

BERNARD LONERGAN AND MYSTICISM

GORDON RIXON, S.J.

[The author assembles and interprets archival materials, advancing a preliminary assessment of the significance of mysticism for the development of Lonergan's intellectual project. Lonergan assigns priority to a mysticism of transforming union as the existential principle from which flow charitable service and theological reflection. The density of Lonergan's published account of religious experience is relieved by an exploration of its relation to the thought of Karl Rahner, Harvey Egan, and William Johnston. A suggestion is made about the continued importance of systematic reflection for the refined articulation of religious experience.]

INTERPRETERS OF BERNARD LONERGAN'S intellectual project may find it difficult to assess the influence of mysticism on the development of his thought. Interpreters who approach Lonergan through his early writings may find the suggestion that mysticism had any impact on the genesis of his cognitional theory, epistemology, and metaphysics to be an anachronistic accommodation to later readers' heightened interest in spirituality. Even though the moving viewpoint of *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* does arrive at a treatment of general and special transcendental knowledge, the tenor of Lonergan's discussion carries no resonance to the mystical experiments of spiritual authors such as John of the Cross or Teresa of Avila.¹ Interpreters who approach Lonergan through *Method in Theology* and his other later writings encounter a significantly different tonality of expression.² Here explorations of existential topics such as feelings, faith, and religious conversion are able to evoke strong affective responses in the reader. At times Lonergan might even be described as poetic in the fecundity of his idiom. The difficulty of estimating the influence of mysticism on

GORDON RIXON, S.J., received his Ph.D. from Boston College in 1995. He is assistant professor and director of basic degree studies at Regis College, in the Toronto School of Theology. He specializes in systematic theology with emphasis on methodology, foundations, and grace.

¹ Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan 3 (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1992; original ed. London: Longmans, 1957).

² Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1999; original ed. London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1972).

the evolution of Lonergan's thought is real. My review of Lonergan's correspondence and other personal papers will reveal that he struggled with mysticism and prayer, both existentially and intellectually, as he pursued his interest in the philosophy of history and his larger theological project. This article hopes to make a preliminary contribution to the thesis that Lonergan's evolving appreciation of mysticism provides an important, dynamic context for the development and interpretation of his thought.

SPIRITUAL PERFECTION

Lonergan does not make frequent references in his writings and correspondence to his personal prayer life. A biographer of Lonergan suggests that his early spiritual life was quite arid but that obstacles encountered in his initial training and subsequent life as a Jesuit priest and academician occasioned a greater affectivity in his prayer.³ As a young man who entered the novitiate of the Society of Jesus at Guelph, Ontario, in 1922, Lonergan belonged to a generation of Jesuits whose religious training was framed by a classicist model of spiritual perfection. Lonergan's first appropriation of the Ignatian tradition of spirituality was mediated by authors such as Alphonsus Rodríguez (1526–1616) and Johann Philipp Roothaan (1785–1853).⁴ While Rodríguez is eloquent in his description of the general aim of religious life, his ascetical program, first published in 1609, submerges into

³ Frederick Crowe recalls that Lonergan remarked later in life that an injustice during his Jesuit training taught him to pray. Crowe indicates that this injustice was the extension of his "regency" (a period of studies and teaching prior to ordination) from the usual three years to four (*Lonergan* [Collegeville: Liturgical, 1992] 7, 17). Crowe also suggested to me in a conversation that dismissive criticism leveled against Lonergan's *Verbum* articles in *Theological Studies* (1946–1949) may have occasioned another deepening of the affective dimension of his prayer. For the criticism of the *Verbum* articles, see Matthew J. O'Connell, "St. Thomas and the *Verbum*: An Interpretation," *The Modern Schoolman* 24 (1947) 224–34. The timing of such a development corresponds to a remark made by Lonergan to a correspondent: "I was touched by your wishing me 'joie spirituelle'. Most sincerely I hope and pray that it be yours. After twenty-four years of aridity in the religious life, I moved into that happier state and have enjoyed it for over thirty-one years. But I have no doubt that God's love is always with us no matter how we feel" (Bernard Lonergan to Louis Roy, 16 August 1977, Lonergan Research Institute [LRI], Toronto). All unpublished materials are quoted with permission of the Trustees of the Estate of Bernard J. F. Lonergan, and an archive catalogue number is indicated where available. I am grateful for the assistance of Frederick Crowe, Robert Doran, Robert Croken, and John Dadosky who brought important archival materials to my attention.

⁴ Alphonsus Rodríguez, *Practice of Perfection and Christian Virtues*, 2 vols., trans. Joseph Rickaby (London: Manresa, 1929); John Roothaan, *The Method of Meditation* (New York: John Gilmary Shea, 1858).

over 1500 pages of itemized commentary on the rules, practices, and perfection in the virtues of religious life. Roothaan who was the third Superior General of the Society of Jesus after its restoration in 1814, employs the categories of faculty psychology to detail instruction in the “science of meditation,” further blunting the Jesuit student’s “ardent desire” for prayer. An interpreter familiar with the subsequent development of Lonergan’s thought in the early 1930s will appreciate that the younger Lonergan’s reading of these spiritual authorities would have been classicist, likely uncritical and perhaps even nominalist in character.⁵ Although Lonergan commented much later on his previous long incomprehension of the concept of “consolation without a previous cause,” a fundamental notion in Ignatian spirituality, he did not seem to direct the same strong criticism toward his spiritual formation that he does address to his intellectual training within the Jesuit order.⁶

CONCRETE IDEAL

Even though Lonergan states in 1978 that it was not until 1975–1976 that he began to understand what the words “consolation without previous cause” meant, there is evidence that his appropriation of Ignatian spirituality began to emerge from its initial classicist framing much earlier. In the summer of 1941, shortly after returning to Canada as an ordained priest to teach theology at the College of the Immaculate Conception in Montreal, Lonergan preached a retreat to a group of Jesuit students.⁷ In the first conference of this retreat Lonergan cited Johannes Lindworsky’s *The Psychology of Asceticism* as he emphasized that each person must respond to God’s call by taking “our end” out of the “abstract” and making it “into a

⁵ For Lonergan’s retrospective on this period, see “Insight Revisited,” in *A Second Collection*, ed. William F. Ryan and Bernard J. Tyrrell (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974) 263–78, at 263–65.

