

## LonerGANism, Impressionism, Christianity

“The only merit I have is to have painted directly from nature with the aim of conveying my impressions in front of the fugitive effects, and it still upsets me that I was responsible for the name given to a group the majority of whom had nothing of the impressionist in them.”<sup>1</sup>

Thus Claude Monet writes at the age of 86. Was Monet, then, not an Impressionist? The middle word of my title can be read now as posing implicitly that question. But it muddles my title thus so as to pose two other odd questions: Was Lonergan a Lonerganist? Was Jesus a Christian?

But stay with Monet and his life of expressing his contextualized sightings, his neuromolecular impressions subtly mediated into expressions. Stay, if you like, with the book mentioned in footnote 1, with its glorious reproductions of such expressions.<sup>2</sup> Stay here and now, rather, with “The Quest for the Historical Monet.”

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<sup>1</sup> From a letter of Monet to Evan Charteris, 21 June 1926. Monet died that autumn. The letter is reproduced in *MONET by himself*, edited by Richard Kendall, translated by Bridget Strevens Romer, Chartwell books, MacDonald, 1989; reprinted 2014, 265.

I would note three aspects of this little essay. First, the text stands on its own as my short reply to the June 25<sup>th</sup> pause at the end of the Boston regarding my appeal of this past year. Secondly, there is the aspect of the enlarged challenge weaved into these notes. So, thirdly, that enlarging challenge of your possible and probable initial-meaning-poise can begin now with a strange impressionistic question: what is your impression of the fourth millennium of the Christian era? Does this not enlarge the meaning of the problem of those who “rarely think of the historical process” (*Collection, CWL 4, “Finality Love Marriage”, 47*). And is it not a legitimate question of the 1833 Overture “indicating the view that would result from developing ....” (*Method in Theology*, 250, line 26). On initial meanings, see *The Allure of the Compelling Genius of History*, Axial Publishing, 2015, note 24, p. 51; note 33, p. 145; note 4, page 223. This book is to be referred to below as *Allure*.

<sup>2</sup> The subtitle of the book, or really pre-title, is “Paintings, drawing, pastels, letters.” Note the problem lurking in these two sentences. First, recall the origin of the name *Impressionism*. The name *impressionism* came from an unfriendly critic, Louis Leroy, who took it from Monet’s *Impression, Fog (Le Havre)* 1872: so, quite ungrounded methodologically. Next think of Thomas’ medieval struggle with *impressa* and *expressa*. Think, then, of writing and painting as the

Then one is poised “in front of the fugitive effects” of a pilgrimage comprehended only by God. What is that poise to be, if it is to be at and beyond the level of our times, effectively fostering human reaching into the patterns of these compelling geniuses?<sup>3</sup>

The impressionist Lonergan reached an answer, but the Cosmopolis answer fell among “a group the majority of whom had nothing of the impressionist in them.”

This essay is the fifteenth of the series of 14 essays that challenged the Boston Workshop final meeting of June 25, 2016 to take serious Lonergan’s brilliant leap to the need and character of future collaboration. Only a naive observer would claim that my discomfoting push was a success.<sup>4</sup>

What are we to do now, what am I to do?<sup>5</sup> To say the least, whether we are living in the end lines of Lonergan’s 1833 Overture or simply, with Lonerganism, in the chit-

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performance of a neglected or truncated subject. Leap, perhaps to being a what straining about luminous thinking about a reader “come about” (See *Insight*, 537, eleven lines from the end of the page) towards reading this type or that book of *Monet Himself*: reading it in the mind of that page-turning paragraph 60910 of *Insight* 609. It is not thinking but fantasy that is to be your dominant effort here, battling stale brain-cell patterns. All we have at present is, perhaps, “Impression, Fog”. How distant from us, in this century, is the serious move towards accounting progressively and futuristically for painting, personality, politics or piety?

<sup>3</sup> You might divert here to page 189 of *Allure*, and muse over Lonergan’s musing over “the many species (not individuals except as types as dominating personalities)”, the understanding of which would lift humanity’s climb towards undreamed of achievements. But of course there is the center-piece of the genius of Jesus that coped, in those early years, with a terrible tension-gap of meaning around his mother’s house, a tension that would mount in the presence of the mouths of his mates. We are invited by Grace to share this tension-gap. Monet talked of the pretender-impressionists and one might think of Cezanne’s late remark: “All my contemporaries are assholes.” But, more gently and realistically, we may sense the impression of *persona* in Christianity’s past two millennia, well-meaning victims of a skin-soaked presenting of initial meanings.

<sup>4</sup> Comments on the meeting are given in the fourth of the new series **HOW**, that hovers communally round questions of progress raised by participants who wish to leave behind present academic putterings. The three previous **HOW** essays seek to open up a new perspective.

