Horizons, 52, pp. 229–261. © College Theology Society 2025.
doi:10.1017/hor.2025.10062

Let Us Consider Our Considerate and Inconsiderate Lives

WILLIAM P. GEORGE
Dominican University, USA
wgeorge@dom.edu

This article invites readers to consider certain questions too rarely asked: What are we doing when we consider or fail to consider something or someone? What implications, especially theological implications, does our considering or failing to consider have for ethics as reflection on our moral lives? Finally, will considering our considering help us to become more considerate human beings? Three major figures from the Christian tradition—Bernard Lonergan, Bernard of Clairvaux (author of De Consideratione*), and Thomas Aquinas—help us to answer these questions in ways that urge us to consider not only their own words and ideas, but also those of others, especially ourselves. As teachers, they also lead us to ask how consideration might become a more frequent focus of education, broadly understood. And in closing, the reader is asked to consider the possibility that everyone, in their serious questioning, or considering, is "theologizing" in a way.*

Keywords: considering, consideration, ethics, Bernard Lonergan, Bernard of Clairvaux, Thomas Aquinas, prudence, self-appropriation

This article invites the reader to consider at least three questions that are too rarely asked: First, just what are we doing when we consider or fail to consider something or someone? Second, what implications, theological and other, might our considering or failing to consider have for ethics as reflection on the moral life?[1] Third, might carefully considering our considering, and our failures to consider or to consider well, lead us to become more considerate human beings?[2]

[1] Facing his death, Socrates famously proclaimed that "the unexamined life is not worth living." See Plato, *Apology*, in *Essential Dialogues of Plato*, ed. Pedro de Bals, trans. Benjamin Jowett. (New York: Barnes and Noble, 2005), 41.

[2] I am grateful to *Horizons* for reviewers' careful attention to an earlier draft of this article and for helpful suggestions for revision.

William P. George is an emeritus professor of theology at Dominican University, River Forest, Illinois, and, presently, a visiting scholar at Loyola University Chicago. His research and publications have focused on such topics as the ethics of mining, concern for future generations, gun violence, and the law of the sea.

Competing interests: The author declares none.

https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2025.10062 Published online by Cambridge University Press

That considering has a place in our lives should be clear enough. After all, we frequently use or hear some form of the word "consider," as in, "I'm considering changing my major" or "I guess we never considered that. Too late now." But whether even thoughtful people stop to consider just what it means to consider, or what we should consider, is not so sure. When an English professor I had not seen for some time asked me what I was up to, I said that I had been thinking about what it means to consider something. Her reply: "What does it mean to consider something? Hmm. I've never thought about that. And I pay a lot of attention to the meaning of words." She may not be alone. Search engines find "consideration" or "considerations" in article or book titles that state or imply the importance of this consideration or that for the topic to be discussed.[3] But such searches seem not to turn up careful studies of the notion, the act, the experience, or the practice of consideration itself.

To aid our attempt to pay more attention not only to the meaning of words but also to cognitive and deliberative acts and practices, especially our own, we will draw on three prominent sources from within the Christian tradition without exhausting their possible contributions. First, we will consider certain insights of Bernard Lonergan (1904–1984), chosen because, as philosopher and theologian, he had so much to say about human beings, individually or in community, as subjects of their own cognitive and deliberative acts. Next, we turn to Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153) for the obvious reason that he wrote explicitly on the topic. In *On Consideration* (*De Consideratione*),[4] Bernard advises Pope Eugenius III (1080–1153), his Cistercian brother, on what it means for a pope to consider as he should, an especially timely topic during a year in which one pope died and another was elected. Finally, we will turn to Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), who, throughout the *Summa Theologiae*, asks readers to "consider" question after question "under the aspect of God."[5] But to stress the role that consideration plays in the moral life, we will ask what the virtue of prudence, in relation to other virtues, requires that we consider when making decisions of various kinds.

[3] See, for instance, Martha D. Shulski and Daniel R. DiLeo, "What Is Happening to Our Common Home? Considerations from a Catholic Climate Scientist and a Catholic Theological Ethicist," *Journal of Moral Theology* 9, special issue 1 (2020): 71–89. This is an especially pertinent example given that, in *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis uses some form of "consider" (*considerare*) more than thirty times. See Francis, *Laudato Si'* (May 24, 2015), http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html (hereafter cited as *LS*).

[4] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Consideration,* trans. George Lewis (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908).

[5] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (London: Benziger,1948) (hereafter *ST*), I, q. 1, a. 7.

https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2025.10062 Published online by Cambridge University Press

These guides can help us better understand the ethical and theological implications of our considering and our considerations. They also offer insights into our failures to consider as we should, and how graced love might heal our inconsiderate ways. But attention to the three leads to two further considerations, to be discussed briefly at the end. First, we will ask how each author encourages us to expand our horizons of consideration by listening not only to them but to other voices, past and present, as well. Second, recalling that the three aforenamed authors were exemplary teachers, we will ask whether and how considering might become a more prominent focus of education, broadly defined. Then we will close by considering whether anyone who considers something or someone might be theologizing in some way.

Considering a Definition

Before turning to our selected authors, the reader might welcome at least a working definition of "considering" in order to begin our inquiry. Surely, one can find in dictionaries or in one's own vocabulary definitions such as "turning attention to," "thinking carefully about," "taking into account," or "contemplating." But such definitions may beg the sorts of questions that our authors, singularly or together, help us to pursue. For instance, Lonergan's *Insight: A Study in Human Understanding*,[6] which runs to about eight hundred pages, has much to say about what "thinking carefully about" something might entail, and the "transcendental method," discussed in *Method in Theology* involves answering at least three big questions: "What am I doing when I am knowing? Why is doing that knowing? What do I know when I do it?"[7] Furthermore, in their various writings, each makes multiple suggestions as to just what we should or might "turn our attention to" or "take into account," and each has something to say about considering as "contemplation."

Furthermore, if we are looking for guiding definitions, we should note that the origins of "consider," along with a related word, "desire," are unclear. One possibility is that because, in Latin, *con* means "with, together, jointly" and *sīder, sīdus* means "star, constellation," etymologically, "to consider" might mean "to be with the stars." "Desire," on the other hand, also from *sīder, sīdus*, but also from *de*—"down from, away"—might mean "down or away from the

[6] See Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, 5th ed. revised and augmented, vol. 3, Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan, ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992).

[7] Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, vol. 14, Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan, ed. Robert M. Doran and John D. Dadosky (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017), 25. I say "at least three" questions because I am not sure that, as stated, they express as fully as they might what occurs especially on the fourth level of conscious intentionality, which has much to do with values, feelings, and responsible decision-making leading to actions.

https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2025.10062 Published online by Cambridge University Press

stars." But early meanings of the words might be more mundane, as *sīder, sīdus* might simply mean "target" or "goal."[8] So we might consider the possibility that both the mysterious, perhaps indefinable cosmos and the not-so-simple down-to-earth will be relevant here.

In any case, we might ask: Should the definition or definitions we are seeking be provided at the beginning of our inquiry? Or are the fullest, most nuanced, and polyvalent definitions discovered little by little, not only by what these three writers have to offer, but also, with their help, by what we find when we examine our own lives? I lean toward the latter view.

Considering Insights from Bernard Lonergan

Given his sustained and careful attention to knowing and decision-making, and his efforts to aid others in examining these complex and sometimes delicate matters in their own lives, it is reasonable to turn to Bernard Lonergan for initial thoughts on what we are doing when we are considering—or not. So we find that building on *Insight* but with added stress on values, feelings, and responsible decision-making, Lonergan opens *Method in Theology* by discussing "transcendental method," with its distinct yet integrated levels of conscious intentionality: *experience, understanding, judging*, and *deciding*.[9] Method so construed includes "a basic pattern of [human] operations," which Lonergan lists as "seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, tasting, inquiring, imagining, understanding, conceiving, formulating, reflecting, marshalling and weighing the evidence, deliberating, evaluating, deciding, speaking, writing."[10] But the list does not include "*considering*." What should we make of this?

Perhaps Lonergan simply did not intend the list to be exhaustive. Other operations could be added. For instance, could not "painting" or "dancing" be included along with "speaking" and "writing"? Surely these activities are also rich carriers and conveyors of the meaning and value about which Lonergan has so much to say.[11] Or, one might suggest that the exclusion was something of an oversight, that he could and should have put "considering" on the list but did not. After all, in his discussion of meaning, he includes the word on at least one similar list.[12] If it was in fact an oversight of some sort, that might confirm

[8] See "'Desire' and 'Consider': A History," *Webster Dictionary*, Word Play, https://www.merriam-webster.com/wordplay/the-history-of-desire-and-consider.

[9] See Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 7–27.

[10] Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 10.

[11] On realms and stages of meaning, see "Meaning," chapter 3 of Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 55–95. Various aspects and kinds of values (e.g., ontic, personal, originating, religious, and terminal) are discussed throughout *Method in Theology*.

[12] "The formal act of meaning is an act of conceiving, thinking, *considering*, defining, supposing, formulating" (Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 71; emphasis added). Note that six distinct operations together constitute "an"—that is, *one*—act.

https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2025.10062 Published online by Cambridge University Press

my suspicion that our considering might not receive, even from great thinkers, the focused attention it deserves.

Whatever the reason for excluding "considering" from this particular list of operations, it is arguably closely tied to many, if not all, of the operations found there. When during a meeting someone says, "So, let's consider our options," are not those present being asked first to *hear* or *see*, but then to *imagine*, to *understand*, to *inquire* further, and, after *marshalling and weighing the evidence*, to make *judgments* of fact and value about each of the options that may lead to a *decision* about which one to choose? For Lonergan, "considering" may be distinct from but is certainly not separate from or independent of the many other operations on this list or an expanded list. Considering would seem to involve, in some instances if not all, each of the four levels of conscious intentionality and thus multiple operations integral to the lives of individuals and groups. So, we can assume that when Lonergan uses some form of "consider" more than sixty times in *Method in Theology* he does so within the context of the whole of knowing and doing, the whole of "method," indeed, with the whole person in mind.

