

**Seton Hall University**

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**From the Selected Works of Richard M Liddy**

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# Review- Startling Strangeness: Reading Lonergan's Insight. By Richard M. Liddy.

Michael McGuckian



Available at: [https://works.bepress.com/richard\\_liddy/37/](https://works.bepress.com/richard_liddy/37/)

Major insights are on offer: Lonergan's project in *Insight* to re-write scholastic epistemology, no longer locked in opposition with a Cartesian sceptic or modern relativist, but unfolding Newman's *Grammar of Assent*, comes as a sun-burst to the bewildered. On occasion Kerr's keeping himself to expositor and historian inhibits a deeper historical appreciation; for example, Balthasar goes so far in accommodating Barth's Reformed dismissal of the scholastic project to synthesize Classical philosophy and Christian revelation (a 'hellenization' of Christianity) that he writes that, in the love of God in the Trinity, the persons are constantly 'surprised' by one another (p. 142). Perhaps so, but that claim should at least be put into dialogue with the Aristotelian view that the need for change and distraction is a sign of our

dependent status and falls away with an independent being. Kerr's final view is that of a good historian, and less than a ringing endorsement: the times are different, and the imbalance or excess of an earlier era leads not infrequently to an imbalance in that which follows. This is evident in his concluding chapter 'After Vatican II' in his discussion of the 'silent schism' over sexual reproductive technology, and is a bit dated. He omits mention of the fact that divorce rates have shot up across the board, Catholics included, hovering at around 50%. Also no country in the West (including Japan) is reproducing itself; large-scale immigration means that the demographics of each country in fifty years will be substantially altered.

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*Startling Strangeness: Reading Lonergan's Insight.* By Richard M. Liddy. Pp. xxii, 251, University of America Press, 2007, \$64.95.

Liddy has produced a very useful introduction to Lonergan's approach to philosophy. He takes a very personal approach and it works well. In a first part, 'The Way to *Insight*', he gives an autobiographical account of his life up to the time when he finally faced the challenge of reading Lonergan's difficult and somewhat forbidding book. The second part, 'Reading *Insight*', consists of ten chapters introducing the reader to key ideas in Lonergan's book. A third part tells how Liddy finally caught on to what Lonergan is at in the book, and gives a few personal reminiscences of encounters with the great man himself. Liddy presents straightforward Lonergan, with no frills and no critical comments. The autobiographical approach certainly eases the way into some difficult ideas. For one who has experienced the 'startling strangeness' himself, it is fascinating to read another's story, and Liddy also

gives accounts of some others of his friends and acquaintances made the breakthrough to systematic interiority. It will not be such an easy read for those unfamiliar with this approach, but the method Liddy has chosen should help those coming to Lonergan for the first time to see what is different in *Insight*. Its aim is not simply to communicate ideas, but to invite one to a personal experiment, a heightened awareness of one's own cognitional activities which can become the basis of one's own personal philosophy. I recommend this book highly, and I suggest that it should find its place on the reading list of any course which would take an experiential approach to epistemology, and it is hard to see what other kind of approach there can be.

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