

REFLECTIONS ON THE NOTION OF IMPLICIT FAITH

Jeremy D. Wilkins

Volume 75, numéro 1, janvier–avril 2023

Lonergan, Ethics and the Bible
Lonergan, l'éthique et la Bible

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1094626ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Collège universitaire dominicain, Ottawa

ISSN

0316-5345 (imprimé)
2562-9905 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Wilkins, J. D. (2023). REFLECTIONS ON THE NOTION OF IMPLICIT FAITH.
Science et Esprit, 75(1), 79–94.

Résumé de l'article

Si l'on affirme que le salut peut advenir sans une option en faveur de la révélation chrétienne, il faut alors admettre ou bien que la foi n'est pas nécessaire au salut, ou bien que la foi qui sauve puisse advenir en dehors de la transmission historique de l'Évangile. Ces conclusions s'avèrent l'une et l'autre difficiles à concilier avec la doctrine catholique traditionnelle. Supposons que l'affirmation selon laquelle la foi peut advenir en dehors de la communion historique au Christ soit plus conforme à la doctrine catholique que celle selon laquelle le salut peut advenir sans la foi. Une double question se pose alors concernant l'avènement de celle-ci en dehors d'un contexte chrétien : comment une telle foi est-elle reliée à Jésus Christ, et quelle relation entretient-elle avec les significations et les valeurs du contexte où elle surgit ? Cet article élabore certaines notions théologiques pour aborder la question, en conversation avec Thomas d'Aquin, Lonergan et la doctrine catholique traditionnelle.

REFLECTIONS ON THE NOTION OF IMPLICIT FAITH

JEREMY D. WILKINS

If we affirm that salvation occurs apart from the acceptance of Christian revelation, then either faith is not necessary for salvation, or saving faith occurs apart from the historical transmission of the Gospel. Either conclusion is difficult to reconcile with traditional Catholic doctrines.

According to the Council of Trent, justifying grace is never infused apart from the virtues of faith, hope, and charity. If justifying grace is never given apart from theological faith, and if justifying grace is given and received outside the context of the historical church, then the theological virtue of faith is also given and received outside the context of the proclamation and acceptance of the Gospel. Nor is that saving faith reducible to trust alone; it must regard some object.¹ But, according to *Dominus Iesus*, as there is only one economy of divine revelation, there is only one tradition to which theological faith can rightly assent as revealed by God. The credence [credulitatem] that adherents of other religions accord their own traditions is not identical to the theological virtue of faith, where by faith is meant the acceptance, by grace, of revealed truth.²

Let us suppose that it is more congruous to say that faith occurs outside the historical communion of Christ than to say that salvation occurs without faith. There arises a twofold question about the faith that occurs outside a Christian context, namely, how it is related to Jesus Christ (or to Christian revelation), and how it is related to the meanings and values of the context in which it does occur.

A notion of implicit faith is sometimes invoked to resolve this apparent tension. But outside of the logical necessity with which valid conclusions follow from their premises, the notion of 'implication' is materially rather vague.

1. Council of Trent, session 6, Decree on Justification, canon 12, in Norman P. TANNER et al. (eds.), *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 2, Washington D.C., Georgetown University Press, 1990, p. 679. The post-Reformation manuals regularly contrasted 'fiducial' with 'dogmatic' faith.

2. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration *Dominus Iesus*, 7.

Its potential significance for this question results from the different patterns it might receive.

Faith and Beliefs

Thomas Aquinas distinguished the objects of faith into primary and secondary. He distinguished the manner in which they were held into implicit and explicit. The primary objects of faith are God and the way to God. The secondary or accidental objects include various details of salvation history. Because the mystery of Christ's humanity is the concrete way to our beatitude, it was always necessary to believe, in some way, in the primary objects of faith: Christ and the Trinity, insofar as the Trinity is implicated in the mystery of Christ.³ Thomas held that, after the promulgation of the gospel, the primary objects of faith must be believed explicitly,⁴ but he acknowledged that an implicit faith might be salvific prior to the advent of Christ.⁵

'Implicit' here covers a lot of ground. Before the promulgation of the Gospel, the many in Israel believed in Christ implicitly through the veils of figure and prophecy.⁶ If it is objected that the gentiles, to whom no revelation was made, could have neither explicit nor implicit faith in Christ, Thomas replies that they could still have saving faith in a mediator through implicit reliance on divine providence:

Even if, however, some were saved to whom no revelation had been made, they were not saved apart from faith in a mediator. For, though they did not have explicit faith, still they had an implicit faith in divine providence, believing God to be the liberator of human beings according to ways pleasing to himself...⁷

Ex hypothesi, the implicit faith of the righteous gentile is not an assent to revelation ("to whom no revelation had been made") but it is an assent to truths. The assent is motivated by God's goodness and regards God and God's providence as its objects. Presumably these objects are attained under the light of grace, since the faith that so attains them is a saving faith; but still, it is not a faith that explicitly apprehends Christ, the way actually provided by God.

Both the faith of the Israelite and the faith of the righteous gentile would seem to be implicit on the side of the objects believed. Christ and the Trinity are not explicitly conceived and affirmed, but they are implicit in other objects

3. *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 2 a. 8c.

4. *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 2 a. 5c.

5. *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 2 a. 6c.

6. *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 2 a.7 c.

