

# WILFRED CANTWELL SMITH AND BERNARD LONERGAN ON FAITH EXPERIENCE

## A Call for Interpretations

Chae Young Kim<sup>♦</sup>

**Abstract:** Wilfred Cantwell Smith (1916-2000) is well known for his influential work in religious studies and Bernard Lonergan (1904-1984) for his work in the foundations of theology. To some extent, their works are mutually connected. Among other things, both Smith and Lonergan were interested in how the human faith experience is crucial for interreligious encounter. The purpose of this essay is threefold: (1) to draw attention to preliminary evidence of both affinities and differences in the work of Smith and Lonergan; (2) to draw attention to the relevance of their work to the contemporary challenge of religious and cultural diversity; and (3) to invite fresh efforts toward interpreting their respective works on the human faith experience.

**Keywords:** Bernard Lonergan, Faith Experience, Interiority, Interreligious Dialogue, Method, Religious Pluralism, Wilfred Cantwell Smith

### 1. Introduction

Diverse religious traditions are neither abstract nor speculative. Religious diversity is, rather, part of our historical and social situation. In recent years, however, some loss of historical memory has been occurring about religious pluralism that has been and still is present, for example, in East Asia. A present-day

---

<sup>♦</sup>**Chae Young Kim** is the Professor and Chair of Religious Studies in Sogang University and the President of Korean Academy of Religion. His publications include *Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, *Religious Education*, *Korean Christianity* and translations of William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* and Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death* into Korean.

challenge, then, is to find ways to mediate interreligious encounter. Part of what is needed for positive interreligious encounter is recovery of our memories of the pluralistic religious experience that has existed in Asia. In order to work out ways to mediate interreligious encounter not only in Asia, but also globally, we need to find a meeting point that will lead to deeper mutual understanding. We need tools that can be used constructively within our current pluralistic world situation, a situation that includes combinations of religious and secular societies.

Both Wilfred Cantwell Smith (1916-2000) and Bernard Lonergan (1904-1984) seemed to suggest that understanding the human faith experience would be a key to mediating interreligious dialogue. Smith and Lonergan, however, were working from quite different points of view, and with different aims. Smith focused on the problem of interreligious dialogue. Lonergan was working out new foundations for the entire geo-historical theological enterprise, an enterprise that ultimately includes interreligious dialogue. Smith's horizon was within traditional scholarship whereas Lonergan was grounded not only in a mastery of philosophical and theological traditions of more than two millennia, but also in a detailed understanding of methods of modern sciences.<sup>1</sup> While Smith's work mainly is descriptive, Lonergan's work appeals to description, but also appeals to metaphysics grounded in both ancient and modern scientific methods. In order to reach some kind of explanatory interpretation of either of their works will at least require explanatory heuristics of individual and communal development in descriptive meaning, development of both traditional and new methods of scholarship, and past and

---

<sup>1</sup>Lonergan was a genius, with a control of meaning across categories of meaning, a singular achievement in history. For some discussion of "categories of meaning," see Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1975, secs. 11.5-11.8.

present emerging scientific methods. Interpretation of that calibre, however, will need to be left to future research.<sup>2</sup>

However, it is possible now to draw attention to preliminary evidence of affinities, and significant differences in the works of Smith and Lonergan, to draw attention to the probable relevance of their works to the contemporary situation, and to invite fresh efforts toward interpreting their works on faith experience. The contribution here, then, is modest and, of course, is not explanatory comparison. Preliminary evidence suggests that both of their works eventually will contribute to progress in interreligious and secular dialogue mentioned above.<sup>3</sup> For, eventually, functional communications will effectively promote interreligious dialogue within a pluralistic world community.

## 2. Methods and Methodologies

Smith and Lonergan were the two well-known Canadian scholars of religion in the twentieth century. Smith was an ordained pastor in the United Church of Canada and Lonergan

---

<sup>2</sup>The need and future possibility of explanatory interpretations was anticipated by Lonergan, expressed in brilliant but doctrinally compact description. See Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding in Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, vol. 3, eds. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992, 585-617.

