

## The Word Made Fresh

“The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago;  
the second best time is now.” (Chinese Proverb)

For some months I have pondered over this essay, filling large “white boards” with twists and turns relating to the question, “What is How-Language?” and with the pragmatics of bringing initial answers into our Christian struggle to effectively weave the meaning of Jesus into global loneliness.<sup>1</sup> But, alas, that pragmatics requires a huge change of heart and mind and bloodstream,<sup>2</sup> and it seems to me now that can symbolize that stretch here effectively by pointing to the datedness of the recently published *The Incarnate Word*.<sup>3</sup> Lonergan was deeply aware of its defects even as he struggled to revise it, contextualize it, etc.<sup>4</sup> *CWL 8* points forward neither to the renewal of theology as a science nor to courses grounding pastoral outreach to

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<sup>1</sup> The problem of that weave is at the heart these present *HOW* essays, climbing from 8 to 12. I would note that some of the scribbles mentioned above turn up here, and indeed in the next essay. For example, see notes 18 and 25 below. More will emerge in *HOW 14*, “Aspiring Models and Dead Time.”

<sup>2</sup> Later neurodynamic analysis should reveal superego brain damage and the realities of the “bad blood” of axial times.

<sup>3</sup> *CWL 8*, University of Toronto Press, 2016. It goes as far as Thesis 14 of the original text used by Lonergan. Theses 15-17 are in the forthcoming *CWL 9*. My comments below on the inadequacy of volume 8 can be extended to 9, and indeed to 7, 11 and 12, but the adequacy varies. I have used the old versions of *CWL 12* as a basis of contemplation since the later fifties: there is a sense in which it is massively adequate but tapers off at the end into scriptural nudges. But the issue of adequacy is to be met slowly, by cycles of functional contemplation.

<sup>4</sup> Lonergan talked to me in the 1970s about the task of producing these works and the task of teaching the large group. But he was quite public about his Roman texts: “these things were practical chores that you have to do if you’re teaching a class of 650 people” (“An Interview with Bernard Lonergan,” edited by P. McShane, *A Second Collection*, 211). The effort “belongs to a period in which the situation I was in was hopelessly antiquated” (*Ibid.*, 212). Then there is a hint of the psychic agony mentioned at note 13 below. “It was because of teaching obligations that I was led to write this book and not because I had nothing better to do” (*The Ontological and Psychology Constitution of Christ*, *CWL 7*, 3).

Christians or non-Christians. How, then, I ask, are we to make fresh words about the Word Made Flesh in the century and the millennia to come?

I pose the question thus in a full broadness so that it might stir Lonergan students towards wider imagining of present needs, present studies. It is with such a stirring, a nudging, a “cajoling or forcing attention”<sup>5</sup> that I have been concerned in various stumbling ways in the past 60 years. My recent efforts have been greeted with silence. Perhaps this added poise and focus on the irrelevance of the newly published *CWL 8* would stir up a whirl of public rejections of my views and my efforts?

At all events, I am raising very elementary questions regarding HOW-language in claiming that The Incarnate Word is irrelevant. Does my suggestion, following Lonergan’s hints, not warrant abandoning HOW-talk in its old mode?<sup>6</sup> Do not Lonergan’s clear pointers to a new mode not merit attention?<sup>7</sup>

The question is yours—whether you are a teacher or student of Lonergan—lurking behind the scene in every stale class on Christology. When Lonergan was dragged to the Gregorian in 1953,<sup>8</sup> Romano Guardini was writing “One might comply with the

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<sup>5</sup> *Insight*, 423.

<sup>6</sup> Have I not perhaps beaten this point to death in recent writings? The point is the turn of the first page, 3, of *Method in Theology*, from its final words, “academic disciplines” to the facing of the failure of that muddled mode that his new method removes.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 4, lines 1-11. Note that, in this essay, I am placing that challenge in the larger context of *Insight* chapter 17 with its problems of expression, as well as the context pitched at the reader of *Method in Theology* by lines 19-23 of page 287. “From such a broadened basis one can go on” e.g. to the neurodynamics of Jesus’ present concern with you and me and all. I would note that such a present concern would be included in the front-edge thesis on the mystical body help by the theological community in its being gripped by *Comparison (Method in Theology, 250)*. Such a grip would have a commonsense grounding reality in pastoral education, thus contributing to the future irrelevance of *CWL 8* and 9. What of the relevance of *CWL 7, 11* and 12? That is a topic best left to *HOW 13*.