7. *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 2 a.7 arg. 3 and ad 3. See too Frank CLOONEY, "Implications for the Practice of Inter-Religious Learning," in Stephen J. POPE and Charles HEFLING (eds.), *Sic et Non: Encountering Dominus Iesus*. Maryknoll NY, Orbis Books, 2002, pp. 157-168, here 158-159; Philip A. CUNNINGHAM, "Implications for Catholic Magisterial Teaching on Jews and Judaism," in *Sic et Non: Encountering Dominus Iesus*, pp. 134-149, here 135-136.

that are explicitly conceived and affirmed. What is explicit is the affirmation that human beings are alienated from God, who alone may be trusted to provide a suitable remedy. This affirmation implies the actual remedy, Christ. The implication, however, is not strictly logical. The supposition determines the general contours of a suitable remedy, but not the specific details of the actual remedy. The Israelite, however, has Christ implicitly in a further manner, in the figures and under the veils of the prophets. To move from the implicit to the explicit in this sense, one has to ‘connect the dots,’ as the disciples on the road to Emmaus grasped the meaning of the Lord’s suffering from an exposition of the prophets.⁸ *Novum in vetere latet, vetus in novo patet*: what is implicit in the earlier, becomes explicit in the later, as Augustine put it.⁹

It seems, then, that Thomas’s hypothetical righteous gentile has a saving faith, motivated by the knowledge of God and God’s goodness, attaining no more than naturally knowable truths, and those only implicitly or, we might say, heuristically. A faith that assents to truths, but not to revelation, is not what the authors of *Dominus Iesus* had in mind. They conceived faith as “assent to revealed truth,” “assent to God revealing himself.”¹⁰ These formulations could easily be drawn from Thomas himself, who opens his treatise on faith (in the *Summa theologiae*) by specifying that the faith in question – the theological virtue of faith – means an assent to truths because God has revealed them.¹¹ In other words, assent to revealed truths is because of, motivated by, the authority of the one who reveals them; the assent has a supernatural motive (object *quo*) when its motive is the authority of God revealing. How the faith of Thomas’s righteous gentile (which again, *ex hypothesi*, is not a response to revelation) coheres with this specification is a nice question, but it is beyond our remit to sort out here.

8. Compare Bernard J. F. LONERGAN, “The Assumption and Theology,” in *Collection* (Collected Works 4), Frederick E. CROWE and Robert M. DORAN (eds.), Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1988, pp. 66-80, here 70-71.

9. Augustine, however, was probably thinking at least as much of what God intended as the author of history, as of what the prophets intended as the literary authors. So we speak of the ‘historical implications’ of, say, the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand. Like literary implications, historical implications have to be gathered by ‘connecting the dots.’ But, unlike literary implications, there is in history a real, contingent order of cause and effect. Because the connection is not necessary but contingent, the historical implications are determinate only in retrospect.

10. Note that theological faith principally regards God, not the determinations of any tradition. Thus, there may be theological faith in God, though not necessarily *as revealing*, or in the determinations of a tradition as revealed: no revelation has been made to Thomas’s gentile. But such faith, if it is saving, is not merely fiducial, because it is always related to some categorial determinations, even if it does not assent to those determinations *as revealed*, but only *as de facto* instruments of providence. I take *Dominus Iesus* to mean that what is forbidden is to postulate that there is a proper assent to God *as revealing*, outside the revelation made in Christ and to Israel; not that there is theological faith in no sense whatever; otherwise, there also could not be justifying grace in the sense defined by the Council of Trent.

11. *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q.1 a.1c.

Besides what is implicit in the objects, there is also what is implicit on the side of the subject.¹² Thus we might conceive the ‘psychologically’ implicit as what is ‘known’ by experience even though it is not yet named, conceived, affirmed. Consider what it means to repose implicit trust in someone. It does not mean only that we believe what is said; it means, too, that we are ready to believe even what is not said; and still more, we are ready to suppose good will, to impute the best intentions, to trust even where we are quite unable to understand, to read everything in the best possible light. So small children spontaneously regard their parents, and so friends and lovers regard one another. Such an implicit confidence is a natural consequence of being in love. There is no way, in fact, it can be made adequately explicit. When one surrenders to another in love, it is only in the living that the concrete implications of the loving come to light. Any attempt to determine them beforehand would only impoverish the reality. ‘I will love you and honor you all the days of my life,’ is not the kind of thing that can be spelled out in a prenuptial agreement.

Both Thomas’s righteous gentile and his Israelite have a faith that is implicit, not only on the side of the objects but also on the side of the subjects. It is psychologically implicit as a disposition in the subject (*lumen fidei*), the faith that grounds the act of assent. It regards God with implicit trust, and it is only on account of this implicit trust in the trustworthiness of God, that the gentile expects a remedy and the Israelite expects the fulfillment of prophecy.

Objections

As J. A. Di Noia points out, anyone who wishes to develop a Christian universalism on the model of implicit faith has to reckon with three awkward difficulties.¹³ In the first place, there is the strange possibility that a non-Christian is supposed to implicitly affirm what explicitly, perhaps, she rejects. For Aquinas, however, it is not possible that someone explicitly reject the Gospel yet have an implicit, saving faith. This is because, for him, the promulgation of the Gospel is universal in principle and requires explicit acceptance or rejection. A saving, implicit faith was, for him, possible only before the advent of Christ. Further, DiNoia objects, the faith one implicitly reposes in another presupposes that the other is known to be trustworthy. Aquinas’s righteous gentile cannot be an avowed atheist, and Aquinas does

12. These reflections are stimulated, in part, by a fragment in the Lonergan archives, 42300DTL060, “De explicito et implicito.”

