

## Gatherings

There is the obvious meaning of the title as referring to conferences, workshops, and other classes of meetings that occur in some way associated with Lonergan's name. But there is a whole range of other meanings lurking there. One might, for instance, think of the *Collected Works* as gatherings. Or the more modest effort of gathering stuff for an article or towards a thesis.<sup>1</sup>

An odder notion would move to the subject, even to the mysterious subject-as-subject. What, in that odd context, is a Lonergan gathering? Now there's a question that seeds detailed messing, if you are up to it, up to sharing in and with this potential series of essays some questing of the future relevance of Lonergan's lonely climb.

Then there is the beginner's problem: of gathering stuff from Lonergan or a teacher of Lonergan's perspective. John Todd and Fred Crowe mused over this in the early 1970s and came up with *Introducing the Thought of Bernard Lonergan*.<sup>2</sup> It contained the three papers, "Cognitional Structure," "Existenz and Aggiornamento," and "Dimensions of Meaning." Perhaps it could have profitably included the article "Functional Specialties in Theology" from *Gregorianum* 1969?

Now THAT suggestion may seem odd to many, indeed may seem quite unacceptable as a gathering of Lonergan. Many of my senior colleagues treat that article and its later evolution as, well, a possible distraction from the main work of introducing people to

---

<sup>1</sup> As it happens, this new series start coincides with the publication of a thesis of mine, which gathers into the reality of Jesus the push of the two books *Insight* and *Method in Theology*. I might risk claiming that it is a Lonergan Gathering at Ground Zero. But it would be too much to think of it as Lonergan Gatherings Zero. Rather, it is something like Lonergan Gatherings Omega. *The Allure of the Compelling Genius of History: Teaching Young Humans Humanity and Hope* (Vancouver: [Axial Publications](#), 2015) (\$15/€10).

<sup>2</sup> *Introducing the Thought of Bernard Lonergan*. Three papers reprinted from *Collection* with an Introduction by Philip McShane, Darton, Longman and Todd, 1973.

Lonergan's perspective. With that view my introductory remarks to the little book containing the three articles agrees. There I wrote in the second paragraph: "What then is Lonergan getting at? The uncomfortable answer is that Lonergan is getting at you and me. And my uncomfortable answer grows in value as an introduction to the degree that it causes the reader to pause in the self-questioning, 'Do I want to be got at?'"

Over forty years later it seems to me that the suggested addition of the Greg article is not at all odd.

Let me put it this way.

De facto, you are being got at steadily, inside and outside of Lonergan studies, by what might still be described in Lonergan's blunt words: "the monster that has stood forth in our day."<sup>3</sup> There is, then, the existential challenge of countering that monster or at least dodging it in some slippery way—recall the unjust steward—that reduces the tentacles of the monster's intrusion in our lives and those of our families and children, making those lives superficially livable in the reality of the wasteland of the Ecumenic Age, of three millennia, of three recent centuries. The monster holds sway, "when philosophers for at least two centuries, through doctrines on politics, economics, education, and through ever further doctrines, have been trying to remake man, and have done not a little to make human life unlivable."<sup>4</sup>

The deep trouble, the axial trouble, is that the monster's sway is not really noticed, so that the sway is secure: we're doing pretty O.K. in suburbia, with our bread and circuses, even if there is global warming and global terror. That the global terror includes the IMF and government and business at all levels: 'well now, you got to be kiddin'!

---

<sup>3</sup> *Method in Theology*, 40.

<sup>4</sup> *Topics in Education* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), CWL 10, 232.

Yet in the existential context, with children and grandchildren in mind, would it not be better to have some decent effective hope about the monster, exposing the monster, getting the monster out of town and gown? Yet you see the problem a little, even if it does not seize you—unless art and suffering flicks your imagination into evolution’s longing, lurking in trees and bees and beasts and birds, to reach new heights and flights in the sown whats of these recent few million years. Self-discovery at some level is O.K. and helps slip quietly—or even skip cheerily—through the conventional days and daze. But you would surely like to think of a defeating of the hidden monster, like to see a *Perelandra*<sup>5</sup> grounding of the fairytale world that young kids live in fleetingly. Is there hope?

So I pose my standard question regarding human hope: “Do you view humanity as possibly maturing—in some serious way—or just messing along between good and evil, whatever you think they are?”

