant a continual approximation to the "all" of the resolution of *all* relevant questions demanded by the norms immanent and operative in human intelligence.

NICAEA: A MODEL OF DEVELOPMENT IN THEOLOGY

The following lengthy excursus on the development of the Nicene doctrine and post-Nicene trinitarian theology serves the purpose of formulating an analogy for functional differentiation and systematic developments within the theology of grace. Since Lonergan has written on the development of the Nicene doctrine and its relation to later trinitarian and christological insights, the case of Nicaea can serve as a frame of reference for understanding a similar process of evolution in the theology of grace.

An important illustration of the early differentiation of Christian consciousness can be found in the movement of philosophic and post-philosophic thinking leading up to and following the doctrine originating

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[6] See ibid. 309.

[7] See Bernard J. F. Lonergan, "The Origins of Christian Realism," in his *Philosophical and Theological Papers 1958–1964*, Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan (hereafter CWBL) 6, ed. Robert C. Croken, Frederick E. Crowe, and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1996) 89. See also. Lonergan, *Insight* 554–72.

at Nicaea. The Nicene statement is more or less an answer to the question, who is the Son of God? The authors of the New Testament a few centuries earlier were asking ostensibly similar questions, but their answers were noticeably different. The questions of the earliest disciples arose within a horizon, one in which a theoretical context of meaning had not yet been adequately distinguished from a symbolic context of meaning. In other words, the disciples' questions about the identity of Christ did not give rise to an explanatory understanding but to a description in terms of their own narrative. While these authors knew that, in some sense, Jesus was both divine and distinct from the Father, their concerns, unlike those of later Christian thinkers, were not driven by the need to understand the precise sense in which Jesus is divine. The New Testament is not a systematic treatise on Christ, and its authors were not concerned about logical coherence but about telling a story that would change the world. Consequently, their concerns were not theoretical but practical. Their interest was not in systematic understanding but in effecting religious conversion. Questions aim at understanding, and the object of early apostolic understanding was not the Son of God "in himself" but the Son of God "for us." In other words, the New Testament authors could ask and answer all the questions they considered relevant and still never come to an understanding of the hypostatic union or the consubstantial reality of the Son in relation to the Father. The kinds of systematic questions that arose in the minds of later Christian thinkers were, simply speaking, beyond the horizon of the New Testament authors. Had Thomas Aquinas been able to converse with the Evangelist Mark and introduce his question about the locus of union in Christ, whether it be in the *suppositum* or *hypostasis*,[8] it would most likely be regarded as strange at best and insignificant at worst; for what cannot be assimilated into a given horizon will not be of interest, and "if forced on our attention . . . will seem irrelevant or unimportant."[9] To the question, who is Jesus? the Gospel writers were content to draw upon the symbols of their own Jewish heritage to formulate an answer. He is the Messiah, the one in whom God fulfills his promise to establish the covenant forever. The New Testament authors tended to conceive of Jesus in terms of the chief symbols of the "Old Testament." But the Christian conversation with Greek philosophy, Platonism in particular, effected a change in the kinds of questions asked and answers attained.[10]

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[8] *Summa theologiae* (hereafter *ST*) 3, q. 2 a. 3
[9] Lonergan, *Method in Theology* 237.
[10] This is not to say that the New Testament authors had no awareness of Greek philosophy. The Prologue to John's Gospel suggests otherwise. But even if John consciously associated the *logos* with the divine mediator found in the Neo-platonic texts, it does not mean that he had a fully mature theoretical perspective.

Origen and Arius

Origen appealed to Platonist categories to answer the question about the divinity of the Son of God.[11] Within the more differentiated horizon of Middle Platonism, Origen said that the Son of God was divine by participation. So when Origen asked the question, in what sense is the Son of God divine? he intended an answer that expressed the identity of the Son in terms of his eternal relation to the unoriginated *arche*. These were questions that could not be answered simply by appealing to the Old and New Testament narratives. So because of the Christian appropriation of the logical techniques of Greek philosophers, the Scriptures began to raise questions that Scripture could not adequately answer. Arius agreed with Origen that the Son of God participates in the divinity of the Father. Like Origen, Arius was thinking in Platonist terms. But given his monarchian conception of God, less than God is not God at all. According to Arius, if the Son is subordinate to the divinity of the Father, then the Son of God is a creature. So Arius pushed the subordinationism of Origen's Middle Platonist conception to its logical conclusion. Christian thinkers were using Platonist categories to conceive the relation between the Son and the Father. What Arius showed was that a Platonist understanding of the Son of God rules out his divinity.

The Nicene Answer

The Arians' contention that the Son of God is a creature precipitated a crisis in the church. The crisis erupted because the Arian statement was in clear tension with the longstanding Christian belief in the Son's divinity. The crisis demanded a response from the church—a counterstatement affirming what the church always held to be true. But before the church could respond to the Arians, the Christian community had to clarify what exactly it meant when it affirmed the divinity of the Son. So Emperor Constantine called a council at Nicaea, and presumably the Council Fathers began to raise questions such as: How do we express the relation between the Son and the Father in a way that counters the Arian claim and preserves the steadfast belief in the divinity of the Son? What precisely does it mean to say that the Son of God is divine? It was not simply a wide open question; the Arian teaching served to clarify what the church was looking for. Arius made perfectly clear the basis of his teaching: if the Son of God is less divine than the Father, then he is not God at all. So the question was seeking an answer that would somehow affirm the true

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The Gospel of John does not reflect the kind of systematic control of meaning that one finds in third and fourth, or even second, century commentaries on the NT.