13. J. Augustine Di Noia, *The Diversity of Religions: A Christian Perspective*, Washington D.C., Catholic University of America Press, 1992, pp. 98-103; Id., “Implicit Faith, General Revelation and the State of Non-Christians,” *The Thomist*, 47 (1983), pp. 209-241, here 222-228. The book reproduces material from the article, though not always in the same order. I am grateful to an anonymous referee for bringing them to my attention.

not conceive of a person for whom 'God' has no meaning. Third, DiNoia adds, the implicit faith of the simple faithful is not a readiness to believe just anything at all, but to believe that the values, teachings, and practices of their religious community are right, true, and worthy. Though the simple faithful may understand these things rather vaguely, still their reasonable supposition is that others understand them more fully and could give a better account. If, then, we say that adherents of other traditions implicitly believe in Christ, are we not saying that the Christian theologian knows, better than they, what they 'really' believe?

We may dispatch this last difficulty forthwith; the others will require further examination. The intention of things precedes knowledge of them. Aristotle seems to have conceived water and fire as elemental properties emergent in matter.¹⁴ Chemists today conceive water as a molecule, and fire as a type of oxidation reaction. There is no doubt Aristotle and the chemists are referring to the same phenomena. There is also no doubt the chemists' explanation is more adequate than Aristotle's.¹⁵ But a better explanation of the phenomena is not a better understanding of Aristotle; for that we turn not to the chemist but to the scholar. Or, to give a case more germane to theology: the simple faithful know that God is triune, which Aristotle did not; but Aristotle could prove the existence of God (or at least of a first or an unmoved mover), which the simple faithful cannot. Each, then, knows something of the reality intended by 'God' that the other does not; but neither understands the concepts of the other. Aquinas, the Christian theologian, knows both.

Just as anyone who intends (quidditatively) to understand fire, intends to understand a type of oxidation, so anyone who intends to know God, intends to know the Trinity. As Aquinas explains, God is really triune, but only a Christian knows this; the non-Christian theist apprehends none of the divine persons distinctly, but rather the one God as indistinctly personal.¹⁶ Similarly, with respect to Christ, Aquinas held that the prophets – and perforce the writers of the New Testament, and their (more or less) comprehending readers – knew how their oracles would be fulfilled, though the multitude of Israel did not. To accept the oracles without knowing their fulfillment in Christ is to intend Christ without, in some sense, knowing him. It is to follow under a cloud (1 Cor 10:1-4) or to see through a glass, darkly (1 Cor 13:12). Revelation, in other words, unfolds in stages and the later contexts add further determinations to the meaning of the earlier. But Thomas's hypothetical righteous gentile

14. *On generation and corruption*, I, 1.

15. Hence Lonergan distinguishes explanatory concepts, which explain how things are, from heuristic concepts, which specify the range of phenomena to be explained; the illustration is his *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (Collected Works 3), Frederick E. CROWE and Robert M. DORAN (eds.), Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1992), p. 759.

16. *De potentia*, q. 8 a. 4 obj. 4 and ad 4.

has no revelation at all. His knowledge is merely heuristic, it regards the contours of a possible remedy to his separation from God in sin. It is the Christian believer who knows (by faith) the actual remedy, Christ. In other words, things are what they are; insofar as Christianity is true, it states what is so.

This claim regards things, not heuristic concepts of things. Christ is the actual remedy provided by God. Anyone, therefore, who lays hold of the actual remedy howsoever, lays hold of Christ. To say as much is not a special hubris, appearances to the contrary notwithstanding. Anyone who affirms any position as true is bound to regard contradictory alternatives as false, less adequate, or at best somehow complementary.¹⁷ This is not at all the same, however, as saying that a Christian, who rightly affirms Christianity, claims to know what a Buddhist ‘really’ thinks better than does the Buddhist.

Love

On the side of the subject, faith is always implicit in the psychological sense. That does not mean it exists in some vacuum with no categorical determinations. Faith, as the basis for assent, is a readiness to believe. For clarity, it may be helpful to distinguish (A) the disposition or readiness to believe (‘faith’), (B) the act of believing, and (C) the determinate contents believed (‘beliefs’, *fides quae*). ‘Beliefs’ are what one accepts as true, not on the basis of personal discovery and verification, but by taking another’s word for it (‘believing’). Taking another’s word for it, in turn, rests on a prior openness, disposition to trust, readiness to hear and to hearken. That psychologically implicit readiness

17. Of course, religious meanings and values do not float free in some vacuum; they are embodied in a language, in a religious or cultural symbolism, in a set of practices. S. Mark Heim suggests that there are multiple paths because there are multiple ends. I would suggest that the multiplicity is some function of the transition from transcendent values to categorical expression via a polymorphic human consciousness. See S. Mark HEIM, “A Protestant Reflection on Ecumenism,” in *Sic et Non: Encountering Dominus Iesus*, pp. 68-79, here 77-78; much more fully in ID., *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion*, Maryknoll NY, Orbis, 1995; and ID., *The Depth of the Riches: A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends*, Grand Rapids MI, Eerdmans, 2001. See Bernard J. F. LONERGAN, *Method in Theology* (Collected Works 14), John D. DADOSKY and Robert M. DORAN (eds.), Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2017), pp. 77-78, 106-108; ID., “Philosophy of God, and Theology, Lecture 3: The Relationship between Philosophy of God and the Functional Specialty ‘Systematics,’” in Robert C. CROKEN and Robert M. DORAN (eds.), *Philosophical and Theological Papers, 1965-1980* (Collected Works 17), Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2004, pp. 199-218, here 218. Also L. Matthew PETILLO, “The Universalist Philosophy of Religious Experience and the Challenges of Post-Modernism,” *The Heythrop Journal*, 51 (2010), pp. 946-961, esp. at 955. Nor would I conceive different traditions as paths to different religious goods and thus speak of a plurality of ‘salvations.’ I agree with Catherine Cornille on the need for “a humble understanding of the provisional, relative, and historical nature of truth” as a “necessary condition for dialogue,” *The Im-Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue*, New York NY, Crossroad, 2008), p. 40. But I would add that truth, while relative to a context and provisional in its formulation, is also the positing of an absolute: see LONERGAN, *Insight*, pp. 296-303.