If considering is related to method in its entirety, we might consider the implications of that fact. One implication is that considering has much to do with the operative norms that, Lonergan contends, spontaneously guide, or should guide, one's spirit of inquiry and indeed one's life. So considering as we should—that is, in accord with our inherent capacity to seek the real and the good—will mean abiding, in this instance or that, by the transcendental precepts intrinsic to and operative in our knowing and doing, precepts thematized as "Be attentive, Be intelligent, Be reasonable, Be responsible,"[13] with, for good reason, "Be loving" sometimes added to the list.[14]

The operations at the various levels—experience, understanding, judging, and deciding—and the transcendental precepts guiding them, are at the heart of method in theology. But such operations and their guiding norms arguably characterize method as Lonergan understands it in other areas of inquiry and human activity: parenting, running a business, governing, teaching, conducting scientific experiments, or writing a book—to name a few. If that is the case, then this commonality invites some observations. One has to do with the notion of "mediation" and the "functional specialties" this mediation entails. As Lonergan states in the opening line of the introduction to *Method in Theology*, "A theology mediates between a cultural matrix

[13] Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 22– 23, 49, 52, 54, 217, 282, 367, 380, 389.

[14] For a discussion of method that emphasizes love, see John P. Cush, "Lonergan's Communal Novum Organon," *Church Life Journal* (November 28, 2018), https://churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles/lonergans-communal-novum-organon/.

https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2025.10062 Published online by Cambridge University Press

and the significance and role of a religion within that matrix."[15] Theologians carry out this mediation with regard to the past (mediated phase), as well as the present and future (mediating phase), by way of "functional specialties" that for Lonergan correspond to the four levels of conscious intentionality. Thus, in the mediated phase, theologians engage in (1) research (level of experience); (2) interpretation (understanding); (3) history (judgment); and (4) dialectics (decision). In the mediating phase the specialties are (5) foundations (decision); (6) doctrines (judgment); (7) systematics (understanding); and (8) communications (experience).[16]

Now, any one of these specialties presents considerable challenges. Think, for instance, of what, within the Christian or other traditions, the "interpretation" of Scripture has entailed over the centuries, assuming that it can even be established, at the level of research, just what counts as the relevant texts to be interpreted. Think of the functional specialty dialectics, within a particular tradition or across traditions, where complementary but also contradictory beliefs, viewpoints, theories, policies, or practices are sorted through and evaluated.[17] In the mediated phase, consider the challenge of settling on foundations, which objectifies horizons implicit in conversions,[18] for moving forward, or of communications with, say, the "nones" in faith-based institutions, regarding the doctrines of that institution's faith tradition.

Method, as Lonergan describes it, can be so challenging that it is no wonder that it requires collaboration. For this and other reasons, there is no intent here of discussing in sufficient depth the "cumulative and progressive" results of method.[19] Rather, I simply suggest that with its functional specialties, method may be loosely summarized as the multipart question: "Where have we been, what went right or wrong, how have we needed, and perhaps still need, to change (mediated phase), and on what basis, and with what strategies, do we move into the future (mediating phase)?"[20]

[15] Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 3.

[16] Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 128–30. I would stress that the correspondence between the specialties and the four levels does *not* mean that those engaged in a particular specialty, say, research, are restricted to operating at only one level, such as "experience," rather than all four.

[17] On the different kinds of differences—developmental, complementary, and radical—with which dialectics must deal, see Cynthia Crysdale, "Horizons That Differ: Women and Men and the Flight for Understanding," *Cross Currents* 44, no. 3 (Fall 1994): 345–61.

[18] On the relationship between foundations and conversion (intellectual, moral, religious), see Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 125, 126, 130, 136, 137, 159, 336.

[19] Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 8.

[20] On this interpretation of the functional specialties, see William P. George, *Mining Morality: Prospecting for Ethics in a Wounded World* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2019), 34, 65, 71, 145, 219.

https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2025.10062 Published online by Cambridge University Press

This pertains not just to method in theology.[21] Those asking these sorts of questions could have in view a nation (such as the United States at a time of great division, with democracy under threat), a legal tradition, a business, a school or educational system, or perhaps a patient in the examining room with a medical history who awaits a prognosis and a treatment plan.

Individual questioners or communities may also be examining themselves. One thinks of an examination of conscience or consciousness, or of what St. Ignatius of Loyola called "the discernment of spirits,"[22] and with the examen integral to that discernment.[23] Indeed, those making the Ignatian *Spiritual Exercises*, are repeatedly asked to consider various matters over the course of "four weeks."[24] Lest we overstress rationality, we should also note the crucial role that imagination and affectivity (e.g., consolation and desolation) play in this considering and decision-making process. Whatever the case and whoever the inquiring subjects might be, the inquirers face the need to consider the past, to consider where things stand now, and to consider where things should go and, indeed, the persons or communities they are called to become.[25]

Considering and Self-Appropriation

To elucidate further what method as described by Lonergan might have to do with consideration, let us focus on the relationship between method and

[21] For an example of how the functional specialties of method may guide other fields of inquiry, see John Raymaker with Ijaz Durrani, *Empowering Climate-Change Strategies with Bernard Lonergan's Method* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2015).

[22] See Office of Ignatian Spirituality, "Ignatian Discernment," https://jesuitseastois.org/discernment. Recognizing Lonergan's roots in the Ignatian tradition, a leading Lonergan scholar has written at great length on ethics as discernment. See Patrick M. Byrne, *The Ethics of Discernment: Lonergan's Foundations for Ethics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016).

[23] See Office of Ignatian Spirituality, "The Ignatian Examen," https://jesuitseastois.org/examenlive.

[24] See Louis J. Puhl, SJ, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola, Based on Studies in the Language of the Autograph* (Chicago, IL: Loyola University Press, 1951). John D. Dadosky shows the close relationship between Ignatian spirituality and Lonergan's thought, especially regarding decision-making and the fourth level of conscious intentionality. See John D. Dadosky, "Is There a Fourth Stage of Meaning?" *Heythrop Journal* (2010): 768–80, at 777–78.

[25] Such considering or reconsidering can be a challenge. Consider, for instance, the efforts of the 1619 project to alter what its proponents see as the defective ways in which the history of the United States has been commonly understood (mediated phase) and what corrections (conversions?) are required for moving forward (mediating phase) as a nation. Opposition to the project attests to the range of contrasting appraisals of who, what, and where the country has been and visions of where it needs to go. See, for example, Adam Serwer, "The Fight over the 1619 Project Is Not about the Facts," *Atlantic*, December 23, 2019.

https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2025.10062 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the individual subject. As Lonergan explains, "In a sense everyone knows and observes transcendental method … precisely in the measure that he is attentive, intelligent, reasonable, and responsible." Then, however, he goes on to explain that "In another sense it is quite difficult to be at home in transcendental method, for that is not to be achieved by reading books or listening to lectures or analyzing language. It is a matter of *heightening one's consciousness by objectifying it*, and that is something that each one, ultimately, has to do in himself and for himself."[26]

What Lonergan is referring to is "self-knowledge, self-appropriation, [or] self-possession,"[27] a process requiring human subjects to pay attention to, seek insights into, arrive at sound judgments about, and make responsible decisions in light of the data not just of sense, but also of their own consciousness—that "self-presence" that is inherent in one's acts of attentiveness, inquiry, and so on.[28] For instance, if self-reflection reveals a tendency to rush to judgment before considering the relevant evidence, perhaps examining the data of consciousness regarding that tendency will lead the person to change. Self-reflection may also reveal self-centeredness, and thus the need to consider and care for others, too.

Self-appropriation is no easy matter. In *Method in Theology*, Lonergan points out that "I am offering only a summary, that the summary can do no more than present the general idea, that the process of self-appropriation occurs only slowly, and, usually, only through a struggle with some such book as *Insight*."[29] Here, I am not offering even an adequate summary of what Lonergan is getting at, much less the equivalent of "some such book as *Insight*." Still, what I am inviting the reader to do is, I believe, in accord with Lonergan's intent. That is, just as he invites readers of *Insight* or *Method in Theology* to "objectify" their experience, understanding, judging, and deciding, and to take ownership of all of this with an openness to change or conversion (intellectual, moral, religious, maybe psychic),[30] so I would invite the reader to objectify[31]—to consider—their considering and resulting considerations with

[26] Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 18; emphasis added.

[27] Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 26.

[28] For an explanation of what Lonergan means by "consciousness," see Fred Lawrence, "The Fragility of Consciousness: Lonergan and the Postmodern Concern for the Other," *Theological Studies* 54 (1993): 55–94.

[29] Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 10n4.

[30] The theme of conversion runs throughout Lonergan's *Method in Theology*. For a brief discussion of the topic, see Robert M. Doran, "What Does Bernard Lonergan Mean by Conversion?" Lonergan Resource, Marquette University, https://lonerganresource.com/academic/lectures/.

