

Posthumous 8

My Story, His Story, Position

“Might we once and for all remind the reader that once the new context is introduced, one may not revert to the old without confusion and fallacy. ... It would be a blunder, if not mere ill will, to relate the methods of the new context in the manner appropriate to relating sciences in the old context.”¹

In Posthumous 7 I expressed my intention of beginning 2013 with two essays that would carry forward my plea for an implementation of functional collaboration. I make this earlier move because, frankly, my plea has fallen on deaf ears and I expect no change of heart in these next months. There seems no point in waiting through the end of this year for some late awakening. My Lonergan colleagues, in the main, choose to ignore the invitation, the challenge, the overture.²

My move now is to descend to the popular for this *Posthumous* and to move on, in my quaint way, in *Posthumous 9*, towards a massive recasting of the special categories of Christian theology.³ I am not, then, shifting here to *haute vulgarization*, something despised by Lonergan even though he was, objectively, seduced by it.⁴ I seek rather to create some fermenting of a popular tradition and a satirical ethos regarding Lonergan studies.

Back to this fermenting shortly, but first a comment on the shift from the two promised essays to the two now emergent. The titles of the two promised essays, 8 and 9, were: “My Story, His Story, *Comparison*” (8) and “Position, Poisition, Finite Processions” (9). These two essays were, respectively, to be linked to two

¹ Lonergan, “*Method in Theology*, Chapter I: The New Context,” archival item 58700DTEL60, at page 37. Available on the archive website: <http://www.bernardlonergan.com/>

² See note 18 below.

³ Check *Method in Theology*, 282, and add the context of my *Road to Religious Reality* (Axial Publishing, 2012), Chapter 11. Then consider the problem of that + on the top line of **W₃** and its complexification by the bottom line in that diagram. Are there more precise molecular cosmic vestiges (see *Summa Ia*, q. 45, a. 7) of Those Three?

⁴ This is a complex topic which needs functional cycling and recycling. Lonergan’s sharp critical comments on *Haute Vulgarization* are densely communicated in CWL 6, 121, 155.

previous essays, *Quodlibet* 8 and *Cantower* 9, with titles “The Dialectic of My Town, *Ma Vlast*”(8) and “Position, Poisition, and Protopossession”(9).⁵ The linkage remains, but the structure is looser, a new looseness indicated by the change of title of the present essay and the resultant change of the title of the following *Posthumous* 9 to “Poisition, Comparison, Finite Processions.”

This seems, and indeed is, tortuous. The main point is that I now view it as best to be short and blunt in this essay, and then to go on in the next to the struggle for the discontinuously higher theology, globology, that was Lonergan’s life-quest.⁶ What is that higher ground? It is the ground to be sloped up to patiently by spiraling round the Tower of Able in vastly strange luminous selves- and Selves-possession and processions.⁷ It is the ground whose beginning is so briefly noted in these *Posthumous* Essays, but more fully noted – it has been my life-quest – in a plethora of works that followed the 1961 essay, “The Contemporary Thomism of Bernard Lonergan.” But here, in a popular turn, I symbolize the higher ground with the title of N.T. Wright’s recent book, *How God became King*.⁸

I pause with Wright’s Preface regarding the “need of a fundamental rethink” (ix). “We have to take a deep breath and go back to the beginning,” (xi) – rather than being breathless, late, and pretentious.⁹ We have to move into and beyond what Wright calls “composition criticism” (xv), a genuine venture,¹⁰ to the quite foreign thin air of studies in *Comparison*.¹¹ And in breathing that thin air we are to break

⁵ *Quodlibet* 8 is available at: <http://www.philipmcshane.ca/quod-08.pdf> and *Posthumous* 9 is available at: <http://www.philipmcshane.ca/cantower9.pdf>.

⁶ See note 14 below.

⁷ See note 3 above.

⁸ N.T. Wright, *How God Became King. The Forgotten Story of the Gospels*, Harper, 2012. Referred to below as *How God Became King*.

⁹ An obvious reference here to Lonergan’s appeal of *Insight*, 755.

¹⁰ “We actually have Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. It makes good sense to ask of them, as it does of a Jane Austin novel or a Shakespeare play: What story was the author telling, and how did he or she go about it?” (*How God Became King*, xv). It is useful to think of composition criticism on the level of science: how do the buckyball (C₆₀) or the Higgs Particle go about their business? But we will get to that more seriously in *Posthumous* 9.