<sup>8</sup> “Dragged.” Do I need quotations here? I am reminded of that magnificent essay of Michael Patrick Gillespie, “Edna O’Brien and the Lives of James Joyce,” *Wild Colonial Girl. Essays on Edna O’Brien*, edited by Lisa Colletta and Maureen O’Connor, University of Wisconsin Press, 2005, 85. Edna writes of Joyce, “his aloneness he kept to himself.” Gillespie writes of this: “It is both churlish and pointless to ask how, if Joyce kept his fear of isolation to himself, O’Brien would know of it.” “Dragged” is not the description of the Rome tug that was given in the Lambert-

present tendency and attempt a psychology of Jesus; the trouble is that a psychology of Jesus is an impossibility.”<sup>9</sup> Lonergan, literally, lived in that psychology. But Rome was not the place then—nor is it now—to weave forward one’s living and one’s invitational teaching round Jesus as subject. “No such study of Jesus Christ, save the most limited, is feasible. Anyone who attempts to overstep the obvious limitations only loses sight of the authentic figure, core of which is the *mysterium Dei*, canceler of all psychology.”<sup>10</sup>

Mother history had been whispering to Bernard, a Step Han destined to start a new Han Dynasty<sup>11</sup> that would sweep us into the subjectivity of Jesus, but he was located psychically in present history’s patterns in a way that killed his seeding of leap in the communal contemplation of that sweet mystery-minding.

Perhaps now you might read again the conclusion to my reflection on Edna O’Brien’s life, sniff out freshly the psychic agony of Jesus and Lonergan, sniff out freshly the possible weave of your own living. So I repeat that ending here:

“The Mother

(a green rill of bile trickling from the side of her mouth) You sang that song to me. Love’s bitter mystery.

Stephen

(eagerly) Tell me the word, mother, if you know now. The word known to all men.’<sup>12</sup>

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McShane biography. But, as Ellmann says in the Introduction to his revised biography, “we are still learning to be Joyce’s contemporaries” (James, Joyce, Oxford University Press, 1959, 1).

Note, however, that the questions both this and Gillespie raises in his article, about “the transitory nature inherent in every reading” (op. cit., 89) push us towards a heuristic precision that is to be reached by geohistorical analysis, a very distant refinement (see *Allure*, 135-40) of the remote goal of Lonergan that I call 60910. Only then can we arrive at a grip on the meaning of “the irrelevance of CWL 8.”

<sup>9</sup> Romano Guardini S.J., *The Lord*, translated from the German (1954) by Elinor Castendyk Briefs, A Meridian pb, 1969, v.

<sup>10</sup> Guardini, *The Lord*, v.

<sup>11</sup> See note 13 in *HOWX* “-Factor In: You’ve Got Talent,” on the Han Dynasty image. Also *Allure*, 202-3, 223.

<sup>12</sup> James Joyce, *Ulysses*, Penguin, 473-4.

'All we know is somehow with us . . . it lurks behind the scenes.'<sup>13</sup> Skin-within are molecules of cosmic all, cauled, calling. The rill of her mouth can become the thrill, the trill, of a life-time, the word made fresh. Might we inspire and expire the lungs of history? But the hole story is you and I, with and within global humanity, upsetting Love's Sweet Mystery into a new mouthing, an anastomotic<sup>14</sup> spiral way of birthing better the buds of mother."<sup>15</sup>

HOW-language in its fullness is to be a effective global spiral way of birthing better the buds of mother, whether you think of mother history, or mother Mary, or the Divine Parent Scenting Absolutely, Cherisingly, history. How, HOW, Home Of Wonder,<sup>16</sup> might we stumble towards it today, this week, this Autumn, this millennium?

I am, you may notice, back now at the appeal about present situations, like present classes and sermons on Jesus, that I was making at the end of *HOW* 9:

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<sup>13</sup> *Insight*, 303.

<sup>14</sup> *Ana-*, again, *stomein*, to provide with a mouth. "Using the device of *anastomosis*, Joyce attempts, in the last chapter of his last work, to bridge all the great ontological chasms." (Margot Norris, "The Last Chapter of *Finnegans Wake*: Stephen Finds His Mother," *James Joyce Quarterly* (25) 1987-8, 11. The device layers into the concluding page of the second chapter of *Lack in the Beingstalk*, (Axial Publishing, 2006) but also here, and indeed, haunts the climb into and in *HOW* 12, "The Word Made Fresh."

