

## Posthumous 15

### “Spiraling upwards to an ever fuller view”

I quote here from a 1962 lecture, obviously antedating the emergence and statement of functional collaboration. The full quotation wonderfully anticipates an aspect of that collaboration that is key to our moving forward comfortably. So it seems best to quote that piece more fully, a short piece with Lonergan’s heading, *The Genetic Circle*.

That circle – the systematic exigence, the critical exigence, and the methodical exigence – is also a genetic process. One lives first of all in the world of community and then learns a bit of science and then reflects, is driven towards interiority to understand precisely what one is doing in science and how it stands to one’s operations in the world of community. And that genetic process does not occur once. It occurs over and over again. One gets a certain grasp of science and is led onto certain points in the world of interiority. One finds that one has not got hold of everything, gets hold of something more, and so on. It is a process of spiraling upwards to an ever fuller view.<sup>1</sup>

The quotation raises complex issues – for example, the collaborative cyclic relations between the three exigencies – but I wish to avoid complexity here in order to get you thinking of one simple aspect of the cyclic collaboration: a rough and messy beginning it is to move to a simple elementary success that over generations is to mature into a powerfully successful omnidisciplinary global care. Nor do I wish here to seriously tackle the problem of the messy beginning: that is a topic that floats around all the way to *Posthumous* 21 and into the Spring Campaign.<sup>2</sup> So: let us muse over the shift from present structures to simple beginnings.

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<sup>1</sup> *Early Works on Theological Method 1*, University of Toronto Press, 2010, CWL 22, 140.

<sup>2</sup> I already mentioned, in note 16 of Posthumous 14, the Spring Campaign of 2013, and will return to it again in note 3 of Posthumous 17.

Getting to a heuristic fantasy of this or of the climb beyond beginnings is not easy for those working “in the less successful subject”<sup>3</sup> of theology. One may wonder about even the possibility of rising to a commonly-accepted system.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps it is useful to think of some commonly accepted perspective that is representative of “the basis of Christian ecumenism.”<sup>5</sup> One might even go so far as to pick some acceptable presentation, be it a general creed, a block of the New Testament, or a book I have already used in these essays: *How God Became King*.<sup>6</sup> Some of the Lonergan community would claim a fairly large common ground. Others of that community would say that we are missing the common global scene shamefully, that we have become an effete ghetto.

Neither these issues, nor problems of the messy beginning, concern me in this essay. Rather, I am interested in opening the way to a very elementary heuristic fantasy. It is a fantasy – and such fantasy takes molecular stretchings of the mind, even when simple – of what might be meant by “cumulative and progressive results.”<sup>7</sup> Before I comment briefly on the stretching I would note that these essays are a push for a full optimistic fantasy about the future, an optimistic fantasy that in fact weaves its way into Lonergan’s meaning and fantasy. That indeed is the key point in my venture of musing about a re-write of his chapter in

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<sup>3</sup> *Method in Theology*, 4, top.

<sup>4</sup> The simple conventional system has been the axiomatic system, such as one finds in Aristotle, Aquinas, Newton, etc. Genetic system is a difficult ball-park that is rather unfamiliar to Lonergan students. Rising to that as existential bent is going to take work. Cantower 7, “Systematic and General Systems Theory” (available at: <http://www.philipmcshane.ca/cantower7.pdf>) invites the venture in, centering attention on Lonergan’s view of the genetic systematics needed by the historian of mathematics. In that essay, too, there are pointings to the integral omnidisciplinary systematics that is grounded on the antisymmetric sloping of disciplines in their withdrawal to and return from common foundations. What theologians have to reach for is a still fuller perspective that moves comfortably in the symbols of geohistorical details.

<sup>5</sup> *Method in Theology*, 360.

<sup>6</sup> N.T. Wright, *How God Became King. The Forgotten Story of the Gospel*, Harper, 2012. Keep in mind the comments in note 7 of *Posthumous* 14.

<sup>7</sup> *Method in Theology*, 4 and 5. The difficulty about even simple illustrations is that they ask for some sense of serious scientific shifting.