<sup>5</sup> Recall note 1. You may read on in the text, without reaching into the notes, to get a first impression: what I am to do, and have done, is write this short textual response. But now there is the weaving in of a challenge that should discomfort theologians of Lonerganist persuasion. It concerns going back to that old style science of theology and the problem in it identified by

chat of academic disciplines, we are not at peace. To say the most, we should be openly at war, and require tuning, not just into *The Art of War*, but into the functional subtlety of a science of a war in the culture of humanity.<sup>6</sup> “To win without fighting is best,”<sup>7</sup> but we, in Lonergan studies, are beyond the option of the cajoling alternative of Lonergan’s “cajoling or forcing attention.”<sup>8</sup>

There are layers of force. “When opponents are at ease, it is possible to tire them.”<sup>9</sup> My Lonerganesque opponents, it would seem, are at ease. Might some “perhaps not numerous center”<sup>10</sup> tire them by spiraling, in well-being,<sup>11</sup> round and about the glorious “Improbable Christian Vision,”<sup>12</sup> especially if the glorious vision increasingly appears to be edging towards the vision of the historical Jesus?<sup>13</sup> That appearance

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Lonergan in *Insight* (pages 763-4): where might the treatise on the mystical body fit in? The question is like asking about the Higgs mechanism in physics: a parallel lost on my colleagues. In the past decade I have offered an answer regarding its place and its character, yet one can glimpse that answer as fitting within old style theology as a type of history of efforts to identify the meaning of those words, mystical body, over the centuries. But first here I wish to note a scientific scandal: there has been no response, no nay or yeah, to my suggestion among the usual suspects. It seems apt to carry my challenge forward through the notes.

<sup>6</sup> There is the reference here to *The Art of War* by Sun Tzu. My copy, from which I quote below, is the translation by Thomas Cleary, Shambhala, Boston, 2005. But the science of war is sublated into the strangeness of the “absolutely supernatural” (*Insight*, 746) and the Art “seeks to solve problems” (*Insight*, 442) in its “fuse into a single explanation” (*Insight*, 610) that is ultimately “the Scent of a Nomen” (*Allure*, 223).

<sup>7</sup> *The Art of War*, vii, quoting here from the translator’s comments. Think broadly of the advice of chapter 3, “Planning a Siege,” e.g. “The best policy is to use strategy, influence, and the trend of events to cause the adversary to submit willingly.”

<sup>8</sup> *Insight*, 423.

<sup>9</sup> *The Art of War*, 78.

<sup>10</sup> “Dimensions of Meaning,” *Collection*, CWL 4, 245.

<sup>11</sup> The well-being is that talked of in the nineteenth chapter of *Allure*, which points beyond the contemplative achievements of the four appendices of the book (see the table of Contents).

<sup>12</sup> Part of the title of the chapter on future economics in my [Lonergan’s Challenge to the University and the Economy](#). The book is copied from Lonergan’s copy, with his interesting markings.

<sup>13</sup> The gap between this edging and the hedging of the usual stuff on the historical Jesus indicates a sickness that diseases the reality of ordinary Christian piety, a piety which spontaneously views the pilgrim Jesus as being way beyond the level of this time or that time, a Jesus not a stranger to the Jesus who now listens. Surely Lonergan students of CWL 8, *The Incarnate Word*, can sense the sickness that, e.g., would leave Jesus of the public life scratching his head about who he is?

and reality pushes me to the wondrous slogan for my disciples of this millennium: stay CALM! “Invincibility is in oneself, vulnerability is in the opponent.”<sup>14</sup> It is the invincibility of the humble integral reacher, the true political character,<sup>15</sup> living peacefully in the molecular straining of a fantasy tuned to long-term optimism. Integral? That bent is aided by the fantastic CALM question about the commonness of a reaching for the historical Christ, the historical Avila, the historical Lonergan, and the historical Monet. That commonness is to be found, but found within ever-growing luminosity, in the road sketched in the Appendices of the little book *The Allure of the Compelling Genius of History*, an ever never land climb together towards “Deepening the Image of Global Valuing.”<sup>16</sup> The togetherness is the gripping and being gripped by the open genetic systematics<sup>17</sup> that is as seemingly secular as Impressionism and as solidly sacred as the pilgrim grasp of the Symphony of Jesus.<sup>18</sup> So, Monet is dancing in

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<sup>14</sup> The Art of War, 56

<sup>15</sup> I need hardly recall the beginning of the *Magna Moralia* and my usual way of weaving it into section 1 of *Method in Theology's* last chapter.

<sup>16</sup> I refer to the title of the last of the four appendices, in *Allure*, on contemplation: 135-40.

<sup>17</sup> Here I arrive at the key point of my challenge of note 5. The genetic systematics of the new theology is realistically dependent on the cyclic dynamics of functional collaboration, which sublates Lonergan's suggested reversal through the increasingly-refined control of a universal viewpoint. In symbols: GS ([CFS], [RUV]). But you might leave out the dependence symbolized by [CFS] – and still have a shot, helped by *Insight's* canons of hermeneutics to push for a vision of the mystical body. Or you may follow the present sick conventions and view the canons as an uncookable ploy in disguise, so leave out [RUV]. Then you putter along in amateur privacy in the hunt for a better controlling grip on “the greatest of all works” (CWL 12, *The Triune God: Systematics*, 491.) Need I give references to some of my senior colleagues' lame efforts? It is against this folly and its ineffective mess that Lonergan's life-work stands. But the modified challenge I propose is for my colleagues in theology to push on genetically – this being a methodological fog for them – in old ways, towards an adequate center of theology, a scientific center that would show “cumulative and progressive results” (*Method in Theology*, 4) in “a method of effective action that was not possible within the limitations of the parliamentary game” (CWL 18, *Phenomenology and Logic*, 305), be the parliamentary game in Brussels or Beijing, Reykjavik or Rome.