<sup>15</sup> Philip McShane, *Lack in the Beingstalk. A Giants Causeway*, Axial Publishing, 2006, 66 and 183.

<sup>16</sup> Here you find a neat nudge to suspect that the field stretches way beyond the immature Christian horizon of these early days and millennia of the Incarnational story. The Home of Wonder is an exigence (See *CWL* 18, index under *exigence*) for subject-to-subject conversation with the Divine Jesus on a full and fulsome global scale. How are we to make "the earth and every common sight take on the glory and the freshness of a dream" (*Insight*, 556) come true, Come Truth? "The field is the universe, but my horizon defines my universe" (*CWL* 18, *Phenomenology and Logic*, 199). The blood in our horizon is molecularly clotted by an axial superego. Such stale conventional blood bows to the brutal decay of "the state taking over all cultural functions and subordinating them to the state's one ends, economic and political" (*CWL* 18, 305), be the state secular or supposedly sacred. See further, note 23 below.

Have I succeeded in bringing you to a contemplative poise over the present sequence of problems, the words sliding familiarly past your eyes, under the forehead to which they and I point? “There is the value to be had in worrying about those problems when you get to them. But never feel rushed. Often, in order to find an answer, you need time to grow. That’s why we apply ourselves, and learn as we go.”<sup>17</sup>

Does the value escape your attention, so that you join the majority of Lonergan readers, prejudiced towards convention? Or, heavens, the majority of those who read Jesus’ prayer?<sup>18</sup>

“History, heredity, personal experience, all combine to rivet my prejudice upon me. Under their influence, I gradually outdistance the disturbing echo of his words, spoken without reservation to me as to everyone else who should believe in Him, until at last I hear them no more.”<sup>19</sup>

And if I have failed, how might I change the HOW of how I talk so as to bring you, even to co-mission you, to commission you, to a shaky stand beyond convention, beyond “the vegetable bondage of the blood”?<sup>20</sup> I have been distracted, as you see, by a similar if simpler reach of almost fifty years ago, when I appealed at length through the words of Ezra Pound’s Commission:

“Go, my songs, to the lonely and the unsatisfied,  
Go also to the nerve-racked, go to the enslaved-by-convention,

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<sup>17</sup> This inner quotation recalls the lengthy quotation in the *HOW* 9, “Implementation”, at note 15, from Keigo Higashino, *A Midsummer’s Equation. A Detective Galileo Mystery*, translated by Alexander O. Smith, Minotaur Books, New York, 2016, 356-7.

<sup>18</sup> A reading that I suggest would be in increasingly crazy mansion-climb optimism about “they being one”: “Is it to be taken literally or is it figure? It would be fair and fine, indeed, to think it no figure” (Lonergan: the conclusion to his essay of 1936 on “Fundamental Sociology”). That reading would be a Faithfilled YES to the question, “Do you view humanity as possibly maturing – in some serious sense – or just messing along between good and evil, whatever you think they are?”

<sup>19</sup> I quote from a book read fifty years ago, quoted thus in my *Music That Is Soundless* of 1968, (3<sup>rd</sup> edition, 2005, expanded with a new subtitle: *A Fine Tuning for the Lonely Bud A*, 51, 140, note 16: H. J. Steuart, *The Inward Vision*, London, 1929, 113).

<sup>20</sup> I am quoting from *Commission* by Ezra Pound, a poem quoted at length on page 29 of *Music That Is Soundless. An Introduction to God for the Lonely Bud A*, third edition, Axial Publishing, 2005.

Bear to them my contempt for their oppressors.  
Go as a great wave of cool water.”<sup>21</sup>

My appeal is to be changed—of which change Lonergan is the foster-father—and made effective by mother history.<sup>22</sup> But how, HOW, might you and I make it fresh and get the word made fresh out, weaving into history’s, His Story’s call, caul?<sup>23</sup>

The psychology of Jesus was certainly not impossible for Thomas or Lonergan.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* : quoting from the beginning of the poem.

<sup>22</sup> I regularly point to history being the mother of functional collaboration and Lonergan being the foster-father. The First chapter of [Method in Theology: Revisions and Implementations](#), talks of the plausibility of reversing Lonergan’s sequencing of self-discovery as prior to the discovery of functional collaboration: yes it is a theoretical group. But I suspect that the globe will get to self-discovery under the pressure of functional recycling.