⁶ Bernard Lonergan to Thomas O’Malley, 8 November 1978, LRI, A3108, quoted in part in n. 52 below. Lonergan was known for his concerns about the intellectual formation within the Jesuit order and the general state of Catholic intellectual life (Crowe, *Lonergan* 5–6). Crowe also recalled in a conversation with me that about 1975 Lonergan expressed strong criticism of Roothaan’s influence on the practice of Ignatius’s *Spiritual Exercises*.

⁷ From 1933 to 1940 Lonergan completed his initial studies in theology at Rome, then his tertianship (a formative year of spiritual training) in Amiens, France, and thereupon returned to Rome for a biennium in theology. My account of the retreat experience is based on interviews with Frederick Crowe, Michael Lapierre, and Patrick Malone who were participants at the eight-day retreat at Stanley House in Muskoka, Ontario. Michael Lapierre kept careful notes which I have transcribed and, with his permission, make available to the LRI. I cite these notes as Lapierre, “Retreat Notes” and indicate the folio page.

concrete ideal.”⁸ In *The Psychology of Asceticism*, Lindworsky makes a fundamental distinction between two approaches to Christian perfection. One approach focuses on the acquisition and perfection of the classical list of theological and cardinal virtues. A second approach strives toward the realization of a “religious aim form.” According to Lindworsky, religious aim forms arise from the interplay between the objective spirit of belief, circumstances, and general outlook of an age, and the aptitudes and inclinations of individuals. In effect, the person’s religious vocation is historically conditioned. For example, Joseph in Egypt is the rescuer and guide of the Israelites, Moses is the law-giver and leader, and David is the founder of the state. Perfection in virtues obviously remains important for each religious aim form but they are developed in a manner that is organized by the motive force inherent in the available religious aim form associated with a particular person’s vocation. Thus, religious aim form asceticism is not the accrual of an aggregate of perfections in specific virtues but a historically contextualized, unified, dynamic process that organizes the personal growth and work of a religious person as he or she responds to the call of his or her own particular vocation.⁹

In the retreat conferences Lonergan employs the concept of a “concrete ideal” to refer to a particular person’s “religious aim form.”¹⁰ Lonergan discusses the asceticism of ordinary religious life as the “realization of my concrete, whole, coherent, unified and harmonized ideal.” He invites the students to ponder their knowledge, appreciation, and performance of their vocations in light of their own “divine discontent,” abilities and shortcomings as well as the needs of their contemporary situation.¹¹ The movement from “the abstract” to “a concrete ideal” indicates the person’s will-

⁸ While the immediate audience of Lonergan’s remarks is a group of fellow Jesuits, his illustrations suggest that his comments are more generally conceived and applicable. I would therefore read “our end” to be expansive in meaning, indicating “our human end” and not “our end” as a group of Jesuits. The exact text of Lapierre’s note reads: “the importance of *our end* which must be taken out of the abstract and made into a concrete ideal” (“Retreat Notes” 1; emphasis original). Lindworsky is also a Jesuit but again his examples and citations point toward a consideration of religious dynamics that is not limited to any particular spiritual tradition and does not proceed under the then common assumption that Christian perfection is coextensive with vowed life in a religious community (Johannes Lindworsky, *Psychologie des Aszese* [Freiburg: Herder, 1935]; English trans.: *The Psychology of Asceticism*, trans. Emil A. Heiring [London: H. W. Edwards, 1936]).

⁹ Lindworsky, *Psychology of Asceticism* 7–21.

¹⁰ For instance, Lonergan uses the notion of “concrete ideal” to refer to Lindworsky’s example of “daughter of God” as the religious aim form of St. Thérèse of Lisieux (Lapierre, “Retreat Notes” 1; and Lindworsky, *Psychology of Asceticism* 9–10).

¹¹ Lapierre, “Retreat Notes” 3. By “divine discontent” Lonergan seems to mean the affect that accompanies the task of the human person to transcend self. In a

ing engagement of a determinate, historical process as he or she responds to the transcendent call of his or her vocation. Here the notion of “the abstract” refers first, not to the normative, classicist enumeration of the virtues of religious life but to the potential paths to sanctification arising from the objective spirit of an age, which are then to be considered in light of an individual’s aptitudes and inclinations. While the end in the abstract might be shared with others, the concrete ideal sets a unique, determinate goal before a specific person.

Loneragan acknowledges that people struggle with the external demands and challenges of their concrete ideal. The retreat conferences included considerations of penance, mortification, and reformation of life.¹² Still, he advises the students that good meditation does not consist in “having fulfilled the scaffolding” but rather in the ordinary conscious effort of “having tried to speak or think with God.”¹³ I suggest, therefore, that Lonergan’s emerging alternative to classicist spirituality addressed, in effect, three conscious dialectics. One dialectic involves the divine discontent, expressing the pervasive and absolute task of self-transcendence. A second dialectic involves the interplay between the abstract end of religious life and the particular context of an individual that yields a concrete ideal. Finally, a third dialectic addresses the conflict between the concrete ideal and sin, overcome through the movements of penance and mortification. Lonergan’s approach here reflects and perhaps informs his development of a dialectical philosophy of history that had achieved a synthetic but still preliminary expression in the methodological chapter of his doctoral project, completed in 1940.¹⁴

TRANSFORMING UNION

Some years later, after Lonergan had finished writing *Insight*, he prepared two drafts of a lecture outline identically entitled “Grace and the

conversation about the 1941 retreat more than 50 years later, Patrick Malone recalled the emphasis that Lonergan placed on the phrase “Le métier de l’homme est de se passer.”

¹² Lapierre, “Retreat Notes” 4, 5, 7. ¹³ Ibid. 11.