[31] The use of the word "objectify" is perhaps unfortunate if it suggests some sort of crude or radical subject-object dualism that is quite foreign to the spirit of inquiry that Lonergan has in mind.

https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2025.10062 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the possibility that such self-reflection will lead to change. "I guess I never considered that," the self-reflective person might say. "Next time, I won't be so quick to judge."[32]

Bias and the Inconsiderate Life

In some small way, these pages might further the process of self-appropriation, leading the reader to become more considerate. But that requires, as the title of this article suggests, that we consider our *in*considerate lives as well. So, we turn to a major concern of Lonergan, namely, the problem of bias. Dramatic bias involves a suppression of images, often affect-laden, needed not only for daily living but also for recognizing and solving problems.[33] Thus, we might fail to consider the plight of evicted renters, of abused animals, or of those affected by war. We look away, thus decreasing the odds that such suffering and its causes might be addressed. Individual bias constricts human capacities, leaving individuals unable, or unwilling, to consider the implications of choices, actions, practices, and policies for anyone other than themselves.[34] Group bias in the extreme so assures us that our group, our political party, our race, our religion, our generation, our country has a corner on truth and goodness, and that others may be regarded as so blind, so ignorant, so wrong—maybe even so downright evil—that we may fail to consider and affirm even the partial truths or goodness that other groups have to offer, just as we fail to consider flaws in our own group's grasp of the real and the good.[35] Contracted consideration of this kind decreases the odds of peaceful relations, civil discourse, cooperation on worthy projects, and so much else.

The general bias of common sense—which can affect both individuals and groups—can be especially insidious and destructive.[36] By common sense, we relate things to ourselves rather than to one another.[37] Now, common sense is remarkably subtle and complex, is crucial to our daily living, and may be

[32] On the relationship between self-appropriation and ethics, see Byrne, *The Ethics of Discernment*, especially chapter 3, "Self-Appropriation" in part 1, "Self-Affirmation," and chapter 10, "Self-Appropriation," in part 2, "Why Is Doing That Being Ethical?"

[33] Lonergan, *Insight*, 214–27.

[34] Lonergan, *Insight*, 244–47.

[35] Lonergan, *Insight*, 247–50.

[36] Lonergan, *Insight*, 250–67.

[37] Think of acceleration, as common sense might describe it, as the experience of "going faster." Compare this to the mathematical formula for acceleration ($a = \Delta v/\Delta t$), the understanding of which (see, e,g., "Acceleration," Science.net, https://www.sciencefacts.net/acceleration.html) is accompanied by no experienced difference in speed, but can be quite helpful to someone seeking to design a car or airplane.

https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2025.10062 Published online by Cambridge University Press

self-correcting when correction is required.[38] But there is much that, on its own, common sense cannot do. It cannot distinguish between common sense and common nonsense. It cannot say what to do when your common sense and my common sense conflict.[39] It cannot even explain what is meant by "common sense." For that, theory or a higher viewpoint involving a broadening of our horizons of consideration will be required. It may also require what John D. Dadosky calls a "fourth stage of meaning," implicit in Lonergan's writings, beyond the stages of common sense, theory, and interiority. Present in this stage of meaning are such things as unconditional love.[40]

Common sense can be especially quick to judge and fail to consider the complexity of things. So, the general bias of common sense—asking common sense to do what it cannot do—can result in simplistic or distorted analyses of complex situations, soundbites rather than sound solutions, binary thinking over multidimensional approaches to problem-solving. When common sense, seriously affected by bias, is out of its depth but rules the day and decision-making at various levels, high and low, it can lead to what Lonergan calls the "longer cycle of decline." Regarding this cycle, Lonergan asks, "Why is the longer cycle so long? Why is the havoc it wreaks so deep, so extensive, so complete? The obvious answer is the difficulty of the lesson it has to teach."[41] One such difficult lesson is the critical need, as individuals and groups, to broaden our sometimes highly constricted horizons of consideration—to undergo a consideration conversion, one might say.

A Theological Consideration

At this point, and to close this overview of Longergan's theology, let us consider with Lonergan what a "consideration conversion" might mean theologically. Because comments here must be brief, I turn to one of Lonergan's shorter essays, "Healing and Creating in History."[42] There, he argues that true progress in history, in accord with what it means to be authentically human and humane, requires creativity—the application of intelligence to daunting

[38] Lonergan, *Insight*, 197–98.

[39] For this reason, in a sharply divided polity, the "common sense" to which politicians and others appeal in reference to proposed laws or policies—sometimes with the implication that anyone who cannot see the wisdom in such proposals must be stupid—may not be "common" at all.

[40] See Dadosky, "Is There a Fourth Stage of Meaning?."

[41] Lonergan, *Insight*, 258.

[42] Bernard J. F. Lonergan, "Healing and Creating in History," Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan, vol. 16, A Third Collection, ed. Robert M. Doran and John D. Dadosky (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017), 94–103.

https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2025.10062 Published online by Cambridge University Press

tasks, such as creating in the example he gives, effective governing structures and institutions to deal with out-of-control multinational corporations. For Lonergan, however, creative efforts joining theory and practical intelligence are not enough. When human beings are unmoored from the scale of values (vital, social, cultural, personal, religious) and propelled by bias, they can be extremely creative, for instance, in finding ways to hack into a hospital's computer system, demanding ransom as a reward for their remarkable creativity.[43]

So, what is also required, in addition to creativity, is healing love that overcomes hatred, greed, and other vices. As Lonergan puts it, "Just as the creative process, when unaccompanied by healing, is distorted and corrupted by bias, so too the healing process, when unaccompanied by creating, is a soul without a body."[44] The love to which Lonergan refers, with reference to the Holy Spirit, is integral to what he elsewhere calls "the law of the Cross."[45] Here, we have entered the realm of grace, but grace that does not deny or replace but rather builds upon and expands our natural capacity to consider whatever the moment, the problem, the mission, the burning question requires.[46] It may also mean entrance into a fourth stage of meaning beyond the stages of common sense, theory, and interiority. At this stage, a "transcendental exigence" gives rise to "a religiously differentiated consciousness that speaks to a person who is habituated into the dynamic state of being-in-love in an unrestricted manner."[47] Put otherwise, along with the vectors of progress and decline, the vector of graced redemption is present in history as well, leaving us with the hope of becoming, with divine assistance, more loving and thus more considerate human beings.[48]

[43] On the ascending scale of values, see Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 32, and Brian Cronin, "We Need to Think about Values," *Spiritan Horizons* 7, no. 7 (Fall 2012): 75–85.

[44] Lonergan, "Healing and Creating in History," 102.

[45] See Mary Gerhart, "Bernard Lonergan's 'Law of the Cross': Transforming the Effects of Violence," *Theological Studies* 77, no. 1 (2016): 77–95.

[46] As Lonergan puts it in relation to the natural knowledge of God affirmed by Vatican I: "I do not think that in this life people arrive at a natural knowledge of God without grace, but what I do not doubt is that the knowledge they so attain is natural." See Bernard J. F. Lonergan, "Natural Knowledge of God," in the Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan, vol. 13, A Second Collection: Papers by Bernard J. F. Lonergan, ed. Robert M. Doran and John D. Dadosky (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017), 113.

[47] Dadosky, "Is There a Fourth Stage of Meaning?," 771.

[48] For a brief discussion of progress and decline that includes remarks about the redemptive role that self-sacrificial love as well as faith can play in history, see Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 51–54, 112–114.

https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2025.10062 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Lessons from Bernard of Clairvaux's *De Consideratione*

The omission of "considering" from Lonergan's list of human operations left us with an indirect path to a fuller understanding of what consideration is all about. Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, by contrast, offers a more direct route. Over the course of several years, Bernard wrote a series of letters to Pope Eugenius III, who, as Bernardo Paganelli, had been Bernard's fellow Cistercian and his student. Bernard, a mystic, abbot, cofounder of the Knights Templar, and great reformer of the Benedictine tradition by way of the newly formed Cistercian order, left behind numerous writings, but *On Consideration* may be his greatest work. I make no attempt to comment in depth on these "five books," even as I encourage others to give them careful consideration in their own well-spent time. Rather, I wish simply to make some observations about Bernard and his reflections that might help us better know what it means to consider, why we should consider, and what we should consider in our day, just as Pope Eugenius was advised—admonished, really—to stop and consider more frequently and more profoundly in his day.

We may begin by simply recalling that Bernard was a reformer. So, if he is writing about consideration, we can expect that, for him, consideration has much to do with reform or change, or, as Lonergan would put it, conversion—conversion perhaps of entire institutions, such as the church, but also of individuals such as Eugenius III.[49] Related to this, we note that even though a decade younger than the pope, Bernard regarded himself as his teacher, even his "mother," advising someone *under* his care.[50] At the same time, he was writing to a person who, on at least one hierarchical scale, was clearly *above* him. This suggests that admonitions or subtle pleas for us to strengthen, expand, redirect, or refine our considering may come from above (a parent, an older colleague, an expert in one field or another—even a pope[51]) or from "below" (a student, a younger generation, maybe a member of a supposedly "lower"

[49] Recall the phrase popularized by Karl Barth and others: *Ecclesia semper reformanda est* (the church is always in need of reform). For one account of the history and meaning of this phrase, see Dr. Tim LeCroy, "*Semper Reformanda*: The Origins of the Slogan and Its Meaning," on his website, *Vita pastoralis*, https://pastortimlecroy.com/2024/10/31/semper-reformanda-the-origins-of-the-slogan-and-its-meaning/.

[50] See Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Consideration*, prologue. Perhaps those living in the age of Bernard were more comfortable than are some today with mixing gender identities and roles.

[51] As noted previously (Shulski and DiLeo, "What Is Happening to Our Common Home?"), in *Laudato Si'* Francis frequently uses some form of the word "consider." So perhaps the "ecological conversion" he urges in the encyclical is in large part a matter of our becoming more considerate human beings.

https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2025.10062 Published online by Cambridge University Press

species[52])—even as "above" and "below" can be ambiguous, even terribly misleading, terms.

