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The Interweaving of Love and Truth: Bernard Lonergan, Intellectual Conversion, and the Synodal Process

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Abstract: This article explores the relatively theoretical question of what contribution academic theology is making to the synodal process and how this interaction might deepen in the years to come. It stresses the importance of what it calls foundational theological questions, employing the thought of the Jesuit philosopher and theologian Bernard Lonergan to define this term. It traces how a slow awareness of the importance of such questions, and an explicit attention to the question of theological method that is related to this, began emerging in the Second Vatican Council. It then suggests that such questions have come closer to the center of attention in the synodal process launched by Pope Francis. It proposes that the synodal process in the future will benefit by making further use of the thought of Lonergan. It leaves to a further study the question of how clarifying foundational and methodological questions in theology might have consequences for Catholic education in general.

Keywords: synodality; Vatican II; Lonergan; theological method; historical consciousness; intellectual conversion; transcendental precepts

Citation: Whelan, Gerard Kevin. 2024. The Interweaving of Love and Truth: Bernard Lonergan, Intellectual Conversion, and the Synodal Process. *Religions* 15: 1369. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15111369

Academic Editors: Eamonn Conway and Renée Köhler-Ryan

Received: 6 August 2024
Revised: 18 October 2024
Accepted: 1 November 2024
Published: 11 November 2024

This article explores the question of what contribution academic theology is making to the synodal process and how this interaction might deepen in the years to come. In doing so, it adopts a perspective based on the thought of Bernard Lonergan, as expressed in *Method in Theology* and elsewhere. This perspective stresses that the question of theological method is of key importance in a Catholic theology that operates in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council and that attention to questions of method needs to be based on a yet more foundational reality, that of the conversion of the theologian. It begins by tracing how questions of method and foundations were more implicit than explicit in Vatican II but suggests that they have gained a degree of explicit attention in the current synodal process. It proposes that those involved in the synodal process can find in the thought of Lonergan an aid it helping guide this process into the future.

1. Vatican II and Foundational Questions

In his opening address to Vatican II, Pope John XXIII spoke of the need for an updating, or "aggiornamento", of aspects of Catholic practice and teaching so as to fulfil its mission of proclaiming the Gospel today:

> The Church. . .must ever look to the present, to the new conditions and new forms of life introduced into the modern world, which have opened new avenues to the Catholic apostolate. . .the whole world expects a step forward toward a doctrinal penetration and a formation of consciousness in faithful and perfect conformity to the authentic doctrine, which, however, should be studied and expounded through the methods of research and through the literary forms of modern thought. The substance of the ancient doctrine of the deposit of faith is one thing, and the way in which it is presented is another.[1]

Notable in these comments was the appeal for a new openness to the "methods of research" and "literary forms of modern thought". Some days after this speech, Cardinal Suenens from Belgium made a speech that proposed the bishops should respond to Pope John by organizing a council that focused on questions of ecclesiology and that distinguished

between the mission *ad intra* and the mission ad extra of the church (see Ruggieri 1997, pp. 281–357). What resulted over the course of the next four years was the production of sixteen documents that broadly complied with what Suenens had proposed. Most of these documents, such as the "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church", *Lumen Gentium*, treated issues that primarily concerned ad intra matters. However, in the final year of the Council, a series of documents were approved that spoke of the ad extra mission of the Church. Foremost among these was the "Pastoral Constitution on the Church", *Gaudium et Spes*: The Church in the Modern World. Others included a "Declaration on Religious Freedom: *Dignitatis Humanae*", and a "Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions: *Nostra Aetate*".[2]

The emergence of foundational theological questions in Vatican II was more implicit than explicit. A preliminary definition of what the term "foundational questions" means is: pertaining to what theological method should be employed to replace the relatively monolithic method of Neo-Scholasticism.

Theologians played an active role in drafting the documents of the Council. Some of these were aware that the Council was breaking new ground in terms of theological methods. During the first year of the Council, it had already become obvious that, in order to respond to the opening address of Pope John XXIII, Catholic theology would need to leave the paradigm of Neo-Scholastic theology behind. At first, the replacement began in a piecemeal manner, with, for example, an image of "People of God" being employed as a preferred image over "the Church as hierarchy" in *Lumen Gentium*. Foundational reflections on questions, such as revelation and faith, were treated in the "Dogmatic Constitution on Revelation: *Dei Verbum*", which adopted an approach that was clearly not Neo-Scholastic. However, as the Council progressed, some participants became aware that there was no consensus on exactly what theological method should replace Neo-Scholasticism. This problem emerged particularly as Council attention turned to documents that treated the ad extra mission of the church.

One sign of theological uncertainty occurred during the discussion of the draft text for *Gaudium et Spes*. Disagreement emerged between French theologians, such as Marie Dominique Chenu and Yves Congar, and German theologians, such as Karl Rahner and Joseph Ratzinger. The former group wove an appeal to social sciences into their theological reflection in a way that the latter group perceived as conceding too much to secular thinking. In the end, the approach of the "French school" was accepted, though reluctantly by some (Komonchak 2003). Similarly, in composing the Declaration on Religious Freedom, intense disagreement emerged during discussions at the committee level of draft texts. The main theological expert in these discussions was the Jesuit from the USA, John Courtney Murray.[3] He became aware of two sources of disagreement. The first was relatively predictable. On one side of the conflict there existed members of what had come to be called the "Council minority", who, since the second session of the Council were widely regarded as not wishing to adopt the shift of approach for which Pope John XXIII had called in his opening address to the Council. Courtney Murray presented their arguments as a "First View" on what a draft document on religious freedom should state. The second side belonged to the "Council majority" that understood itself as cooperating with the request of Pope John and presented a "Second View". Murray was clear that the intense and conflictual character of the debates revealed that what was at issue were foundational issues:

> This abortive dialogue seems to indicate where the real issue lies. The First and Second View do not confront each other as affirmation confronts negation. Their differences are at a deeper level indeed, at a level so deep that it would be difficult to go deeper. They represent the contemporary clash between classicism and historical consciousness.[4]

Next, however, Murray writes about encountering a second source of opposition to his ideas. This emerged from fellow progressives and, as he understood it, indicated disagreement on just what it meant to conduct theology in a historically conscious way. As the draft document of *Dignitatis Humanae* reached its final stages, he found that editorial

changes were imposed on the final draft that disappointed him. He felt that concessions in terminology had been made to a conservative, pre-conciliar, perspective on religious freedom that rendered the final argument of the document less than fully coherent. Notably, these changes were promoted by Yves Congar and what Murray calls the "French School", the very group who had been considered to be relatively progressive during the drafting of *Gaudium et Spes*.[5] Murray was not alone in holding such opinions. One commentator suggested that during the final debates on *Dignitatis Humanae*, Congar found himself "wavering before the novelty of Murray's ideas" (Miccoli 2002, vol. IV, p. 545).