[11] See Origen, *De principiis* 2.

divinity of the Son in a way that avoided both Sabellianism on the one hand, and any hint of subordinationism on the other. In other words, since the Council Fathers were responding to Arius, their answer to the question, what does the divinity of the Son mean? would have to express a relation between the Son and the Father that was not susceptible to the kind of critique leveled against Origen. What precisely does it mean, then, to say that the Son of God is divine? It means, according to the council, that he is "one in being" with the Father.

The idea that the Son is "one in being" with the Father was held in the past, but it never meant exactly what it meant when Athanasius expounded and clarified its meaning. According to Lonergan, Athanasius clarified what the council meant by *homoousious*: whatever is predicated of the Father must also be predicated of the Son, except for the term "Father"; whatever is attributed to the Son must be attributed to the Father, except for the term Son.[12] It meant a radical one and the same, a radical equality between the Son and the Father, while also maintaining distinction. It had to mean a radical one and the same to overcome the Arian difficulty. So the Arian controversy opened up a set of questions that pushed the thinking of the church toward the Nicene definition and Athanasius's clarification. As Athanasius made clear, it was not a simple repetition of belief in the divinity of the Son. Rather, according to Athanasius, the Nicene statement elaborated the precise sense in which the Son of God is divine. It did not attribute to the Son of God particular qualities, like being eternal and impassible. It was much more radical. It meant whatever *at all* is attributed to the Father is to be attributed to the Son except for the term "Father."[13]

Since Christians had not yet developed a philosophical vocabulary of their own, Origen and Arius were attempting to work out Platonist answers to philosophical questions about the Son of God. So it was the Platonist reflections of Origen and Arius that drove the development of the question to which the Nicene statement was an answer. Was this statement somehow logically implicit in the knowledge of Scripture in the way that a conclusion of a syllogism is logically implicit in the premises? No. There is a way in which the Nicene statement said something that was not said before. Statements are never merely statements, but answers to questions; the Nicene statement said something new because it was an answer to a new question, one motivated by the concern to find a solution to the problems raised by Arianism. The church, from the beginning, did not already have the answer, because it did not already have the question.

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[12] Lonergan, "Origins of Christian Realism" 251.
[13] Ibid.

Postphilosophical Thinking and Systematic Development

As shown by Athanasius, the Nicene statement was a distinctively Christian answer to a distinctively Christian question. The data of revelation—the writings and practices of the Christian church—could not support, and in fact resisted, a philosophical[14] interpretation of the Son of God. No system of rational thought could bring to light the intelligibility immanent in the data of revelation. As such, the language of Nicaea, as elucidated by Athanasius, became representative of a kind of postphilosophical thinking within the church.

By clarifying the meaning of the Nicene statement, Athanasius played an important role in the postphilosophical act of naming the mystery of God. This, in turn, opened up the possibility of continuous development of trinitarian theology. Like Athanasius, Augustine played a role in clarifying the meaning of grace and contributed to the development of the Catholic doctrine of grace. He participated in the Council of Carthage (418), and his writings are among the documents of the Synod of Orange (529), in a section featuring the "Holy Fathers." The two councils helped define the Christian doctrine of grace. Once the councils, with the aid of Augustine, were able to "name the mystery"—once they affirmed the absolutely gratuitous character of grace—theologians could begin the ongoing task of understanding the meaning of this gratuitous character with respect to the human person.

THE SCHOLASTIC TRANSITION

A proper theory of grace began to surface in the writings of Augustine. While he was, in some measure, theoretically minded, the theoretical development of Christian consciousness did not reach full maturity until the full-scale medieval integration of Aristotelian philosophy and logic. The implications of this intellectual accomplishment were numerous and far-reaching. Not only did it enable a comprehensive and systematic ordering of the vast deposit of statements stored in the rich treasury of Scripture and tradition, but it also ensured that theological understanding was governed by logical rigor and metaphysical analysis rather than by the flow of images and feelings evoked by religious stories and symbols. In other words, it fully released theology from its commonsense and narrative apprehensions in order to answer questions that were otherwise unanswerable and to meet the exigencies of scientific or explanatory understanding.

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[14] "Philosophical" refers to a Platonist philosophical interpretation of the Son of God. While the data of revelation exclude a Platonist interpretation of the Son of God, they do not exclude a theoretical interpretation.

Concerns, Questions, Methods

A brief analysis of Augustine's doctrine of grace will evince not only its merits but, more importantly, its limitations in relation to its Scholastic successors. I will not engage in a point-for-point comparison between Augustine and Aquinas on grace; rather, I will select a few instances of contrast in order to adduce sufficient evidence to corroborate the thesis of theological development. The content of Augustine's mature statement, namely, that good will is not the condition of grace but rather its consequence, entailed a series of insights into the depth of human depravity and the radical impotence of the will. Such statements presuppose a set of concerns, questions, and methods that were integral to their generating insights. The concerns driving the development of Augustinian theology were, for the most part, not theoretical but apologetic; and, as a corollary, the principal context in which he worked out the meaning of grace was not systematic but doctrinal. For this reason, his questions, unlike those of the later Scholastics, did not seek a complete explanatory account of the reality of grace. His focus was more limited. Because of his study of Pauline literature, his own protracted existential battle with concupiscence, and the absence of a theorem of the supernatural, Augustine conceived grace more narrowly than did the Scholastics and dwelt on grace as healing rather than as elevating.