is faith or, in traditional terms, the light of faith, the light of grace, or perhaps the gift wisdom which, for Aquinas, flows from love.¹⁸

Nevertheless, it seems that faith, in this sense, is a confidence reposed in someone known and trusted.¹⁹ Even the ‘unknown god’ whose altar on the Athenian Areopagus so impressed the Apostle at least had been conceived to exist and to be pleased by reverence (Acts 17). “Without faith it is impossible to please God,” writes the author of Hebrews in his influential panegyric, “because whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and rewards those who seek him” (Heb 11:6). Nothing is loved unless it is first known, nothing is desired except it first be apprehended as good, appetite follows apprehension and, perforce, a rational appetite must follow a rational apprehension of the good. These are soundly traditional considerations.

If, on the other hand, we ask whether there is a saving faith outside traditions that name God explicitly, we then have to contend with the possibility that saving faith may occur in a person to whom it would not occur to ask what is meant by God or whether God exists, because the very name and question of God has been forgotten, erased, or never properly brought into focus by the resources of her tradition.

But the universal priority of knowledge to love is questionable. Scholastic psychology worked by distinguishing kinds of souls (life-principles) by their faculties. Faculties were identified by the kinds of acts received in them. The acts were classified according to the different kinds of objects they attained, or the manner in which they attained them.²⁰ The faculties were divided into apprehensive and appetitive and higher and lower. The appetitive faculties have their objects specified by the apprehensive, and, in particular, the object of volition (that is, of higher, rational appetite) is specified by the intellect.²¹

For Aquinas, this logic dictates that, in the order of their genesis, faith precedes charity.²² The first operation of grace is the radical reorientation of the will moving the intellect to the submission of faith.²³ In conversion, the first

18. Lonergan distinguishes ‘faith’ from ‘beliefs’ as the ground of assent from the objects of assent (*fides quae*, the articles believed); see *Method*, pp. 115-119, 123-124. “...in acknowledging religious beliefs we are acknowledging what also was termed faith, and in acknowledging a faith that grounds belief we are acknowledging what would have been termed the *lumen gratiae* or *lumen fidei* or infused wisdom” (123). *Dominus Iesus* defines faith as “acceptio, vi gratiae, veritatis revelatae” (the acceptance, by the power of grace, of revealed truth). To compare, distinguish (A) the ground (*lumen fidei*, *lumen gratiae*), (B) the act of assent (*actus credendi*) to some categorial determination, and (C) the categorial determinations accepted (*fides quae*). Faith, in Lonergan’s sense, is (A); the act of believing is (B); beliefs are (C). But in *DI*’s sense, faith is (B), revealed truth is (C), and ‘*vis gratiae*’, the power of grace, is (A).

19. DI NOIA, *Diversity of Religions*, pp. 100-101; “Implicit Faith,” p. 224.

20. More fully, Jeremy D. WILKINS, “What ‘Will’ Won’t Do: Faculty Psychology, Intentionality Analysis, and the Metaphysics of Interiority,” *Heythrop Journal*, 57 (2016), pp. 473-491.

21. *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 9, a. 1.

22. *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 4, a. 7.

23. *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 111, a. 2.

act of repentance is God converting the heart.²⁴ It is an operative (and actual, not habitual) grace grounding a sequence of cooperative graces. Commenting on the sequence of acts in Aquinas's account of conversion, Bernard Lonergan remarks,

The first act [God converting the heart] does not presuppose any object apprehended by the intellect; God acts directly on the radical orientation of the will. On the other hand, the acts of faith, of servile fear, and of hope obviously presuppose an intellectual apprehension.²⁵

It seems somewhat anomalous that this preliminary divine operation on the will should presuppose no apprehended object, though perhaps Aquinas takes for granted some prior, natural belief in God's existence, and some awareness of one's estrangement from God in sin. But whatever else is going on in his thought here, the first supernatural movement imparted to the will is not charity, because it precedes faith, while charity cannot precede faith, because the supernatural love of God presupposes a supernatural apprehension of God, through faith, as the object of a supernatural beatitude.

For Lonergan, such difficulties exemplified the ineptitude of faculty psychology for sorting out the relation of love to knowledge. He argued that the Scholastic adage, *nihil amatum nisi praecognitum*, nothing is loved unless it is first known, turns out to be importantly wrong, at least in the case of God.²⁶ He shifted from a metaphysical analysis of the soul to an intentionality analysis of consciousness. On Lonergan's showing, intentionality analysis does not verify the division of faculties into apprehensive and appetitive in any straightforward way. Rather, it reveals the occurrence of feelings that apprehend value and are intentional responses to value.²⁷

A state like irritability colors consciousness without arising from the apprehension of any proper object; it is non-intentional in the sense that it is not caused by a conscious awareness of its cause or a knowledge or apprehension of its cause or a recognition of its cause. Similarly, a non-intentional but goal-oriented trend like hunger or thirst enters consciousness independently

24. *Summa theologiae*, III, q. 85, a. 5. God's operation on the will is a precondition for hearing, learning, and drawing near to God: see *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 112, a. 2, esp. ad 2; and *De virtutibus*, q. 1, a. 9, ad 16.