In Book 1, Bernard assesses Eugenius's life and work thus far and chides him for becoming distracted from his true calling as pope. This means, for instance, spending too much time adjudicating property disputes between greedy people rather than taking time for reflection and devoting himself to the task fitting his ecclesial role. In fact, "leaving time for consideration" is the very definition—at least in Bernard's definition—of piety. "What is so essential to the worship of God," Bernard asks, "as the practice to which He exhorts in the psalm, 'Be still and see that I am God'? [Psalm 46]. This certainly is the chief object of consideration. Is anything, in all respects, so influential as consideration?"[53]

Consideration, however, is not simply mysticism or contemplation totally removed from practice. Bernard appeals to Eugenius's own experience in judging cases brought before him, when, due to a lack of consideration, things turned out badly. Furthermore, the practice of consideration makes one a better person, and thus a better actor in the world. As Bernard explains:

> First of all, consideration purifies the very fountain, that is the mind, from which it springs. Then it governs the affections, directs our actions, corrects excesses, softens the manners, adorns and regulates the life, and, lastly, bestows the knowledge of things divine and human alike. It is consideration that brings order out of disorder, puts in the links, pulls things together, investigates mysteries, traces the truth, weighs probabilities,[54] exposes shams and counterfeits. It is consideration which arranges beforehand what is to be done, and ponders what is accomplished, so that nothing faulty, or needing correction, may settle in the mind. It is consideration which in prosperity feels the sting of adversity, in adversity is as though it felt not; the one is fortitude, the other is prudence.[55]

Following upon his mention of fortitude and prudence, Bernard elaborates on the relationship between consideration and "justice" and "temperance"—that is, the other two cardinal or "hinge" virtues.[56] As Stephen J. Russell explains,

[52] One thinks of the film *My Octopus Teacher*, https://www.netflix.com/title/81045007.

[53] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Consideration*, 26.

[54] Note that Lonergan also pays a great deal of attention to "probabilities," especially "emerging probability," a worldview that may be traced to our third guide for consideration. See Patrick H. Byrne, "The Thomist Sources of Lonergan's Dynamic World View," *Thomist* 46 (1982): 108–45.

[55] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Consideration*, 26–27. I count no less than eighteen distinct verbs used to describe just what consideration does for the considerate person.

[56] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Consideration*, 27–30.

https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2025.10062 Published online by Cambridge University Press

there is considerable nuance in Bernard's and others' understanding of these virtues, for instance, whether they are four distinct virtues or simply four different aspects of one and the same virtue.[57] For present purposes, I simply suggest that, for this Cistercian reformer, the virtuous person will be a considerate person, and vice versa.

Considering a Failed Crusade and More

In Book 2, written five years later, Bernard explains further what he means by consideration, but he begins with comments on the Second Crusade, a disastrous military undertaking with many pilgrims tagging along. At the request of Eugenius III, Bernard had put out the clarion call. The failure of this enterprise and all the suffering it brought was deeply troubling and many were quick to blame Bernard. In his apology for his part in this immense failure, Bernard turns to the Old Testament to show how such failures do not of themselves prove that God is absent or has led them astray. Resting on his faith Bernard states his preference that blame fall upon him, rather than on God, who is not to blame and remains faithful even in dark and confusing times.[58]

To ensure that Eugenius does not regard these few paragraphs about this debacle as irrelevant or at best tangential to the topic at hand, Bernard writes, "If I remember, the subject of my discourse to your Excellency was to be *Consideration*. And certainly the matter to which I have referred [the crusade I preached] is important and requires much consideration."[59] Here, we may concur with Bernard and expand briefly on that concurrence to emphasize the continuity between Bernard's time and ours. If war was a matter for consideration in the middle of the twelfth century, surely it is a matter for consideration in ours—even if the realities of war and ways of thinking about it, within the Christian tradition and beyond, have evolved.[60] We must remember that Bernard was preaching a crusade with theological

[57] J. Stephen Russell, "Piety's Dance: The Cardinal Virtues in Bernard's *De consideratione*," *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 49, no. 1 (2014): 27–41.

[58] See Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Consideration*, 37–40.

[59] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Consideration*, 40; emphasis in the original

[60] Consider, for instance, the still painfully relevant issue of obliteration bombing, discussed in John C. Ford, SJ's classic article condemning the practice. In building his argument, Ford uses the word "consider" at least eleven times. For example: "We still must consider *what the result for the future will be if this means of warfare is made generally legitimate*." See John C. Ford, SJ, "The Morality of Obliteration Bombing," *Theological Studies* 5 (September 1944): 261–309, at 302; emphasis in the original.

https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2025.10062 Published online by Cambridge University Press

underpinnings, so consideration of war is surely grist for the mill of theological ethics.[61]

First and Last, the Pope Should Consider Himself

Without leaving aside war and other issues confronting us today (climate change, migration, gross inequality, etc.), we might ask just what it is—or who it is—that Bernard says the pope should be considering. He explains in more detail than we can recount here that Eugenius should consider "(1) himself, (2) things below him, (3) things around him, (4) things above him."[62] So, in a way that at once recalls Socrates's claim that the "unexamined life is not worth living" and anticipates Lonergan's stress on self-appropriation, Bernard instructs Eugenius to "Let, then, your consideration begin at yourself; and not only so, let it end there. Whithersoever it may roam, recall it to yourself, and it will bring with it the fruit of salvation."[63] To consider him*self*, Eugenius must consider *what* he is—"a man"; *who* he is—the pope; and *how* he is, that is, "what manner of man he is," or his character.[64]

Bernard explains that "The investigation of the first of these," *what* he is, "may be more the work of a philosopher than of an apostolic man; still, in the definition of a man as a rational mortal animal, there is something which you may, if you choose, carefully ponder."[65] Here, one might ask whether Bernard's plea that Eugenius consider *what* he is comes across as ambiguous, weak,

[61] The literature is vast but, limiting ourselves to our three guides, we note that Aquinas asks readers to consider war, with significant implications for just-war thinking as well as nonviolence (at least on the part of clerics), within the context of charity (*ST* II-II, q. 40). It is striking that Lonergan, by contrast, has little to say about war as a moral issue, even though he lived through two devasting world wars. Still, his insights can help us to consider theologically the most terrifying realities of war. See William P. George, "'Tongues of Fire': Hiroshima as Hell and a New Pentecost?," *Theological Studies* 8, no. 3 (December 2020): 860–81.

[62] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Consideration*, 42.

[63] Plato, *Apology*, 38a5-6. Some might ask whether a true Christian should not be considering others before oneself. But just as for Lonergan, *self*-appropriation requires self-*transcendence* and conversion, so Aquinas puts "love of self" right below "love of God" but ahead of "love of neighbor" in the "order of charity" (*ST* II-II, q. 26, aa. 2-3). Self-love properly understood as love of one's *true* self, precisely in relation to God, is for Aquinas the basis for love of neighbor. Inordinate self-love, on the other hand, is the source of every sin (*ST* I–II, q. 77, a. 4). Catherine of Siena (1347–1380), also put great emphasis on self-knowledge that was also heightened awareness of God and neighbor. See Dadosky, "Is There a Fourth Stage of Meaning?," 773–75.

[64] See Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Consideration*, 43.

[65] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Consideration*, 43.

https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2025.10062 Published online by Cambridge University Press

or both. At this point in the text, it is unclear—we get more clarity later—what exactly "a man" means in terms of gender and age. Furthermore, if the definition of a human as a "rational mortal animal" is something that Eugenius "may, if you choose, carefully ponder," this appears to be more a suggestion than a true imperative.

Thus, one might ask whether, today, considering *what* one is—a human being—should not be taken more seriously, with no illusions about the challenges this might bring. Consider, for instance that Bernard's philosopher may not always agree with other philosophers on what it means to be human—or rational and mortal. Today, given such realities as wars, identity politics, disputes regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion, and more, just what would it mean to stress one's own as well as others' "whatness," or humanity, before all else? Or, when questions of human rights are raised, what, exactly, do we mean by human?[66] So, it may be essential to consider *what* one is before all else. But it is also intellectually, and in other ways, demanding to do so.

When it comes to *who* Eugenius is—the pope—Bernard is more detailed. Eugenius should recall his "origins," that is, his earlier formation as a Cistercian, upon which, as pope, he can and should build.[67] "This consideration" of origins "makes a despiser of honour even in the midst of honour."[68] The pope is to consider the "burden of service," rather than the "privilege of lordship" over others. He is who he is "only by the grace of God," and he must consider that he cannot do everything on his own; prophets have come before him, and others will follow.[69] He is not to live a life of luxury but of duty. With care of all the churches, his life cannot be one of ease. Just as Jesus commissioned the apostles—"Not lording it over the charge allotted to you, but making yourselves example to the Flock"—so should it be with Eugenius. "You will,"

[66] Consider this excerpt from the preamble to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the most widely ratified human rights treaty (the United States is the only UN member country that is not a party): "Bearing in mind that, as indicated in the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, 'the child, by reason of his physical and mental immaturity, needs special safeguards and care, including appropriate legal protection, *before as well as after birth*.'..."; emphasis added. To see the challenge of establishing the *whatness* of human beings, note that this statement does not use inclusive language, does not state exactly what is meant by "before ... birth," and does not venture to say what "appropriate" legal protection might be. For the sake of agreement on the convention, the lack of elaboration in the preamble or the articles that follow on just what the child requires "before birth" may, for good reason, have been intentional.

[67] Just as, in our day, the "origins" of Pope Francis were, to a significant degree, the Society of Jesus, and of Pope Leo XIV, the Augustinians. Nor, for present purposes, should we overlook Lonergan's Ignatian and, perhaps by way of Aquinas, his Dominican "origins."

[68] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Consideration*, 44.