If disagreement among progressive theologians was one characteristic of the final phase of the Council, another was the fact that a rushed, *ad hoc*, approach was adopted to voting on documents in its final weeks. One reason for this rush was simply that bishops did not want the Council to run for an additional year and that the ad extra documents were the last to be treated. However, another was that many theologians were simply not clear on how to proceed in investigating the important but new questions they were now trying to address. This was evident in the process leading up to the passing of *Nostra Aetate*. This process led from an initial desire to say something positive about Judaism to feeling obliged to respond to bishops who wanted complementary statements first on Islam and then on the other World Religions. One commentator claimed that the drafting of both *Dignitatis Humanae* and *Nostra Aetate* "took the Council to the frontiers of ecclesiastical culture", adding, "the vast majority of the Catholic episcopate was caught by surprise and had no sufficient deposit of doctrinal thought to fall back on" (Alberigo and Komonchak 1995–2006, vol. 4, p. 629). He added:

> There was a profound difference between the inductive method and the usual deductive method. With his call to read the 'signs of the times', John XXIII had hoped that the Council in tackling problems would start not from eternal principles but from the consciousness that contemporary humanity had of its problems. . . . Nonetheless, it was hard for many fathers to accept a cultural 'conversion' that they perceived as difficult and dangerous, whereas the familiar deductive method of Scholasticism seemed easy and safe. (Alberigo and Komonchak 1995–2006, vol. 4, pp. 544–45)

2. Synodality in Continuity with Vatican II

Section 3, below, will propose that the current synodal process has arrived at a situation that is analogous to the final phase of Vatican II, as just described. Before that, it is important to make some preliminary comments about the synod itself.

First, disagreements between progressive theologians in the later stages of Vatican II became accentuated in the fifty years after the closing of the Council (See Komonchak 2012). Second, synodality is an effort both to reconcile such differences and to help the Church carry out its mission in the twenty-first century. In 2018, the International Theological Commission produced a document, "Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church", in which it stated:

> Although synodality is not explicitly found as a term or as a concept in the teaching of Vatican II, it is fair to say that synodality is at the heart of the work of renewal the Council was encouraging.[6]

The above section emphasized that Vatican II was less than clear about certain foundational matters that were relevant to its own project. Nevertheless, there did exist a consensus around certain principles concerning how to proceed. These included the idea that the church should attempt to continually discern the "signs of the times" and that a theological reflection on the meaning of these should involve some kind of consultation of the wider church. The decades after the Council demonstrated how difficult it was to follow-up, even on these principles. One difficulty lay in the fact that the world experienced accelerated social and cultural change and discerning what was positive and what was negative in these changes proved difficult. Another challenge related to the fact that the

Catholic Church expanded rapidly, and the notion of consulting the wider church became more complex. A structure of "Synods of Bishops" had been established by *moto propio* of Pope Paul VI *Apostolica Sollicitudo*, written in the last year of the Council.[7] Since then, a certain kind of synod of bishops had been held occasionally, but, as one commentator writing in 2015 states: Recently, a certain dissatisfaction has been registered with the [synodal] process, which heretofore had become somewhat sterile" (Kasper 2015, p. 51). To further complicate matters, in places such as Latin America, opinions began to emerge that the consultation process in ecclesial discernment should extend beyond bishops to other representatives of the People of God.

Third, the synodal process is complex, and any comments about what is emerging from it need to understand not only the documents it is producing but also its organizational structure. In 2018, Pope Francis produced the Apostolic Constitution, *Episcopalis Communio: On the Synod of Bishops*[8] (EC), as a point of reference, introducing significant changes to *Apostolica Sollicitudo*. EC establishes the Secretariat of the Synod as a permanent institution in Rome, distinct from the Vatican Curia. This Secretariat assists the work of the Synod, which begins with an elaborate process of global consultation on one or other pastoral question and culminates in a synodal assembly of Bishops. When the assembly closes, it produces pastoral recommendations to the Pope concerning the questions that have been consigned to it. The Pope is the President of the Synod and retains the right to refuse to accept these proposals. However, it is assumed that he will be largely open to them. Next, over the subsequent period of months and years, the Office of the Synod is required to liaise with the Pope and his Curia regarding the implementation of the resolutions passed by the most recent synodal assembly. After completing one synodal cycle, the whole process begins again with the launching of a new synod of bishops on a new topic. A notable characteristic of the structure established by EC is that the Office of the Synod operates, in a certain sense, "over against" the Pope and his Curia. Ormond Rush spoke of how the relationship introduces a healthy tension between the center and periphery into the heart of the organizational structure of the universal Catholic Church, between the global and the local. He employed the image of *perichoresis* ("dancing together") from Trinitarian theology to describe how this relationship need not be adversarial but rather can be interactive, pluralistic, and productive of improved pastoral decision-making.[9]

Fourth, the complexity of the synodal process has meant that even the organizational structure launched by EC has, itself, needed to be modified. In this respect, the first synodal assembly to be convoked under the apostolic constitution, the so-called "Synod on Synodality", has a special importance.[10] As the title indicates, the theme of this synod is synodality itself and it involves an effort in "learning by doing" regarding how to implement EC. The theme of the Synod on Synodality is broken down into three subthemes: "Communion", "Participation", and "Mission". An innovation in the organization of this synod occurred when a decision was made to expand the process from holding just one assembly of bishops—in October 2023—to adding a second assembly in October 2024.[11] It was thus decided to address the themes "Communion" and "Participation" in 2023 and the theme "Mission" in 2024. Other innovations included decisions to award votes on the assembly floor to certain non-episcopal participants.