25. Bernard J. F. LONERGAN, *Grace and Freedom: Operative Grace in the Thought of St Thomas Aquinas* (Collected Works 1), Frederick E. CROWE and Robert M. DORAN (eds.), Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2000), p. 128; see pp. 58-64, 98-104, 124-128; also the parallel discussion, pp. 421-423. The crowning acts in the sequence described by Aquinas, left out of Lonergan's enumeration (but Aquinas's passage is quoted in the same place), are charity and filial fear.

26. LONERGAN, *Method*, p. 118; Bernard J. F. LONERGAN, "Faith and Beliefs," in *Philosophical and Theological Papers, 1965-1980* (Collected Works 17), Robert C. CROKEN and Robert M. DORAN (eds.), Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2004, pp. 30-48, here 42.

27. LONERGAN, *Method*, pp. 31-41.

of the apprehension of any proper object, and only later discovers its proper object.²⁸

But intentional responses to value are somewhat different from these cases, and Lonergan makes love his example. Loving is “the supreme illustration” of a feeling so stable and momentous as to “channel attention, shape one’s horizon, direct one’s life.”²⁹ The highest values to which love can respond are religious. Lonergan explains that the gift of divine love “abolishes” the previous horizon of our knowing and choosing, and “sets up a new horizon in which the love of God will transvalue our values.” Such love is “the proper fulfillment” of our capacity for self-transcendence, “an experience of mystery,” “conscious on the fourth [i.e., the practical and existential] level of (...) intentional consciousness,” “pertaining to the unmediated experience of the mystery of love and awe.”³⁰ By such love, one “is oriented positively to what is transcendent in lovableness. Such a positive orientation and the consequent self-surrender, as long as they are operative, enable one to dispense with any intellectually apprehended object.”³¹ Later, Lonergan would conceive love as pertaining to a fifth and highest level of consciousness.³² It goes “beyond the moral operator” that defines the fourth level. It is proper to “a further realm of interpersonal relations and total commitment.”³³

Although other readings of Lonergan on this matter have been proposed,³⁴ the better reading understands Lonergan to mean that such love is prior to an intellectual apprehension, but not prior to or (originally) apart from all apprehension whatever. If (as Lonergan puts it) love is the supreme illustration of the intentional response to value, if it transvalues our values, if it sets up a new horizon, if it involves us in a new realm of meaning or of consciousness, if it grounds total commitment, it would seem to intend and apprehend value. A love that orients us to transcendent mystery would seem to intend transcendent mystery. God’s love comes “with a determinate content but without

28. See Patrick H. BYRNE, *The Ethics of Discernment: Lonergan’s Foundations for Ethics*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2017, pp. 118-168. The idea of a non-intentional state or trend, as Byrne points out, is not without difficulties.

29. LONERGAN, *Method*, pp. 31-34.

30. LONERGAN, *Method*, pp. 102, 103, 108.

31. LONERGAN, *Method*, p. 260.

32. Lonergan’s development on this question is traced in Jeremy W. BLACKWOOD, *And Hope Does Not Disappoint: Love, Grace, and Subjectivity in the Work of Bernard J. F. Lonergan, S.J.* (Marquette studies in theology 88), Milwaukee WI, Marquette University Press, 2017).

33. Bernard J. F. LONERGAN, “Philosophy and the Religious Phenomenon,” in *Philosophical and Theological Papers, 1965-1980* (Collected Works 17), Robert C. CROKEN and Robert M. DORAN (eds.), Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2004, pp. 391-408, here 400.

34. Robert Doran has suggested that the gift of God’s love is (like irritability, perhaps) “conscious but nonintentional,” at least “in its originating moment”: *The Trinity in History: A Theology of the Divine Missions* (Lonergan Studies), Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2012), p. 144; see 36. The passage is almost identical to “The Starting Point of Systematic Theology,” *Theological Studies*, 67 (2006), pp. 750-776, here 758, n. 17.

an intellectually apprehended object,” it “enables one to dispense with any intellectually apprehended object,” it is a feeling that responds to transcendent mystery without presupposing knowledge of transcendent mystery. The feeling is prior to the intention of God as an object to be known by asking and answering questions.³⁵

If this interpretation is correct, then, for Lonergan the love of God would be a felt response to transcendent value, prior to any cognitive intending of God as the source of the apprehension and its adequate object. Considerations on the relationship of intellect and will led Aquinas to conclude faith precedes charity in the order of their genesis. But considerations of intentionality analysis led Lonergan to conclude, on the contrary, that love transforms knowing and its eye is faith.³⁶ The gift of God’s love, he argued, comes first as “a conscious content without an apprehended object.”³⁷ This means the original apprehension of God is as the term of an orientation of love rather than an object disclosed by inquiry. The orientation of love is intentional, but it is not originally a cognitional intention, and in fact it is love that specifies the cognitional intention and not the other way around.

Hence Lonergan’s first grace can be what Thomas’s seemingly cannot: the infusion of an otherworldly love. Notice the parallel between Aquinas’s seriation of the events in conversion, quoted above, and Lonergan’s description of the gift of divine love: “The dynamic state [of love] of itself is an operative grace, but (...) as principle of acts of love, hope, faith, repentance, and so on, is grace as cooperative.” Again, he adds in the same place, this dynamic state “really is sanctifying grace but notionally differs from it.”³⁸ For Aquinas, charity is a desire that faith begets; for Lonergan, faith is the eye love opens to see by.

Deed

Conversion, although always fragile, “ever a withdrawal from unauthenticity,”³⁹ supplies criteria for what is believable. But if today we are far less inclined than

35. The first statement occurs in a lecture delivered the year *Method* appeared (LONERGAN, “Relationship between Philosophy of God and ‘Systematics,’” p. 204). The stress in this context, as in the parallel discussion in *Method*, pp. 340-342 / 315-317, is on the difference between loving God and cognitively apprehending God.