This perspective restricted the scope of relevant questions and pertinent insights. The point warrants reiteration. In his later writings Augustine was not seeking a comprehensive understanding of the reality of grace; he was seeking to clarify how grace heals and liberates us from the debilitating effects of sin. The question did not originate from a simple desire to know but was prompted chiefly by the controversies fomented by Donatus and Pelagius, both of whom stressed a humanistic optimism at odds with the implicit faith of the church. In fact, it was this inattention to the impact of sin embedded in the theological anthropologies of Donatus and Pelagius that pushed Augustine to accentuate divine operation and the infirmity of the human will. Since his aim was not to define but to defend, his method involved, as Lonergan put it, "argument, indeed, but not philosophic argument nor any scientific ordering of thought, just triumphant rhetoric marshalling such an array of texts that the claim is obviously true, 'Not I, but Scripture itself has argued with you.'"[15] Consequently, the terms "liberty" and "grace" were, according Lonergan, "not the specialized products of abstract reflection but common notions to be found in scripture and,

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[15] Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Grace and Freedom: Operative Grace in the Thought of St. Thomas Aquinas*, CWBL 1, ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2000) 7.

indeed, familiar to all."[16] Augustine's doctrine of grace was not the result of refined scientific questions and methods, but was largely reached, as Patout Burns observed, "by working out the logic of his assumptions under the pressure of events and the demands of controversy."[17] For example, in his response to the Donatists, Augustine "insists that no one is free from all sin, not even from the time of baptism."[18] His premise, however, does not derive from the exigencies of rational reflection but rather "from the petition for forgiveness in the *Pater Noster* which *every* Christian prays."[19] In other words, "the neglect of the natural desire for God and consequent assertion of the impotence of human nature were implications of . . . ecclesial [and Scriptural] doctrines."[20] The Donatist and Pelagian controversies became, for Augustine, occasions to render explicit the implicit claims of revelation.

Scholastic concerns, unlike Augustine's, were theoretical. Their questions intended the analogous intelligibility of grace as well as its formulation in the technical terms and relations of definition. Augustine used his distinctions in his later works, chiefly in the service of apologetic, not theoretical, goals. Unlike the development of the Augustinian position on grace, the Scholastic theology of grace, as Burns put it, "progressed through the resolution of a series of theoretical problems by the gradual appropriation of more adequate instruments of analysis."[21] To understand the essence of grace and express its content in precise terminology requires, first and foremost, discriminating among divine gifts; it demands an apprehension of the manner in which the gift of grace differs from other divine gifts. So the Scholastics began by seeking a means of distinguishing grace and creation as gifts. Even in the ancient church, and no less in the mind of Augustine, the "natural" and the "gracious" were dogmatically defined as gifts of God beyond the desert of human persons. But prior to the context of 12th- and 13th-century theology, such dogmatic and confessional statements, while inciting devotional practice, did not quite precipitate the sort of questions that initiated the unparalleled theoretical achievement of Aquinas. A growing familiarity among Scholastics with Aristotelian texts, especially the logical works, seems to have effected a vital transition. The introduction of more sophisticated rational controls of meaning expanded the range of questions available to medieval theology. Within the horizon of a more differentiated consciousness, drawing distinctions

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[16] Ibid. 7

[17] J. Patout Burns, *The Development of Augustine's Doctrine of Operative Grace* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1980) 13.

[18] Ibid. 81

[19] Ibid., emphasis added.

[20] Ibid. 186–87.

[21] Ibid. 13.

between divine gifts shifts questions to the level of theory. If the "gracious" and the "natural" share a common definition with respect to their gift character, how does one distinguish them as gifts?[22] The breakthrough to a supernatural order absolutely disproportionate to the order of nature, according to Lonergan, is to be attributed to Philip the Chancellor in 1230.[23] Aquinas, seeking to pursue theology as a science, exploited the distinction between grace and nature in the world of theory. The theorem of the supernatural by which Aquinas intellectually grounds the distinction between grace and nature was an answer to a question that met the demands of medieval *scientia*.

In contrast to the polemics of Augustine, late medieval insights into the nature of grace were generated by the meticulous procedures of scientific method. The Scholastics worked out the theorem of the supernatural as an extended analogy of proportion with nature. Since the theorem extrapolates from the natural order, it relied, as Lonergan points out, on the discovery of a line of reference termed "nature."[24] Prior to the appropriation of Aristotelian insights and methods, medieval theology struggled to secure a clear conception of human nature. Aristotle conceived human nature on the basis of a method of metaphysical psychology. In his treatise on the soul, he explains that the initial phase of understanding "nature" requires an apprehension of objects in relation to their corresponding operations. On the basis of a conscious correlation between acts and objects, one can infer habits and potencies. Furthermore, after elaborating various potencies, one can specify and distinguish "natures." With this understanding of nature in place, a collaborative theological effort in the 12th and 13th centuries was able to distinguish the abstract series: nature, intellect, will, and natural beatitude, from the correlative abstract series: sanctifying grace, faith, charity, and supernatural beatitude.[25] Aquinas improved on the theorem by raising further questions, educing broader implications, and establishing additional correlations.[26] In other words, the basic scheme of Philip the Chancellor was complemented by an accumulation of further insights and enriched by the Thomist formulation of grace and nature as two entitatively disproportionate and coordinated orders. For Aquinas, grace and nature are distinct because each has a distinct telos; but the infusion of grace can, nonetheless, subsume and elevate human nature.