¹⁴ Bernard Lonergan, “The Form of the Development,” Part II-1, *Grace and Freedom: Operative Grace in the Thought of St. Thomas Aquinas*, Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan 1 (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2000) 162–92. The methodological approach taken in his doctoral project is a transitional achievement following a series of at least four previous attempts to write a philosophy of history, beginning in 1933. For a discussion, see Michael Shute, *The Origins of Lonergan’s Notion of the Dialectics of History, 1933–38* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1993) and my Ph.D. dissertation “Bernard Lonergan’s Notion of Vertical Finality in His Early Writings” (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI, 1995) 29–94.

Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius.”¹⁵ Lonergan indicates that his intention in the lectures is to unburden the experimental life of grace presumed by the authentic practice of the *Spiritual Exercises* from voluntarist and conceptualist presuppositions in order to explore the transformative union of the human person with God.¹⁶ Lonergan observes that the *Spiritual Exercises* are sometimes depicted as “a set of things that I am going to do to make myself holier.” He continues to remark that if the *Spiritual Exercises* were not heretically characterized as Pelagian, commentators still placed no emphasis on “the spontaneous movement of the soul towards God because of the workings of grace.”¹⁷ Lonergan asserts that while the *prima facie* cause of such depictions lies in the existence of superficial Ignatian practitioners, the more fundamental cause rests in the contemporary state of theology. Lonergan observes that theology should provide the “conceptual network” needed to read Sacred Scripture and to understand life.¹⁸ Theology, in fact, had degenerated into a set of purely metaphysical entities

¹⁵ The longer four-page outline is found in Batch II, Folder 18, entitled “Habitual Grace,” LRI, A161, cited here as “Folder 18” with folio page indicated. The shorter two-page outline is found in Batch II, Folder 19, entitled “Grace,” LRI, A164, cited here as “Folder 19” with folio page indicated. “Folder 19” presents four points, provides a short list of implications for the praxis of *Ignatian Exercises*, and cites Francis X. Lawlor, “The Doctrine of the *Spiritual Exercises*,” *Theological Studies* 3 (1942) 513–32; Augustin Poulain, “Chapter XIX: The Spiritual Marriage (Fourth and Last Stage of the Mystic Union),” in *The Graces of Interior Prayer: A Treatise on Mystical Theology*, trans. Leonora L. Yorke Smith (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1950) 283–98; and Joseph de Guibert, *La spiritualité de la Compagnie de Jésus* (Rome: Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 1953) 122–61. “Folder 18” presents three more fully developed points, provides a more extensive list of illustrations drawn from the *Spiritual Exercises* but cites only Lawlor and de Guibert. “Folder 18” incorporates and develops several of the insights related to the unitive way attributed to Poulain in “Folder 19” without explicit citation. The first point presented in “Folder 18” incorporates the first two points of “Folder 19” but provides a more highly developed and organized analysis of contemporary misunderstandings of the experimental life of grace presumed by the practice of the *Spiritual Exercises*. Conversely, the first point of “Folder 19” does not appear to summarize the development of “Folder 18.” “Folder 18” therefore appears to be dependent upon “Folder 19.” Our discussion will focus on “Folder 18” but refer to “Folder 19” as necessary. The lectures were apparently to be addressed to fellow Jesuits but there is no external evidence with which to date the drafting of the outlines beyond noting that the most recent cited source was published in 1953.

¹⁶ For a literal English translation, see Ignatius Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius: Based on Studies in the Language of the Autograph*, trans. Louis J. Puhl (Chicago: Loyola University, 1951), cited as *Spiritual Exercises*.

¹⁷ “Folder 18” 1.

¹⁸ Lonergan will later differentiate this “conceptual network” into the special and general categories (*Method* 285–93).

that could not be related “intelligibly and organically” to ordinary living.¹⁹ In this climate the experimental character of the *Spiritual Exercises* became eclipsed by an unhelpful conceptualist treatise on grace.

Moreover, Lonergan remarks, the life of grace is prior to even a satisfactory theological theory. The *Spiritual Exercises* are at first “a practical manual on a method of cooperating with grace.”²⁰ Theological reflection remains contingent upon the prior effects of grace, incorporating integral persons as living members of Christ Jesus.²¹ Simply, the notional apprehension of grace in theology is not to be confused with the real apprehension of grace in concrete living.

Lonergan’s discussion of the experimental grace sought in the *Spiritual Exercises* indicates that “Grace is that by which 1) we are; 2) more and more we are; 3) living members of [Christ] Jesus and; 4) more and more fully and even more consciously living members of [Christ] Jesus.” The unitive effect of grace emerges as “a factor in the general field of consciousness.” Lonergan’s explication of this union indicates that the inhabitation of the Holy Spirit assimilates a participation in the grace of Christ; “producing in us the effects that it produced in the humanity of Christ; [that] habitual and actual illumination of our understanding and of the orientation of our wills.”²²

Thus, grace reforms and informs our conscious striving, releasing us from bondage to sin and strengthening our desire to love God in all we do. Lonergan synthesizes his appreciation of the process of union and assimilation effected by transforming grace with Ignatian discernment of consolation and desolation. Periods of affective struggle and ease accompany the conscious dynamism of transforming grace as issues are addressed and resolved. Lonergan notes that the discernment process brings the factor of grace in general states of consciousness into “sharper relief” with practical implications for decision-making. He writes: “one can go from the state to

¹⁹ “Folder 18” 1. Lonergan’s comment here should be read in light of his discussion of critical metaphysics in *Insight*, see especially his consideration of metaphysical equivalence (*Insight* 526–33).

²⁰ “Folder 18” 1.

²¹ Lonergan writes “Grace: not a set of abstractions o[f] which some schematic and superficial knowledge [is] needed for exams; not a set of rules for theologically correct speech but that by which, that which makes it really true, that we, the whole of us, body and soul, biologically, sensitively, intellectually, voluntarily, are living members of [Christ] Jesus” (“Folder 19” 1). Or again: “Grace is a mystery: there is notional apprehension through theology; there is a real apprehension in concrete living; the [E]xercises are a device of real apprehension. St. Bernard on the unitive way: one cannot talk about it; each one has to drink at his own well; true, for all concrete real apprehension of grace; you know life by living; you know what is to be a living member of [Christ] by being one as fully as you can” (“Folder 18” 3).