36. LONERGAN, *Method*, pp. 102, 111-120; see Frederick G. LAWRENCE, “Growing in Faith as the Eyes of Being-in-Love with God,” in Randall S. ROSENBERG and Kevin M. VAN DER SCHEL *The Fragility of Consciousness: Faith, Reason, and the Human Good*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2017, pp. 384-404.

37. Bernard J. F. LONERGAN, “Prolegomena to the Study of the Emerging Religious Consciousness of Our Time” (Collected Works 16), in John D. DADOSKY and Robert M. DORAN (eds.) *A Third Collection*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2017, pp. 52-69, here 69. See too LONERGAN, *Method*, p. 102, n. 11.

38. LONERGAN, *Method*, pp. 103-104.

39. LONERGAN, *Method*, p. 106.

Thomas to specify the objective determinations (*fides quae*) of salvific faith, perhaps it is not simply that we are more interested in the disposition of faith than the content of belief. It may be also because we are too well aware that there never is a vacuum. Conversion is always worked out in a context and in relation to the spiritual resources available in that context. Thomas was well aware of the difficulty of moving from general principles to particular cases,⁴⁰ but we, with historical and world-cultural consciousness, can contemplate a diversity of cases beyond the ken of his world.⁴¹ Doubtless this includes cases where Christianity is familiar and expressly rejected or where God is named and denied.

Lonerger famously appealed to performative self-contradiction, or retorsion, in proof of his cognitional theory.⁴² One may deny being intelligent, but to do so one invokes reasons. The negation is incoherent, not on the level of the statement, but on the level of the performance. One is mistaken about oneself; the deed is a surer index than the word.

Here, then, we have a preliminary notion of what is implicit in a performance. When Aquinas hypothesized his righteous gentile he was asking what, on the side of the objects (*fides quae*), would it be necessary and sufficient to know in order to be saved. Fundamentally, his answer was that it would be enough to know that God is good. And perhaps we really do agree with him though we might wish to put things a little differently. Perhaps we would want to say that the thing one must know and live by is the existential difference between good and evil. And the fact that this knowledge would be more instinctual than conceptual might be relevant to Lonergan's reversal of the traditional (Thomist) priority of faith to charity in their genesis.

40. See Frederick E. CROWE, "Universal Norms and the Concrete *Operabile* in St Thomas Aquinas," in Michael VERTIN (ed.), *Three Thomist Studies*, Boston MA, Lonergan Workshop, 2000, pp. 1-69.

41. In a paper at the 2014 Lonergan Workshop at Boston College, Nikolaus Wandinger suggested that the essential elements of Vatican II's teaching on salvation outside the Church were well in place long before the Council, and that the real significance of the Council lay in effecting a shift to a new paradigm within which what was once the exception came to be seen as the rule, and vice versa. Consider two examples of how the concrete problem of conversion was acknowledged in Catholic doctrine prior to the Council, both pointed out by Wandinger. First, Pius IX's speech against indifferentism, 1854, in which he on the one hand reiterates that church membership is necessary for salvation, but adds that it is certain that those who live in insurmountable ignorance about the true religion have no guilt in this matter. And he closes with a question: "Who, however, could claim so much as to determine the boundaries of such ignorance, considering the particularity and difference of peoples, places, natural dispositions and many other things?" Next, the letter of the Holy Office to the Archbishop of Boston, 1949, in the matter of Leonard Feeney (see Denzinger-Hünemann [=DH] nos. 3866-3873). The letter explains that *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* is an infallible doctrine in the sense intended by the Church. That sense is that no one, who knows the Church to be divinely instituted by Christ, refuses to submit to it or to the pope, can be saved (DH 3867).

42. See LONERGAN, *Insight*, pp. 353-360; *Method*, pp. 19-22; see Andrew BEARDS, "Self-Refutation and Self-Knowledge," *Gregorianum*, 76 (1995), pp. 555-573.

If Aquinas allowed the sufficiency of a faith implicit through veils or by way of a simple trust in divine providence, it was a temporary, a provisional expedient. After the promulgation of the Gospel, he held, explicit assent has become necessary for everyone. An implicit assent could suffice, only when and where there was no opportunity for explicit assent. Once the Gospel was openly proclaimed, this situation is no longer obtained. Everyone would now be offered an opportunity for explicit assent. Explicit assent was therefore the new standard, and where explicit assent was lacking, implicit denial (at least) could be inferred.

Today this theological conclusion is no longer tenable, because it rests on a supposition that is no longer tenable. We can no longer suppose that everyone is offered a sufficient opportunity for assent to the Gospel. The chief difference, then, between what Thomas was prepared to say and what we might be prepared to say, regards not the significance of faith but the significance of the exterior promulgation. With Thomas, we are prepared to grant the possible sufficiency of a faith that is related to Christ only implicitly, and is not an assent to any revelation. Against him, however, we must insist that the revelation of Christ has not rendered such faith useless in our dispensation, any more than the veils of figure and prophecy conveyed to Israel rendered the faith of righteous gentiles otiose.