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[22] Even though the explanatory questions regarding the distinction between grace and nature were not raised until the time of Aquinas, there was a long-standing commonsense apprehension of *gratuita* exceeding *naturalia*. See Lonergan, *Grace and Freedom* 16.

[23] See Lonergan, *Method in Theology* 310.

[24] Ibid. 17.   [25] Ibid.

[26] See *ST* 1–2, qq. 110–11.

Conversion and Charity

In the following analysis, I attempt to illustrate the advance of Aquinas over Augustine on the theological understanding of grace. The first point of comparison concerns the relation between the grace of conversion and subsequent graces. Augustine, in his mature theology, distinguishes four operative graces: conversion (faith), charity, perseverance, and beatitude. For him, the grace of charity cannot inhabit the will without the requisite preparation. So the grace of conversion prepares the will to receive the gift of charity. In his *Confessions*, Augustine calls the reader's attention to the acute and prolonged discord between his intention and his performance. The temporal succession of conversion and charity is, in Augustine's understanding, instantiated in the life of St. Paul. According to Luke-Acts, there is an interim between Paul's being struck down by God, signifying his conversion, and the restoration of his sight, signifying the gift of charity.[27] Even in Augustine's own experience, recounted in his *Confessions*, his will, vitiated for a long time by the effects of sin, made him powerless to devote himself entirely to what by faith he had known to be true. In other words, in his own recollection, Augustine receives the gift of conversion prior to receiving the gift of charity. He works out his theology of grace within a narrative framework; accordingly, he understands the grace of conversion and the grace of charity as distinct moments in a temporal sequence. Burns remarks that, for Augustine, "a person's own opposition to the gospel is *first* overcome by the gifts of this hearing, and *then* he is excited to virtue."[28]

Aquinas also speaks of the gift of conversion as a distinct and preparatory grace. In that sense, he retains Augustine's basic distinctions and ordering of graces. But while Augustine considered the reception of charity in relation to his own psychological experience of readiness, Aquinas conceives the preparatory work of conversion as an instance of a more general metaphysical law. The methodological divergence yields significant results. Aquinas conceives the relation of charity and the will on the analogy of form and matter. More specifically, he uses the reception of an accidental form by a material substrate as a model for understanding the infusion of charity into the will. In the initial stage of the argument, Aquinas enumerates a set of laws that regulate the acquisition of new forms. He asserts that the matter in question must be properly disposed. Moreover, the length of time required to build up a disposition is determined by both the extent to which matter is resistant and the power of the disposing agent. Aquinas goes on to argue that since the power of God extends to infinity, the resistant principle in matter is effectively nullified. Therefore, it is possible

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[27] See Burns, *Augustine's Doctrine of Operative Grace* 152.
[28] Ibid. 154, emphasis added.

for God to instantaneously develop the proper disposition to receive the form of charity. By implication, God need not infuse the preparatory grace of conversion into the person at some prior point in time. Rather, since God can generate the proper disposition of the will simultaneously with the infusion of the form of charity, God can simultaneously infuse the graces of conversion and charity.[29] Aquinas retains the priority of the grace of conversion as a means of preparation, but he conceives the priority of conversion as a logical (or *onto-logical*), not a temporal, priority. In his estimation, while God *can*, he need not, grant conversion and charity at two distinct moments in time. In the Thomist view, the temporal priority of conversion over charity becomes one possibility within the providential wisdom of God.[30] Therefore, the shift to metaphysical analysis allowed Aquinas to overcome certain limitations of the Augustinian paradigm.

Charity and Perseverance

The second point compares the relation between the grace of charity and the grace of perseverance. Augustine distinguishes graces on the basis of their locus on a temporal continuum. But aside from these relative designations, he conceives an intelligible correlation between certain graces on the basis of merit. The operative grace of conversion, according to Augustine, merits the grace of charity; and until his encounter with Pelagius, he conceived the grace of perseverance as free choice cooperating with the gift of charity. But the exigencies of controversy forced Augustine to conclude that, as Burns puts it, "the degree of charity which a person can receive without the beatific vision empowers and inclines him to love and choose the good; but taken alone it does not guarantee performance, especially against the opposition of the world and the flesh."[31] So in the year 418, Augustine reconceived the grace of perseverance as an operative grace modeled on the grace of conversion. This insight allowed him to develop an analogy of proportion between two distinct sequences of grace. As the grace of conversion merits the grace of charity, so also the grace of perseverance merits the grace of beatitude. Furthermore, as the grace of conversion is bestowed without prior merit, so also the grace of perseverance is imparted "without regard for prior good merits," including the good merits won by previous graces.[32] While Augustine formulates an intelligible

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[29] According to Aquinas, the grace of conversion is the proximate condition for sanctifying grace and the remote condition for charity. Augustine does not distinguish sanctifying grace and charity as Aquinas does; so for the sake of comparison, I omitted sanctifying grace from the discussion.

[30] *ST* 2, q. 113, a. 7.

[31] Burns, *Augustine's Doctrine of Operative Grace* 175.