Fifth, it is within this organic, self-adjusting, process that the role of academic theology in the synod has been coming into more clear focus. To understand this, it is necessary to recognize the importance of a "Synthesis Report" (SR) that was produced in October 2023. This document serves as a progress report on the synodal process to date and points to ways forward. One obvious insight offered by the SR is that issues of communion and participation gained the most attention in synodal discussions, and that issues of mission remain to be discussed in 2024. However, the document also includes some remarkable innovations. The Introduction of the SR describes a "month of work" in October 2023 that was primarily characterized by an "experience of listening, of silence and sharing, and of prayer".[12] It then explains that, with such a profoundly inductive method being employed, discussions did not always fit into the rather deductively chosen themes for

the 2023 assembly: Communion and Participation. Consequently, it explains that the SR is organized into twenty brief chapters, with each chapter outlining one aspect of what "we considered to be priorities".[13] Many of these priorities move beyond the immediate themes that the synodal assembly of 2023 was supposed to be addressing. Furthermore, the SR honestly acknowledges that participants were not able to agree on all aspects of how the church should respond to these priorities. Consequently, each of the twenty chapters is divided into two sections: "convergences" and "matters for consideration". At one level, the latter category can be regarded as a polite way of stating, "matters upon which we did not arrive at convergence". However, the term, "matters for consideration", also implies an important insight that obstacles to agreement can often be overcome by a closer—academic—study of the question:

> Individual chapters bring together convergences, matters for consideration. . . The convergences identify specific points that orientate reflection, akin to a map that helps us find our way. The matters for consideration summarise points about which it is necessary to continue deepening our understanding pastorally, theologically, and canonically.[14]

In response to the SR, Pope Francis took two steps. The first was an obvious one. He convened study groups that would prepare the theme, "Mission", for the synodal assembly of 2024. These groups address themes that overlap, to some extent, with the twenty priorities listed in the SR.[15] Next, however, the Pope took a second step of identifying "ten points" that, "by their nature, must be addressed with in-depth study" but that do not necessarily relate directly to the concept of Church Mission, the theme of the 2024 assembly.[16] These ten points each involve a reference to one or more of the twenty priorities listed in the SR. The Pope then announced the convoking of a special study group to study each of these ten points. The groups have the following titles and references to the SR:

1. Some aspects of the relationship between the Eastern Catholic Churches and the Latin Church (SR 6).
2. Listening to the Cry of the Poor (SR 4 and 16).
3. The mission in the digital environment (SR 17).
4. The revision of the *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* from a missionary synodal perspective (SR 11).
5. Some theological and canonical matters regarding specific ministerial forms (SR 8 and 9).
6. The revision, from a synodal missionary perspective, of the documents touching on the relationship between bishops, consecrated life, and ecclesial associations (SR 10).
7. Some aspects of the person and ministry of the bishop (criteria for selecting candidates to Episcopacy, judicial function of the bishops, and nature and course of ad limina *Apostolorum* visits) from a missionary synodal perspective (SR 12 and 13).
8. The role of Papal Representatives from a missionary synodal perspective (SR 13).
9. Theological criteria and synodal methodologies for shared discernment of controversial doctrinal, pastoral, and ethical issues (SR 15).
10. The reception of the fruits of the ecumenical journey in ecclesial practices (SR 7).

The remarkable characteristic of these groups is that they have been in a certain sense "spun off" from the main synodal process.[17] They will offer a progress report to the second sitting of the assembly of bishops to be held in October 2024, but they will continue to conduct their work beyond the lifetime of this current iteration of the synodal process.

Sixth, within the SR and the forming of ten study groups, one recognizes the emergence of a distinction that Lonergan identifies as a distinction between systematic theological questions and foundational theological questions. The next two sections, Sections 3 and 4, explain this point further.

3. Synodality and Foundational Questions

A minimal definition of what Lonergan means by foundational questions was offered above. They pertain to the conversion of the theologian and pass through an explicit

attention to questions of theological method before guiding more conceptual debates on different theological topics. Strictly speaking, only Study Group 9 treats what Lonergan calls foundational and methodical questions. However, even this represents an impressive step beyond anything stated in Vatican II. The forming of this study group was prompted by Priority 15 of the SR, "Ecclesial Discernment and Open Questions", and was given the following title by Pope Francis: "Theological criteria and synodal methodologies for shared discernment of controversial doctrinal, pastoral, and ethical issues". Here, one immediately notes the use of the term "discernment", a term more commonly found in discussion of spirituality than theology. One recalls that Pope Francis is a Jesuit, and the term "discernment of spirits" is a commonplace of Ignatian spirituality and related to a notion of the prior conversion of heart of the one who seeks to employ discernment in subsequent decision making.

Seen in this light, on recognizes that, in fact, foundational questions are present as a dimension of many of the priorities of the SR and the study groups that are based on these. What follows is a collecting of data for an explanation, in Section 4, of how Lonergan understands what is truly foundational in theology.

An interest in foundational questions emerged already in the Introduction of the SR. It confessed that, in the small-group discussions that characterized the assembly, participants learnt that:

> It is not easy to listen to different ideas, without immediately giving in to the temptation to counter the views expressed; or to offer one's contribution as a gift for others and not as something absolute or certain.[18]

This implies that synodal participants are still learning what "ecclesial discernment" means. Next, as already mentioned, this Introduction offers the foundational insight that an important way to avoid making simplistic judgments and thus provoking conflict is to turn to an academic study of the deeper issues that are at stake.