I am only raising questions here, searchings in you and me, in our battered molecules, for a mood. I would like to think that I am pushing for a freshening of popular tradition regarding any type of gathering of Lonergan. This guy, I would claim, gave us serious hope, but the need for an effective serious grounding of that evolutionary hope was something that pushed him—like the loving molecules of nature push the Pacific salmon to go uphill in the river-waters of British Columbia or the mother elephant to lead the annual trek in the Okavango Delta—to find a operable solution to the problem of being got-at.

So we are in what Lonergan talks of, in his musing on popular tradition, as an existential category, one that involves “aesthetic apprehension of the group’s origin and story,”<sup>6</sup> your story as it weaves dramatically into contact with some part of the spectrum of Lonergan gatherings. Like, ‘how the hell do I get through this doctorate

---

<sup>5</sup> I am thinking of course, of the second of C. S. Lewis’ trilogy, published in 1943.

<sup>6</sup> *Topics in Education*, CWL 10, 230.

and stay sane?’ But there is the deeper weave of that aesthetic apprehension, an apprehension that would boost our willingness in the full order of the universe’s longing “so it wills with that order’s dynamic joy and zeal.”<sup>7</sup>

Enough of my initial rambling towards a possible collaborative effort at freshness. The collaboration may begin by simpler puzzlings, rambling questions about this and that supposedly little problem. (You may even want to stay off-line with me, especially if you might offend some solemn professor. I still cherish Lonergan’s advice to me about dealing with Oxford’s demands in 1968: “Give the guy what he wants: it’s only a union card.”) But that is just coping with being got at by persons and institutions numbly cozy with the monster. What you deeply want to get at is the hidden better self, who may be screaming quietly through the days, dreaming sweatily at night. Perhaps that hidden self may even now be puzzled about the long-term hope I talk about, expressed in that odd suggestion of adding to the three obvious Lonergan intro-articles the one that suggests that there is a global way forward towards a world in which your descendants will be got at properly.

That global way is quite essential: evolution and history’s “dynamic joy and zeal” (*Insight*, 722, end) are blotted out by the monster’s guiding hand in science and technology and the industries of the arts and the arts of politics. So, for instance, the ecology and neurology of your life are captive to its cramping sickness: in the streets but also down the corridor from your department of philosophy, economics, education, or theology.

My e-mail is available to you, but why not repeat it here: [pmcshane@shaw.ca](mailto:pmcshane@shaw.ca) . Where is this series going to go? It is an open final folly of mine, and it could be in continuity with that odd book just finished and available, *The Allure of the Compelling Genius of History: Teaching Young Humans Humanity and Hope*, a book that tries to relocate

---

<sup>7</sup> CWL 3, *Insight*, 722: last line.

Jesus in the dynamics of *Insight*, poising His Galilean World View of science in opposition to the crippling Aristotelian view on science that leaves us now, through its weakness in the face of modernity, with effete academic disciplines and unguided religiosity. But that large continuity may not at all be dominant in our stumblings: the issue may well be a search for a fresh start of and for beginners, seeking humanity and hope just in their, in our, little local mess.

A beginning, then. A reverierun past Eve and Adam. You may simply have a question to pose to me and others. You may have a short comment or even a full essay to offer. Whatever comes in to me, goes up. In this poise you immediately notice, then, that I am not starting anything as complicated as a forum, or a free rambling discussion on a site. Such processes, indeed, could emerge, even in functional style, from your suggestions and expertise. I would prefer the simple start, with some guiding control from me: it is a way to avoid initial learned messing or scattering of focus.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> I could well have left this first essay as a lone invitation, but it seemed best to add the four brief essays that follow. They illustrate key directions and so should be of help: the first of these, *Loneragan Gatherings 2*, raises questions about contemplation; the next two are about collaboration; the fifth essay, *Loneragan Gatherings 5*, a lengthier effort, picks up on *Loneragan Gatherings 2*'s topic, to pose the existential challenge of core and *cor* issues of kataphatic contemplation. However, that fifth essay, "Being at OM in Transcendental Method," differs in scope from the other four. Recall the book mentioned in note 1: *Loneragan Gatherings 5* invites a move forward towards a tenth mansion of the Interior Tower, and towards a fuller poise, luminously analogical, in one's luminous darkness of circumstances. I would hope that this set of starting essays would stir sufficient interest to bring forth contributions from others to the series, and to bring forth retirement for me. But that retirement would not be from the offer made in this first essay, to communicate and collaborate, e.g., through e-mail. Generating such communication is the hope and aim of this final enterprise of mine.