[69] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Consideration*, 45.

https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2025.10062 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Bernard says, "vanquish the wolves, but not lord it over the sheep, the care of which you of course undertook that you might feed them, not oppress them. If you have well considered who you are, you are not ignorant that this is your duty."[70]

The considerations of *who* he is as pope continue in this vein, with Bernard placing emphasis on Eugenius's own conscience, able to call him to account.[71] But to answer better the question of *who* the pope is Bernard returns to the more fundamental question of *what* he is, "a man." Here, it becomes clear that he is referring not to the pope as a grown male but rather to how he came into this world, "born in sin," as a vulnerable child fully in need of others' care.[72] "Strip off the disguise of this fleeting honour [of being pope] and the tinsel of this sham glory, so that you may consider yourself in your bare nakedness, for naked you came out of your mother's womb."[73] And further, "While you think of yourself as supreme pontiff, bear in mind as well that you not only were, but are, worthless ashes."[74]

To know himself, Eugenius must consider, then, both *what* he is and *who* he is. But he must also consider "what manner of man he is," that is, his character. Here, Bernard counsels moderation, for "every abiding place outside the bounds of moderation is only exile to the wise man."[75] So, for example, Eugenius is not to get too long, too wide, too high, too deep. "By length," Bernard explains, "I mean a man promising himself a long life; by breadth, his being racked with superfluous cares; by height, his trusting too much in himself; by depth, his being unduly depressed."[76] Bernard goes on to note particular vices—or, given the nature of consideration, distractions—for which Eugenius must be on the lookout. These include "idleness, trifles, and profitless conversation." Bernard does not think "avarice" will be a problem for Eugenius; unlike some other popes, he has no great love of money or other worldly things. But "credulity," being too quick to trust sly people, leading to anger at being duped, is another moral pitfall of which Eugenius must be aware—a warning from Bernard all too relevant in our day of scams, cult-like followings, conspiracy theories, and misplaced or absent trust.[77]

[70] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Consideration*, 50.
[71] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Consideration*, 54.
[72] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Consideration*, 58.
[73] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Consideration*, 57.
[74] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Consideration*, 58. According to the Roman Missal, all who come forward to receive ashes on Ash Wednesday, whatever their age, class, race, gender, and so on, might be, hear the words: "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you will return."
[75] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Consideration*, 59.
[76] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Consideration*, 63.
[77] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Consideration*, 64–65.

https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2025.10062 Published online by Cambridge University Press

But He Should Consider That Which Is below, around, and above Him, Too

Although consideration of self, which we have not exhausted, is the first—and last—order of papal business, considering does not stop there. Eugenius must also consider that which is *below* him, *around* him, and *above* him. With regard to the first, as the heading for the opening of Book 3 puts it, "The pope should aim not at subjecting all men to himself but at bringing them into the bosom of the Church."[78] Stewardship, not ownership, must mark the relationship of the pope to those under him.[79] Bernard goes into considerable detail about what Eugenius must consider, such as the matter of exemptions of religious order[80] or the possibility that those under him might offer bribes.[81] But here, I simply note that similar matters for consideration arise today. One thinks of the pope's relationship to bishops viewed as problematic, or decisions about the Latin Mass, who is allowed to preach, or whether same-sex marriages should be blessed. And we cannot overlook the clerical sexual abuse crisis, which may be viewed as a consideration crisis to the degree that not only abusers but also religious leaders and others did not consider fully, if at all, the profound and painful impact of the abuse on its victims.[82]

We might also note, however, Bernard's concern that Eugenius steer clear of considering, or passing judgment on, temporal matters better left up to those who govern that sphere. To make his point, Bernard places the pope alongside Christ himself and his response to those wanting him to weigh in on an inheritance case: "Who made Me a judge?"[83]—another connection to consider between Eugenius's time and ours.[84]

[78] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Consideration*, 69.

[79] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Consideration*, 70.

[80] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Consideration*, 85.

[81] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Consideration*, 111–12.

[82] In his analysis some fifty years ago of the "disaster" of the Catholic Church taking so long to condemn the practice of slavery, John Maxwell gives several reasons for that tardiness. "Yet another reason," he states, "seems to be that Catholic moralists, in general, have a tendency to neglect a *consideration* of the natural and necessary effects of the slave-master's acts or omissions and to pay more attention to his intentions or motives"; John Francis Maxwell, *Slavery and the Catholic Church: The History of Catholic Teaching Concerning the Morality of the Institution of Slavery* (Chichester and London: Barry Rose Publishers, 1975), 15; emphasis added. One might argue that, in hauntingly similar fashion, over the years religious leaders have tended to give more consideration to the moral status and welfare of offenders under their care than to the effects of their acts on victims.

[83] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Consideration*, 24.

[84] "Who am I to judge?" may be the most frequently quoted if variously interpreted words of Pope Francis. See Nicole Winfield, "Who Am I to Judge?'

https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2025.10062 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Bernard reminds Eugenius that he must also consider those *around* him.[85] These may also include those under him, for instance, clergy, but the distinction has to do with proximity. Again, Bernard goes into much detail. Here I simply make three observations. First, when it comes to questions of who or what to consider, for Bernard, nearness counts.[86] The fact that the pope's reign is, in a way, over the whole world, does not mean he can overlook what is transpiring close to home, for example, in his day, the tumult in Rome. Second, while consideration of those around him means special care for them, it does not mean that he alone can expect, or be expected, to cure or solve all their problems.[87] Third, discussion of those around the pope gives Bernard occasion to remind Eugenius that there are many levels of responsibility and care. Consideration is, in part, a matter of respecting these various levels. Had he been writing today Bernard might have reminded the pope that considering and micromanaging are not the same thing.[88]

Finally, Eugenius must consider things *above* him. Although "the former books, although they bear the title 'On Consideration,' have very much in them relating to action, inasmuch as they teach or admonish that some things should be not only considered, but also done … the things which are above you—and that is our topic—do not call for action, but for contemplation."[89] These two kinds of consideration, however, are not separate or contradictory. For we rise to the things above—"God and the Divine"— "by the creature of the earth."[90] Here, consideration of things above involves the realms of opinion, faith, and understanding, and objects of consideration include the Holy

Pope Says of Gay Priests," AP, July 29, 2013, https://apnews.com/general-news-7b465b60945f40deb3a68b3de742f84a; and Joshua J. McElwee, "'Francis Explains 'Who Am I to Judge?'" *National Catholic Reporter*, January 10, 2016, https://www.ncronline.org/francis-explains-who-am-i-judge.

85 Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Consideration*, 96–102.

86 For Aquinas, as a matter of charity and of the "foresight" central to the virtue of prudence, even future generations might qualify as "near." See William P. George, "Regarding Future Neighbours: Thomas Aquinas and Concern for Posterity," *Heythrop Journal* 33, no. 3 (July 1992): 283–306.

87 Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Consideration*, 110.

88 With regard to "levels" of care or governance, one might consider a key element of Catholic social teaching, namely, the principle of "subsidiarity." Problematic situations existing at a lower level of governance should be addressed at that level, with higher levels playing a subsidiary role—ready to assist if needed. In the United States, one need only utter the words "states' rights" to see how challenging the application of this principle can be.

89 Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Consideration*, 129.

90 Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Consideration*, 146.

https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2025.10062 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Angels, the Being of God, the Person of Christ, God the Judge, the reality of Hell, and a mystical interpretation of the Holy Scriptures.[91]

There is, of course, much to be said about each of these, for instance ways in which Bernard's own approach to the Christian faith differs from that of the dialecticians of his time. Here, I simply stress one point: that Bernard's various distinctions—regarding the self (what, who, how); between and among the things below, around, and above; and between consideration leading to action and consideration as contemplation—are not separations. Even as each of the five books has a distinct focus, all five come under the one title, *On Consideration*. Further, in Book 5, Bernard discusses the mystical interpretation of God in terms of God's eternal "length, breadth, height and depth."[92] Recall, however, that he discussed the self in the very same, or at least analogous, spatial terms. Perhaps this is what Bernard meant by saying that the self is both the starting point and the end point for consideration. Through mystical union, but also by consideration leading to and informing action, the pope, with his human length, breadth, height, and depth, may ascend to the divine and return to his finite self—but to a more considerate self, divinely transformed.

Thomas Aquinas and the Considerations That Prudence Requires

Bernard Lonergan did not focus directly on considering or consideration. Bernard of Clairvaux, by contrast, devoted five books to the topic. Thomas Aquinas perhaps falls in between. None of the 361 major questions in the *Summa Theologiae*, broken down into about three thousand more specific questions or "articles," appears to ask the reader to consider directly what it means to consider something.[93] But Aquinas repeatedly uses some form of the word "consider"—sometimes interchangeably with "inquire"[94]—to introduce question after question about such matters as the divine essence,[95] the divine relations,[96] angels,[97] or the union of body and soul.[98]

[91] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Consideration*, 129–56.

[92] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Consideration*, 165–66.

[93] We would likely have a very good grasp of what he means by "to consider" were we to focus on everything he has to say in the *Summa Theologiae* about human knowing and doing. But, in fact, we can learn through experience what Aquinas means by the term if we follow, in attentive, intelligent, reasonable, and responsible ways, his reasoning in answering question after question about all manner of things.

[94] Recall that, for Lonergan, "inquiring" is one of the "procedures of the mind."

[95] *ST* I, q. 2.

[96] *ST* I, q. 28.

[97] *ST* I, q. 50.

[98] *ST* I, q. 76.

https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2025.10062 Published online by Cambridge University Press

This is only a small sampling of what Aquinas asks the reader to consider in part 1 of that great work. He continues his considering ways in part 2, with its two parts, and in part 3, left unfinished.[99] This surely includes moral questions, for instance when he announces that "we will consider what counts as murder, whereby a man inflicts the greatest harm on his neighbor."[100] So, differences in their thinking and modes of discourse notwithstanding, not unlike Bernard, Aquinas is asking the reader not only to consider oneself but also things below, around, and most certainly above the self.[101] Furthermore, if readers accompany Aquinas in considering the numerous questions he poses in the *Summa*—each with its "Whether…?";[102] its "Objections"; its "On the contrary"; its "I answer that"; and its "Replies to the objections"—they may acquire, in Lonergan's words, a plethora of "data of consciousness" upon which to reflect and act, and thus become more considerate human beings.