Group 2, "Listening to the Cry of the Poor", was inspired both by Priority 4, "People in Poverty, Protagonists of the Church's Journey", and Priority 16, "Towards a Listening and Accompanying Church". These chapters remark on how an innovative characteristic of the synod was that it extended invitations to participate in the Synod to "those who have suffered forms of marginalization in the Church or in society", and describes how "many were greatly surprised by the invitation".[19] The two priorities devote much time to describing different categories of poverty, their particular characteristics, and specific responses the church should make. However, Priority 4 also touches on issues that are both foundational and what Lonergan calls "methodical" in character when it declares:

> For the Church, the preferential option for the poor and those at the margins is a theological category before being a cultural, sociological, political or philosophical one.[20]

This statement implies that even if theological considerations come first, considerations that are "cultural, sociological, political or philosophical" are also important. This raises the question of the interdisciplinary character of theology and how this should serve synodal reflection. In other words, those involved in ecclesial discernment should be able to negotiate the challenges of interdisciplinary thinking. A related point is the statement in Priority 4 that theological considerations compel us to be concerned with "building up the common good and defending the dignity of life"[21] and that, today, we are increasingly aware that, "the cry of the earth and the cry of those living in poverty are the same cry".[22] As Pope Francis made clear in his encyclical *Laudato Si'*, a concern for integral ecology requires deeply interdisciplinary thinking.[23] Also of interest in Priority 4 is a comment on the need to maintain in "dynamic tension" a "prophetic denunciation" of injustice and a "recourse to diplomacy".[24] It is not difficult to recognize here an implicit reference to the concern expressed by the Catholic magisterium in the 1980s about the use of Marxist social analysis in theology.[25] This again raises the interdisciplinary question: if we are to avoid Marxist social analysis, what social-scientific categories should we employ?

Priority 5, "A Church 'out of every tribe, tongue, people and nation'", is rich in foundational and methodical implications. It is regrettable to note, however, that it is not named as a theme that prompts the forming of any of the ten study groups.[26] Priority 5 explains that during the synodal discussion, "we were able to experience directly, and mostly joyfully, the diverse expressions of being Church".[27] It then comments on how easily, in wider society, cultural difference becomes a source of conflict and adds, "the Church too is affected by polarization and distrust in vital matters such as liturgical life and moral, social and theological reflection". It suggests that cultural attitudes play a role in this polarization because, "meanings and priorities vary among different contexts".[28] By referring to issues of meaning and context, Priority 5 evokes foundational themes of historical consciousness that are treated by hermeneutical philosophers.[29] Hermeneutical themes are also evoked when it speaks of the need for "fostering forms of decentralization" in the church, while also maintaining "a dynamic balance between the dimension of the church as a whole and its local rootedness".[30]

As already mentioned, Group 9, "Theological criteria and synodal methodologies for shared discernment of controversial doctrinal, pastoral, and ethical issues", was formed in explicit response to Priority 15, "Ecclesial Discernment and Open Questions", and is the only group that explicitly addresses foundational questions. Implicit in the titles of both the priority and the study groups is the following insight: the notion of ecclesial discernment should include an academic moment. Taking up a theme from the Introduction, Priority 15 acknowledges that controversies on "doctrinal, pastoral and ethical issues" were not absent from the synodal conversations of October 2023. It offers examples of controversial questions. These include "ministry, and issues related to sexuality and 'bodiliness'". That these issues would fail to produce agreement was predictable, considering the debates leading up to the synodal assembly that were widely reported in the press. However, other controversial issues listed by the SR were less predictable. They included "the anthropological effects of digital technologies and artificial intelligence, non-violence and legitimate self-defence".[31] It was then noted that ecclesial discernment cannot avoid serious academic reflection. It stated "it is crucial to promote anthropological and spiritual visions capable of integrating and not merely juxtaposing the intellectual and emotional dimensions of faith experience".[32] It added, "it is important to clarify how conversation in the Spirit can integrate the contributions of theological thought and the humanities and social sciences".[33] Implicit in these comments is the proposal of a theological method that includes stages of: conversion, discernment, and an interdisciplinary academic practice, all of which should result in the formulation of pastoral proposals.

Finally, Priority 15 states: "At the heart of many of these controversial matters lies the question of the relationship between love and truth".[34] Continuing in the same vein, it stated:

> It is necessary to continue ecclesial reflection on the original interweaving of love and truth flowing from Christological revelation, with a view to an ecclesial practice faithful to these origins.[35]

At this point, one seems to have arrived at the center of what the SR has to say about foundational theological questions. Without doubt, the SR goes beyond anything stated in the documents of Vatican II in recognizing that questions of theological method must be clarified in order to advance as a synodal church. At the same time, there remains some ambiguity regarding just what the SR means on issues that one can call foundational. For example, it is not immediately evident how the themes of love and truth are central to resolving the controversial themes that have received explicit mention in the SR. However, one can attempt to "fill in the dots" on this matter. One recalls that the theme of mercy (love) is important to the teaching of Pope Francis and how his conservative critics ask whether this stress on mercy may blur the lines of doctrinal orthodoxy (truth), especially on ethical issues, resulting in Christians becoming unclear about just what is sinful. If one accepts that such matters provide a background for the stress of the SR on balancing love and truth in theological reflection, it is notable that the SR attempts to show respect for those critics

of Pope Francis who would like to hear him speak more often about the truth claims of Catholic moral teaching.[36] It can now help to introduce some reflections from Canadian Jesuit Bernard Lonergan. What does Lonergan have to say on love and truth? Addressing these questions not only helps to relate Lonergan to the SR, but it is also a convenient way of introducing his thought. On the basis of this, one can proceed to outline Lonergan's thought in the terminology he himself preferred—to discuss questions of theological method in the light of foundational questions of the conversion of the theologian.