²² “Folder 18” 2.

its cause; and from its cause to a practical conclusion about God's will in me."²³

In "Folder 19" Lonergan refers to Augustin Poulain's descriptive account of mystical prayer as a "conspicuous instance" of conscious union and assimilation. Poulain's account relies on the distinction of mystic and ordinary prayer and the stages of mystic prayer as described by Teresa of Avila in her *Interior Castle*.²⁴ Lonergan cites progress through the prayer of simplicity, quietude, union, and ecstasy to the culmination of transforming union. Lonergan emphasizes Poulain's treatment of transforming union that is characterized by permanent union with God, the transformation of the conscious operation of the intellect and will, and an intellectual vision of the Trinity or some divine attribute.²⁵ Although Lonergan does not cite Poulain explicitly in "Folder 18," he does retain a consideration of the "phenomena of the unitive way." Lonergan writes: "A break across consciousness: intellect and will engaged in supernatural operations (the presence of God in the soul, in my soul); sense undergoes successively greater eclipse (control of inner, outer senses, increasingly lost) and then returns to function normally despite [the] presence of higher operations."²⁶

Thus, the normal functioning of the senses is interrupted in the course of a developmental process in unitive prayer. In the general context of the integrative movement of Lonergan's treatise on grace, one might find it puzzling that Lonergan indicates that the normal functioning of the senses returns "despite" the transformation of the operations of intellect and will. One might anticipate that this observation would give way to an appreciation that the transformation of a person's conscious knowing and willing through unitive prayer anticipates and stimulates a corresponding transformation and reintegration of his or her spontaneous biological and psychic sensibilities.²⁷

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Poulain's approach is descriptive rather than speculative or explanatory. Poulain defines mystic prayer as "those supernatural acts or states which our own industry is powerless to produce, *even in a low degree, even momentarily*" (*Graces of Interior Prayer* 1). Teresa's four stages of mysticism are quietude, union, ecstasy and transforming union. The first three stages are progressive, "non-transforming union" representing increased passivity of the intellect and will in prayer. The fourth stage, also known as spiritual marriage, is not a further perfection of the previous stages but a modification of intellect and will by conscious participation in the divine life. Ordinary prayer involves supernatural acts such as contrition in which human effort "corresponds to grace." With respect to ordinary prayer Poulain describes four stages including vocal prayer, meditation, affective prayer, and the prayer of simplicity (*Graces of Interior Prayer* 1–58).

²⁵ Poulain, *Graces of Interior Prayer* 283–89.

²⁶ "Folder 18" 2.

²⁷ Such as suggested by Robert M. Doran (*Theology and the Dialectics of History* [Toronto: University of Toronto, 1990]).

Nonetheless, Lonergan's discussion of the interaction of the illuminated intellect and the inspired will does reflect the deeply integrative approach of authentic Ignatian spirituality. In both "Folder 19" and "Folder 18" Lonergan refers to Joseph de Guibert's treatment of the spiritual doctrine of the *Spiritual Exercises* in his *La spiritualité de la Compagnie de Jésus*, emphasizing the docility to the Spirit that guides the combination of strong and prudential reasoning with tenacity of will in the process of discernment.²⁸ Lonergan gives clear precedence to Ignatius's "second time" for decision-making in which the fruits of prudential reasoning are further tested by the affective suggestions of grace expressed in the movements of consolation and desolation. Here Lonergan makes no mention of the direct inspiration of the first time and the more rational evaluation of the third time.²⁹

Significantly, Lonergan's citation from the volume *La spiritualité de la Compagnie de Jésus* stops abruptly short of de Guibert's concluding synthesis of Ignatius's spiritual doctrine, which summarizes the thematic of Ignatius's spirituality as apostolic service as a disciple of Christ.³⁰ Here de Guibert contrasts Ignatius's approach with a mysticism of union and transformation. "Mystique de service par amour, plutôt que mystique d'union et de transformation . . ."³¹ Lonergan chooses to cite Poulain's description of Teresa's mysticism of transforming union rather than accept de Guibert's assertion that Ignatius took an alternative approach. While it can be obviously argued that neither a mysticism of service through love nor a mysticism of transforming union are mutually exclusive, Lonergan's discussion of the *Spiritual Exercises* makes a clear option for the priority of union and assimilation as the principles from which service might consequently flow. Lonergan's approach resonates with Ignatius's respect for God's direct action in the human person.³²

Lonergan continues in "Folder 18" to develop a parallel between the role of a teacher and the role of a spiritual director. The teacher can hope only to assist the student's learning by providing helpful visual and auditory stimulation. The principle of the student's learning is his or her own wonder. Comprehension is a personal achievement first producing the inner word of understanding that may then ground the outer word of expression. The outer word of a student's personal achievement is not to be confused with mimicry or mere manipulation of the clues offered by a teacher. The

²⁸ Joseph de Guibert, *La spiritualité* 122–23; English trans.: *The Jesuits: Their Spiritual Doctrine and Practice*, trans. William J. Young (Chicago: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1964) 134.

²⁹ See *Spiritual Exercises* no. 175 ff.

³⁰ de Guibert, *La spiritualité* 162–70. Lonergan cites only pages 122–61 of the Guibert text in both "Folder 19" and "Folder 18."

³¹ de Guibert, *La spiritualité* 167.

