

**METHOD IN THEOLOGY:
REVISIONS AND IMPLEMENTATIONS**

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I thank
the heart of sickness
for the man of rain
laughing away from me

returning
slipping through me
like a needle
a word
morning ice
memory blitz
a knife
with a mind of its own
to stab
cut
and save
my life

that after sixty years
I wonder at
know little about
sitting here
watching pigeons invigorate themselves
beaks working breast and back and wing
before they test the hardy air
of this March morning

[Brendan Kennelly, *The Man Made of Rain*, Bloodaxe Bks, 1998, the end]

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Foreword

I recall having supper with Bernard Lonergan in the late 1970s, when he was musing over a title for what he envisaged writing in economics. He grinned at me saying, “You’re good at titles Phil?” We did not come up with a title; but I have a sense of his grin as the title of this book bubbles up today, eighteen months after the completion of the book. But we’ll get to just how cute the title is after the next paragraph.

Why the delay in putting the book on the website, such a delay that its sequel is already there?¹ Well, it was a matter of running the book past University of Toronto Press, and indeed doing so successfully, with two enthusiastic readers and editor Ron Schoeffel in support. But alas yesterday word reached me from the Canadian Federation, a grant source, that the book was not deemed worthy of a publication grant. So, here you are, a website freebie!

But back to the title. The submitted book was titled, *Method in Theology and Botany*. Then one of my good readers for University of Toronto Press suggested the alternate title, *Molecules, Minding, Meaning*, and I decided to go with that for publication: it has already been so named by me in various writings and this paragraph serves as notice that no such book is on the way! *Method in Theology and Botany* really didn’t catch the drive, whereas that new title certainly echoes my present mood and emphasis: the fresh peculiar molecular infolding of billions-year-old energy that is promised by global collaboration.² Still, might it fail to catch the attention of my intended audience, students of Lonergan? So back I went today to *Method in*

¹The sequel was written during 2006: it is *Lonergan’s Standard Model of Effective Global Inquiry*. To follow is the book mentioned below, at the final note of the Foreword.

²I am talking here literally or more accurately, explanatorily, of the dynamics of cosmic finality, a dynamics which is to continue into a genetic *eschaton*.

Theology as a piece of a title: surely students of Lonergan will give me a hearing with such a part-name? What of *Botany*? It is certainly relevant, indeed central. It could well be included by a twist of title to *Method in Theology: Sunflower Seeded*.³ A good title, perhaps even Lonergan would agree. Still, too Mcshaneian, and so too easily dodged by orthodoxy.⁴ I finally settled for the present title. It is good in various ways. First of all, it is accurate. But also it is annoying, at least for some. Who is this guy talking of revisions to Lonergan's great last work? Well, you just have to read on to reach a view on that, **and**, please, to answer me openly, to tell me and others publically why you think I am silly e.g. to read page 250 of *Method in Theology* with such seriousness.⁵

And what of implementations? These are what bring beauty into method. There are the humble internal implementations of cyclic contemplation that is the inner future of the Tower of Able. And there is that eighth specialty, in which "theological reflection bears fruit,"⁶ a strange

³There are many layers of meaning to this piece of the title, which retains the pointing to botany, a pointing captured in the second of my Cantower series: "Sunflowers Speak to us of Growing". At the beginning of that Cantower I placed a poem which gradually became the poem of the entire series: Sun, flowers, Son-flowered, / Speak to us of growth / seed cauled, cribbed, / Kabod yet confined, / Crossed with dark earth, / Light-refined, / Rill open-ends a trill / Annotaste of Throat."

⁴There is a Lonergan orthodoxy that is really an entrapment in old ways, ways of comparison and contrast and common sense and ineffective dialogue. Fr.Fred Crowe's stand against that orthodoxy was to ask "What functional specialty are you in?". Just recently an Australian colleague, Tom Halloran, came up with the wonderous alternate question, What is your audience? The audience, in the collaborative cycle, is the group in the next specialty. What is my audience? I am puttering, foundationally, in the task of communications, so I am talking both to future researchers and to a present commonsense Lonerganism.

⁵I was serious enough to think about it for a year recently, and to write some 200 pages about it, around it: SOFDAWARES and *Quodlibets*.

⁶*Method in Theology*, 355.

and distant hope of this century, perhaps even of this millennium. Might this little book help you fantasize pragmatically forward towards a global future in which at least one-eighth of those dedicated to serious theological reflection are a solid coordinated internationally-effective reach not only into pews and schools and colleges, into shops and streets, but into the hearts of world governors, into whatever is to remain of the UN, the World Bank, etc?

But best halt here, July 12th 2007, and let you get back, or forward, to what I wrote in 2005. I have come quite a distance since then, of course, but I resist the temptation to revise in any way.⁷ There are certainly questions here of revisions and implementations reaching way beyond this small book, but I would hope that it is a help, a fresh start. The sequel continues the effort, and I would hope that my final book-effort, *Bernard Lonergan: His Life and Leading Ideas*, would add further reachings, leadings.⁸

⁷Adult accelerating growth is the lurking topic here. On this, and on the relation of functional specialization to the survival of *Insight*, see my contribution to *The Importance of Insight*. Essays in honour of Michael Vertin, University of Toronto Press, 2007, “The Importance of Rescuing *Insight*” (199-225). I would note that the essay was directed to those facing the wonderful challenge of retirement, a fresh beginning. I have not despaired of such adventurers among my older colleagues!

⁸Pierrot Lambert and Philip McShane, *Bernard Lonergan: His Life and Leading Ideas*, will appear both in English and in French and in a few other languages within the decade.