4. Bernard Lonergan on Love and Truth

Bernard Lonergan was a Professor of Theology at the Pontifical Gregorian University during the Council and was registered as a theological expert.[37] He was not actively involved in the drafting of documents and would later observe that the Council never quite arrived at posing the kind of foundational, methodical, questions upon which he was competent. However, he was convinced that such questions would sooner or later have to be addressed by Catholic theologians. Writing during the final year of the Council, he stated:

> Classical culture cannot be jettisoned without being replaced; and what replaces it, cannot but run counter to classical expectations. There is bound to be formed a solid right that is determined to live in a world that no longer exists. There is bound to be formed a scattered left, captivated by now this, now that new development, exploring now this, now that new possibility. But what will count is a perhaps not numerous centre, big enough to be at home in both the old and the new, painstaking enough to work out one by one the transitions to be made, strong enough to refuse half-measures and insist on complete solutions even though it has to wait. (Lonergan 1988, pp. 244–45)

These were prophetic comments to make in 1965. Arguably, the categories of "solid right" and "scattered left" do much to explain theological tendencies and conflicts that would characterize the Catholic Church in the decades that followed the Council. In 1972, Lonergan would publish his book, *Method in Theology*, which he hoped would contribute to the implementation of Vatican II. Before discussing the content of this book more directly, as already mentioned, one can take the prompt by the SR and address the question: what does Lonergan say about truth and love?

Concerning truth, this Canadian Jesuit philosopher and theologian Lonergan had much to say in his 700-page book, *Insight*, *A Study of Human Understanding* (1954) (Lonergan 1992). He insisted on treating this question as primarily philosophical, only proceeding subsequently to the question of how we can know as true that which is revealed by Jesus Christ.[38] At the beginning of *Insight*, Lonergan pointed out that the knowing process begins with our attending to the data of our senses and our posing the question, "What is it?" Appealing to the famous "*Eurika*" experience of Archimedes in his bath, he explained that the process of questioning culminates in an act of insight, which he called a "direct insight". From this, he proposed a first description of the act of insight:

> Insight 1. comes as a release to the tension of inquiry, 2. comes suddenly and unexpectedly, 3. is a function not of outer circumstances but of inner conditions, 4. pivots between the concrete and the abstract and 5. passes into the habitual texture of one's mind. (Lonergan 1992, p. 28)

He traced how, after receiving an insight, our minds formulate a concept that expresses the meaning of what we have just understood in a form that is capable of being communicated to others.

Next, however, Lonergan asserted that, "insights are a dime a dozen", and he noted that many of the insights we receive are mistaken. He described how the mind is capable of asking a further question: "Is it so?" (Lonergan 1992, pp. 296–347). In this process, the mind turns to the concept that has been produced by the act of insight and begins to check it and advance toward affirming or rejecting the insight as true. He described a process with a

series of steps: First, we search for conditions that, if fulfilled, would render the insight "invulnerable", or "virtually unconditioned". He asserted that, when the insight warrants it, we come to a "reflective insight" that the conditions are, indeed, fulfilled. Finally, we make an act of assent and judge as true the original insight that we received. He explained that we possess a "notion of being" that allows us to make concrete affirmations of the being of the thing into which we have gained insight. He characterized the knowing as a "heading for being" (Lonergan 1992, pp. 401–2), in which the act of judgment is decisive. He then offered a definition of truth as "a relation of knowing to being":

> The definition of truth was introduced implicitly in our account of the notion of being. For being was identified with what is to be known through intelligent grasp and reasonable affirmation; but the only reasonable affirmation is the true affirmation; and so being is what is known truly. Inversely, then, knowing is true by its relation to being, and truth is a relation of knowing to being. (Lonergan 1992, p. 573)

Lonergan next spoke about the biased mind. He recognized that we often do not respect the "transcendental precepts" that are implicit in his invitation to intellectual conversion: be attentive, be intelligent, be reasonable. He described how we can fail in any one of these precepts but stated that the most fundamental and common bias is to fail to observe the second precept and jump to claims that we know the truth without passing through the moment of insight:

> Just as insight can be desired, so too it can be unwanted. Beside the love of light, there can also be a love of darkness … to exclude an insight is also to exclude the further insights that would arise from it, and the complementary insights that would carry it towards a rounded and balanced viewpoint. (Lonergan 1992, p. 214)

When speaking about love, Lonergan took care to distinguish between a natural human capacity to love and to do good and the capacity to love and do good that is the result of God's grace. In his book, *Method in Theology* (Lonergan [1972] 2017), he began his account of the natural side of this reality by describing how after making an act of judgment of, so to speak, a cold matter of fact, our drive to self-transcendence promotes in us to experience an affective response to this fact. He identified this as the first step of a fourth level of consciousness. He asserted: "not only do feelings respond to values, they do so in accord with some scale of preference". He then asserted, "so we may distinguish vital, social, cultural, personal, and religious values in an ascending order" (Lonergan [1972] 2017, p. 32). He explained that our ability to intend values in terms of a scale implies that we recognize the value of sacrificing lower values for higher values. Lonergan next stated that after a period of discernment[39] of the values at issue in a particular situation whose facts we have affirmed, we are capable of bringing this evaluation to a close by making a judgment regarding the particular value that is most at issue in this situation. He stated, "judgments of value differ in content but not in structure from judgments of fact" (Lonergan [1972] 2017, p. 37). He explained that they differ in content because they are concerned with decisions to create new instances of being and so involve a judgment concerning, "what does not [yet] exist". He added that the similarity of structure lies in the fact that the criterion of whether one has judged well or not is "the self-transcendence of the subject" (Lonergan [1972] 2017, p. 37). He further explained:

> It is by the transcendental notion of value and its expression in a good and uneasy conscience that man can develop morally. But a round moral judgment is ever the work of a fully developed self-transcending subject, or, as Aristotle would put it, of a virtuous man. (Lonergan [1972] 2017, p. 41)

In continuity with this fourth level of consciousness, Lonergan introduced a fourth transcendental precept: "be responsible". One notes that, up to this point, Lonergan's account of existential self-transcendence was philosophical. Lonergan's account of how God's grace enters the drama of human consciousness began with an account of how

bias occurs at the fourth level of conscious. He continued, "continuous growth seems to be rare" (Lonergan [1972] 2017, p. 40), and noted that a "most notable" aberration of moral consciousness is the kind of envy-driven state of consciousness that French-speaking philosophers have identified as, "*ressentiment*". He explained that this "extends over time, even a lifetime. It is a feeling of hostility, anger, indignation that is neither repudiated not directly expressed" (Lonergan [1972] 2017, p. 34). He concluded that, either through a lapse into *ressentiment* or by other means, "bias creeps into one's outlook, rationalization into one's morals, ideology into one's thought" (Lonergan [1972] 2017, p. 40).