<sup>3</sup>Also discovered by Lonergan (February 1965) was the need and possibility of a normative eightfold division of labour in the academic community. The need and possibility of collaborating in ways that explicitly take advantage of the normative eightfold division of labour was called *functional specialization*. See Bernard Lonergan, “Functional Specialties in Theology,” *Gregorianum* 50 (1969), 485-505. The paper also appeared as chapter 5 of *Method in Theology*. Functional specialization will be a global cyclic dynamics of functional research, interpretation, history, dialectics, foundations, doctrines, systematics, and communications. For discussion of interpretation within this division of labour, see, for example, *Method in Theology*, chapter 7. Within this context, the contribution of the present article is a rather mixed and pre-functional effort. Partly, the present article is pre-functional research, calling for future functional research. There is also the expectation, then, of follow-up functional interpretations of the works of both Smith and Lonergan. Within a future global functional collaboration, those future interpretations would be taken up within the global cyclic dynamics called functional specialization.

was a priest in the Society of Jesus. Smith had been originally trained in Islamic Studies at Princeton and later taught at McGill University where he established a famous centre for Islamic Studies. Then, he moved to Harvard University where he served creatively as the director of the Centre for the Study of World Religions for many years. Lonergan taught at the Gregorian University in Rome, the Regis College in Toronto, Boston College and the Harvard Divinity School in the USA. Unlike Smith, Lonergan did not direct any organization or hold any administrative post.

Academically, Smith was influential in religious studies; Lonergan, in theology and philosophy. Smith engaged in the comparative study of world religions as his life's work (a work that began when he had served in his early years as a missionary in India). Lonergan, on the other hand, did not directly engage in comparative religious study.

The more I read their works, the more I find affinities. I could not find, however, any references about Lonergan's writings in Smith's works. I wonder whether he was even aware of Lonergan's works. By contrast, Lonergan in his "Lectures on Religious Studies and Theology"<sup>4</sup> and in his lecture at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion, in 1969, referred to Smith's works.<sup>5</sup> Smith was an invited respondent at that meeting, and Smith and Lonergan exchanged questions and answers. The terse report of the exchange simply noted that they agreed with each other.<sup>6</sup> Apart from this report, we do not have other information about Smith's view of Lonergan's work and in subsequent works both do not refer to the thought of the other.

In 1971, Lonergan published *Method in Theology*. There he quoted several key figures in religious studies like Mircea Eliade,

---

<sup>4</sup>Bernard Lonergan, *A Third Collection: Papers by Bernard J. F. Lonergan*, Frederick E. Crowe, ed., New York: Paulist Press, 1985, 122-123.

<sup>5</sup>Bernard Lonergan, *Philosophical and Theological Papers 1965-1980*, Robert C. Croken and Robert M. Doran, eds., Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004, 30-32, 42-43, 175-176.

<sup>6</sup>Lonergan, *Philosophical and Theological Papers*, 47-48.

Friedrich Heiler, and Ernst Benz.<sup>7</sup> He referred to a text from *The History of Religions: Essays in Methodology*, edited and published in 1959 by Joseph Kitagawa and Mircea Eliade.<sup>8</sup> To this volume, Smith contributed one of his best essays: “Comparative Religion: Whither – and Why?” However, Lonergan does not mention this essay in *Method in Theology*, though he refers to an essay by Heiler titled “The History of Religions as a Preparation for the Cooperation of Religions”<sup>9</sup> and to Rudolf Otto’s *The Idea of the Holy*,<sup>10</sup> as keys to interreligious dialogue on the basis of the religious commonality of world religions.

It is interesting that, in *Method in Theology*, Lonergan largely quotes from what were then major phenomenologists of religion. For the phenomenologists, a main goal was not to attain knowledge that would be gained through value judgments. Instead, the aim was to have an understanding of other religious traditions, in ways that would bracket questions about truth. As shown by Heiler’s essay, the object was, instead, to identify common elements among different religious traditions.

After publishing his essay on methodology, Smith began to discover what he considered to be limitations of phenomenology with respect to a deep dialogic understanding of religion. He thought that one cannot continue to bracket questions about the value judgment in religious studies; one has to develop a theological project that is more honest. He challenged the modern secularist approach to the study of religions and made efforts to build a new context for open theological discourse in religious studies especially in North America and non-Western countries. In contrast with the earlier phenomenological study of religion as one finds in Eliade and others, Smith thought that religious studies should collaborate with faculties of theology, whether Abrahamic, Buddhist, or of other traditions. Smith openly pointed to a “theological” implication with respect to

---

<sup>7</sup>Lonergan, *Method*, 105-110, see footnotes.

<sup>8</sup>Lonergan, *Method*, 69, 88, 108.

<sup>9</sup>Lonergan, *Method*, 109.