There seems to be no end to what Aquinas is asking the reader of the *Summa Theologiae* to consider. In fact, there is no end because that work was left unfinished, and later commentators, including Lonergan, would raise further questions of their own.[103] But because our primary if not sole focus is on ethics as reflection on one's life (attentive, intelligent, reasonable, responsible—or not), with decision-making so much a part of that life, we will limit our focus to the few questions dealing with the virtue of prudence, introduced in this way: "After treating of the theological virtues, we must in due sequence *consider* the cardinal virtues. In the first place we shall *consider* prudence in itself; secondly, its parts; thirdly, the corresponding gift; fourthly, the contrary vices; fifthly, the precepts concerning prudence."[104] We cannot give

[99] A word search of the *Summa Theologiae*, Latin or English (https://aquinas.cc/la/en/~ST), reveals just how frequently Aquinas uses *considerare/consideration* or consider/consideration.

[100] *ST* II-II, q. 64. To see how much there is to consider in this question, see William P. George, "Murder, He Wrote: Introducing Christian Ethics through One Question in the *Summa*," *Teaching Theology and Religion* 11, no. 4 (October 2008): 222–29.

[101] As Aquinas points out, in the *Summa Theologiae* "All things are treated of under the aspect of God: either because they are God Himself or because they refer to God as their beginning and end" (*ST* I, q. 1, a. 7).

[102] Thus, answering, sometimes with subtle qualifications, questions not just at the level of *understanding* or hypothesis ("What is it?") but of *judgment*: ("Whether it is so?").

[103] See Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Grace and Freedom: Operative Grace in the Thought of Thomas* Aquinas, vol. 1, Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan, ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000); and Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas*, vol. 2, Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan, ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997).

[104] *ST* II-II, q. 47; emphasis added.

https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2025.10062 Published online by Cambridge University Press

each of these topics their due. Rather, we will consider: (1) the relationship of prudence to the other virtues, especially charity; (2) the various kinds or spheres of prudence; (3) the quasi-integral parts of prudence; and, very briefly, (4) the vices opposed to or resembling prudence.

Prudence and Other Virtues

In *Laudato Si'*, Francis says that "everything is connected."[105] Aquinas would likely agree. He certainly stresses the connection among the virtues. Here, I simply point out that he considered, on the one hand, the connection between the grace-filled theological virtue of charity and the other virtues, and, on the other, the connection between the virtue of prudence and other virtues. So, we note that charity is the "mother and root of all the virtues."[106] But because prudence and the other virtues are in fact "infused along with charity," this means that charity is not exercised concretely apart from other virtues.[107] One might say, "No charity, no justice" and also "no justice, no charity in act." Now, prudence is connected not only to charity but especially to the other cardinal or "hinge" virtues: justice, temperance, and fortitude or courage. That is, prudence is required if the ends of these virtues are to be attained in the concrete.[108] So not only is there no charity without prudence, but there is no justice, temperance, or courage as well. This leads us to consider whether human beings can be truly moral, that is, authentically living up to their own nature as human beings, apart from divine assistance.[109] But it also leads us to consider whether graced charity can operate apart from human beings' good habits or virtues, such as justice or prudence. According to Aquinas it would seem not. Again, grace heals and builds upon natural capacities; it does not replace them.

Kinds of Prudence

Virtues, whether theological or acquired, are exercised concretely. And in keeping with that concreteness, Aquinas distinguishes different kinds, or spheres, of prudence. There is prudence by which individuals direct their own lives but also prudence that extends to "the common good of the multitude":

[105] *LS* §117.

[106] *ST* I-II, q. 62, a. 4; *ST* II-II, q. 23, a. 8.

[107] *ST* I-II, q. 65, a. 3.

[108] *ST* II-II, q. 47, aa. 6-7.

[109] See Lonergan, *Grace and Freedom*; J. Michael Stebbins, *The Divine Initiative: Grace, World-Order and Human Freedom in the Early Writings of Bernard Lonergan* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995).

https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2025.10062 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the household or some larger body, such as the military or a kingdom.[110] Interestingly, "political prudence" includes not only "regnative" prudence required for ruling[111] but also the ability to follow, in a free and rational manner, the directives set by the rulers—as is the case with slaves and subjects.[112]

These distinctions, especially when it comes to slavery, require more discussion, but here I simply make three points.[113] First, what we need to consider as we live our lives will differ according to our differing roles: parent, restaurant shift manager, journalist, school principal or school board president, head of a religious order or congregation, elected leader of a nation, and so on. Second, prudence is required both for making good rules, such as the "rules of the road" for drivers, and for following those rules, as, for instance, good and safe drivers do.[114] Third, the prudent person may occupy multiple roles. A hospital administrator overseeing many may, at the same time, be under a particular doctor's orders or prudent care. As Bernard of Clairvaux made clear, who one is—say, a pope—will say a lot about what that person needs to consider. By distinguishing between and among kinds or spheres of prudence, Aquinas would likely agree—even if, in real life, the distinctions and relations are not nearly so simple as he might make them seem.

The Quasi-Integral Parts of Prudence

But what does the virtue of prudence itself ask that we consider? Here, we turn to the virtue's eight "quasi-integral parts": memory, understanding, docility, shrewdness, reason, foresight, circumspection, and caution.[115] It is clear from questions regarding at least three of these (memory, docility, and circumspection) that, for Aquinas, considering is integral to the exercise of each quasi-integral part.[116] If we ask what each of these parts requires the prudent person to consider, the possible answers are many, depending on what

[110] Displaying his preference for kingship as the best form of government, Aquinas explains that "the species of prudence should be denominated rather from a kingdom, *yet so as to comprehend under regnative all other rightful forms of government*, but not perverse forms which are opposed to virtue, and which, accordingly, do not pertain to prudence" (*ST* II-II, q. 50, a. 1, ad. 2; emphasis added).

[111] *ST* II-II, q. 50, a. 1.

[112] *ST* II-II, q. 50, a. 2.

[113] For instance, one might ask just what it means for Aquinas to say that slaves retain their rationality and, especially, their "free will." See *ST* II-II, q. 50, a. 2.

[114] *ST* II-II, q. 47, a. 12.

[115] *ST* II-II, q. 49, aa. 1–8.

[116] With regard to memory: "Secondly, whatever a man wishes to retain in his memory *he must carefully consider and set in order*, so that he may pass easily from one memory to another" (*ST* II-II, q. 49, a. 1, ad. 2; emphasis added). With regard to docility:

https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2025.10062 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the issue happens to be. Here, I will offer an example or two to illustrate each part. But because prudence operates in the concrete it might be good—that is, prudent—for readers also to imagine cases of their own to see just what prudence is asking us to consider before we act.

So, *memory* requires that we consider the past as fully and accurately as possible: While famous quips may carry only partial truths, Santayana's "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it" has relevance here. So, too, are remembrances of what went well for us or others, and why. In any event, "true to being memory," as Josef Pieper, puts it,[117] can be quite a challenge, as the example of the 1619 project, cited previously, may illustrate. Recalling Lonergan's discussion of biases, there are all sorts of ways in which memory can fade, become distorted, rendered false, or fall victim to a kind presentism that sees no need to look back. In addition to historians, elders with long memories to draw on will always be needed, so long as they do not get stuck in a past in need of real change.

The second quasi-integral part is understanding, "the right estimate about some final principle, which is taken as self-evident."[118] Such principles, for instance "do good and avoid evil" or "be just," are best understood as heuristic principles: they move us toward a good decision but of themselves are not sufficient for that decision. For instance, physicians may be committed to "do no harm," but they may need a lot more information, and years of medical training, if they are to honor the norm in a particular case. Still, first principles grasped by human intelligence do matter: whether "do no harm" or "maximize profit" is the guiding norm for a physician, or an entire health-care system, can make a huge difference in the concrete.[119] Truly prudent people will seriously consider questions such as "What are we really after in this case?" or "What is our true moral bottom line?."

A physician seeking to do no harm may also need to consider the advice of others, for instance, specialists in another area of medicine. If so, this is an example of docility—not the passive attitude often associated with the term,

"*... since such matters are of infinite variety, no one man can consider them all sufficiently*; ... Hence in matters of prudence man stands in very great need of being taught by others ..." (*ST* II-II, q. 49, a. 3; emphasis added). With regard to circumspection: "Just as it belongs to foresight to look on that which is by its nature suitable to an end, *so it belongs to circumspection to consider whether it be suitable to the end in view of the circumstances*" (*ST* II-II, q. 49, a. 7, ad.3; emphasis added).

[117] See Josef Pieper, *The Cardinal Virtues* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World, Inc., 1965), 15.

[118] *ST* II-II, q. 49, a. 2.

[119] Aquinas warns that the "greed for gain ... knows no limit and tends to infinity" (*ST* II-II, q. 77, a. 4).

https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2025.10062 Published online by Cambridge University Press

but rather a true eagerness and effort to listen to others and to consider what they have to say. So, when it comes to facing issues requiring decision and action, for instance climate change or species extinction, policy-makers will need to consult those with more knowledge than their own. International lawyers need to work with scientists,[120] and those concerned about the health of the oceans should consider what Indigenous Peoples say and do.[121] When it comes to many issues, I see no reason why docility should not include what we can learn if we consult future generations[122] or other species, whether on land, in the air, or in the sea.[123]

If docility often requires painstaking and time-consuming consultation with others, shrewdness complements docility by moving quickly on our own when we can and should. Quoting Andronicus, Aquinas says that shrewdness is "a habit whereby congruities are discovered rapidly."[124] First responders, for instance, must be prudent in this way. Politicians and others who "kick the can down the road" or call for "another study" when that is simply a stall tactic to avoid a painful change of law, behavior, or direction, may be less than shrewd. So, while docility demands that we need to consider more with help from others, shrewdness requires that when we know enough, we need to act.[125]

The fifth part of prudence is reason, "not the power of reason, but its good use."[126] Were we God or even angels, this would not be a problem. We would grasp principles and their applications to specific cases in a single act.