It is in such contexts that Lonergan spoke of religious conversion as an event that is registered at the fourth level of consciousness.[40] He claimed that this moment occurs for virtually all people, including those who numbed their ability to feel attracted to higher values, as opposed to self-centered satisfactions.[41] He claimed that the move to religious conversion begins when, at the level of our ability to apprehend value in feeling, we can enjoy "an experience of the holy, of Rudolf Otto's *mysterium fascinans et tremendum*" (Lonergan [1972] 2017, p. 102). He averred that, now, the question of God appears, not as a question of whether or not God exists but, rather, as "primarily a matter of decision. Will I love him in return, or will I refuse?" (Lonergan [1972] 2017, p. 112). He then stated that, if one answers this question in the affirmative, we experience, in the words of St. Paul, "God's love flooding our hearts". In describing the subsequent state of religious "Being-in-love", he took care to maintain a distinction between our native ability to love and that which is born of religious conversion:

> Being-in-love is of different kinds. There is the love of intimacy, of husband and wife, of parents and children. There is the love of one's fellow men with its fruit in the achievement of human welfare. There is the love of God with one's whole heart and whole soul, with all one's mind and all one's strength (Mk. 12, 30.). It is God's love flooding our hearts through the Holy Spirit given to us (Rom. 5:5.). (Lonergan [1972] 2017, p. 105)

In exploring this reality of religious conversion, Lonergan noticed a paradox. He recognized that being in love in an unrestricted way is "conscious fulfilment" of our "capacity for self-transcendence". At the same time, he stated, "it is not the product of our knowing and choosing" and, indeed, "it dismantles and abolishes the horizon in which our knowing and choosing went on" (Lonergan [1972] 2017, p. 102). Rather, he stated, "it sets up a new horizon in which the love of God will transvalue our values, and the eyes of that love will transform our knowing" (Lonergan [1972] 2017, p. 102). He described how religious conversion can be followed by moral conversion, "which changes the criterion of our decisions and choices from satisfactions to values" (Lonergan [1972] 2017, p. 225). He then described how this grace-inspired moral conversion can produce consistent fruits in our lives. He stated, "where hatred reinforces bias, love dissolves it". Referring to the social and historical consequences of the efforts of the Christian community to give witness to authentic religious and moral conversion, he stated: "love breaks the bonds of psychological and social determinisms with the conviction of faith and the power of hope".[42]

5. Intellectual Conversion and Theological Method

In this brief exposition of Lonergan's thought on love and truth, two final reflections can help. First, in various writings, Lonergan sought to anchor his philosophical and theological account of human operations in the long tradition of Christian and Catholic thought (see Lonergan 1976, 2005). As noted above, the SR stressed that theological reflection must give evidence of being anchored in this manner. Second, however, Lonergan claimed that on one key issue his thought is innovative: in calling his readers to make an act of "intellectual conversion". He stated that Christian philosophy needs to take seriously the "turn to the subject" of Enlightenment philosophy and must begin with being attentive to one's own intentional conscious, gaining insight into how it is structured as a process of self-transcendence in four levels, and arriving at the moment of affirming "I am a knower" who employs these four levels. We can then affirm that what we know is

objectively true and we can thus proceed to metaphysics. He insisted that this epistemology can be completed coherently with an act of "intellectual conversion" that completes what is left incomplete by Enlightenment thinkers. In this respect, he criticized the "truncated notion of the subject" that is found in the major strands of Enlightenment thought, which he characterizes as tending toward either Empiricism or Idealism. Rather, he proposed a "Critical Realism" and asserts:

> Only the critical realist can acknowledge the facts of human knowing and pronounce the world mediated by meaning to be the real world: and that he can so only do this inasmuch as he shows that the process of experiencing, understanding, and judging is a process of self-transcendence.[43]

In *Method in Theology*, Lonergan described intellectual conversion as a rock on which to build his more theological arguments. He explained that it is only in the light of intellectual conversion that one can identify with precision the mysterious dynamics at work in religious conversion and the way religious conversion stimulates moral conversion. Similarly, he insisted that it is only by understanding "the very structure of human enquiry" (Lonergan [1972] 2017, p. 128), that one can develop a theological method with the depth and subtlety needed today. In 1972, he published *Method in Theology*, and he opened the book with the statement: "A theology mediates a cultural matrix and the significance and role of a religious tradition within that matrix" (Lonergan [1972] 2017, p. 3). He explained that such a theology must consist of two phases, a first, *in oratione obliqua*, where one retrieves a religious tradition, and a second, *in oratione recta*, where one mediates this tradition to a cultural matrix (Lonergan [1972] 2017, p. 129). He then stated that each of these phases is characterized by four "functional specialties", explaining that the aim of each functional specialty is "analogous to the aim" of one of the four levels of conscious. He stated:

> Functional specializations arise, then, inasmuch as one operates on all four levels [of consciousness] . . . the very structure of human inquiry results in four functional specializations, and since in theology there are two distinct phases we are led to expect eight functional specializations in theology.[44]

Lonergan next explained how such thinking about the theological method can meet the interdisciplinary challenge involved in responding to the signs of the times. He stated that the church "will have to recognize that theology is not the full science of man" (Lonergan [1972] 2017, p. 335), and that a full appropriation of the how the church should act in history can only occur "when theology unites itself with the other relevant branches of the human sciences" (Lonergan [1972] 2017, pp. 335–36). He then asserted that because the notion of functional specialties is so anchored in the very structure of human enquiry, it should be possible to develop, within the social sciences, "a method that runs parallel to the method of theology" (Lonergan [1972] 2017, pp. 336–37). He concluded that such converging methods could become the basis for interdisciplinary collaboration, thus assisting theology in fulfilling its aim of mediating between a religious tradition and the cultural matrix within which it finds itself.