[32] Ibid.

connection between the grace of conversion and the grace of charity, and between the grace of perseverance and the grace of beatitude, there is no ostensible, intelligible relation between the conversion-charity sequence and the perseverance-beatitude sequence, save the divine decision. In other words, the only link between charity and perseverance is God's will. Instead of conceiving multiple graces as a series of discrete gifts, Aquinas thinks about distinct graces as component elements in a supernatural order. As the essence of the soul is understood to be the principle of its potencies, so sanctifying grace is understood to be a principle of the habit of charity; as habits are the source of a recurring sequence of operations, so also the habit of charity is understood to be the source of a recurring sequence of charitable operations; and as operations are related to objects, so charitable operations attain God—and not merely God, but God *uti in se est*. As a good life merits natural beatitude, so also a life of charity that attains God merits supernatural beatitude.

Additionally, nature is teleological. That is, by virtue of human nature persons are ordered to an end: a beatitude proportionate to the formal properties of human beings. Similarly, the sanctified person—a person infused with the habit of sanctifying grace—is ordered to the end of super-natural beatitude. In this view, nature is the remote source, and habits are the proximate source, of acts that attain a kind of natural beatitude; so sanctifying grace becomes the remote source, through the mediation of charity, of the meritorious activity sufficient to attain a supernatural beati-tude. Charity becomes the proximate cause of a series of meritorious acts. In other words, in the Augustinian view it is the proximate cause that grounds "perseverance." For Aquinas, much like Augustine, charity does not automatically produce good decisions. Though the infusion of charity properly orients freedom, individual choices still require that God operate directly on the will to ensure that it withstands the overwhelming pressures of the "world and the flesh."[33] While the habit of charity reduces the probability of sin, it does not eliminate it; so, according to Aquinas, in addition to the habitual gifts of charity and sanctifying grace, God issues a stream of what the later medievals called "actual" graces to secure perse-verance and fix beatitude for the elect. Therefore, instead of two distinct sequences of grace bridged only by the mystery of divine election, Aquinas expresses an integrated scheme of grace—a kind of supernatural ecology of graces and virtues. The gifts of charity and perseverance do not simply have a clandestine relation in the mystery of the divine will but become, in Aquinas's theological perspective, two integral components in a dynamic structure of graces and virtues that work in tandem to promote super-natural beatitude. The succession of divine motions or actual graces that

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[33] See Lonergan, *Grace and Freedom* 46.

collectively is termed "the grace of perseverance" facilitates the work of charity in advancing the goal of glory. Sanctified persons possess a supernatural finality. Within this teleological perspective, it is only fitting to bestow the sufficient actual graces (perseverance), to those whom God has elected, as a means of actualizing the end to which the gift of sanctifying grace bears an ontological orientation. In other words, since sanctifying grace is both the proximate cause of the supernatural virtues and, through the mediation of charity, the remote cause of the acts that merit supernatural beatitude, it is fitting for God to grant sanctifying grace and charity with the adequate graces to persevere that bring the grace infused into the essence of the soul to fruition in the eternal life of glory.

Thinking about the bestowal of grace as the implementation of a supernatural order enabled Aquinas to conceive an intelligible link between the gift of charity and the gift of perseverance. He develops a more systematic account of grace precisely because he is able to derive a controlling analogy from the order of nature. For Aquinas, God works in and through secondary causes to bring about his will in the natural order. Grace is no exception. As God is the direct and immediate cause of all causal series in the order of nature, so God is the direct and immediate cause of the causal series of graces and virtues in the supernatural order. Thus Aquinas understands divine election as an instance of the more general law of divine providence.[34]

Healing and Elevating Grace

The order of nature, in Scholastic understanding, was not concrete but abstract. The breakthrough to an abstract perspective allowed for a teleological conception of nature. Conceiving the order of nature in terms of the principles, habits, and acts that promote a kind of natural beatitude demands a method that prescinds from the concrete, historical instances of nature. According to Lonergan,

the whole problem lies in the abstract, in human thinking: the fallacy in early thought had been an unconscious confusion of the metaphysical abstraction "nature" with concrete data which do not quite correspond. . . . [The] achievement was the creation of a mental perspective, the introduction of a set of coordinates, that eliminated the basic fallacy and its attendant host of anomalies.[35]

Elaborating an abstract view of nature, even though it never exists outside the context of sin and grace, allows one to understand more precisely the impact of sin and grace on human persons. The question, what is nature, in

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[34] See ibid. (on the theory of operation in Part I, section 4, 66–93) and on the possibility of sin (Part I, section 5, 111–16).
[35] Lonergan, *Grace and Freedom* 17.

itself, apart from sin and grace? was not raised in the writings of Augustine, because the notion of theology as a science modeled on Aristotle's method of demonstration was not yet developed. In the concrete, natural operations are either turned away from their supernatural end or are able to attain this end only by divine assistance. De facto, human nature is either sinful or graced. Aquinas prescinded from the concrete and developed a perspective that enabled him to conceive of grace as a distinct order of being beyond the order of nature. Since the *telos* toward which the sanctified person proceeds is supernatural and disproportionate to the end of human nature, grace, in Aquinas's understanding, serves not only a sanative but also an elevating function. More precisely, grace heals by elevating nature to a level of participation in the divine life—a *participatio divinae bonitatis*—which it would otherwise never attain.

Concluding Remarks on the Scholastic Transition

As evidenced by the forgoing comparative analysis, the theology of Aquinas enjoys several advantages over its intellectual predecessors. Its conceptual schemes are fixed by a series of insights derived from scientific methods and principles. Consequently, its set of interrelated propositions answer a comparatively broader range of relevant questions. It reflects a grasp of things not in relation to senses and feelings but of things in relation to one another; its correlations are not based on narrative or doctrinal reason but on necessary or immanent reasons; its insights have a broader application; it enables the resolution of more problems and grounds an ordered sequence of further relevant questions and insights*;* in addition, its network of terms and relations reflects more nuanced and subtle distinctions and admits a wider range of implications. Lastly, it renders possible the coordination of disparate fields of speculation in a more synthetic and comprehensive viewpoint.