In a sense, perhaps, we Christians have ourselves become veils under which the revelation of Christ is concealed in the new dispensation, especially in a post-Christian world acutely sensitive to the conspicuous infidelities of Christians, the scandals of Christian institutions, the involvement of Christians in empire and expropriation. Reflecting on why Christ left no written word of his own, Thomas makes a suggestive observation: the Lord wanted his doctrine to be spread throughout the world not in the form of his own letter but by way of his disciples and their words.⁴³ He includes, of course, the written words of the apostles, but the basic insight, it seems to me, is that the Lord preferred the mediation of personal relationships to the immediacy of his own written word. Since we are decidedly ambiguous signs, we must, on the basis of self-knowledge alone, be prepared to grant that there may be many who, 'through no fault of their own,' have not heard the Gospel in a way they can receive. 'Through no fault of their own,' in other words, may also mean 'through our most grievous fault.'⁴⁴

The remedy for the veils that we ourselves are, is an interior promulgation of the Gospel. Just as (according to Thomas) the natural law was promulgated by being implanted in the human heart in such a way that everyone knows it by a kind of instinct,⁴⁵ so we might suppose that the new law, which is

43. *Summa theologiae*, III, q. 42, a. 4c.

44. See JOHN PAUL II, *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 33.

45. *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 90, a. 4 ad 1. Both the implanted natural law and the infused new law come to concrete determination through experience, *In 3 Sent.*, d. 23, q. 3, a. 2, ad 1,

principally the grace of the Spirit, is promulgated in two ways: exteriorly, in the human life of Christ, and interiorly, by being implanted in our hearts.⁴⁶ “I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts” (Jer 31:33). Only an interior promulgation is proportionate to the Gospel as a doctrine that cannot be contained in words,⁴⁷ a doctrine that is less instruction than power,⁴⁸ a doctrine that cannot be received without the grace of the Holy Spirit, even if the very tongue of the Savior should speak it.⁴⁹ A twofold, interior and exterior promulgation befits Christ as a teacher who impresses his doctrine on the hearts of the learners.⁵⁰ A twofold promulgation befits the mystery of the law itself, because its whole redemptive efficacy derives from a divine person having made it the law of his own human and historical life.⁵¹

The new law is not the kind of law that can be adequately reduced to a body of doctrines and precepts. Life in the Spirit is not a matter of adherence to a code or possession of created gifts, but of an ongoing docility to a person. Categorical determinations are its secondary elements; by them, the faithful are disposed and instructed how to believe and what to do.⁵² The proportion here is not between two kinds of object (as in the distinction between primary and secondary objects of belief), but between subject and object. The principal element is the subject as transformed; the secondary elements are the determinations of her transformed subjectivity in the world mediated by meaning.

n. 255, and ad 4, n. 259; ed. Moos, 747-748. Of course the notion of a ‘natural law’ is not unproblematic: see Stephen J. POPE, “Theological Anthropology, Science, and Human Flourishing,” in Lieven BOEVE, Yves DE MAESENEER, and Ellen VAN STICHEL (eds.), *Questioning the Human: Toward a Theological Anthropology for the Twenty-First Century*, New York NY, Fordham University Press, 2014). The principal difficulty is determining the relevant meaning of ‘nature.’ I have argued elsewhere that Lonergan’s program of self-appropriation recovers a normative meaning of ‘human nature’ that avoids the criticisms usually leveled against teleology. Jeremy D. WILKINS, *Before Truth: Lonergan, Aquinas, and the Problem of Wisdom*, Washington D.C., The Catholic University of America Press, 2018, pp. 61-95.

46. See Bernard J. F. LONERGAN, ‘Mission and the Spirit,’ in ed. Frederick E. CROWE (ed.), *A Third Collection*, New York NY, Paulist, 1985, pp. 23-34, at 32. “Without the visible mission of the Word, the gift of the Spirit is a being-in-love without a proper object; it remains simply an orientation to mystery that awaits its interpretation. Without the invisible mission of the Spirit, the Word enters into his own, but his own receive him not.”

47. *Summa theologiae*, III, q. 42, a. 4c.

48. *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 106, a. 1c.

49. “etiam ipse filius organo humanitatis loquens, non valet, nisi ipsemet interius operetur per spiritum sanctum” [THOMAS AQUINAS, *Super Evangelium Sancti Ioannis lectura*, 14.6.1958, Raffaele CAI (ed.), Torino, Marietti, 1952, p. 367].

50. *Summa theologiae*, III, q. 42, a. 4c.

51. See Ligita RYLIŠKYTĖ, “Conversion: Falling into Friendship Like No Other,” *Theological Studies*, 81 (2020), pp. 370-393.

52. I am making a systematic-theological claim and not an exegetical one. But, for Aquinas, faith is not caused by, but only receives determination from, the preaching of the Gospel. Compare *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 106, a. 1c. Bernard J. F. LONERGAN, *Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas* (Collected Works 2), Frederick E. CROWE and Robert M. DORAN (eds.), Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1997, pp. 68-69.

The created gifts of grace are for the sake of docility to the Spirit. The supreme virtue is love of God and all things in God, because it directs the whole life of virtue. From this love there flows that wisdom which is an instinct of right judgment by a kind of connaturality or transparency to the Spirit. It is not a wisdom that is learned but a wisdom that is infused. It is a redeeming wisdom. By it one 'knows', instinctually, the value of finding a way forward in love; one has Christ implicitly in the trust that love, not power, will have the final say.

To such a love, the doctrines, the precepts, the practices of a religious or cultural tradition may be positively disposed. By it they may be informed. Without categorial determinations, the ineffable law could come to no concrete expression. The meanings and values of a tradition, insofar as they are authentic, make it possible for the grace of conversion to be received and lived. Love entails concrete obligations to the friends one has, the truth one knows, the values one respects. One must follow the light and fresh air one has.