³² *Spiritual Exercises* Annotation 15.

spiritual director likewise can only help another person recognize God's action in his or her life, transforming his or her knowing and willing. No external action takes precedence over or replaces the gracious transformation of the human person as he or she becomes the indwelling Spirit's true other self; unitive love then overflows in charity.³³

A MYSTICAL EPIGRAM

In *Method in Theology* Lonergan provides his reader the vantagepoint toward which the moving viewpoint of *Insight* progressed but never arrived. In *Insight*, Lonergan had approached general and special transcendental knowledge as an expansion of his intentionality analysis and his position on the complete intelligibility of the real. After a thorough development, he was able to present his argument for the existence of God in a rigorous syllogism.³⁴ In *Method*, however, Lonergan considers the question of God more important than the exact manner in which the answer is formulated, and the human person's basic awareness of God arises "not through our arguments or choices but primarily through God's gift of his love."³⁵

Lonergan develops in *Method* his previous intentionality analysis, now conceiving the good not simply as the intelligent and reasonable but as a distinct transcendental notion revealed in questions for deliberation.³⁶ Human consciousness is not only empirical, intelligent, and rational but also deliberative. The reflexive application of the operations of deliberative consciousness constitute the subject as existential; human persons inform and reform themselves through their deliberative choices.³⁷ Still, even as Lonergan refines the achievements of his intentionality analysis, he recognizes that the existential subject lives within a mystical horizon. Here he understands the transcendental notions to be the divine call transformed and fulfilled by the further call and gift of God's grace.³⁸ The human

³³ "Folder 18" 4.

³⁴ *Insight* 696.

³⁵ See Lonergan's retrospective, "Insight Revisited" 277.

³⁶ *Method* 104–5. The transcendental notions are "our questions for intelligence, for reflection and for deliberation . . ." See also Lonergan's discussion of transcendental notions as active and passive potencies (*Method* 120–21).

³⁷ Lonergan writes: ". . . [T]he change in *Method* primarily regards the fuller attention to the fourth level on which consciousness is conscience and subjects are not only practical (changing objective states of affairs), interpersonal (relating to others) but also existential (transforming themselves)" (Bernard Lonergan to Edward Braxton, 12 February 1975, LRI).

³⁸ Lonergan responds to a series of questions during the Regis Method Institute, a 1969 presentation of *Method* as a work in progress, offered at Regis College, Toronto: "Are the transcendental notions like a call? Yes. That would be true. The transcendental notions are the call. There is the further call of God's grace. *What about mystery?* I think the experience of mystery lies in a fulfillment of the tran-

person is a conscious, existential response to this complex divine initiative. In *Method* Lonergan's reflective, methodological analysis proceeds within the context of an explicit acknowledgment of religious experience.

In the period during which Lonergan was drafting *Method*, he struggled to synthesize the approach he had taken to transcendental knowledge in *Insight* and his affirmation of the priority of experimental grace such as that found in "Grace and the Spiritual Exercises."³⁹ In January of 1968, Lonergan responds in a letter to a question posed by a correspondent:

While we do not in this life experience God, we do not know him apart from experience. We do not experience him, for God is not among the data of sense or the data of consciousness. We do not know him apart from experience, for it is our experience of this world and of its complete intelligibility that provides the premises whence we infer to his existence."⁴⁰

In contrast with this juxtaposition of the possibility of "knowing God" with the impossibility of "experiencing God" in this life, 19 months later Lonergan takes a different position. During the question period following a pre-publication presentation of *Method* as a work in progress, Lonergan offers the following responses:

How are these (transcendental) notions related to God? They are associated, and from them I get the question of God: not the experience of God, the experience of the divine. *What is the difference?* Have you read Rahner on St. Ignatius and

scendental notions, of what one is in terms of the transcendental notions. The experience described by St. Paul when he says in Romans 5.5, 'God's love has flooded our hearts through the Holy Spirit he has given us.' In chapter 8 of Romans St. Paul goes on to explain that there is nothing in heaven or on earth that can separate us from the love of Jesus Christ. The Old Testament talks about loving God with one's whole heart and soul and mind and strength. To get to that love is something conscious but we cannot say what it is; it is mystery. But it is loving, and it is loving in an unrestricted manner; it corresponds to the unrestricted character of the transcendental notions" (Bernard Lonergan, questions 100–101, "Regis Method Institute," transcribed by Nicholas Graham, Regis College, Toronto, July 17–18, 1969, 583–84).

³⁹ Lonergan had also previously completed a genetic analysis of the development of the doctrine of grace in *Grace and Freedom* and a preliminary systematic treatment of grace in published lecture notes (Bernard Lonergan, *De ente supernaturali: Supplementum schematicum* [Montreal: College of the Immaculate Conception, 1946; re-ed. Frederick E. Crowe, Willowdale, Ontario: Regis College, 1973]). For a discussion, see J. Michael Stebbins, *The Divine Initiative: Grace, World-Order, and Human Freedom in the Early Writings of Bernard Lonergan* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1995).

⁴⁰ Bernard Lonergan to Rocco Cacópardo, 28 January 1968, LRI. Lonergan continues in this letter to write: "Mysticism is a distinct pattern of experience, but when the mystic ends his prayer and joins the rest of us, he can ask about the validity of his experience and raise such intellectual questions as I raised in chapters 19 and 20 [of *Insight*]."

consolation without a cause? Well, that sort of thing I would call *an experience of God*.⁴¹

The published text of *Method* confirms the possibility of religious experience but does so almost epigrammatically. Lonergan describes religious experience as “being in love with God . . . without limits or qualifications or conditions or reservations,” the proper fulfillment of the human person’s unrestricted capacity for self-transcendence.⁴² Lonergan’s elaboration tends toward paradoxical expression. If the transcendental notions are a divine call, their fulfillment in the further gift of God’s love is a radically transformative terminus. The fulfillment of unrestricted human intentionality is not the product of human knowing and choosing but, in fact, the denouncement of the established horizon of human knowing and choosing in the accouchement of a new horizon “in which the love of God will transvalue our values and the eyes of that love will transform our knowing.” Lonergan describes the new horizon as “a conscious dynamic state of love, joy and peace, that manifests itself in acts of kindness, goodness, fidelity, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22).”⁴³ Clearly, the fulfillment of the transcendental notions, the realization of the human person’s unrestricted capacity for self-transcendence becomes a principle of further (supernatural) activity.