<sup>10</sup>Lonergan, *Method*, 106.

religious pluralism of our times.<sup>11</sup> Eventually, he published his life-long project book, *Towards a World Theology* in 1981.<sup>12</sup>

Given Smith's practical bent, why did he not quote from Lonergan's *Method in Theology*, which outlines the possibility of normatively practical theology?<sup>13</sup> In reflecting on Smith's lack of interest in Lonergan's thought, I was led to recall a meeting with him that I had in India. Shortly before I came to North America in 1988, I met Smith at the Madras Christian College. I had an opportunity to talk with him about many things. Before we parted, I asked a question: "Whom or what do you think is the most important thinker or book, except for the scripture, of world religions, for your thought?" Surprisingly, he mentioned St. Thomas Aquinas and Paul Tillich. Afterwards, I came to realize that Smith quoted St. Thomas Aquinas many times in his works, and he dealt with him in a special section in his book, *Faith and Belief*.<sup>14</sup>

After I began to read Lonergan's works, however, I thought that Smith would have benefitted from paying more attention to Lonergan. In rechecking Smith's responses to Lonergan's lecture, and by looking at his index references to St. Thomas Aquinas, I began to see that perhaps unlike Lonergan, Smith did not see Aquinas' vast system or his books as his focal research point. What interested Smith was Aquinas' faith – a faith that flows through his teaching and books. Of course, Smith did not develop systematically the discovery of Aquinas' interiority; nor did his descriptive work function for him as the seed of a generalized empirical method, as it did for Lonergan. However,

---

<sup>11</sup>Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "Comparative Religion: Whither—and Why?" in *The History of Religions: Essays in Methodology*, eds. Mircea Eliade and Joseph Kitagawa, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1959, 33.

<sup>12</sup>Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Towards a World Theology*, Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1981.

<sup>13</sup>Darlene Mary O'Leary, *Lonergan's Practical View of History*, Master of Arts in Theology, University of St. Michael's College, Toronto, Canada, 1999. Hardcopy is available at the John M. Kelly Library, University of St. Michael's College, Toronto and the library at Regis College, Toronto.

<sup>14</sup>Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Faith and Belief*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1979, 78-91. The section is titled "St. Thomas Aquinas."

Smith realized that Aquinas' works were not simply doctrinal agglomerations; they were expressions of Aquinas' faith.

In this context, thus, Smith noticed that the flowing of this faith<sup>15</sup> need not be seen merely as 'Christian,' but as an authentic human dimension that exists in Aquinas' thought. He thought that, for Aquinas, at least implicitly, a primary object was not to become an institutionalized Christian but rather to become an authentic human being. In this context of struggle and effort, Aquinas sought to work with the heretical views of his day as these existed in Greek and Islamic philosophy. If Aquinas had a closed parochial Christian mind, he perhaps would not have ventured to meet the heretical philosophies. Hence, Smith suggested that this dimension of Aquinas should be retrieved by contemporary academics for the sake of active engagement in interreligious dialogue and beyond.<sup>16</sup>

A reason for Smith's lack of the awareness of Lonergan's books is perhaps the fact that Lonergan explicitly uses the word 'method' and considers it most important. Smith severely criticized the use of 'method' in the study of the humanities in general and especially in religion. For Smith, such a title as *Method in Theology* could not be imagined. Throughout his life, he thought the term was a problematic word when used in connection with the understanding of human beings and of religion in general.

In addition, the use of the word 'method' tended to incite controversy and argument not only for Smith but also for other scholars with respect to the question of approaches in religious studies. Smith thought that questions about 'method' were relevant to the natural sciences but that they could not be applied to studies of interiority in the humanities and religious studies. He observed that current methods worked to obstruct movements that would lead to deeper human understanding. He was very sceptical about there being any proper involvement of questions about method or methodology in religious studies.

---

<sup>15</sup>Smith, *Faith and Belief*, 91.

<sup>16</sup>Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Towards a World Theology*, Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1981, 116-117.

He criticized even the phenomenology of religion in religious studies.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, after contributing one essay to the methodology volume edited by Kitagawa and Eliade, he did not publish any later articles in connection with Eliade and his school. He did not even contribute an essay to Eliade's and Kitagawa's vast editorial project that later appeared in the *Encyclopaedia of Religion*. He severely criticized the modern academic obsession with questions having to do with method or methodology. He saw this interest as a sort of 'ideology'.<sup>18</sup>

Lonergan thought of 'method' in very different terms, and it is one of the most crucial notions in his works. He thought that, whether we liked it or not, modern world included scientific method. The sciences have influenced all modern academic disciplines, including religious studies. Lonergan appealed to the conspicuously successful sciences, but also cautioned against uncritical acceptance of scientific method within religious studies and within all academic fields in general.<sup>19</sup> "Some third way, then, must be found and, even though it is difficult and laborious."<sup>20</sup> In particular, he pointed out that the methods of science, as they are commonly understood, should not be seen as absolute, or that all contemporary academic disciplines should reduce to such methods. Instead, scientific methods emerge from interior procedures of the scientists involved in asking questions, which lead to interpretations, judgments, deliberations, and decisions.<sup>21</sup> In this sense, Lonergan's concerns about method in religious studies probably in some way were related to Smith's concerns.<sup>22</sup>

In contrast to common expectations, Lonergan sought to identify inner processes constitutive of the scholar's self-dynamics. He claimed that a common set of inner activities

---

<sup>17</sup>Smith, *Towards a World Theology*, 85.