[120] See Joseph Orangias, "The Nexus between International Law and Science: An Analysis of Scientific Expert Bodies in Multilateral Treaty-Making," *International Community Law Review* 25 (2023): 60–93.

[121] See, for instance, Marine Biology and Sustainability Learning Center, https://www.marinebiodiversity.ca/how-indigenous-marine-knowledge-reshapes-modern-ocean-conservation/.

[122] For such a future orientation, see C. G. Weeramantry, *Tread Lightly on the Earth: Religion, the Environment and the Human Future*, A Report for the World Future Council (Pannipitiya, Sri Lanka: Stamford Lake, 2009). Future generations are also a concern of Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'*.

[123] In the introduction to a later printing of *The Sea Around Us*, renowned ocean scientist and advocate Sylvia Earle writes: "Most remarkable for me is what Rachel Carson did imagine. Her writings are so sensitive to the feelings of fish, birds, and other animals that she could put herself in in their place, buoyed by air or by water, gliding over or under the ocean's surface"; Rachel Carson, *The Sea Around Us* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), xi.

[124] *ST* II-II, q. 49, a. 5.

[125] See *ST* II-II, q. 47, a. 8: "Whether command is the chief act of prudence?."

[126] *ST* II-II, q. 49, a. 5, ad. 1. Here, we should recall Lonergan's discussion of how bias can affect our reasoning.

https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2025.10062 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Unfortunately, we are neither God nor angels.[127] It's one thing to grasp that we should, as Pope Francis would say, "care for our common home." It's another thing to decide what that means in, say, the case of seabed mining, when recovering vast resources required for green energy (batteries, wind turbines, etc.) to replace fossil fuels can seriously disrupt ecosystems and newly discovered sea life. Other morally thorny issues regarding health care, migration, housing, business, education, AI, parenting, and so forth require a lot of careful reasoning, too—perhaps especially when "reasonable people" disagree. There is just so much to consider and, here, soundbites or slogans are of limited help.

If memory requires that we consider the past, foresight requires that we consider "future contingents," that is, what might happen in the short or long term, depending in part on present decisions.[128] It would be hard to overestimate the importance of this part, for, as Aquinas explains, "Foresight is the principal of all the parts of prudence."[129] Think for instance of all the future contingents at issue when it comes to responding, or failing to respond, to climate change.[130] This is just one of numerous issues, from the personal to the global, that call for prudence. So, in the interest of space, but also to aid in the process of self-appropriation, here I simply invite readers to complete this statement in ways befitting one or more of their roles in life: "Let's consider what will or might happen if we …"

One reason good decision-making is so challenging is that circumstances differ and change. It might be good to speak with someone about off-putting behavior, but as the saying goes, "Now is neither the time nor place." To deal with varied and changing circumstances, circumspection is required. In response to the objection that circumstances are infinite, Aquinas replies that "Though the number of possible circumstances be infinite, the number of actual circumstances is not; and the judgment of reason in matters of action is

[127] "In the truths which they know naturally, [angels] *at once* behold all things whatsoever that can be known in them" (*ST* I, q. 58, a. 3; emphasis added). See also William P. George, "'Angelism' and Its Devilish Effects on Education," *Chicago Studies* 39 (Summer 2000): 194–210.

[128] *ST* II-II, q. 49, a. 6.

[129] *ST* II-II, q. 49, a. 6, ad. 1.

[130] Note the title of this 2001 statement by the U.S. Catholic Bishops: "Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence, and the Common Good," https://www.usccb.org/resources/global-climate-change-plea-dialogue-prudence-and-common-good. Whether the bishops have been robustly prudent in following up on their own call is open to question. See Daniel R. DiLeo, "Study: Most US Catholic Bishops Kept Silent on Francis' Climate Change Push," *National Catholic Reporter*, October 19, 2021, https://www.ncronline.org/earthbeat/politics/study-most-us-catholic-bishops-kept-silent-francis-climate-change-push.

https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2025.10062 Published online by Cambridge University Press

influenced by things which are few in number."[131] The challenge to the prudent person or organization is to sort out the relevant circumstances that must be considered in this case with this family, this school, this city—and on and on. When asking for a ride home from a party, I need not consider whether the car is red or blue, but prudence requires that I consider whether the prospective driver is sober or not.

Finally, prudence requires caution. Perhaps Aquinas placed it last for emphasis, for it is surely needed for good decision-making. Bad decisions can have enormously harmful, even catastrophic consequences.[132] As Aquinas explains, however, good is mixed with evil, and the aim is to have "such a grasp of the good as to avoid evil."[133] So, the prudent decision-maker must consider not only worst-case scenarios; relatively good outcomes, and how they may be realized, must also be fully in the picture. Furthermore, recall that prudence is a virtue connected to other virtues. Thus "Caution is required in moral acts, that we may be on our guard, not against acts of virtue, but against the hindrance of acts of virtue."[134] In other words, no less than Bernard of Clairvaux, Aquinas is urging the prudent decision-maker to consider his or her own character. And because prudence is especially connected to the theological virtue of charity and is thus informed by God's healing and elevating grace, the person cautious about what, who, and how he or she is may become at once a more considerate and a more charitable human being.

Vices Opposed to or Falsely Resembling Prudence

Because caution requires being on the lookout for that which would undermine virtue, Aquinas would have us "now consider the vices opposed to prudence," such as imprudence and negligence, as well as those falsely resembling this virtue.[135] This topic requires more attention than space allows

[131] *ST* II-II, q. 49, a. 7, ad. 1. Here, Aquinas might have said "*relatively* few"—relative, that is, to an infinite number. The morally relevant circumstances in some cases—say in a war—may be finite in number, but they can still be many and enormously complex. This makes circumspection more crucial still.

[132] Given the immense power of technology, it is understandable that the philosopher Hans Jonas counseled that we should be guided by a "heuristics of fear." See Hans Jonas, *The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 26–27, 202–03. On the other hand, Aquinas warns that fear can cause distortion, "making things seem either bigger or smaller than they are" (*ST* I-II, q. 44, a. 2).

[133] *ST* II-II, q. 49, a. 8.

[134] *ST* II-II, q. 49, a. 8, ad 1.

[135] *ST* II-II, q. 53.

https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2025.10062 Published online by Cambridge University Press

here.[136] We can at least consider a fitting example: When we say, "I'll take that into consideration" or "We'll give careful consideration to your proposal," and end up doing nothing of the kind, this is what Aquinas means by inconstancy—a sometimes serious failure to follow through.[137]

Three Sources Pointing Beyond Themselves

Although Lonergan, Bernard of Clairvaux, and Thomas Aquinas have been helpful in examining the place of consideration in our lives, I have hardly considered their work in full. Nor have I sufficiently considered contributions from others beyond the three. To remedy that in part, I would stress that they point beyond themselves, inviting us to consider questions, sources, topics, and problems that, for various reasons, they have not pursued.

Bernard Lonergan

Lonergan's thought is clearly open-ended and left unfinished. Human beings have a "desire to know" that is "pure and unrestricted," our failures to follow this desire notwithstanding.[138] Even in his extensive writings, Lonergan did not consider everything worth considering, but he did encourage others to consider more. For instance, his move from a classicist to a more historically minded or empirical view of culture, with no one culture viewed as normative for all (consider the problem of "Eurocentrism"), encourages theologians and others critically to engage, appreciate, and assess various cultures.[139] His focus on an "emerging religious consciousness of our time" encourages interfaith and interreligious dialogue, and his sustained engagement of philosophy, history and historiography, the sciences, economics, and more is an invitation for others to do the same.[140] What he calls notions rather than concepts of being and value are dynamic and heuristic, encouraging an ongoing spirit of inquiry.[141] Because human beings are not the only beings, the notion of being points us toward other beings, living and nonliving—and, of course, a possible "supreme being" as well.[142] Lonergan's stress on conversion calls us to

[136] For more on this topic, see George, "Regarding Future Neighbours," 298–99.
[137] *ST* II-II, q. 53, a. 5.
[138] See Lonergan, *Insight*, 5, 9 and *passim*.
[139] See Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 48–49.
[140] See Lonergan, "Prolegomena to the Study of the Emerging Religious Consciousness of Our Time," in *A Third Collection*, 52–69.
[141] See Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 14–15.
[142] See Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 110.

https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2025.10062 Published online by Cambridge University Press

expand our own horizons of consideration, and those conversions are never complete.

With such openings, it is no wonder that others have used his work when considering, as he himself did not, feminist and womanist thought,[143] development in Africa,[144] climate change,[145] and law,[146] including international law.[147] Readers both of Lonergan and of these pages are encouraged to consider yet further questions, issues, problems, and sources. And as we go about our considering—which for Aquinas can be synonymous with "inquiring"—theologians especially, but others, too, should consider in depth, or ponder, Lonergan's reminder that "the question of God is the question that questions questioning itself."[148]

Bernard of Clairvaux

As for Bernard of Clairvaux, he was no doubt bound by his times and in other ways, and he was addressing a particular person—a pope. What if we simply applied his main points about what a pope should consider to what anyone should consider? Would this not take us beyond the specifics of *On Consideration*? Individual readers of *On Consideration*, or of this article, could consider Bernard's advice to Eusebius III as directed to themselves: consider *what* you, the reader, are as a human being. Consider who you are: a parent, a citizen, a police officer, a teacher, a student, a consumer, a lawyer, a minister, a soldier—maybe some combination of these or so many other

[143] Cynthia S. W. Crysdale, ed., *Lonergan and Feminism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994). As the abstract for an article on M. Shawn Copeland's theology puts it, this eminent scholar "joins a liberationist epistemology with the conceptual framework of Bernard Lonergan to offer both a stinging critique of racism and a constructive Catholic theological anthropology"; Christopher Pramuk, "Living in the Master's House: Race and Rhetoric in the Theology of M. Shawn Copeland," *Horizons* 32, no. 2 [Fall 2005]: 295–331.