6. Conclusions: Lonergan and the Synodal Process

The relevance of Lonergan's thought for the future of the synodal process is partly obvious and partly needs explaining at greater length than is possible here. However, the following points can be noted.

First, in terms of Lonergan's thought, the synodal process can be understood as an impressive example of introducing the transcendental precepts into Church decision-making: be attentive, be intelligent, be reasonable, and be responsible. Lonergan sometimes stated that religious conversion involved a fifth transcendental precept: be in love. The synod can also be understood as applying this precept.

Second, what Lonergan calls foundational theological questions have emerged in the synodal process in a way that is analogous to Vatican II, and, in fact, more explicit.

This became evident when the SR recognized that the persistence of disagreement within synodal conversations requires deeper academic reflection on a variety of questions, and when it added: "At the heart of many of these controversial matters lies the question of the relationship between love and truth".[45] Statements such as these, and the fact that Study Group 9 will explore questions of "Theological criteria and synodal methodologies for shared discernment of controversial doctrinal, pastoral, and ethical issues". Indicate that the synodal process may have reached a point where explicit reference to Lonergan could help.

Third, if there is one key proposal that can be distilled from this all-too-brief introduction to the thought of Lonergan it is that the many important academic questions emerging in the SR need to be confronted on the basis of intellectual conversion. This implies that Lonergan offers a precise definition of foundations: what is truly foundational is the state of religious, moral, and intellectual conversion of the members of a church that desires to be synodal. Here, it is worth noting that Lonergan accepted that explicit intellectual conversion (as opposed to a general intellectual authenticity that will characterize all religiously and morally converted individuals) is an achievement to be attained only by philosophers. Consequently, Lonergan's thought included a stress on the important role that academic philosophers and theologians must play even in a process that is as widely consultative and inductive as synodal reflection.

Fourth, following on his proposal of intellectual conversion, Lonergan proposed a notion of an academic method based on functional specialization.[46] It is beyond the scope of an article such as this to enter more deeply into this question. However, three points can be noted. First, Lonergan's thought can appeal to conservatives. His distinction between insight and judgment serves as a base for avoiding relativism, either in epistemology in general or ethics in particular. In his theological method, one of the phases of theology is entirely dedicated to the retrieval of theological tradition. Furthermore, one of the functional specialties of the second phase is called, "Doctrines". Second, Lonergan's thought can also appeal to progressives. Students of Lonergan have explored how his method can give explanatory substance to the rather descriptive term, "signs of the times", and explain how a study of the current cultural and social reality is as much as source of theology as are scripture and tradition. Third, it is notable that in the case of at least one of the priority issues treated by the SR, Priority 3: "The Mission in the Digital Environment", one synod participant has already begun to explore the issue by employing Lonergan's notion of functional specialization.[47] One could hope for more examples of such a practice.

Fifth and finally, one recalls that the theme of this issue of *Religion* is "Catholic Education and Pope Francis' Dream for a Synodal Church". If the synodal process were to enable an increased appreciation in the Catholic Church of the need for intellectual conversion, this would have major implications for our understanding of both the content and methods of Catholic education.[48]

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Data Availability Statement: No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

1 Pope John XXIII, *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia*, Opening Discourse to Vatican II, 10 October 1962, http://w2.vatican.va/content/vatican/it.html (Consulted 30 July 2024). It can be assumed that all subsequent citations from websites were consulted during this same period. Similarly, unless otherwise mentioned, all other official Church documents can be found on the website, The Holy See (vatican.va).

2 The sixteen documents of the Second Vatican Council are divided into "Constitutions", "Decrees", and "Declarations". See Documents of the Second Vatican Council.

[3] Two key commentaries on the role Murray played during the Council are Hooper (1986) and McElroy (1989). Most of Murray's published articles have been uploaded to a website operated by the "Woodstock Theological Library at Georgetown University", John Courtney Murray, S.J. | Georgetown University Library. Direct references to publications of Murray refer to that website.

[4] John Courtney Murray, "The Problem of Religious Freedom", John Courtney Murray, S.J. | Georgetown University Library, Section III, paragraph 8. Hooper (1986) claims that, in this text, Murray was employing notions of "classicism" and "historical consciousness" derived from an article of Lonergan (2016, pp. 202–20).

[5] Murray, "This Matter of Religious Freedom", describes the process of drafting *Dignitatis Humanae*. "Vers une intelligence du dévelopment de la doctrine de l'Église sur la liberté religieuse" discusses his disagreement with the "French School", who took control of the final draft. Significantly, this second article relied heavily on the thought of Bernard Lonergan. See John Courtney Murray, S.J. | Georgetown University Library.

[6] International Theological Commission, "Synodality in the Life of the Church", Paragraph 6. Synodality in the life and mission of the Church (2 March 2018; vatican.va).

[7] Pope Paul VI, Moto Proprio *Apostolica Sollicitudo* (15 September 1965) | Paul VI (vatican.va). This paragraph offers a highly synthesised account of the decades after Vatican II that would benefit from longer treatment and would be disputed by some. One accessible overview of these decades is included in the book by Walter Kasper, *Pope Francis's Revolution of Tenderness and Love* (Kasper 2015).

[8] Pope Francis, Apostolic Constitution on the Synod of Bishops, *Episcopalis Communio* (15 September 2018) | Francis (vatican.va).

[9] Ormond Rush, "Synodality for a World Church: A New Phase in the Reception of Vatican II" (22 February 2024), a lecture presented and consulted on YouTube (accessed on: 30 July 2024). Reference to the image of perichoresis for the synodal process occurs at minute ten and following. LEST XIV Opening lecture—Synodality for a World Church: A New Phase in the Reception of Vatican II.

