

HD requiring clarification and further research if they are to yield christologically viable theories.

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**STARTLING STRANGENESS: READING LONERGAN'S INSIGHT** by Richard M. Liddy (*University Press of America, Lanham 2007*) Pp. 251

How does one go about introducing a classic in philosophy such as Lonergan's *Insight*? No doubt there are various approaches to be taken. The one adopted by Mgr. Richard Liddy, a professor of theology at Seton Hall University, New Jersey, is through autobiography. I think the book is a success both as an exercise of intellectual and spiritual autobiography and as, at once, an introduction to *Insight*, principally, but also to *Method in Theology*. As the author explains in the beginning of the work, these two strands in the book can to some extent be separated out, since earlier and later chapters deal with Liddy's own intellectual and spiritual journey and his contacts with Lonergan, while central sections of the book are more focused on coming to grips with the self-appropriation to which one is invited in reading *Insight*.

Liddy's own story is emblematic of many of his generation. He grew up in a devout American Catholic household in the 1940s and '50s and began seminary formation in New Jersey, going on to study at the North American College, Rome in 1960. One has the impression from what Liddy writes that this solid foundation in Catholic faith and practice played its part in his weathering the storms which followed in the great cultural and ecclesial upheavals of the 1960s. His Catholic upbringing included every encouragement to pursue the intellectual quest to bring faith and reason into harmony.

Liddy's interest in philosophy was awoken before going to Rome by a seminary lecturer who introduced him to the historical analysis of philosophy in Gilson's work. Once in Rome, Liddy, like many of his contemporaries who attended the 'Greg' during this period, encountered Lonergan, then lecturing on the Incarnate Word and the Trinity. Liddy provides us with entertaining and insightful anecdotes reflecting the teaching style and personality of Lonergan and the way he was regarded by a student audience for the most part baffled by what he had to say. (Anthony Kenny appreciated what he heard – although, he admits, he never came to grips with *Insight*. The young Hans Küng, on the other hand, thought the Canadian Jesuit had nothing to tell him that he needed to know.) After ordination in 1963 Liddy returned briefly to the United States only to be told by his Bishop that he should return to Rome for a doctorate in philosophy which would equip him to teach the subject in the seminary. The Second Vatican Council was in session and the cultural and political turmoil of the 1960s was now beginning to affect the young priest's outlook. Liddy was unsure as to how effective philosophy could be and he began to be more concerned with social activism and with new psychological theories concerning individual affective growth. His doctoral work was on the aesthetics of Susanne Langer, but in order to find out if philosophy had anything of real value to offer he followed the advice of other students and began to tackle Lonergan's magnum opus, *Insight*.

The way Liddy contextualises his encounter with *Insight* is one of the strengths of the book, since he shares with the reader the prejudices he had regarding the perceived aims of the book and the way the personal transformation that took place in struggling with Lonergan's text helped him to overcome the dichotomies that were present in his prior assumptions. *Insight* helped Liddy to see as misguided the modern dichotomies of 'either intellectual or experiential', 'either social activism or ivory tower philosophising', 'either everything post-conciliar

or the medieval world of Aquinas'. At a time when a good number of his contemporaries were leaving the priesthood, Liddy's existential struggle with *Insight*, together with his deepening prayer life, kept him both a priest and a Catholic. Rather than philosophy having nothing to say, the drama of his encounter with Lonergan's thought and with rival philosophical conceptions now brought home to him the personal nature of the opportunities and challenges of philosophy.

In the late 1960s a work by Langer appeared in which she frankly professed a metaphysical materialism and reductionism which entailed that the religious world-view was so much myth. Liddy could no longer view such challenges to religion as items to be learnt for a theology exam soon to be forgotten. One had to be authentic in facing the alternatives: was this materialist world-view right or was the Christian one cogent and true? His Archimedean 'eureka' moment occurred not in a bath but, in true American style, in a shower and was a resolution of this intellectual and personal conflict. Liddy saw the way the central features of Lonergan's *Insight* fitted together in such a fashion as to show that a materialist metaphysics, arising as it does from an empiricist view of cognition, is erroneous. Not only that, he saw also that the alternative, critical realist position on epistemology, metaphysics, ethics and natural theology, adumbrated in *Insight*, is something to be personally verified (in its fundamental aspects) in one's own conscious experience.

The 'startling strangeness' of the book's title refers to Lonergan's way of describing the breakthrough to a critical realism which is experienced to be at once a home coming to what, as Wittgenstein would put it, we have always in some obscure way 'known' about ourselves as persons who know, choose and love, and at the same time a challenging and awkward experience. Why the latter? Because the inveterate empiricism to which we are prone as part animal makes it difficult for us to appropriate the intelligent and reasonable operations of which we have been conscious since we were small children and in accord with which we operate. Even small children assess the evidence of what they see and what they are told in order to come to a reasoned judgment and through such judgments make claims about reality. But the history of philosophy shows that spelling out such operations and following through on their implications is a very tricky matter.

I believe that both the engaging drama and humour of Liddy's autobiographical introduction to the study of Lonergan's thought, and his clear and judicious presentation of key arguments in Lonergan's philosophy, make this book a most valuable contribution to the secondary literature on this seminal thinker in the Catholic tradition.

ANDREW BEARDS

**A SECULAR AGE, by Charles Taylor (*Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 2007*) Pp. x + 874 pp., \$39.95 pbk**

One scarcely knows how to endeavor to write a brief review of Charles Taylor's recent *magnum opus*, *A Secular Age*, which comes in at just under 900 pages.

If I were a sociologist, I could try to evaluate Taylor's engagement and critique of various theories of secularism and secularization in the post-medieval west and his proposing of a new genealogy of the rise of secularity, a genealogy centered in the new focus on the world that appeared in Franciscan theology and piety, and not just in the metaphysics of Duns Scotus (p. 94), and in new forms of focus on the laity in the high middle ages (p. 94 again), a discussion that Taylor recognizes is in some, but not radical, tension with the more idealist genealogy proposed by John Milbank (pp. 773–776). Or I could focus on Taylor's discussion of the