<sup>20</sup>Smith, "Comparative Religion," 33.

<sup>19</sup>Lonergan, *Method*, 3-4.

<sup>20</sup>Lonergan, *Method*, 4.

<sup>21</sup>Recall, for example, Lonergan's earlier analysis of contemporary scientific methods in his initial magnum opus, *Insight* towards a final magnum opus, *Method in Theology*.

<sup>22</sup>Lonergan, "Method: Trend and Variations," in *A Third Collection*, 18-19.



could be identified in human beings which includes the ways and means of scientific progress, and which has commonalities as one moves from one discipline to another. This common set of activities is found by adverting to one's own performance in human knowing and doing. His work *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* briefly indicates the possibility of a “generalized empirical method” in which one appeals to the data of consciousness.<sup>23</sup> He makes this more precise in *A Third Collection*:

Generalized empirical method operates on a combination of both the data of sense and the data of consciousness: it does not treat of objects without taking into account the corresponding operations of the subject, and it does not treat of the subject's operations without taking into account the corresponding objects.<sup>24</sup>

In this sense, then, neither religious studies nor theology stand apart from a common generalized empirical method. In *Method in Theology*, however, Lonergan goes further:

A method is a normative pattern of recurrent and related operations yielding cumulative and progressive results. There is a method, then, where there are distinct operations, where each operation is related to the others, where the set of relations forms a pattern, where the pattern is described as the right way of doing the job, where operations in accord with the pattern may be not repetitious, but cumulative and progressive.<sup>25</sup>

In the works of Smith and Lonergan, there is probably some overlap in the concern. Smith evidently had a naïve grasp of scientific method. However, both Smith and Lonergan were concerned about possible misapplications of ‘method’ within religious studies and theology. Both were interested in the possibility of developing as to how to go about religious studies and theology, though they had different emphases. Each one attempted to move in a new direction. Each sought to understand how one could attend to the inner dimensions of

---

<sup>23</sup>Lonergan, *Insight*, 96.

<sup>24</sup>Lonergan, *A Third Collection*, 141.

<sup>25</sup>Lonergan, *Method*, 4-5.

religion as a basis for creating a new consciousness within religious studies – a consciousness that can lend its support to an emergent consciousness of religious pluralism in our world today. Smith’s descriptive comparative studies of human religious history can support Lonergan’s subtly articulated analysis of method in theology and religious studies. Smith’s work counters recent secularist approaches to the study of religion.

One could also argue that Lonergan’s understanding of method in religious studies most probably subsumes Smith’s descriptive comparative studies. This is seen in Lonergan’s precision in his appeal to data of consciousness and in his further envisioning of an open methodology for theology that would take up Smith’s contributions within a larger functionally collaborative enterprise. However, the works of both Smith and Lonergan invite us to understand and mediate religion within human life, as well as the place and role of interreligious dialogue in a pluralistic global world.

### **3. Faith as a Basis of Religion**

Some religions and denominations emphasize belief systems within their traditions while others attend more to rituals and rites and how they might organize themselves into many different groups. Religions like Native American Religions, Folk Religions, and Shamanism cannot be fully understood simply in terms of their doctrinal systems. Similarly, much of Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism cannot be understood if no concern is given to meanings determined by ritual considerations. In this sense, the textual or doctrinal approach that we find among Asian religions, including the philosophies, is not sufficient to enable us to understand what is going on more generally. The Abrahamic religious traditions pose similar challenges. Given the inherent complexities that exist in all religions, the more we understand their multi-layered worlds, the more we will come to understand and know why we should not work from some kind of rigid definition of religion.

### 3.1. Faith and Religious Pluralism

It is widely accepted within contemporary religious studies that religion can be studied as a human construct. Without the past, present, and future involvement of human beings, no religion can be born, transmitted, developed, and maintained in human history. If they could not elicit the commitment of their followers, they would disappear and turn into dead religions, in some cases, inhabiting a museum.

