THE DIVINE INITIATIVE: GRACE, WORLD-ORDER, AND HUMAN
FREEDOM IN THE EARLY WRITINGS OF BERNARD LONERGAN. By
xxii + 399.

The scholarly diligence of Stebbins has produced in this book an
excellent opportunity for Lonergan students to trace the growth of
Lonergan’s thinking as revealed in his published and unpublished
writings before 1950. This is important for understanding not only the
scholastic controversies about God’s grace and man’s freedom but also
the emergence of a method of theologizing that systematically avoids
the arid wastes of controversy and concentrates on positive develop-
ment.

This positive turn is facilitated by learning from past mistakes,
particularly the mistakes discovered by Lonergan in the Molinist,
Bannezian, semi-Bannezian and Suarezian systems. For centuries, these
systems got entangled in exercises of futility. These are in contrast to
the theological method that Lonergan saw in Aquinas’ “dialectical
position.” Like the mathematical movement into the region of complex
numbers (with their “imaginary” components that solved engineering
problems with very real and functioning hardware), the Thomist
dialectical position asserts the negative coherence of non-contradiction
but also denies the positive coherence of complete understanding (p.
288).

Although human understanding of transcendent reality is incomplete,
still it has been undergoing gradual systematization since the discovery
around the year 1230 of what Lonergan called the theorem of the
supernatural. By designating the distinction between the natural and
supernatural orders as a “theorem,” Lonergan contrasted it with commonsense notions that were poorly defined. The theorem has
become the foundation of a “new and powerful methodological ori-
entation” (p. 68).

The method has been yielding fruitful insights and many of these
are brilliantly highlighted by Stebbins. Particularly impressive are four
insights: (a) into the processions in the Trinity analogous to man’s
cognitional activity: an inner word proceeding from an act of under-
standing, and an act of love proceeding from both the act of under-
standing and the inner word (p. 30); (b) into grace as the created (and
verifiable) communication of divine nature analogous to the uncreated
communication of divine nature among three persons (p. 292); (c) into
the created world-order or community (mystical body) as the primary
recipient of grace, the individual being a secondary recipient (p. 138);
and (d) into the obediential potency (p. 163) in creatures in relation to
divine initiative (analogous to the obediential potency in atoms and
molecules in relation to their upgraded configuration that constitutes
a living organism).

This reviewer begs to question Stebbins' interpretation of Lonergan's
concepts "conjugate" (p. 45) and "asymptotically" (p. 169). The second
word may require a restudy of Lonergan's reflections on mathematical
"extrapolation" and its relation to transcendent knowledge in Insight
some infinite series as "asymptotically" approaching infinity without
ever attaining infinity: every term or every summation of terms that
can be written down before the "etc. . . ." is never infinite. To affirm
that human understanding asymptotically approaches the status of
proper knowledge of the divine essence seems to this reviewer to be
quite consistent with Stebbins' reference to Lonergan's essay on "The
Natural Desire to See God."

The University of Toronto Press is unquestionably justified in investing
its resources in publishing this excellent book and deserves to be
congratulated for the attractive format.

Vicente Marasigan, S.J.

ON NAMING THE PRESENT: GOD, HERMENEUTICS AND CHURCH.
146.

This valuable book is divided into five parts and subdivided into twelve
articles previously published in Concilium since 1978 and selected for
their relevance to the author's plan, brilliantly presented in Part One,
to promote theological conversation, particularly with the marginalized,
by finding a name for "the present." He also sees the need of con-
versation between three sectors of the Western theological world: antismodernity, modernity and postmodernity, each with its own inter-
pretation of the decrees of the Second Vatican Council.

The proposed topics of conversation, ranging through Part Two to
Part Five, deal with the multi-faceted God in theology, history and
psychology, with the Holocaust, Exodus and the changing cosmology,
with Catholic concerns in ecumenism and transformation, and with the
pluralism of interpretations of divine revelation.

The style is very intricate and may call for several carefully repeated
readings that gradually reveal the panoramic breadth of "the present"
and inspire the fascinated reader to identify and sympathize with the