Preface

The Three Parts of this little book emerged in stages. My first intention was to produce a very brief presentation of the drive of history towards functional collaboration and of Lonergan's functional distinctions that would be easily readable in its brevity and style and that would draw on a parallel with botany both to illuminate theological method and to show the relevance of the division of labour to botany. My circulating of that Part produced good responses with such reactions as "finally there is a primer on applying functional specialization in theology". But some asked for more: detailed directives, helpful illustrations, comparisons to work done. There was especially interest in the work of Robert Doran, his years of work on system in theology as well as the work, *What is Systematic Theology?*,⁹ which I mentioned in the Prologue to what is now Part One, but which had not appeared at the time.

To attempt something like Doran's venture into Lonergan's long struggle with method, system and history would be something like duplicating Doran's mighty effort, even if it was only a commentary on Doran's work, and besides it would have defeated my purpose of holding to an introductory style. What to do? Well, it seemed that I could face one of the tasks named as a result of my circulating Part One, of adding helpful supplementary comments and directives, while awaiting the appearance of Doran's *What is Systematic Theology?*. So, Part Two emerged. Then Doran's new work became available to me, setting a further problem. In its fullness it pointed back to his previous work, especially *Theology and the Dialectic of History*, but also to his various writings on psychic conversion. It also pointed forward with very focused attention to the possible

⁹University of Toronto Press, 2005.

entry into theology of Lonergan's subtle and brilliant shift in the core of systematic theology that I might name history's trinitarian realities. His broad sweep left me with the problem already mentioned: the defeat of my project of an elementary approach. But at the heart of his book Doran has two key chapters, titled "Structure" and "Applications," which fitted right in with that elementary approach. Not only that: these chapters both complemented my own reflections on system and pushed those reflections towards further refinements. So the idea emerged of concentrating on those chapters in a manner that would both throw light on the dynamics of Part One and satisfy the desires of some of my audience for comparative reflections.

By this providence I arrived at the present work. My initial project remained intact but soundly advanced. The book is still relatively brief. Furthermore, I found that there was no need to modify the text of Parts One and Two in the light of Doran's work, although here and there I added obvious footnote connects. I further kept the text of Part One integral by not shifting its Preface, or Prologue, into this as a larger Preface, and the other two parts are so presented as to include an introduction to their own dynamic at their beginnings.

The fact that Part One has twenty chapters is still noticeable from the Table of Contents: as the Prologue there points out, it was to draw attention to certain parallels to the book *Insight*. The other two parts are together about the same length as Part One, with seven chapters each.

The work is directed mainly at students of Lonergan's work, and directed at them mainly in the hope of fostering collaboration in initiating a functional division of labour. As I point out in chapter one, that division is relevant to all fields of inquiry, something that I have held since 1969, and indeed Karl Rahner made a parallel point in 1971.¹⁰ But I primarily point out there that history

¹⁰His comment and the reference are in note 70 of Part One.

has pushed us, and is pushing us, towards that division, and this in a global fashion.

Why, then, do I direct my writing to those interested in Lonergan? Because it seems to me that within the following of Lonergan there is a potential to shift the probabilities toward history achieving its finality sooner rather than later.

Whitson could write of *The Coming Convergence of World Religions*,¹¹ but I have no doubt that the convergences of this millennium are to include a global convergence of theory and metatheory, a convergence that will paradoxically save local cultures. Indeed, I see a deeper convergence here, indeed one anticipated beautifully by Lonergan when he wrote: "Theoretical understanding, then, seeks to solve problems, to erect syntheses, to embrace the universe in a single view."¹² This seems to anticipate a new species of theoretician in any or all disciplines, a new phase of adult growth, and the emergence of a new type of global elder.

But the task of history is to get the show on the road, or as I say, get the show on the roll,¹³ for the dynamics of the collaboration is to be cyclic, "a normative pattern of recurrent and related operations yielding cumulative and progressive results."¹⁴ The cyclic collaboration is to be efficient in yielding such results, integral and beautiful in fostering a new global ethos for the study and

¹¹R.E. Whitson, *The Coming Convergence of World Religions*, 1971.

¹²*Insight*, University of Toronto Press, 1992, 417[442]. The first number given here, and below, is the reference to the first edition published by Longmans, Green and Co, 1957.

¹³The slogan "A rolling stone gathers *Nomos*" is the title of two chapters of previous books: *Economics for Everyone*, chapter 5 and *A Brief History of Tongue*, chapter 3, both from Axial Publishing, Nova Scotia.

¹⁴*Method in Theology*, University of Toronto Press, 2000, 4.

implementation of human progress.¹⁵ But more about that as we move along. My point here is that there are increasingly to be those among Lonergan's followers who gallantly work towards stirring the treacle of present conventions of inquiry, thus gradually providing an enviable model of fruitful and efficient collaboration in philosophy, theology, and all other areas of inquiry, beyond their present stands and fragmentations. So they would make manifest and operative, with a new functional meaning, Lonergan's claim about his hope in 1953, when he wrote in the 31st and final place of chapter 20 of *Insight*: "The antecedent willingness of hope has to advance from a generic reinforcement of the pure desire to an adapted and specialized auxiliary ever ready to offset every interference with intellect's finality."¹⁶

¹⁵"It is quite legitimate to seek in the efficient cause of a science, that is, in the scientist, the reason why a science forms a unified whole."(Lonergan, *Topics in Education*, University of Toronto Press, 1993, 160).

¹⁶*Insight*, 726[747].

PART ONE

METHOD IN THEOLOGY AND BOTANY