I think that Smith and Lonergan originally developed this point in their works. They both insisted on the fact that the locus of human involvement that makes religions and gives life to realities in human history is something evidenced in human consciousness. Moreover, they both opted for an understanding of the whole human person, unlike the fragmentary understanding of the human subject which prevails in modern times. They struggled with the problem posed by the fact that the modern scholarship does not pay much attention to the inner dimensions of the person.

Smith addressed this question in connection with traditional world religions at a meeting of the International Association of the History of Religions in 1965:

[...] and I have argued that what has been called the study of religion must be recognized, rather, as the study not primarily of things but of persons. This, I would contend, is always true; and most of all for the study of today, when even such phenomena as there are may be different from the traditionalist ones. I suppose that my entire thesis can be summed up in the affirmation that the study of religion must be fundamentally a study of persons.<sup>26</sup>

Lonergan also developed a similarly worded point of view:

Existential reflection is at once enlightening and enriching. Not only does it touch us intimately and speak to us convincingly but also it is the natural starting-point for fuller reflection on the subject as incarnate, as image and feeling as

---

<sup>26</sup>Wilfred Cantwell Smith, “Traditional Religions and Modern Culture” in *Religious Diversity*, Willard G. Oxtoby, ed., New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1976, 76.

well as mind and will, as moved by symbol and story, as intersubjective, as encountering others and becoming “I” to “Thou” to move on to “We” through acquaintance, companionship, collaboration, friendship, love.<sup>27</sup>

Their concern for the human interior dimension was not a transitory interest. Instead, it was a focal point of their respective works. Smith began to investigate that dimension of faith from his studies of Islam in 1957. The major works on the human interior dimension of faith began with the publication of a modern classic, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, in 1962.<sup>28</sup> He developed this focus in his other major works such as *The Faith of Other Men* (1962), *The Questions of Religious Truth* (1967), *Belief and History* (1972), *Faith and Belief* (1979), and *Towards a World Theology* (1981).<sup>29</sup>

Lonergan also developed the interior dimension of the human subject in his first major work *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (1957).<sup>30</sup> Unlike Smith’s works, in *Insight*, Lonergan did not explicitly elaborate the problems posed by religious pluralism.<sup>31</sup> In *Insight*, he touched on the problem briefly and tangentially. In other works, though, there is ample evidence that even early on he had reached a nuanced grasp and control of meaning in the core dynamics of faith.<sup>32</sup> Later, in *Method in Theology*, Lonergan went on to describe faith in terms

---

<sup>27</sup>Bernard Lonergan, “The Subject” in *A Second Collection*, William F. J. Ryan and Bernard J. Tyrrell, eds., Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974, 85.

<sup>28</sup>Kenneth Cracknell, “Introductory Essay” in *Wilfred Cantwell Smith: A Reader*, Oxford: OneWorld, 2001, 7-8.

<sup>29</sup>Cracknell, “Introductory Essay,” 9-10.

<sup>30</sup>Richard M. Liddy, *Transforming Light: Intellectual Conversion in the Early Lonergan*, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1993, xviii-xxi.

<sup>31</sup>Lonergan, *Insight*, see index, 741-745.

<sup>32</sup>See, for example, *Method Journal*, 20.2, “The Analysis of Faith,” now available in *Early Latin Theology, Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, trans. Michael G. Shields, eds. Robert M. Doran and H. Daniel Monsour, vol. 19, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011, 413-481. See also Bernard Lonergan, *Understanding and Being: The Halifax Lectures on Insight*, Elizabeth Morelli and Mark Morelli, eds., Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990, 209.

of “knowledge born of religious love.”<sup>33</sup> It was only some years after writing *Method in Theology* that he began to work out further aspects of faith experience in the context of religious studies and religious pluralism.<sup>34</sup>

### 3.2. Faith, Authenticity, and Barriers to Authentic Study

Smith and Lonergan tried to correct views of human understanding that were overly conceptual. To do this, they proposed that discussion of human understanding should be related to experience. Contemporary notions tend to be steeped in what Smith referred to as “impersonalism”<sup>35</sup> and what Lonergan referred to as “conceptualism”<sup>36</sup> or “classicism.”<sup>37</sup>

Smith thought that the use of abstract external names in the study of the major world religions tended to enhance an impersonal approach that deflected scholars from focusing on what is happening inwardly in religion amongst believers and, so, interreligious encounters were not encouraged in a way that could join persons with each other. For this reason, in *The Meaning and End of Religion*, Smith critically looked at the historical development of the names that have arisen to speak about Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, and the meaning of these respective religions. He found that, with the exception of the name ‘Islam’, the other names emerged in contexts that were governed by Western cultural conceptions.<sup>38</sup> He argued that the use of abstract external names tended to make human beings forget or overlook a dynamic faith dimension that exists in all religions. For this reason, Smith claimed that he was abandoning the

---

<sup>33</sup>Lonergan, *Method*, 115.