[144] See, among his several publications drawing on Lonergan, Joseph Ogbonnaya, *Lonergan, Social Transformation, and Sustainable Human Development* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2013); and Joseph Ogbonnaya, "Towards a More Indigenous African Catholicism: Insights from Lonergan's Notion of Culture," *The Ecumenist* 52, no. 1 (2015): 17–23.

[145] See n21 above.

[146] See Patrick McKinley Brennan, "Asking the Right Questions: Harnessing the Insights of Bernard Lonergan for the Rule of Law," *Journal of Law and Religion* 21, no. 1 (2005/2006): 1–38.

[147] See William P. George, "International Law as Horizon," in *Ongoing Collaboration in the Year of St. Paul*, vol. 23, Lonergan Workshop, ed. Frederick Lawrence (Boston: Boston College, 2012): 195–226.

[148] Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 103.

https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2025.10062 Published online by Cambridge University Press

things. Furthermore, whoever you are, consider what, or who, is above you, below you, around you. Most certainly consider how you are. That is, consider your character. With the help of others—friends, philosophers, poets, elders, economists, filmmakers, podcasters, to name a few—consider these things, in your own time and place, and see if your horizons of consideration expand beyond what Bernard himself might have had in mind when addressing his Cistercian brother, now pope.

Thomas Aquinas

When we turn to Aquinas who, in the *Summa Theologiae* (hardly his only work), invites readers to consider hundreds and hundreds of questions, we might recall Lonergan's comment toward the end of *Insight* that he spent "years reaching up to the mind of Aquinas" and was profoundly changed in the process.[149] Were readers today to take Aquinas as seriously, they, too, might be changed. Their repeated experiences of considering question after question would become "data of consciousness," which they could objectify for the sake of greater self-knowledge and conversion.

We also note that even in the few pages of the *Summa* we have discussed, namely, the virtue of prudence with its eight "quasi-integral parts," Aquinas lays out the various things a decision-making person or a group must consider: the past (memory), input from others (docility), particular circumstances (circumspection), the future (foresight), and so on. He leaves to us the task of filling in the blanks, with others' help, of what we should consider in any particular case. For instance, while memory may require that we consider the past, Aquinas does not tell us which past, or which particulars of that past we must consider as fully and accurately as possible: One's health history? The history of a particular business? Slavery in the United States and elsewhere? One's faith tradition? The "history of ideas" concerning any number of subjects? Earth history? The history of the cosmos?

Nor, when it comes to docility, does he elaborate on who our consideration consultants should be: experts in our field or in other fields? Artists and poets? Those most likely to be affected by our decisions? Those with whom we disagree? These are only a few examples from two of the eight "quasi-integral parts." Multiplying examples for ourselves might convince us that, going beyond Aquinas, we need to broaden our horizons of consideration without losing focus (recall what he says about circumstances being limited in any one case) if we are to be prudent and thus more just, more courageous,

[149] Lonergan, *Insight*, 769. See n103 and n109 previously.

https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2025.10062 Published online by Cambridge University Press

more self-disciplined, more charitable, and, in short, more considerate human beings.[150]

Teaching Consideration

Thomas Aquinas, Bernard of Clairvaux, and Bernard Lonergan were great teachers. Two of them were university professors. So, those in this role might ask themselves: "How can I give more attention in my teaching to the topic of consideration?" I might suggest a few pedagogical strategies, but experienced teachers are quite able to devise their own. In any event, professional teachers at any level are not my sole concern. Just as readers of *On Consideration* might take Bernard's advice to a pope and apply it to their own lives, so I would stress that, in one way or another, virtually everyone is called to be a teacher, if only by example—even as we remain life-long learners. Plumbers bring apprentices with them to a job; parents but also older siblings teach younger children to look both ways in traffic, for example, but also about other pitfalls in life; veteran players counsel rookies on how the game is played; Indigenous Peoples teach others to consider nature in new but also very old ways; an octopus teaches a somewhat lost human being how to live.[151] We might simply ask: What if all teachers, whatever their role in life and whoever their students might be, spent more time designing and offering lessons, free of charge, on the considerate and inconsiderate life?

Considering as Theologizing?

Saint Bernard counsels a pope, but anyone, really, to consider oneself, but in relation to God and to what is "above," "around," and "below." For Thomas Aquinas, considering is a matter of raising and answering distinct yet related questions—hundreds if not thousands of them in the *Summa Theologiae* alone—"under the aspect of God." Bernard Lonergan has much in common with these earlier exemplars of considering and consideration but, in closing, I would stress especially his observation, noted previously, that "the question of God is the question that questions questioning itself."

Now, for Lonergan, considering involves four levels of intentionality (experience, understanding, judging, deciding) and arguably four stages of meaning as well, with the fourth stage being especially theologically rich.[152] Lonergan's

[150] Here I refer only to the four cardinal virtues and one theological virtue. There are numerous other virtues—such as faith, and hope, patience, and kindness—that are relevant, too.

[151] See *My Octopus Teacher*.

[152] See Dadosky, "Is There a Fourth Stage of Meaning?."

https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2025.10062 Published online by Cambridge University Press

observation that "the question of God questions questioning itself" has significant implications for the theological character of considering and of the considerate life. Let us consider three.

First, the "questioning itself" that "the question of God questions" is not restricted to the questioning or the considering that occurs, say, in a college theology course, a theological journal such as this, or a gathering of theologians. Rather, anyone who considers any number of things, including themselves, in a serious, open, questioning, and especially loving way may, without naming it, be theologizing or doing theology. The question of God is ever in the background or the distant horizon of their questioning and of their considering. These theologizers or theologians may be believers or nonbelievers, deeply religious, or "nones." With Augustine, they may be wanderers in this world, with restless hearts, seeking that which they do not know, with a "transcendental exigence" moving them from deep within.[153] If this is so, then members of the theology society might not be only those with degrees or even an expressed interest in theology. Rather, the membership might be comprised of considerate people everywhere, even if they are sometimes inconsiderate, too. For as Martin Luther might have put it, we are not only *simul justus et peccator* (at the same time righteous and sinner) but also *simul considerati/ae et inconsiderati/ae* (at once, considerate and inconsiderate people), ever in need of healing and transforming love.

Second, with the existence and makeup of this wider theology society in mind, "professional" theologians should be eager, as many clearly are and have been, to learn more about God and God's creation by engaging those who, in their considering, are theologizing from within other fields, traditions, cultures, and walks of life.[154] After all, "Because [God's] goodness could not be adequately represented by one creature alone, He produced many and diverse creatures, that what was wanting to one in the representation of the divine goodness might be supplied by another."[155] By engaging those quite removed from theology narrowly defined, theologians are led to consider so many more fragments of that universe, a dynamic perhaps captured by the Ignatian notion of "finding God in all things," including the stars.

[153] See Dadosky, "Is There a Fourth Stage of Meaning?," 771–72.

[154] Consider, for instance, the great impact that Aristotle's philosophy, which extended to animals and other beings, had on Aquinas; that those working in the fields of biology, physics, and paleontology had on Teilhard de Chardin, author of the *Phenomenon of Man,* trans. Bernard Wall (London: Harper and Row, 1959); or that the work and person of Charles Darwin had on the theology of Elizabeth A. Johnson in her writing of *Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the God of Love* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

[155] *ST* I, q. 47, a. 1.

https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2025.10062 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Finally, even as I stress the implicit or hidden theological character of considering, or questioning, wherever and whenever it might occur, we should not overlook the abiding importance of more explicit, if ever-changing, theological discourse and considerations found, for instance, in journals such as this. In *The Idea of a University*, John Henry Newman argued that theology, as the "Science of God," must have its place along with other disciplines lest the university abandon the search for "universal knowledge."[156] Similarly, perhaps, in a questioning but also often unquestioning and sometimes profoundly inconsiderate world, those who pursue the question of God in more explicit and public ways are needed. By example and in other ways, they can remind the human community in all its diversity that the desire to know that informs any field of inquiry or action is, at root, "pure and unrestricted" and that a "transcendental exigence" urges them to remain openminded, openhearted, and loving—in other words, profoundly considerate. Such theologians might think of themselves as joining Aquinas and others in an order of preachers, but preachers that are humble rather than preachy. If they consider, for instance, Aquinas's reminder that "we cannot know what God is, but rather what He is not,"[157] they will give witness in their preaching to their own limitations in the face of mystery and to "the love of God [that] has been poured out into our hearts through the holy Spirit that has been given to us."[158]

[156] See John Henry Newman, *The Idea of a University*, ed. Frank M. Turner (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996), especially discourses two, three, and four, 14–75. I would note that, for Newman, the perfection of the intellect that a university education might advance, while immensely valuable, is not sufficient. "Quarry the granite rock with razors, or moor the vessel with a thread of silk"; he warned, "then may you hope with such keen and delicate instruments as human knowledge and human reason to contend against those giants, the passion and the pride of man" ([discourse 5.9]: 90). All the more reason to consider such things as values, virtues, vices, biases, and healing love that were of such concern to the three guides to consideration profiled in this article.

[157] *ST* I, q. 3, prologue.

[158] Romans 5:5 (NAB). This was a key, perhaps foundational, biblical text for Lonergan.

https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2025.10062 Published online by Cambridge University Press