

Humus 9 Frederick Crowe and Ourselves as Researchers

The patience I asked for at the conclusion to the previous essay needs to be a large and subtle one. We are weaving strategically round the challenge, “Lets Try Talking Functionally,” which you recall as the title of *Humus 4*. Many of the reasons for that patience are mentioned in *Humus 5*. We are struggling, as Crowe told us, trying to move a mountain of dirt with a with a spade and a wheel barrow. Dirt? For the moment we take it that way, rather than seeing the past, especially the past seven centuries as “better than was the reality.” I have, perhaps, too often repeated that remark of Lonergan from a first week of conversations in Dublin (Easter, 1961), about “big frogs in little ponds.” He was talking then of the way in which theology became closed off from culture after the Council of Trent. But the closure from understanding - laced into of varieties of description¹ - was an earlier event.

My little Preludes must move deviously on in a strategic attempt to win over some fraction of present Lonergan students from such patterns of description. But hanging in with the viewing of centuries helps. I recall a previous effort of mine to place page 250 of *Method* in such a context, when I asked readers to image a parallel between that page and a medieval monk or Beguine writing a one-page description of the future centuries of the scientific revolution. He or she would certainly be misunderstood and likely thought crazy.

Insight, on the other hand, is a 750 page description of a scientific revolution, with the second half sadly but providentially unwritten.² It has been misunderstood and indeed thought crazy in various subtle ways. I am trying to move round, match, that misunderstanding and slighting by various devious strategies, and here the strategy is contained in the suggestion, Let’s think of Crowe and ourselves as researchers.

An odd suggestion, you might claim, especially since Crowe is quite explicit about his

¹This is a difficult topic, pointed to in *Insight* but undeveloped there. A helpful push is *Cantower XXIII*, “Redoubt Description”.

²A letter of Lonergan, 1952, to Eric O’Connor, talks of the second volume to follow *Insight* with some such title as *Faith and Insight*. The Letter is available, as Image 24, in Part Two of *Bernard Lonergan: His Life and Leading Ideas*; there are suggestions regarding the content of the missing volume in the Epilogue of the book.

attempting a climb into the functional specialty *History*. Bear with me. Yes, it still fits into the notion of such a climb, but I am putting a fanciful twist on the climb. I would ask you to imagine the beginning of the revolution in physics, variously dated early by present experts, but regularly identified as underway with Galileo. Let us place ourselves in the equivalent of the 16th century: then we become researchers in the broad sense of that word: even, we might say, dilettantes.³ We are fascinated within present shades of Aristotlianism as medievals mused over stones and water falling, birds flying, magnets and lightening: but also, of course, by projectiles and gunpowder and sails and the benches of exchange.

What has all this to do with imagining Crowe and ourselves as researchers? A question that I invite you to brood over: to say the least, it helps to re-envision that neglected functional specialty, *Research*.⁴ And if we battle sufficiently with our theological dilettantism, happy in its superegotic molecularity, we may just begin to see that, yes, Crowe's book is better than it was. So, we come to read freshly some of his remarks: "one may usefully indicated the direction of research to be undertaken, and give some account of the material to be studied."⁵ "I do not know whether its history has been fully investigated in its origins, and in its subsequent development, but I do think there is need to bring it into relation with that work of professional theologians which forms the bulk of the material of our study"⁶ "so we can hope to delineate the new phases at least in some rough manner."⁷

I leave you bemused, I hope? And we hum our way into the next prelude by ending on a massive chord: What was going forward in the past four millennia? What is to go forward in the next four millennia?

³*Process*, chapter 4, talks of oddities in journals of chemistry before Mendeleev's Table.

⁴Lonergan came to regret his short treatment in *Method*. I have push forward on the question in various writings: *Method in Theology: Revisions and Implementations*, chapters 11 and 22, and chapter 8 of *ChrISt in History*. All three chapters are titled "Research".

⁵Crowe, 128.

⁶Crowe, 115.

⁷Crowe, 104.