The theologies of Augustine and Aquinas, however, do not relate in dialectical manner but as successive phases in a developmental process. Aquinas retained Augustine's basic distinctions and ordering of graces, the basic structure of merit, and the compatibility of freedom with divine election and sovereignty. Like Augustine, Aquinas conceives of human freedom in a way that excludes autonomy. Finally, he preserves the idea of the need for a direct and unmediated operation of God on the will. In that way, both theologians stress the divine initiative. But although Aquinas retains the insights of Augustinian thought, he enriched their meaning and enlarged their significance by using them in the development of a more systematic and elegant treatise on grace.

While Augustine chiefly worked out the distinctions and ordering of graces as he wrote his spiritual autobiography, Aquinas fully transcended

the limitations of existential description. In other words, he successfully transposed the Augustinian theology of grace from the psychological context of narrative to the more explanatory context of Scholastic metaphysics. Being able to consider the issue of divine favor within the nuanced framework of Scholastic metaphysics allowed Aquinas to work out a more theoretical and scientific understanding of grace. The theology of Aquinas fully conformed to the ideals of a *scientia subordinata* on an analogy with Aristotle's ideal of *episteme*.

THE CONTEMPORARY TRANSITION: A NEW SCIENTIFIC IDEAL

Due to the medieval appropriation of Aristotelian science, syllogistic argument, as expressed in the *Posterior Analytics*, became the benchmark for measuring intellectual progress. Accordingly, the cultivation of scientific understanding became synonymous with the development of a kind of logical expertise.[36] Medieval science, especially in the late Scholastic period, was content to assume its universal and necessary postulates and axioms and deduce its conclusions in a series of abstractions that, in its more decadent phases, tended to minimize the importance of experience and preclude the acquisition of new data. At this time, the natural sciences occupied a subordinate and derivative place under the hegemony of metaphysics. Modern empirical method was revolutionary with its introduction of experimental verification as a more adequate criterion for knowledge. It was this procedural turn to experiment and "experience" that led to the liberation of the natural sciences as autonomous enterprises. The advent of the new method, which aimed not at apodictic certainty but at increasing degrees of probability, led inevitably to a polarization of natural science and metaphysics. Given the new epistemic norms, modern philosophers considered metaphysical propositions to be no more than hypotheses that required verification. The "turn to the inner experience of the subject," inaugurated by the works of Descartes, emerged not as an exercise in skepticism but as a philosophical attempt to reinstate the legitimacy of metaphysics by elucidating a domain of interior consciousness in which its claims could be verified. Though the Cartesian project failed, it was not because the "turn to the subject" is an invalid starting point, but because the method of hyperbolic doubt with its corresponding techniques of self-discovery was a mistaken means of carrying it out.

Twentieth-century theologians, living in the wake of the scientific revolution, were faced with a challenge similar to the one faced by Descartes. The so-called "personalist turn" or "turn to the subject" in contemporary

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[36] See Lonergan, "The Future of Thomism," in *A Second Collection*, ed. William F. J. Ryan and Bernard J. Tyrrell (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1996) 47.

theology was an attempt to understand and communicate the truths of faith in a new set of terms that resonated less with the abstract and detached language of Scholastic metaphysics and more with the concrete terms of personal experience.[37]

What about grace? Since the concept of an "essence of the soul" as the locus of sanctifying grace results from inferential reasoning and is not experienced in the immediate data of consciousness, the technique proper to the Scholastic method leaves no room for an experience of the reality designated by the theoretical term "sanctifying grace." The idea of an experience of grace lies beyond the ambit of a 13th-century "science of the soul." For it would require, in terms of the stage of meaning proper to Scholastic theology, an experience of a supernatural gift received in the innermost essence of the soul and its potencies; and according to Scholastic science, there is no direct and immediate experience of the soul. An experience of what the Scholastics meant by grace involves a breakthrough to a realm of interiority in which one becomes aware of the innermost depths of subjectivity. Such a breakthrough requires a move beyond the "logical" techniques of medieval science to the "introspective" techniques of transcendental method. Lonergan employed the technique of introspection in his transcendental method as a means of searching for the experiential equivalents of the basic terms and relations of Scholastic metaphysics.

The Shift from Soul to Subject

While metaphysical reflection on the soul begins with a consideration of intended objects, transcendental reflection, in the style of Lonergan, begins with a study of intentional acts. Traditional Thomism starts with the metaphysical consideration of the objects of mental acts and proceeds to an understanding of the self through the objects. The more phenomenological method of introspection attends to the acts themselves and attempts to notice or advert to what else, aside from the objects, is given in one's field of awareness when one performs the acts.

The Scholastics, who conceive metaphysics to be first philosophy, begin by focusing all attention on what is known, and only subsequently come to discover the knowing self; the self, in metaphysical terms, is the remote principle of its own acts. Patrick Byrne remarks that "'remote' is a pretty odd way of speaking about selfhood; but that is inevitable if one follows the

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[37] For instance, Karol Wojtyla, in his *Love and Responsibility*, expressed the basic teachings of *Humanae vitae* not in the natural-law terms derived from metaphysical analysis, as did Paul VI, but in the existential and affective terms derived from an innovative phenomenology of human sexuality.

method of *De anima*: if one begins metaphysically with [objects and] acts it takes a while to get back to the soul. Phenomenologically, of course, this priority is reversed."[38] The phenomenological method of Lonergan begins by attending to the subject or self that becomes present to consciousness by means of the knowing. So the discovery of the knowing self is not last but is in some sense first in the order of discovery.