<sup>18</sup> We move on from note 13, with or without some grip on the pointers of the previous note. The symphony of Jesus involves the sequencing mentioned there, a fog for anyone who has not tried to seriously climb through *Insight* 15, section 7. Present pilgrims of any millennium are to be sustained normally – a matter this of cultural lags – by the positive *haute vulgarization* of the front slice of that genetics, rejoicing in any millennium about holding dear Jesus's vision of the next millennium and His ongoing radiant historical causality (see *Allure*, at note 9 of page 49

a good universe between the before of the ancient Chinese pottery brushstrokes and the after of Jackson Pollock's swirling paint-drips. The dance has been endlessly described, in rich variations of initial meanings. Such endless describing shows the same faulty hidden arrogance as the describing that is settled in a self-satisfying selection of Lonergan's initial meanings, or in Teresa of Avila's crippled guidance. The lift off to global care requires a repentance towards a geohistorical pattern of care that is beyond the present fantasy<sup>19</sup> not only of my tired and tiresome opponents but of us few struggling to hear "the music of the spheres."<sup>20</sup> Let, then, the few put their hands to the plough under present unwelcoming tiresomeness, brutality, terrorism.<sup>21</sup> Pick up some old conventional spade, and "move the first sod."<sup>22</sup> Maybe you have the X-Factor talent, hidden in convention and stale habits.<sup>23</sup> Maybe in those there habits hides a seeding seething see-thing so that you, she or "he has not to go to the Louvre

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and note 56 of page 170. I draw attention to a misleading reference in note 56, line 5, to note 46 of chapter 4. It is, indeed, to the 46<sup>th</sup> note, but it is to the note 9 (p. 49) of the Appendix to the chapter, already given). Fancy, thus, His minding of the fourth millennium and of his own Companioned radiant causal presence there. Are we capable of proving Him wrong? : "Alexander's horse Bucephalus" (*Insight*, 685) being a horse of a different colour? More positively, are we not capable of attuning, paradoxically, to the unknown vision and so see beyond the present state and states to move effectively "to win the allegiance of everyone in the liberal states who wishes justice but not Christ"? (Lonergan, "Essay in Fundamental Sociology." I quote from Shute, *Lonergan's Early Economic Research*, 33.)

<sup>19</sup> I refer here to a task sketched on *Insight* 722. This task is a nice parallel to the task set by *Method in Theology*, 250. The two pages have been dodged. On the dodging of 250, see *Allure*. On the dodging of 722, *Allure* also is eloquent: the page is the most referenced in the book.

<sup>20</sup> Shakespeare, *Pericles*, V. 1. 228.

<sup>21</sup> I am not thinking here of normal terrorism or ISIS, but of the terror of the conventional corporate control of history that makes us just not notice that they are making and have made "life unlivable" (CWL 10, *Topics in Education*, 232). We are victims of random invention manure-fractured around us by greed on steroids. "We are in a situation where people who can do the most harm are doing it and people who could do the most good are not." (CWL 18, *Phenomenology and Logic*, 307).

<sup>22</sup> I quote from the final great challenging page of F.E. Crowe, *Theology of the Christian Word, A Study of History*, Paulist Press, 1978, 149. This gallant effort to get beyond conventional theology, indeed to bring forth a sequencing perspective on the story of the Word in history, inspired me in a range of cliff-hanging reachings during the past decade.

<sup>23</sup> I reflected relevantly on such talent shows as The X-Factor in *Allure* (225ff). There you find the question "Has Cosmopolis Got Talent?"

to behold himself” or herself.<sup>24</sup> Maybe you can hear Lonergan of 1935<sup>25</sup> as Pollock heard Benton in that year: “Before I get started on my own stuff and forget everything else I want to tell you I think the little sketches you left around here are magnificent. Your color is rich and beautiful. You’ve the stuff, old kid—all you have to do is keep it up.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> The inner quotation is from Wallace Stevens, *Prelude to Objects*.

<sup>25</sup> I am referring to the “Essay on Fundamental Sociology” mentioned at the end of note 18.

<sup>26</sup> From a 1935 letter of Thomas Hart Benton to the young Jackson Pollock, quoted in *American Painting, 1900-1970*, from the Editors of Time-Life, 1970, 138. I would note that this good book illustrates marvelously the rich patterning of initial meanings. But what really is going forwards in those seventy years of painting? And what is going on in this little essay? Might you parallel it with Frederick Chopin’s final little Mazurka, and weave in the problem of moving towards a fulsome search for, say, the historical Frederick or Kate Chopin?