In no way does it follow that the new law is whatever one wishes it to be, any more than the native light of the mind or the natural law are whatever one wishes. The light of the mind is *potens omnia facere et fieri*, constitutive of the subject as intelligent and reasonable. Though it is not determined to particular questions or objects, its object is the intelligible and the true. Again, the natural law constitutes moral subjects as sharers in the eternal law. It is not determined to any particular good, though what is good always is concrete; yet it hardly follows that the moral subject is indifferent to the worthy and the worthless. In a similar way, to say that the grace of conversion is constitutive of the religious subject, does not mean that the subject, so constituted, is indifferently related to redemptive and to vindictive ways of being in the world.

As our cognitional and our moral being have performative implications, so too does our religious being. The new law is docility to the Spirit. Its wisdom is a wisdom of listening and recovery. Its praxis is redemptive. It is the Law of the Cross, and the Law of the Cross is Christ's. It is lived by the grace of the Spirit, and the grace of the Spirit is given for the sake of Christ. If the grace of conversion is a share in the paschal mystery, it is because, performatively, latently, it involves us with the one who made that law efficacious in us by first making it his own. The feet by which we walk in this way are the feet of the heart, and the walking implies a mystery ours by grace of another. The converted convert, and in the converting they put on Christ. "They begin to leave who begin to love. Many the leaving who know it not, for the feet on which they leave are the feet of the heart; yet they are leaving Babylon."⁵³

53. AUGUSTINE, *Enarratio in Ps.* 64, 2. "Incipit exire qui incipit amare. Exeunt enim multi latenter, et exeuntium pedes sunt cordis affectus: exeunt autem de Babylonia." The translation is adapted from Eric VOEGELIN, "Immortality: Experience and Symbol," in *Published Essays 1966-*

Conclusion

My question has been that of a Catholic trying to make some sense of the traditional claims of my church. I have not subjected those claims to dialectical critique, but accorded them a presumptive validity. At the same time, I have referred to other traditions of belief only in very general terms. It may be felt that I have merely foisted an a priori meaning on them.⁵⁴ It may be felt that a tradition can be judged only on the basis of its own, internal criteria.

But an alternative reading of my purpose is possible. Our charge is ‘finding God in all things.’ To do it, we need a notion of what we are looking for. That requirement obtains whether the object under scrutiny belongs to our own traditions or to others. In either case we will have to do our business with scissors: a lower blade providing data, interpretations, histories, and evaluation, and an upper blade developing some notions for organizing and evaluating what the lower blade throws up. The question, then, about the validity of our own tradition and the validity of others are united at their root. If indeed there is one real order of providence, the criteria for evaluating ourselves and evaluating the others may be expected to converge. Perhaps there is something to be gained by trying to articulate them.⁵⁵

The touchstone of religious authenticity is to bring good out of evil through love. Whatever disposes to genuine reconciliation, forgiveness, patient endurance, gratitude, is an instrument of the good that God works in all things. And, on the contrary, the sacralization of violence and revenge, the rationalization of injustice, whatever contributes to the social surd is a derailment, wherever it is found.⁵⁶

Theology Department
Boston College

85 (The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin 12), Ellis SANDOZ (ed.), Baton Rouge LA, Louisiana State University Press, 1990, pp. 52-94 at 78.

54. See Frank CLOONEY, “Implications for the Practice of Inter-Religious Learning,” pp. 160-163, on the problem of judging traditions in the abstract.

55. See Catherine CORNILLE, *The Im-Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue*, p. 79; Ashlee KIRK, “Theology of Religion and Interreligious Study: A Need for Conversation and Collaboration,” *Louvain Studies*, 37 (2013), pp. 276-306; Reid LOCKLIN, “Under Construction: Agape as Comparative Category and Christian Criterion of Hindu Truth,” *Toronto Journal of Theology*, 30 (2014), pp. 3-18. Locklin argues that, at least in the context of recent Christian encounters with Hinduism, *agape* has functioned less as a criterion for assessing the truths claimed by the others than as a heuristic for learning from them. I would add only that the principle functions heuristically for the same reason it suggests a criterion of validity or authenticity; by it we recognize what it might be important to learn.

56. Special thanks to Anna Moreland, Reid Locklin, Ligita Rylškytė, Matthew Petillo, and an anonymous reader for their trenchant criticisms.

SUMMARY

If we affirm that salvation occurs apart from the acceptance of Christian revelation, then either faith is not necessary for salvation, or saving faith occurs apart from the historical transmission of the Gospel. Either conclusion is difficult to reconcile with traditional Catholic doctrines. Let us suppose that it is more congruous to say that faith occurs outside the historical communion of Christ than to say that salvation occurs without faith. There arises a twofold question about the faith that occurs outside a Christian context, namely, how it is related to Jesus Christ, and how it is related to the meanings and values of the context in which it does occur. This article develops some theological categories for approaching this problem, in conversation with Aquinas, Lonergan, and the Catholic doctrinal tradition.

SOMMAIRE

Si l'on affirme que le salut peut advenir sans une option en faveur de la révélation chrétienne, il faut alors admettre ou bien que la foi n'est pas nécessaire au salut, ou bien que la foi qui sauve puisse advenir en dehors de la transmission historique de l'Évangile. Ces conclusions s'avèrent l'une et l'autre difficiles à concilier avec la doctrine catholique traditionnelle. Supposons que l'affirmation selon laquelle la foi peut advenir en dehors de la communion historique au Christ soit plus conforme à la doctrine catholique que celle selon laquelle le salut peut advenir sans la foi. Une double question se pose alors concernant l'avènement de celle-ci en dehors d'un contexte chrétien : comment une telle foi est-elle reliée à Jésus Christ, et quelle relation entretient-elle avec les significations et les valeurs du contexte où elle surgit ? Cet article élabore certaines notions théologiques pour aborder la question, en conversation avec Thomas d'Aquin, Lonergan et la doctrine catholique traditionnelle.