Lonergan elucidates that to affirm that the dynamic state of being in love with God is conscious is not to affirm that it is known, clarifying that consciousness is simply experience whereas knowledge is a compound of experience, understanding, and judging. Further, Lonergan locates religious experience as consciousness that has been brought to fulfillment on the fourth level of human intentional consciousness. Religious experience involves the transformed self-presence of the human subject whose deliberative spontaneity has been reoriented and fulfilled by the unconditional love of God. Lonergan is careful here not to associate religious experience immediately with the empirical, intellectual or rational levels of consciousness. Religious experience is immediate; it remains most fundamentally an experience of mystery. Later in *Method*, in the chapter on foundations, Lonergan writes:

(L)et us consider religiously differentiated consciousness. It can be content with the negations of an apophatic theology. For it is in love. On its love there are not any reservations or conditions or qualifications. By such love it is oriented positively to what is transcendent in loveableness. Such a positive orientation and the consequent self-surrender, as long as they are operative, enable one to dispense with any

⁴¹ Questions 102–3, emphasis added, “Regis Method Institute” 584.

⁴² *Method* 105–6.

⁴³ *Ibid.* 106.

intellectually apprehended object. And when they cease to be operative, the memory of them enables one to be content with enumeration of what God is not.⁴⁴

Lonerger indicates that he found William Johnston's *The Mysticism of the Cloud of Unknowing* very helpful and suggests that readers will find there a fuller exposition of mysticism "largely coherent" with his own approach. In the chapter on systematics, Lonergan writes:

On what I have called the primary and fundamental meaning of the name, God, God is not an object. For that meaning is the term of an orientation to transcendent mystery. Such an orientation, while it is the climax of the self-transcendent process of raising questions, none the less is not properly a matter of raising and answering questions. So far from lying within the world mediated by meaning, it is the principle that can draw people out of that world and into the cloud of unknowing.⁴⁵

Still, for both Lonergan and Johnston, withdrawal through the purgative cloud of forgetting into the unitive cloud of unknowing enables a renewed appreciation of creation and participation in world process. The human person is purified and transformed not only to find God in all things but to find all things in God. ". . . (T)rascendent value links itself to all other values to transform, magnify, glorify them."⁴⁶ A new horizon of knowing and willing emerges. Johnston writes:

The all-important thing, however, is that when inordinate desire has been vanquished, so that man can see creatures as they really are, then he may know again. For then (and only then) is he capable of true knowledge. Strangely enough, when the cloud of forgetting has done its work perfectly, man is permitted to remember; and now for the first time he really *knows*; no longer is he warped by the ignorance of concupiscence. He looks out on the created world and he sees there only God for (writes St. John of the Cross) "even as all the trees and plants have their life and root in the grove, so the creatures, celestial and terrestrial alike, have their roots and their life in God;" (*Canticle*, Stanza XXXVIII, 8) and the English author puts the same idea even more forcefully when he says (and reiterates several times) that God *is* the being of all things—not in the sense of a pantheistic identity but because we share analogously in what He has by right. To look on the world and see only God is truth (for he who sees the creature divorced from its Creator is in abysmal ignorance), and it is to this God-filled vision of the world that the author leads. . . . So in the final stage nothing is rejected: science, music, poetry, and the beauty of nature are not rejected but seen and loved and relished in God who is their being. It is simply that when the cloud of forgetting has purified the soul, it is free to love in the liberty of spirit.⁴⁷

Thus, the mystic who "withdraws into the *ultima solitudo*" and "drops

⁴⁴ Ibid. 277–78.

⁴⁵ Ibid. 342. See also Lonergan's comments in his n. 7. William Johnston, *The Mysticism of the Cloud of Unknowing* (New York: Desclée, 1967). The published text of *Method* makes two other references to Johnston (29, n. 1 and 278, n. 4). The transcription of the 1969 "Regis Method Institute" makes no reference to Johnston, either in the text presented or in Lonergan's responses to questions.

⁴⁶ *Method* 116.

⁴⁷ Johnston, *Mysticism* 183.

the constructs of culture and the whole complicated mass of mediating operations,” may reflect upon his or her religious experience and its relation to God, yielding in this life a “mediated immediacy.”⁴⁸ This unitive transformation of deliberative consciousness implicates the integral consciousness and intentional operations of the human person, calling forth adjustments and developments in the first three differentiations of consciousness, reorienting and elevating the operations of knowing and willing, enlivening dialectical and historical religious expression. For Lonergan and Johnston, the mystic’s withdrawal into apophatic prayer returns to find its authentic expression in the expansive freedom of a kataphatic spirituality.⁴⁹

EXPATIATION

The dense expression of Lonergan’s notion of religious experience might be further relieved by paying attention to his repeated references to Karl Rahner’s explication of the Ignatian mystical notion of consolation without a cause. In the published text of *Method* Lonergan makes a cryptic reference to Rahner’s understanding of consolation without a cause, indicating that notion of religious love as the dynamic state of being in love with God corresponds to Rahner’s explication of the Ignatian notion.⁵⁰ Lonergan elaborates upon this comparison on three occasions in the question-answer exchanges of the “Regis Method Institute.”⁵¹ He also indicates several years later that Harvey Egan’s account of Rahner’s explanation stimulated a synthetic reprise of his own previous intellectual and spiritual journey.⁵²

⁴⁸ *Method* 29. In a written response to a question posed during the 1979 Method in Theology Seminar at Boston College, Lonergan wrote: “My ‘mediated immediacy’ is different from the Scholastic view that the beatific vision is immediate. Immediate in the Scholastic sense is the denial of an intermediary object between the act and the object. Mediated immediacy does not posit an object between the act and the object but posits a reflection that understands the nature of the act and its relation to God” (Lecture Notes, LRI, A2860).

⁴⁹ For a discussion of dialectical and historical religious expression, see *Method* 108–12.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 106. Lonergan cites the discussion of consolation without a cause in Karl Rahner, *The Dynamic Element in the Church*, *Questiones disputatae* 12 (Montreal: Palm, 1964) 131 ff. See also *Method* 278 n. 4 where Lonergan again cites *Dynamic Element* 129 ff.

⁵¹ Questions 103, 114, 203, “Regis Method Institute” 584, 591–92, 672.