<sup>23</sup> We are back, of course, or forward, at the massive challenge of Lonergan’s 1954 insight into theology’s climb of which Pat Brown writes in “Interpreting Lonergan’s 1954 View of Theology” in *Seeding Global Collaboration* (Axial Publishing, 2016). Might we, in these next decades, seed the new HOW talk by creeping to talking in the ethos of the new view of ontic and phyletic growth; by fostering effectively the COPON principle in education from pre-kinderhood to post-graduation; by questioning the Grammar of Languages’ ascent from Panini onwards so as to recenter the interrogative and put in question the status of the full stop; by striving for the concomitant “harmonious orientation on the psychic level” (*Insight*, 555). “From the nature of the case such an orientation would have to consist in some cosmic dimension, in some intimation of unplumbed depths, that accrues to man’s feelings, emotions, sentiments” (*ibid.*) But “the nature of the case” is your nature herenow, resolving to make a little effective kataphatic progress; “and finally, I am not certain I speak wildly, out of the very progress itself to produce a mildness of manners and temperament which will support and imitate and extend the mighty power of Christian Charity. This then is the virtue of progress, the virtue of social justice, by which man directs his action so that it will be easier for his neighbours and his posterity to know and to do what is right and just” (Lonergan, concluding page of his 1936 “Essay in Fundamental Sociology”). “This Then”? “This”? The slim anticipation of his vision of three decades later.

<sup>24</sup> Let me ask you to pause usefully – we face it in existential detail at the beginning of HOW 13 – on the psychological reality of admiration in you that may have bubbled up at some spots of this reading, even if only mused about in its usual initial meaning. One finds that meaning in one’s reading one’s reading of Gillespie (*op.cit.*, note 8 above, 83): “Joyce stands out as an artist for whose work she {Edna} feels great admiration and for whose life she feels great sympathy.” Thomas has a heavier meaning in mind when he writes of admiration in Jesus in *IIIa Pars*, q. 15, a. 8. When invited by Lonergan to admire Aristotle – “admiramini deinde subtilitatem Aristotelis” (CWL 12, 580), are we not invited by the trinitarian context to weave Edna and Thomas into a post-modern religious self? We might move further to grope darkly towards questions regarding our post-pilgrim resonance, in everlasting neurodynamics, with the admiration of Jesus, bringing finitude home to Infinite Surprise. So we may come to my abrupt

But it is best for me to end abruptly here with the question that tilts us towards the third stage of meaning. HOW, how how, (how)<sup>3</sup> might we break from the truncation of Jesus and ourselves?<sup>25</sup> “Grace, Grace, Grace: attune us to the allure of the Scent of a Nomen.”<sup>26</sup>

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ending with an admirable nudge to ask about our vastly admirable bulb of the interior lighthouse.

<sup>25</sup> My pointing here will undoubtedly be questioned by conventional Lonergan students, who fancy that they are seriously into both the subjectivity of themselves and Jesus. Nor can I deal with that questioning adequately here. It is useful, however, to pause over Lonergan’s simple pointing, “The neglected subject does not know himself. The truncated subject not only does not know himself but also is unaware of his ignorance and so, in one way or another, concludes that what he does not know does not exist.” (*A Second Collection*, 73). One way or another of Lonergan truncation is to be all-too-easily comfortably settled, in present axial truncation of the first world, secular and religious, into a culture of initial Lonerganesque meanings. But the questioning is to be effectively dealt with only by the slow emergence of a functional conversation which pivots on each participant facing, in some serious form, the 1833 Overture of Lonergan (*Method*, 250, lines 18-33). The following two essays aim to foster that seriousness. *HOW* 14, “Aspiring Models and Dead Time,” deals with the slow shift to a full global culture of effective care. The next note points to the inner dynamic of that care described in *HOW* 13.

<sup>26</sup> This is the central prayer of *Allure*, made explicit in the final four chapters there: see *Allure* 199–200, 223. Following its introduction on 199-200 there is, in the text, the following remark: “Grace understands and condones, All Three together in Their singular inseparate ways, the odd pun, within puns, on an old film, *The Scent of a Woman*. Might you understand and condone and share and find an effective scent of the gap between your understanding and mine, your understanding and Grace’s? But, heavens, I have now leaped into problems of chapter 19 and the systematics of the Divine Three!” Indeed, we have leaped into the problems of *HOW* 13, “The Interior Lighthouse.”