

The Deep Failure of Lonerganism

My topic goes beyond the proceedings of the June 25th meeting of Lonerganism leadership in Boston. I see no point in reviewing those proceedings: they are being made available to the group that gathered on that morning. That, of course, is part of the difficulty I face. Such discussions, and e.g. my discussion here, do not reach the upcoming generations of students. So, it is not difficult for those teaching and directing theses to protect from exposure the failures about which I write.

Among the reports submitted to the Boston Meeting there were two precise appeals for a broader than usual reviewing. There was the appeal of the group SGEME, *The Society for the Globalization of Efficient Methods of Evolving*, for effective consideration of functional collaboration, first made public by Lonergan in the *Gregorianum* of 1969. I focused on the need for that collaboration in my 1970 paper, *Metamusic and Self-Meaning*, a paper of the First International Lonergan Conference in Florida. The need has been studiously ignored since. To get deeper and more uncomfortably into the failure of Lonerganism, I submitted, as ex-President of SGEME and as senior Lonergan scholar, a lesser demand: best add it here.¹

¹ My report did not make it to the meeting. It was added to the SGEME report and so lost entirely in the summary presentations. I add it in the text immediately. But I would note that I had already – months before the meeting – circulated it to the group. Perhaps it will be responded to by some before my September effort to handle creatively the results of the gathering of June 25.

There are many other ways I might have gone in this particular essay, as I wind down my 60 years of Lonergan studies and brood over the gross failure of the movement associated with his name. So, for instance, I might have waited for the official minutes of the June 25th meeting and done some discomfiting analysis: I leave that discomfort for note 49 of HOW 13, especially since my appeal was not presented. Or I might have worked my way through the June Lonergan newsletter, or the list of papers of this year's Boston Conference, showing how the vast majority of the contributions – well-meaning certainly – are condemned in their strategy by the turn of page 3-4 of *Method in Theology*. Might you read the list this month in the light of Lonergan's

“Report submitted by Philip McShane for the June 25th Boston Meeting”

I send this report as a private person, although I am included in the SGEME report: perhaps being senior Lonergan scholar and editor of some of his trickiest works are grounds for an allowance for this exception?

The report concerns a dismal failure needing a serious discussion. We have all failed to take the challenge of Lonergan’s canons of hermeneutics seriously: instead we putter along in the mode of “academic disciplines” (*Method*, end of the first page of chapter one), condemned by Lonergan on the next page of *Method*. The leadership leads in the stale outdated way. Doran swoops thus on *CWL* 11 and 12; Lawrence sweeps thus through German thinkers; McShane swaps thus one discipline for another repeatedly without tackling the genetic hermeneutics of any; etc. etc. Is it not time that we paused to be effectively embarrassed by a central doctrine? [“Doctrines that are embarrassing will not be mentioned in polite company” *Method*, 299] The embarrassment is in finding ourselves among those mentioned by Lonergan on *Insight* 604, in the flow of presenting his view of the needed serious science of interpretation. Being diligent and specialized is not enough.

One may expect the diligent authors of highly specialized monographs to be somewhat bewildered and dismayed when they find that instead of singly following the bent of their genius, their aptitudes, and their acquired skills, they are to collaborate in the

comment on “academic disciplines” (end of page 3) and sense the death of Lonergan’s hopes? But here I keep my nudging blunt and short. It is complimented, in elementary fashion, by the further comments in *HOW* 9, “Implementation.” The other three essays of July 1st – *HOW* 8, 10, and 11 – provide a larger context. About that context, more in *HOW* 9. My appeal of the first [Lonergan Gathering](#) essay of a year ago, for questions and discussions, went unheard. Might there be some in these next two months? September 1st will bring my further push forward in three essays: *HOW* 12, “The Word Made Fresh” will face the problem of expression, of *HOW*-language; *HOW* 13, “The Interior Lighthouse,” will brood on the needed cultural shift of prayer; *HOW* 14, “Aspiring Models and Dead Time,” nudges towards the enlivening of reading the times.

light of abstruse principles and to have their individual results checked by general requirements that envisage simultaneously the totality of results.

The issue, the central doctrine we have dodged, is the emergence, across the board, of genetic systematics, an emergence packed into the genius paragraph (*Insight*, 609-10) of the second canon of hermeneutics:

The explanatory differentiation of the protean notion of being involves three elements. First, there is the genetic sequence in which insights gradually are accumulated by man. Secondly, there are the dialectic alternatives in which accumulated insights are formulated, with positions inviting further development and counterpositions shifting their ground to avoid the reversal they demand. Thirdly, with the advance of culture and effective education, there arises the possibility of the differentiation and specialization of modes of expression, and since this development conditions not only the exact communication of insights but also the discoverer's own grasp of his discovery, since such grasp and its exact communication intimately are connected with the advance of positions and the reversal of counterpositions, the three elements in the explanatory differentiation of the protean notion of being fuse into a single explanation.

I note, in conclusion, first, that the point is made clearly in my two-page essay HOW 6, 'The Pullet's Surprise'; secondly, that the issue I raise is not one of functional collaboration, but of a blatant dodging of Lonergan's pointers, in *Insight*, regarding genetic development."

Neither appeal received serious effective consideration at the June meeting.

I keep to that brief blunt statement so as to avoid the trivial to-and-fro that detailed musings on the gathering might bring. What is required, after all, is a radically discontinuous move away from such discussion to the difficulty challenge of meeting where Lonergan asked us to meet: in what I call his 1833 Overture – *Method in Theology* 250, lines 18–33.

Indeed, what I wish to add here is an 1833 annoying expression of annoyance. So I draw attention to the consistently anti-scientific attitude of my senior colleagues regarding two serious advances in theology that have emerged from Lonergan's work. First there is the problem of a treatise on the mystical body: the solution lies in identifying the content of the activity of *Comparison* that Lonergan built into the new procedures of Dialectic. That solution would transform not only academic theology but commonsense pastoral education. The second is the advance, after 750 years, towards an adequate eschatology, something that Thomas might have pushed towards at the end of his life, something moreover of profound pastoral relevance. I would claim that my advances in both areas are of serious significance. My senior colleagues have made no attempt to show that I am in error. Indeed, there is little sign that there is any interest in either question or in my successful answers. Such failure warrants the accusation of a gross anti-scientific attitude, one that the leadership is content to hand on, destructively, to the next generation of students. This is simply disgraceful, disgusting, a blatant insult to the memory of a great man, an offense against the allure of the Compelling Genius of history.