⁵² Lonergan writes: “I got to know Fr. Egan in 1975–76 when he addressed the Jesuit Community at St. Mary’s Hall on ‘Consolation without a previous cause.’ I had been hearing those words since 1922 at the annual retreats made by Jesuits preparing for the priesthood. They occur in St. Ignatius’s ‘Rules for the Discernment in the Second Week of the Exercises.’ But now, after fifty-three years, I began for the first time to grasp what they meant. What had intervened was what Rahner

In the context of a discussion of the discernment of God's particular will with respect to specific concrete personal decisions, Rahner argues that Ignatius Loyola's approach assumes two complementary foundations. The first foundation is constituted by the first principles of logic and ontology, the rational application of which within the framing provided by knowledge of the actual situation and by adherence to the prescriptions of faith discriminates a general realm of possible, morally acceptable choices. The second foundation is the utterly transcendent love of God, that is, "consolation without a cause," with respect to which specific, concrete choices are tested to discern God's particular will for the individual.⁵³

Rahner draws on his transcendental analysis to explicate the notion of consolation without a cause in contradistinction to the closely related Ignatian notion of consolation with a cause. With respect to consolation with a cause, Rahner suggests that the cause of consolation is the presence of an object from which the understanding or will draw their consolation and consolation itself "signifies the inner frame of mind that follows from the object," characterized as peace, tranquillity, and quiet.⁵⁴ Consolation without a cause is the inner frame of mind that does not follow from a deter-

describes as the anthropological turn, the turn from metaphysical objects to conscious subjects. What I was learning was that the Ignatian 'examen conscientiae' might mean not an examination of conscience but an examination of consciousness: after all in the romance languages the same word is used to denote both conscience and consciousness, both *Gewissen* and *Bewusstsein*. I was seeing that 'consolation' and 'desolation' named opposite answers to the question, How do you feel when you pray? Are you absorbed or are you blocked? I was hearing that my own work on operative grace in St. Thomas (cf. *TS*, 1941–42) brought to light a positive expression of what was meant by Ignatius when [he] spoke of 'consolation without a previous cause: in Aquinas grace is operative when the mind is not the mover but only the moved; in Ignatius consolation is from God alone when there is no conscious antecedent to account for the consolation' (Bernard Lonergan to Thomas O'Malley). In conversation Harvey Egan advises me that the talk given in the 1975–76 academic year was an informal presentation based on his doctoral project, which was rewritten and published as *The Spiritual Exercises and the Ignatian Mystical Horizon* (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1976). Egan's doctoral project, "An Anthropocentric-Christocentric Mystagogy: A Study of the Method and Basic Horizon of Thought and Experience in the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola" (Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität, Münster), was completed in 1972 under the supervision of Karl Rahner. In the O'Malley letter, Lonergan indicates that he became familiar with the published version of Egan's project and had consulted the original dissertation.

⁵³ Rahner, *Dynamic Element* 90–95. Rahner's interpretation of the *Spiritual Exercises* focuses on the "Rules for Discernment of Spirits for the Second Week" nos. 329–36, especially no. 330 and no. 336, and the "Three Times When a Correct and Good Choice of a Way of Life May Be Made" nos. 175–78.

⁵⁴ Rahner, *Dynamic Element* 133.

minate object. Consolation without a cause is the radical, unrestricted love of God which cannot be properly conceptualized.⁵⁵

Rahner observes that consolation without a cause presents an inherent contradiction to those who would identify by definition “‘being the object of a concept for consciousness’ and ‘being known’ (of something in a consciousness).” Rahner’s subsequent treatment, in effect, presents two counterexamples to this identification; the concomitant self-awareness which accompanies every intentional act of the mind, but cannot be identified with the subject as made the object of a mental act; and consolation without a cause understood as the concomitant awareness of God’s unrestricted love which forms the mystical horizon of every intentional act, but can never be associated with the determinate object of any intentional act.⁵⁶

Rahner thus affirms that consolation without a cause is conscious but is not referenced to an object and cannot be properly conceptualized. “The absence of object in question is utter receptivity to God, the inexpressible, non-conceptual experience of the love of the God who is raised transcendent above all that is individual, all that can be mentioned and distinguished, of God as God.”⁵⁷ Or as Ignatius himself says: “It belongs solely to the Creator to come into the soul, to leave it, to act upon it, to draw it wholly to the love of His Divine Majesty.”⁵⁸ Consolation without a cause, the radical, personal, non-conceptual love of God becomes the self-justifying foundation with respect to which the individual’s particular choices are then tested.⁵⁹

Lonergan’s reference to Rahner’s understanding of consolation without a cause as “consolation with a content but without an object” is simply

⁵⁵ Ibid. 135.

⁵⁶ Ibid. 133 ff. n. 28.

⁵⁷ Ibid. 135. See also Lonergan’s responses during the Regis Method Institute: “*Has consolation got a content?* Yes. It has a content, but it hasn’t got an object; this is Rahner’s way of putting it. This is how he puts it in *The Dynamic Element in the Church*. Here he discusses this consolation without a cause that Ignatius talks about as the discernment of the Spirit; and he says that ‘without a cause’ means without an object. Insofar as it is unrestricted it is out of this world; it is otherworldly; there are no conditions or qualifications, etc., to that love, and it is with all one’s mind, heart, and strength. Because it is conscious without being known, it is mystery; one can call its object mystery. Because it is love it is fascinating; because it is unrestricted it is *tremendum*; it is awe as well as love. Now, is that continuous? It is continuous with our capacity for self-transcendence; it is the fulfillment of our capacity for self-transcendence; it is something ultimate in self-transcendence, in the line of self-transcendence. And because it is a fulfillment of a capacity it is a source of joy and peace. It is a joy and peace that is quite different from any other” (question 114, “Regis Method Institute” 591–92).

⁵⁸ *Spiritual Exercises* #330.