[10] See the extensive website maintained by the Office of the Synod, "The Synod on synodality", Synod 2021–2024. (Note that synodal documents are posted on this site, "synod.va", a different website from that of the Vatican Curia, "vatican.va". This is consistent with the insight, mentioned above, that the synod is in some sense "over against" the Pope and Curia). The Synodal document cited below, "the Synthesis Report", is found on this website, "synod.va" (consulted 30 July 2024).

[11] This synodal assembly is called the XVI General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, its numeration emphasizing the continuity of this synodal event with the assembly of bishops held since Vatican II the Papal document already mentioned, *Apostolica Sollicituto*.

[12] XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, First Session, October 4–29, "Synthesis Report" (SR), Introduction. This is cited on the web site of the synod, www.synod.va (accessed on: 30 July 2024).

[13] An example of a chapter in the SR that anticipates the synodal assembly of 2024 is Priority 8, "Church is Mission".

[14] Pope Francis, "Letter of the Holy Father to His Eminence Cardinal Marico Grech (vatican.va, accessed on 30 July 2024)

[15] Pope Francis assigned to the Office of the Synod the task of choosing members of the study groups and making their terms of reference more specific. See Hannah Brockhaus, "These are the Members of the Synod on Synodality Study Groups", Catholic News Agency, 9 July 2024 | Catholic News Agency.

[16] SR. Introduction.

[17] SR. 16b.

[18] SR. 4b.

[19] SR. 4g.

[20] SR. 4e.

[21] Pope Francis, *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*, Encyclical Letter 2015. Laudato si (24 May 2015) | Francis (vatican.va). While much of this encyclical treats issues that are ethical, spiritual, and theological, Chapter 1, "What is Happening to our Common Home?" mostly employs natural and social science.

[22] SR. 4j.

[23] Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith "Instruction on Certain Aspects of Liberation Theology", 1984: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19840806_theology-liberation_en.html (accessed on: 30 July 2024).

[24] One regrets that Priority 5 is not mentioned as a point of reference for any study group. One might hope that it will be added as a point of reference for Group 9 as the Office of the Synod clarifies the terms of reference of each study group (c.f. Brockhaus).

[25] See note 17.

[26] SR. 5g.

[27] Appeal to hermeneutic theory is central to a book by Rush (2024). Rush is a participant in the Synod on Synodality and a member of a Study Group, "Synodal Method", that is preparing the theme of "Mission" for the synodal assembly of 2024 (see Brockhaus).

[28] See note 26.

[29] SR. 15b.

[30] SR. 15g.

[31] SR. 15h.
[32] SR. 15d.
[33] See note 31.
[34] For a conservative, but balanced, critique of the thought of Pope Francis, see (Roy OP 2022).
[35] For a general introduction to Lonergan, see The Continuing Significance of Bernard Lonergan | Thinking Faith: The online journal of the Jesuits in Britain.
[36] Our ability to recognize the truth of supernaturally revealed truths is addressed in the final chapter of (Lonergan 1992, chp. 20, "Special Transcendent Knowledge", pp. 709–52).
[37] Robert M. Doran draws on and expands upon Lonergan as he offers an outline of the the scale of values and then relates this account to the comments of St. Ignatius of Loyola on discernment of spirits (Doran 2008).
[38] (Lonergan [1972] 2017, pp. 101–14). Lonergan explores religious conversion in Chapter 4, "*Religion*". Subsections of the chapter are entitled: religious experience, expressions of religious experience, religious experience as dialectical, the Word, and faith.
[39] The existential vocabulary of *Method in Theology* transposes and develops comments he made in more scholastic terminology in *Insight*. There, he speaks of the "moral impotence" of the human condition (Lonergan [1972] 2017, pp. 650–53) and explains that there results a "problem of evil". He then states that the solution to this problem must be "in some sense transcendent or supernatural. For what arises from nature is the problem" (Lonergan [1972] 2017, p. 719).
[40] Lonergan, *A Third Collection*, 106. Lonergan speaks of the value of functional specialization for ecumenism. He states that Christian disunity is "deeply to be lamented". He notes, however, that while Christians continue to disagree on issues of how to understand Christian faith ("cognitive meaning"), their sharing in a Christian version of religious conversion results in the fact that "the constitutive meaning and the effective meaning are matters on which most Christians very largely agree". He proposes the use of functional specialties by all Christian denominations as a means by which they can work toward a shared cognitive meaning (Lonergan [1972] 2017, p. 339).
[41] Lonergan ([1972] 2017, p. 224). See also, "The Subject", in (Lonergan 2016, pp. 60–74). Lonergan states that the first steps toward a form of Christian realism that would culminate in the critical realism of today were taken in the Council of Nicea (325), where the notion of defining a doctrine implies the ability to distinguish insight from judgment: "At Nicea and in the numerous subsequent synods and decrees that kept multiplying as long as Constantius was emperor, there did emerge in some implicit fashion that the reality of the world mediated by meaning was known not by experience alone, not by ideas alone or in conjunction with experience, but by true judgments and beliefs" (Lonergan 2016, p. 220).
[42] (Lonergan [1972] 2017, pp. 128–29). Parenthesis added. Lonergan names the functional specialties as follows: Research, Interpretation, History, Dialectic, Foundations, Doctrines, Systematics, and Communications (Lonergan [1972] 2017, pp. 123–27).
[43] See note 32.
[44] See Lonergan's discussion of the role that academics have to play in the kind of "Cosmopolos" that can mediate God's redemption to history (Lonergan 1992, pp. 263, 712).
[45] See Lonergan's discussion of the sixth functional specialty, "Doctrines" (Lonergan [1972] 2017, pp. 127, 273–309).
[46] The way in which functional specialization can be developed to engage with the signs of the times was developed by (Doran 1990).
[47] See Cardinal Michael Czerny, Prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, "A New World and a New Mission", in *Thinking Faith*, The Online Journal of the Jesuits in Britain, 28 June 2024, Digital spaces and physical spaces—whelan@unigre.it—Pontificia Università Gregoriana Mail (google.com).
[48] See (Lonergan 1993; Liddy 1989), (PDF) Lonergan and the Catholic University | Richard Liddy—Academia.edu.

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