So what else, aside from the objects, is given in the field of awareness when one intends objects? In Lonergan's opinion, through the performance of an intentional act, one becomes conscious not only of a particular object but also of the acts themselves, as well as of the subject, the one performing the acts. "Whenever any of the operations are performed, the subject is aware of himself operating, present to himself operating, experiencing himself operating."[39] In this view, carefully attending to what is given in consciousness when one performs mental acts reveals not only an object and the act itself, but also an acting subject. The subject or self is experienced in all activities as the one performing them. Let me give an example: when one reads the words on this page, the act of reading makes present the object, my words; but that is not all. One is simultaneously aware of being engaged in an act of reading and, if one attends carefully, of a self, a subject, doing the reading. The subject—the core of the self—is transcendental in the sense that it becomes present to the knower as a perduring component of conscious awareness. "Soul" and "subject" both refer to the reality of the self considered from different points of view. "Soul" refers to the object reached by a series of deductions within the context of metaphysical reflection; "subject" (or "self") refers to the same reality not as the term of inference but as experienced in the field of awareness.

If the subject or self is given in consciousness, why is it so difficult to notice? It is because, according to Frederick Lawrence, "awareness has . . . not only the dimension of explicit, foreground awareness, but a tacit or background dimension—namely, the most radical presence of ourselves to ourselves."[40] The presence of the subject, as a kind of radical self-presence, remains in the "background," so to speak. The subject is not an object of attention but the reality one is aware of in the "background" as the one attending to certain objects. As one reflects on my words, while his attention is fixed on the object of reflection, namely my ideas, in the very act of reflection, he becomes present to himself as reflecting.

[38] Patrick Byrne, "Consciousness: Levels, Sublations, and the Subject as Subject," *Method: Journal of Lonergan Studies* 13 (1995) 131–50, at 147.
[39] Lonergan, *Method in Theology* 8.
[40] Fred Lawrence, "Fragility of Consciousness: Lonergan and the Postmodern Concern for the Other," *Theological Studies* 54 (1993) 40–94, at 59.

The ideas that he reflects on are the objects in the foreground of awareness, the objects on which attention is fixed, while the self, as reflecting, becomes present as a peripheral element in consciousness. According to Lonergan, "the object is present as what is gazed upon, attended to, intended. But the presence of the subject resides in the gazing, the attending, the intending. . . . The subject can be [self] conscious, as attending, and yet give his whole attention to the object as attended to."[41] For this reason, according to Lawrence, "[the subject] can never be made explicit exhaustively."[42] The subject as subject can never be made an object of direct focus. It remains in the background as a prelinguistic and preconceptual self-presence that accompanies all activities.

Peripheral vision can serve as an analogy for the inability to objectify the subject in a complete sense. Once we turn our attention to what is sensed in the periphery, yet another set of phenomena appear there. One can never exhaust the peripheral since, in every direct vision, there will be a peripheral experience. Just as in peripheral vision, phenomena are experienced but not always noticed, so also in the performance of intentional acts, the presence of the subject is experienced but rarely adverted to. Just as I can take notice of the peripheral even while my focal awareness is directed to an object in front of me, so also I can take notice of my peripheral self-presence while fully focused on an intentional object. But the analogy has limitations.

How does one notice or advert to this peripheral presence of the subject? If consciousness is understood on the model of perception, then the self-reflexive exercise of becoming self-conscious amounts to a kind of inner look. But as Lonergan says, "Inward inspection is just myth. Its origin lies in the mistaken analogy that all [conscious] events are to be conceived on the analogy of ocular vision."[43] For Lonergan, consciousness is not perception but simply the range of awareness; so introspection is not a matter of taking an inner look, as the etymological sense of the word suggests, but instead involves a heightening of awareness in the performance of intentional acts. Since the subject is a primordial datum of awareness, one cannot put forth an argument to prove it. It is a reality each person must discover for herself; more precisely, it is a reality that each person must notice within his field of awareness. It is a matter of adverting to an experience, not arguing for a concept. For this reason, the first few chapters of Lonergan's *Insight* should be read less as the proofs of a rational argument and more as an invitation to a set of spiritual exercises.

[41] Lonergan, *Method in Theology* 8.
[42] Lawrence, "Lonergan and the Post-Modern Concern for the Other," *Theological Studies* 54 (1993) 59.
[43] Lonergan, *Method* 8.

Excursus on Lonergan and Kant

Many unfamiliar with Lonergan's work tend to associate it with the philosophy of Immanuel Kant. But Lonergan's transcendental method bears little more than a nominal connection to the transcendental philosophy of Kant. Kant's method was not, properly speaking, phenomenological; he was not concerned with what is given in the field of consciousness when one performs certain rational operations. So, unlike Lonergan's transcendental method, Kant's technique for discovering the self is not a matter of "adverting" to the tacit self-presence given in the background of one's conscious awareness, but a matter of "postulating" certain a priori concepts as the necessary conditions for knowledge. For Kant, a priori concepts are transcendental. For Lonergan, what is transcendental is a preconceptual awareness of self—not postulated as the term of a train of discursive thought, but experienced as a radical self-presence that accompanies all human activities. Moreover, from the Kantian perspective, what is transcendental in the subject is a set of concepts that structure intuition and place limitations on knowledge. These transcendental elements are not open to the noumenal; they thus restrict cognitive access to metaphysical realities. Lonergan, on the contrary, understands the transcendental subject in terms of the *Vorgriff*, a dynamic and unrestricted openness that reaches out toward the totality of the real. In this view, the transcendental subject becomes the fertile ground that makes possible an ongoing and unlimited apprehension of the universe of being.