⁵⁹ Rahner continues to describe the process of concrete, individual discernment which proceeds from this foundational principle (*Dynamic Element* 156 ff).

illustrative of the dynamic state of being in love with God as the conscious horizon within which transformed knowing and willing proceed.⁶⁰ The context and scope of Rahner's discussion suggest a way in which the relation between the dynamic state of being in love and particular acts of knowing and willing can be understood. In effect, consolation without a cause provides the self-justifying principle with respect to which the moral tonality and integrity of particular acts can be discerned; attentive reflection assesses the resonance of a particular act with the person's conscious but unthematized experience of unitive love.

A significant contrast between the two thinkers, however, becomes evident. Rahner's indirect method accepts God's redemptive self-communication as given and unthematically available to human consciousness. His indirect method then approaches intentionality analysis as a discovery of the metaphysical conditions of possibility for redemption. While Lonergan shares Rahner's existential turn to the subject, he disagrees with Rahner on cognitional theory and the epistemology and metaphysics that ensue from it.⁶¹ It is very significant that Lonergan differentiates four interrelated dimensions of intentional consciousness and locates religious experience as the fulfillment of the transcendent striving of deliberative consciousness. The revelation of God's love transforms the horizon within which further conscious acts of knowing and willing occur. For Lonergan, metaphysics refers to the content of what is known through subsequent acts of intelligence and critical reflection. Lonergan's approach recognizes the possibility of conversion as an existential change in the subject which is neither reducible to information nor follows from knowledge and thus is distinct from the thematization of an implicit condition of possibility. Religious conversion remains the unconditional response of a particular person to the mystical experience of God's love flooding his or her heart.⁶²

⁶⁰ *Method* 106 n. 4. See again Lonergan's responses during the Regis Method Institute: "What is the nature and content of religious experience? Rahner says that it has no object but it has a content; that is his way of expressing it. It has a content, viz., being-in-love, that manifests itself in joy, peace, etc. To understand this one can discuss the tag: one can't love what one does not know; and, in a general sense, that is true. But insofar as God's love floods one's heart (Romans 5:5), one doesn't love God because one knows him. One has that love because of the gift of his grace and it is through that gift that one comes to know him" (question 203, "Regis Method Institute" 672).

⁶¹ I am following a clue offered by a comment Lonergan makes in lecture notes for the 1979 Method in Theology Seminar at Boston College regarding Rahner's understanding of the beatific vision (Lecture Notes, LRI, A2860). See also Bernard Lonergan, "A Response to the Reverend William V. Dych's Presentation entitled 'Method in Theology according to Karl Rahner'" (LRI, A2868).

⁶² Lonergan indicates that he learned from Harvey Egan's development of Rahner's thought that such mysticism is not a series of exceptional events but a way of

COLLATION

Loneragan's notion of religious experience as being in love with God remains a very dense expression and requires further expansion. I have attempted to relieve this density by means of an expatiation through some of Lonergan's source texts in the context of a consideration of his evolving appreciation of mysticism. The trajectory of Lonergan's development is toward a transcendental spirituality in which the pervasive dynamism informing human living becomes more adequately expressed in explanatory terms and relations.⁶³ Once an appropriate and sufficiently rich context of interpretation has been evoked, the further development of Lonergan's thought becomes, at least transitionally, a systematic exercise.

Some other interpreters of Lonergan's thought have addressed the compact nature of Lonergan's expression through just such a systematic effort, transposing the metaphysical categories of sanctifying grace and the habit of charity into correlative categories of intentionality analysis.⁶⁴ Robert Doran develops such an approach proceeding from Lonergan's discussion of created participation in the four divine relations, focusing on active and passive spiration, and drawing on Frederick Crowe's analysis of "complacency and concern"; the twofold action in human willing: "the passive process of receiving and the active process of causation."⁶⁵ In a manner

life: "In time I came to know Fr. Egan's views on mysticism. It is not just a series of exceptional events. It is a whole way of life. It is the way to which St. Paul refers in Romans 8:14: 'For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.' It is of a piece with Newman's 'Lead kindly light, lead thou me on.' It replaces Socrates' obedience to his *daimon* with the Ignatian rules: In desolation change nothing; rely on consolation when there was no conscious antecedent that accounts for the consolation. Or in the words of Aquinas, grace is operative when you become willing to do the good that previously you were unwilling to do. The succession of such changes in willingness is the way of the mystic that first purges one of one's inordinate attachments, then opens one's eyes to things as they are, and eventually brings those that persevere to a transforming union with God" (Bernard Lonergan to Thomas O'Malley).

⁶³ See, for instance, Bernard Lonergan, "Healing and Creating in History" in *A Third Collection: Papers by Bernard J. F. Lonergan, S.J.*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe (New York: Paulist, 1985) 100–109; see also Pierre Robert, "De l'analyse de sujet connaissant à la reprise des dimensions existentielle et religieuse chez Bernard Lonergan," *Science et Esprit* 44 (1992) 127–58.

⁶⁴ Robert M. Doran, "Consciousness and Grace," *Method: Journal of Lonergan Studies* 11 (1993) 51–75; Michael Vertin, "Lonergan on Consciousness: Is There a Fifth Level?" *MJLS* 12 (1994) 1–36; Robert M. Doran, "Revisiting 'Consciousness and Grace,'" *MJLS* 13 (1995) 151–59; " 'Complacency and Concern' and a Basic Thesis on Grace" in *Lonergan Workshop* 13 (1997) 57–78.

⁶⁵ Frederick E. Crowe, "Complacency and Concern in the Thought of St. Thomas," *TS* 20 (1959) 1–39, 198–230, 343–95.

that resonates both with our previous discussion of the priority that Lonergan places on transformative union which overflows, so to speak, to inform a principle of consequent service and Lonergan's citation of Rahner's explication of the Ignatian notion of consolation without a cause, Doran develops the correlative notions of a "nonintentional complacency" and "a dynamic state of being in love" as conscious, created participation in the opposed relations of active and passive spiration.⁶⁶ Doran's hypothesis warrants careful assessment. I hope that the effort I have made in this present study to trace Lonergan's evolving appreciation of mysticism will help to evoke the context within which to make just such an evaluation.

⁶⁶ See especially the concluding summary, Doran, "Basic Thesis on Grace" 76–77.