*Method* on religion. But let us go back now, or rather get down now, to some musings about beginnings.

Of course, such musings would be greatly aided by even a popular familiarity of the dynamics of sciences, but again that would carry us forward beyond our modest enterprise here. Where, then, to begin our musing? Perhaps, as a genuine comfort to many, genuinely interested and concerned with what Lonergan offers, I might suggest a positive musing on opting out of the cyclic climb. And I would note that the musing is valid even if one is holding down an academic job. Here we are talking about various types of crawl-spaces, as contrasted with the “elitism”<sup>8</sup> battling beyond “the level of the times.”<sup>9</sup> So I pick out a relevant piece of my recent broad sweep. “If you opt out of that infant crawlspace then you opt out of the tower of collaboration. That opting out can lead both to personal enrichment and to tower seeding.”<sup>10</sup> The footnote there points to aspects of that enrichment and seeding. Let me here point to these in the context of our attention to the meaning of “cumulative and progressive results.”

The elementary results can be in street and church, family and friendships, classrooms and boardrooms: so, for instance, one becomes, cumulatively, a better listener. At the heart of that cumulation, certainly, is the practice of listening. But I would suggest that thinking seriously about what listening is could lift the listening. The thinking seriously is, of course, contemplative prayer: so, here the humble effort merges with the task of the elite, with the task of moving contemplatively towards the contemplative third stage of meaning. Not a bad unified front for Lonergan studies! But the unified front becomes wholesome only if there emerges the Tower Community suggested by Lonergan, and in these initial stages that needed front has to be advocated uncompromisingly by all those prayerfully interested. “One lives first of all in the world of community and then learns a bit of science and then reflects, is driven towards interiority to

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<sup>8</sup> *Method in Theology*, 351.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 350.

<sup>10</sup> P. McShane, *Method in Theology* 101 AD 9011. *The Road to Religious Reality* (Axial Publications, 2011), 47.

understand precisely what one is doing in science and how it stands to one's operations in the world of community." Lonergan's talk here is of doing science, but I am drawing attention to doing the science of understanding spouses and children and friends and then broadening one's puzzling to the larger needs, not of the total world of community, but of the Lonergan community, so as to raise with them the question raised in 1935 by Lonergan in a similar context: "What on earth is to be done?"<sup>11</sup> Might we have something like that in 2013, a Wall Street movement, a movement to remove the psychic wall that blocks Lonergan studies from the statistical ballpark of cumulative and progressive results? Such would be the ethos of a new beginning, a cyclic beginning.

Can I rally people to that movement, fermenting, fomenting, the seeds of the ethos? Obviously, I have been at this for over four decades in unsuccessful ways. But I add now a new twist from a leap of insight of yesterday to which I return later. As it happens, the nudge, the fomenting, is helped by a remark of Lonergan on the previous page of the letter just quoted. Lonergan writes: "give me someone I can speak to plainly and bluntly, that I can attack not only by argument but with the important ally of some well-deserved ridicule, and there is little difficulty in making him see the light."<sup>12</sup>

So here I am now, writing plainly and bluntly, and inviting you to join me. Can I speak plainly and bluntly to, so to speak, those in charge of Lonergan stuff, adding a bit of deserved ridicule? I am not as optimistic as Lonergan about him or her seeing the light, but let me – and I hope some of you – give it a go. So: the point is that those dominating the Lonergan movement are solidly against pushing for the third stage of meaning. Does this accusation not sound ridiculous?

Let me try what may appear to be shallow blunt compact argument.

The third stage of meaning is to be one of effective control of global progress. It is to be the beginning of an operative discovery of Cosmopolis. That beginning is

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<sup>11</sup> I am quoting from the conclusion of a 1935 letter of Lonergan to his Provincial Superior, reproduced in its totality in Pierrot Lambert and Philip McShane, *Bernard Lonergan. His Life and Leading Ideas*, Axial Publishing, 2011, 144-154.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

the acceptance by a significant human subgroup of the solution to the problem of Cosmopolis raised by Lonergan in 1953 and solved by him in 1965. The acceptance so far by the leaders of Lonergan studies has been ridiculous: inattentive, unintelligent, unreasonable, unadventurous, irresponsible.