Moreover, Kant assumes incorrectly that experience is synonymous with a kind of sense perception or intuition, and on that basis he denies the possibility of an awareness or intuition of the self. But since Kant believes that metaphysical claims require verification in immediate intuition, the Scholastic concept of soul, since it cannot be intuited, becomes relegated to a realm of speculation without epistemic value. Thus, Kant's transcendental method led to the proverbial "death of metaphysics." On the other hand, Lonergan, by distinguishing consciousness and perception, was able to realize that an exploration of conscious experience is not a matter of taking an inner look, but rather is a matter of heightening one's awareness, much as occurs in Ignatius of Loyola's practice of spiritual discernment, with which Lonergan was very familiar. The method illuminated a field of interiority and gave Lonergan access to a set of conscious data that allowed for an experiential verification of Scholastic distinctions. As a result, Lonergan's method led to the revival of metaphysics.

"Grace as Experience" and Its Consequences for Theology

In terms of Scholastic theology, sanctifying grace is a qualitative transformation of the essential component of the soul. Since the term "subject,"

as a radical self-presence, means in experiential terms what "essence of the soul" means in metaphysical terms, an experience of sanctifying grace will be an experience not of some kind of object or act but of a certain quality of self-presence. In terms of Lonergan's theology, grace is experienced as a quality of the tacit and background self-presence of which our encounters with the world make us aware. More specifically, Lonergan describes this quality of self-presence as "a dynamic state of being-in-love in an unrestricted fashion."[44] The experience of grace means that, through all human activities and encounters, one becomes aware not simply of objects in the world, but one becomes present to oneself as unrestrictedly in love. Experiencing grace is a matter of becoming aware, in the depths of consciousness, of a peace, joy, and fulfillment beyond measure. As an experience of a serenity and peace that the world cannot give, the experience of grace is an experience of the supernatural—of something other-worldly, of a radical gift.[45] Lonergan goes on to provide a more robust description of the experience of grace:

Because [it is] conscious without being known, it is an experience of mystery. Because it is being in love, mystery is not merely attractive but fascinating; to it one belongs; by it one is possessed. Because it is an unmeasured love, the mystery evokes awe. Of itself, then, inasmuch as it is conscious without being known, the gift of God's love is an experience of the holy, of Rudolf Otto's *mysterium fascinans et tremendum*. It is what Paul Tillich named being grasped by ultimate concern. It corresponds to St. Ignatius Loyola's consolation that has no cause, as expounded by Karl Rahner.[46]

As a peripheral kind of experience, sanctifying grace is conscious without always being noticed; and so, adverting to one's presence to oneself as being-in-love in an unrestricted fashion involves a heightening of conscious awareness in the performance of human activities.

But what are the implications for theology? The shift to the third stage of meaning discussed above has expanded the scope of relevant data and questions in the theology of grace. Adverting to a direct and immediate experience of sanctifying grace through the method of introspection enables the theologian to access a fuller set of experiential data on grace—a set of data on the basis of which to further develop the Christian understanding of grace. The shift to the third stage of meaning especially contributes to an understanding of the relationship between nature and

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[44] Ibid. 105.
[45] The article "a" in the phrase "a radical gift" is, perhaps, misleading. As a quality of self-presence, sanctifying grace, once transposed into the categories derived from an intentionality analysis, becomes an awareness of the subject as subject (the background awareness of self), not the subject as object. Insofar as the article "a" designates an object, it is misleading.
[46] Lonergan, *Method in Theology* 106.

grace, which is expressed, in Thomist terminology, as two distinct orders of being. The idea of two distinct orders of being answered the question about the distinction of grace and nature as gifts, but some questions regarding the concrete interaction between grace and the natural operations of a human subject lie beyond the purview of traditional Thomism. Answering the full range of questions about the precise manner in which grace informs the person requires a direct and immediate apprehension of grace as it operates in the depths of the human reality.

Lonergan uses the distinctions of Scholastic theology in his method of introspection. By distinguishing and naming various metaphysical components, the Scholastics gave Lonergan a clearer sense of what he was searching for in the exploration of consciousness. By clarifying the ways in which Scholastic distinctions can be verified in the data of Christian experience, Lonergan has helped revive the credibility of Scholastic theology and establish it as a source of authentic Christian wisdom in a post-Kantian world. As Aquinas presupposes and uses the basic insights of Augustine in the development of a more scientific account, Lonergan retains and employs the basic insights of Aquinas in the development of a more contemporary scientific account. Aquinas successfully appropriated the ideals of Aristotelian science without adopting the paganism of which his contemporaries were so suspicious. Likewise, Lonergan appropriated the ideals of empirical science without reducing the reality of grace to an empirical or natural phenomenon. As such, Lonergan and his reading of Thomism contribute to the overall project of Vatican II, which might be summarized by Leo XIII's words, "Vetera novis augere et perficere."[47]

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[47] Leo XIII, *Aeterni patris* no. 24.