<sup>34</sup>Lonergan, *A Third Collection*, 113.

<sup>35</sup>Wilfred Cantwell Smith, “Objectivity and Human Sciences” in *Religious Diversity*, Willard G. Oxtoby, ed., New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1976, 166-170.

<sup>36</sup>Lonergan, *Insight*, 717.

<sup>37</sup>Lonergan, *Method*, 302.

<sup>38</sup>Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion: A Revolutionary Approach to the Great Religious Traditions*, New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1962, 60.

coined reified names that have been commonly employed in different religions.<sup>39</sup> Instead, Smith suggested two usages: (1) cumulative tradition as “the entire mass of overt objective data that constitute the historical deposit, as it were, of the past religious life of the community in question;” and (2), faith as “an inner religious experience or involvement of a particular person.”<sup>40</sup> Smith suggests that it is not enough to look at external parts of religion. More importantly, one should look to what is interior and how this interior part relates to the development of the external traditions. However, one cannot understand the faith dimension of a religion unless one also studies external parts because these dimensions are not separate. The external things like rituals would be easily visible and the internal things like faith would be invisible and not known if they were not attended to. Both the parts of religion evolve together through a process of mutual interaction.

As mentioned above, Lonergan found a similar problem within ‘conceptualism’ or ‘classicism’ in religion and theology. Conceptualism “places conception before understanding and things before their orders; in consequence, it divides the order of things into two parts, of which the first is necessitated by the things that are ordered and the second an arbitrary complement added by a voluntaristically conceived divine will.”<sup>41</sup> Further, he wrote in *Method in Theology*:

[W]hile a classicist view would maintain that one should never depart from an accepted terminology, I must contend that classicism is no more than the mistaken view of

---

<sup>39</sup>Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 153. In religious studies, Smith’s suggestion has been so well accepted that today, in many conversations and in many books, one frequently encounters a language which speaks about differing faith traditions as in Christian tradition, Jewish tradition, Buddhist tradition, Hindu tradition, and other traditions. Amongst many academicians, one finds that they use labels in a manner that are influenced by Smith’s concerns. However, it is impossible to drop the names of religions, although it is more important to attend to faith dimensions which exist in all religions.

<sup>40</sup>Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 156.

<sup>41</sup>Lonergan, *Insight*, 717.

conceiving culture normatively and of concluding that there is just one human culture. The modern fact is that culture has to be conceived empirically, that there are many cultures, and that new distinctions are legitimate when the reasons for them are explained and the older truths are retained.<sup>42</sup>

He concluded that this milieu fosters problematic habits. It tends to turn persons toward focusing on the primacy of logical proofs and a notion of a privileged culture.<sup>43</sup>

To critically articulate this point in his talks about ‘doctrines’, somewhat as Smith had done, Lonergan distinguished between the interiority of human personal involvement and the exteriority of religion as this exists in the growth and accumulation of tradition.<sup>44</sup> Later on, in a lecture about religious experience in terms of its relation to religious studies and theology, he drew attention to the authenticity of human involvement in terms of authenticity, or, more precisely, in terms of ‘faith’.<sup>45</sup>

Both Smith and Lonergan, thus, are inviting our attention to experience, and in that sense are pushing for an understanding of faith that eventually will involve various affinities. Smith, though, evidently is working within a foundation of description that is object-oriented. It would seem, however, that Lonergan reached a rare control of meaning, and is consistent in his repeated invitation to attend to ‘inner experience’ and accurately discerns dynamics of faith<sup>46</sup> in human experience.

### 3.3. Faith and Cultures

As the textual evidence increasingly seems to indicate, for both Smith and Lonergan religion is chiefly grounded not in various expressions such as one finds in doctrines, rituals, belief systems,

---

<sup>42</sup>Lonergan, *Method*, 123-124.

<sup>43</sup>The dominance of conceptualism and classicism led to a way of thinking which tended to fall into language games. This bias eventually leads people to forget about the fact that religious life is a process of committed human conversion. Lonergan, *Method*, 338.

<sup>44</sup>Lonergan, *Method*, 302.

<sup>45</sup>Lonergan, “Religious Experience,” 123.