Need I say more? Well, of course I do. I do not share Lonergan's optimism, after 40 years of failed attempts. So I skip the experts here and turn to commonsense readers who are beginners in Lonergan studies. Don't you find it ridiculous that the Lonergan school has been going round in circles of old problems and old-style conferences for fifty years with little sign of any spiraling? Might you make a little noise about it? Put up your innocent hand at a conference and ask why there is no serious interest in Lonergan's hard-won insight?

But add to that noise and questioning some fantasy of the transition to stumbles of cyclic collaboration. Such stumblings have been discussed before and I see no need to go on about them. But now – my key point – add also, personally and in casual conversation, the difficulty of fantasizing the movement of the stumbling into a secure cycling that

does not occur once. It occurs over and over again. One gets a certain grasp of science and is led onto certain points in the world of interiority. One finds that one has not got hold of everything, gets hold of something more, and so on. It is a process of spiraling upwards to an ever fuller view.<sup>13</sup>

And we may envisage not "one" but one gossiping group, a "popular tradition with an aesthetic apprehension of the groups origin and story, operative whenever the group debates, judges, evaluates, decides, or acts – and especially in a crisis."<sup>14</sup>

Furthermore, the popular tradition is to generate a vibrant new spirituality, ***pious*** rather than pious,<sup>15</sup> in kataphatic analogy-controlled conversation with the Three

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<sup>13</sup> See note 1 above.

<sup>14</sup> Lonergan, *Topics in Education*, CWL 10, 230.

<sup>15</sup> I continue here musings (see note 22 of *Posthumous* 14) on secularity, to which is to be associated a new meaning of *character*. My musings included a return, after 66 years, to *The Aeneid*. At 15 I was impressed by the pious Aeneas ("sum pius Aeneas" line 457 of book 1),

Pivotal Persons of history, “a process of spiraling upwards to an ever fuller view.” But let us leave that to these next two essays, which leap forward from the conclusion of *Posthumous* 14. Those essays point to high-powered, decade-long efforts to reach a strange “towering” view that is to bring the advanced global carers into an incredible unity of care. I recommend that you skip those two essays and enter essays 18, 19 and 20, if you wish to follow up my compact argument and the broader task to which it points. Those three essays correspond, respectively, to the first three chapters of *Method in Theology*. The final essay, *Posthumous* 21, returning to the task of re-writing and righting the fourth chapter of *Method*, will carry forward our effort to fantasize about beginning the spiral climb of effective global care. It is tough work, “difficult and laborious” as Lonergan says. And I borrow a quotation from the context of his work on economics: “a lengthy and painful process of trial and error. *Experto crede*.”<sup>16</sup> The borrowed quotation helps us to envisage a useful parallel. Present economists just cannot be reached on the matter of the cyclic rhythms of the economics envisaged by Lonergan. I recall Lonergan remarking to me, as we worked on his preparation for his 1978 lectures on economics, “this is going to take 150 years,” *this* being the implementation of his economic analysis. Present Lonergan experts just cannot be reached on the matter of the cyclic rhythms of collaboration envisaged by Lonergan. Do we have to think of Lonergan’s remark about it taking 150 years? Ridiculous?

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“*insignum pietate virum*” (Book 1, line 11), famous for his devotion which was nothing like the peculiar piety that colours a great swath of Christian expression. As mentioned already, it is a huge cultural problem, winding into the problems I raised in note 15 of *Posthumous* 13, problems that I do not intend tackling here in my cut-back policy regarding these final essays. But, as I have pointed out regularly, there is still the **Q / A** section of my website (available at: <http://www.philipmcshane.ca/qa-01.html>), where we could begin to ingest more seriously the heuristics of finding our way out of the distortions of humanity so piously weaved into formal religions.

<sup>16</sup> “*Experto Crede*”: “believe me, I have gone that way.” I am quoting the end of short chapter of Lonergan’s fragments, “An Outline of Circulation Analysis,” *For A New Political Economy*, University of Toronto Press, 1998, CWL 21, 112.