

The Treatise on the Mystical Body and the Unity of Theology

It seems as well for me to give some further late compact wholesome nudges to the Lonergan gathering of June 25, 2016, and I do so in this and the next 14th essay, which points towards the need for a functional transformation of the usual modes of questing for the historical Jesus.

I do so by recalling three pointers of Lonergan, two, A and B, written within nine months of each other, the third, C, more than a decade later. We have a date for the second pointer, B, since it is in a letter to Fred Crowe of May 4th, 1954. Let me start with the relevant pointing that occurs in this letter.

The Method of Theology is coming into perspective. For the Trinity: Imago Dei in homine and proceed to the limit as in evaluating $[1 + 1/n]^{nx}$ as n approaches infinity. For the rest: ordo universi. From the viewpoint of theology, it is a manifold of unities developing in relation to one another and in relation to God, i.e., metaphysics as I conceive it but plus transcendent knowledge.¹

The previous pointer, A, is Lonergan's puzzling about a missing treatise in his hurried typing of the late summer of 1953.

"It may be asked in what department of theology the historical aspect of development might be treated, and I would like to suggest that it may possess peculiar relevance to a treatise on the mystical body,"² and a very long paragraph follows that gives an old-style context to the problem, but in the fuller context of that reaching Epilogue.

Obviously, without a heuristic grip on a coherent place of a consideration, in theology, of the mystical body, the full unity of theology was still eluding him. No doubt he hoped

¹ This passage is from a letter by Lonergan to Frederick Crowe dated May 4th, 1954. It is presented as he typed it, without italics etc.

² *Insight*, 763.

that it, and other features of his new effort at understanding Faith, would bubble up in him as he faced the task “far larger”³ than *Insight*. The “coming into perspective” of B was surely a jubilant step in the right direction, conjuring a fantasy of viewing, in cumulative creativity, sequential viewings of sequential global developings. Over a decade later he came to step into, leap into, no doubt with larger jubilation, the further key perspective of a recycling creativity, dominated by a complex of schemes of recurrence, that guaranteed to give “cumulative and progressive results.”⁴ But the complex pattern of recurrence schemes was beyond his sketchy muddling of 1965. Sickness shelved the searching and sketching till after the summer of 1966. In that summer there was his ambiguity in talking to me about the challenging change of heuristic: “it’s easy” yet, “I can’t put all of *Insight* into the first chapter of *Method*.”

Well, my little book of fifty years later, *The Allure of the Compelling Genius of History*, was a shot at winding *Insight* into the whole of *Method*, with Jesus centre-stage: and we certainly cannot talk of the winding as easy.

The genius Jesus and the Unfinished Symphony of his Story was part of that winding, but it sang forward in clear heuristic for me only because the solution to the problem of A had emerged in me, in the previous years. It was and is a solution fostered by a decade of struggling with that single page of *Method*, page 250, and indeed with the single word, *Comparison*.

But oddly, I am not now asking you to climb to the solution of A or the understanding of B: I am asking you to please feckin’ read C,⁵ the pointing of the first three paragraphs of *Method in Theology*, thus facing a parallel struggle to the fantasy involved in reading A and B adequately. To rise repentingly to glimpse the existential gap or gape that is

³ *Insight*, 754, top.

⁴ *Method in Theology*, 4.

⁵ “Feckin’” is an Irish way of avoiding the usual four letter word. But *feic* – pronounced feck – is also, in Gaelic, the imperative of the verb to see. I am nudging you, please pretty please to take another look, e.g., at the two last words on page 3 of *Method*.

your life within the pretentious pale pastoral horror of “academic disciplines:”⁶ to thus perhaps see for the first time the sadly missed appeal of the tired old warrior for us to try a “third way ... difficult and laborious.”⁷

But now do you sense my trickery?

Rising repentingly to fecking read C fully means a reading climb through A and B. Ecclesiologists have not puzzled too much about the problem of A. The problem of B? Well, at least Fred Crowe had the wit to know that he did not understand the 1954 leap. He sent the letter to me later, and in my non-understanding I searched around for decades for its meaning. So please do not pass this *Method* page-turning from 3 to 4 so easily this summer of 2016. “... academic disciplines ... Clearly enough, these approaches to the problem of method do little ...” You may still be missing the horror of the shrunken survival of Aristotle’s view of human care, and the feebleness of Thomas gallant shot of fitting the care of Jesus into Aristotle’s paws, a feeble shot that meshed with modernity to seed present trivial pursuits in initial meanings.

Then, yes, you can read shrinkingly those first three paragraphs and thus slip comfortably into the wrong turn taken by Lonergan in paragraph 4. So, you can read on, taking another familiar home run round the “the basis for a third way,” and continue to miss the climb to the fifth chapter. Or you could bow to the need to try the third way that is in harmony with the care of Jesus,⁸ and as you putter with beginnings, being gently seized with the conviction that we have to think our way to a Standard Model beyond the street-shrinkage actuality of all present human inquiry, from

⁶ *Method in Theology*, 3: the end of the first page and the second of my suggested three paragraphs.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 4, line 8.

⁸ *Lonergan Gatherings* 14A, “The Search for the Historical Jesus,” points to structures of that struggle out of the conventions of present studies into the seeds of a visionary heuristics. It should help towards a molecular shake-up of fantasy beyond such conventions in any area.

physics to theology. Thus “you can put spade to earth and move the first sod”⁹ towards an ontic and phyletic heuristic pre-grip on the *ordo universi* that would ground the evaluation and fomenting of the dynamics from mythic grubby garden to hearts throbbing globally with the desire of the everlasting hills.

⁹ Frederick E. Crowe S.J., *Theology of the Christian Word. A Study in History*, Paulist Press, 1978, 149.