<sup>46</sup>Lonergan, “Religious Experience,” 115-116.

social organizations, and so on, but in varying forms of inner human commitment and involvement: faith as prior to, in relation to the externalities of religious traditions. Thus, to know a religion, it is not enough to focus on external things as such. One must rather know how human beings are involved in their traditions and, through their involvement, one must attend to what they experience, understand, judge, and decide sometimes properly and sometimes improperly in their lives. Different persons express their faith in different forms or modes present in the arts, philosophy, business, politics, science, theology, religious studies, communication, friendship, love, etc. The list is always open to changes.

Both Smith and Lonergan emphasize the varieties that one finds in religious traditions, culture, and faith. For both, what is fundamental is not only religious tradition or culture but developing faith – individually, communally, culturally, and historically. With respect to these dimensions, the fundamental constant is always the ultimate point that human beings refer to or to which they orient themselves in their lives. Because of this fundamental point, Smith and Lonergan invite us to attend to that point which is seen or which can be seen by a religious human being who attends to the committed involvement or participation of another person in their religious or human secular traditions. Hence, for both Smith and Lonergan, the argument takes its stand not on the articulation of a subtle speculative argument but through an analysis of humanity – an analysis, which, for Smith, is focused on a global sense of historical faith – that works in all things – and which, for Lonergan, is focused on an unrestricted universal desire found in human experience, implicitly a desire to become fully human.

In these ways, Smith and Lonergan both claimed that faith, ultimately, is not an abnormal strange element in human life, but a fundamentally normal element. When modern ‘secularism’ attempts to deny or eradicate this point, a false impression is conveyed: an impression that faith is not normal in human life, although this kind of diagnosis is both strange and abnormal in the context of global human history. Thus, for them, without a



restoration of this point of view in human life, no one can expect that authentic human encounters or fruitful interreligious dialogue will emerge within the emergent pluralism of our world. Contemporary human culture fails in disregarding the principle of transcendence as faith in human life. This situation turns human beings into fragmented beings who do not attend to an interior self-transcending reality that exists within human souls, the human spirit. Such a modern fragmented and absurd culture does not seriously engage in questions having to do with the transcendent dimension of human life as faith. This conclusion naturally follows from both Smith and Lonergan in their thoughts.

One better understands this implication if one looks at how both men responded to the ‘death of God’ movement.<sup>47</sup> To them it is the modern representative case to show the denial of normal human life as the process of faith. Smith strongly mentions ‘God’ as a living reality to the religious participants in their traditions. To them the reality is not dead but concretely living.<sup>48</sup> In rather similar words, Lonergan also speaks out about the ‘death of God’ movement.<sup>49</sup>

### 3.4. Faith and Interreligious Dialogue

For Smith and Lonergan, interreligious dialogue is not akin to casual conversation. The best analogy is by way of a species of colloquy—a colloquy of faith where the locus of meaning is in the telling of biographical narratives—narratives that express meanings which are artistic, ecological, intellectual, hospitable, and friendly. A context that turns into a community is created through stories, feelings, and gestures. Such an approach has yet to be fully attended to in the context of one’s own religion and in

---

<sup>47</sup>It is a Christian theological movement originating in 1960s, mainly USA. It has emphasized God’s death on cross and also the situation of the contemporary disbelief in God. The main theologians are Gabriel Vahanin, Paul Van Buren, William Hamilton, John Robinson, Thomas Altizer, John Caputo, and Peter Rollins.

<sup>48</sup>Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Questions of Religious Truth*, New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1967, 36.

<sup>49</sup>Lonergan, “The Subject,” 86.

other religions. It should be developed by a focus that attends to an inner personal faith dimension in a colloquy kind of way. This is a new vast uncultivated field in religious matters and it is very crucial for the development of genuine interreligious encounters or dialogue between human beings. Smith and Lonergan believed that by working from the perspective of faith dimension more opportunities would be given to all persons to meet other persons. As a result, a new human convergence creating a community could begin to emerge to overcome and heal the fragmentation of modern daily life. Such healing cannot occur if persons were to work from contexts solely determined by traditions.

In terms of faith *qua* faith as an interior human dynamic, one can find similarities among both religious and non-religious traditions. One can become aware of the fact that we do not exist anywhere simply as empty mechanical human beings. In some way, we exist as faith embodied human beings, irrespective of any differences among religious or non-religious traditions.

This dimension also gives us the opportunity to see each other as mysterious carriers of an ultimate 'reality' in our concrete struggle to become truly human as human beings. Smith articulates this point in his *Faith and Belief*: "Faith intellectually is further, the ability now to recognize (what in our preceding section was but postulated) a truth or a reality lying behind and also transcending any given perception or expression, beyond any 'belief'."<sup>50</sup> Similarly, Lonergan also pointed to faith as the common ground of all religions. In speaking about belief, faith functions as an ultimate point of reference: "We may note, however, that by distinguishing faith and belief we have secured a basis both for ecumenical encounter and for an encounter of all religions with a basis in religious experience. [...] Beliefs do differ, but behind this difference there is a deeper unity."<sup>51</sup>

Both Smith and Lonergan also thought that faith dimensions function to create further embracing community for our fellow

---

<sup>50</sup>Smith, *Faith and Belief*, 170.

<sup>51</sup>Lonergan, *Method*, 119.

human beings in human history. Smith developed this point when discussing his notion of world community in the context of a global history of humankind. He believed that all human beings, whether as Christians, Buddhists, Jews, Confucians, Muslims, or non-believers, participate directly or indirectly in constructing the world community. Of course, admittedly, they do not wear the same ‘cloth’; nor do they participate in the same way. They have been participating in the world community by wearing different ‘clothes’ which have been nurtured by different traditions – participating in the community not principally through their ‘clothes’ or outer dress but through their ‘faith-ing’: a ‘faith-ing’ which refers to authentic moments within the life of human beings.<sup>52</sup>

Like Smith, Lonergan also invites us to participate in building our human society into a larger human community. He sketched this possibility when talking about the nature of communications in human society. Especially in relation to interreligious dialogue, he suggested that a dialectical moment exists in all human beings that encourages them to become true human beings – a dialectical moment which becomes the foundation for thinking about a universal theory of human community. Admittedly, Lonergan did not fully develop his idea concretely with respect to interreligious dialogue, though his articles in *A Third Collection* provide important leads on his thought on the matter. He points to a seminal first principle, a fundamental seed that can be used to point to a new direction.<sup>53</sup>

#### 4. Conclusion

Smith and Lonergan adverted to a common problem with grave consequences in our modern world. At the core of this problem, a misplaced understanding of human understanding exists – a misunderstanding that exists through an impersonalism or a

---

<sup>52</sup>Smith, *Towards a World Theology*, 44.

<sup>53</sup>Lonergan, “The Ongoing Genesis of Methods,” 159. Foundational to Lonergan’s problem was his discovery of functional specialization. This is too large a topic to be discussed here and would deviate from the main purpose of this essay. See, however, note 3.

conceptualism which does not attend to the locus of religion within the human heart. Such a misplaced emphasis eventually leads and has led to a loss of a sense of religion in modern culture – a loss that follows from not attending to what is happening within the interiority of human hearts. Persons have tried to overcome this loss through external forms of activity as this exists in the variety of works and labours which they engage in the workaday world.

In addition, and by way of application to religious realms of meaning, for both Smith and Lonergan, impersonalism and conceptualist philosophies of mind affect what kind of self-understanding exists within different religions and different denominations. In order to correct this deficiency, Smith critically engaged in attempting to understand all religions as faith within a global perspective. Lonergan, for his part, tried to speak about ecumenism and how a possible meeting point for all religions exists in terms of faith as an inner transcultural dimension, as a transformation and a way of living, which is to be understood within a self-transcending notion of human subjectivity. Their respective positions can be seen to transcend sectarian positions, recalling the same kind of spirit and global vision that can be found in Aquinas, Ghazzali, Ramanuja, Chu Hsi, and others who had engaged with traditions other than their own.

Finally, what both Smith and Lonergan say about faith experience should be complemented by additional future studies of religious pluralism. Smith's view can be more fully developed by employing Lonergan's subtle discussion about the nature of human authenticity and how it applies in a concrete analysis of modern culture especially in economics and in the modern sciences. Conversely, Lonergan's views could also be more fully developed by following up on Smith's work and appealing to data on faith. In dealing with these matters, Lonergan's thought could be applied to this uncultivated area which could expand his thought in a way that would include new study and understanding of other cultures and traditions. In various ways,

then, it will be worthwhile to retrieve and interpret the thought of both Smith and Lonergan.

This faith aspect of human history gives us a deep sense of solidarity as human beings. Because of this solidarity, interreligious dialogue or encounters cease to be defensive meetings that occur among human beings. A new, deeper consciousness of things takes over – a consciousness which is transformed by a mutual critical engagement which continually transforms oneself as, by one’s participation, one realizes that one belongs to a larger human community in this world despite differences that exist. Ultimately, in the twenty-first century, religious studies should be further in the direction for the subtle witness of this dimension of our human history beyond the prevalent discourse of impersonalism or conceptualism in the academic world.