¹¹ It took me till last year to break forward to an identification of “the treatise on the mystical body” (*Insight*, 763-4) with the meaning of *Comparison* on page 250 of *Method in Theology*. My little book, *The Road to Religious Reality* (Axial Publishing, 2012), centers on that achievement.

forward in the “attempt to relate the academic study of the gospels to the street-level life of the church” (xvii).

But this air is too thin for my popular reach here.¹²

What, then, of my reach for a popular tradition?

“Popular tradition, whether it be poetry, fiction, or acceptable history, is something essential to human living. It is what the existentialists call an existential category. It is a constitutive component of the group as human. It is an aesthetic apprehension of the group’s origin. The aesthetic apprehension of the group’s origin and story becomes operative whenever the group debates, judges, evaluates, decides and acts – and especially in a crisis.”¹³

And, heavens, can you not sense that there is a crisis? “What on earth is to be done?”¹⁴ We need to get back, or rather forward in strenuous fantasy, to “his story”¹⁵ and ‘my’ story and His story, and take a simple popular position. *My story?* I am here talking out my incomprehensible story: but now what of your

For me, it is a great theological and methodological leap. It has caused no stir among my colleagues. Indeed, my efforts over the past decades have caused little stir, a sad and astonishing state of affairs.

¹² I mentioned the negative side of *haute vulgarization* in note 3 above. But there is a positivity to be rescued by aesthetic presentation. I think of the manner in which I generated enthusiasm in a first year university class in physics in the early 1960s by lifting the group’s fantasy towards larger perspectives.

¹³ Lonergan, *Topics in Education*, CWL 10, 230.

¹⁴ I quote here from the conclusion of a lengthy letter of 1935 written by Lonergan to his superior. See Pierrot Lambert and Philip McShane, *Bernard Lonergan. His Life and Leading Ideas*, Axial Publishing, 2010, 154. The letter is given in full there, pp. 144-154, and it is important in this context: he was luminously living in the agony of decay.

¹⁵ Chapter 12 of the biography mentioned in the previous note, “Research, Interpretation, History, His Story” has “His Story” as title of its ninth section, but in fact Parts 2 and 3 of the book hover over the present crisis. The center of the crisis is dealt with in chapter 10, “The Dominant Context of Lonergan’s Life”.

incomprehensible story there, now?¹⁶ His story? *Simply Jesus*?¹⁷ And what is my simple proposed popular position?

The simple popularly-sensed position is to be the deeply rejected position of Lonergan expressed [a] in his 1833 Overture;¹⁸ [b] in the appeal that spanned his life to get out of low-grade abusive thinking and planning about God's Kingdom, and get on track in tuning into a fantasy of its global emergence, the fantasy that is spelled out as an X called *Cosmopolis*, a fantasy that climbed to **functional collaboration** as a key piece of that X.

So I turn to low-grade satire and humour.

Do you chaps – there are no ladies in this top-level power play – really think that the present scattered patterns of Lonergan studies are going anywhere? That the gatherings in Massachusetts or California or Ottawa or Ontario or Italy, wherever, with packed programs of disorganized papers, are really going towards fostering global sanity?

Ho Ho here I like to fantasize that “satire breaks in upon the busy day,”¹⁹ and “challenges the enclaves of bright chatter.”²⁰ Might younger voices raise questions at these wasteful events? At these and all events, I would have you read down through, and shout out from, that quoted page of Lonergan's *Insight*, in this context of present crisis, with a wit that “knows the difference between

¹⁶ There is a deep and complex issue here regarding self-incomprehension, one I raised in the final pages of *Lack in the Beingstalk* (Axial Publishing, 2007). It has massive significance for pilgrim talk and self-talk, and it is to run everlastingly through the Eschaton.

¹⁷ *Simply Jesus. A New Vision of Who He Was, What He Did, and Why He Matters* (Harper, 2011) is N.T. Wright's book written prior to *How God Became King*. Part of the challenge of *Posthumous 9* is to put his climb of 50 years into the context talked about above in note 9.

¹⁸ I am obviously referring to the Previous *Posthumous* essay. And, obviously too, I am renewing my appeal. What, please, do you find obscure about these lines of page 250 of *Method in Theology*? And please, please say something to me or write something about me and my criticisms of Lonergan studies. We are back at the sadness and astonishment of note 9.

¹⁹ *Insight*, 649.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

promise and fulfillment and refuses to calculate without men as they are, without me as I am.”²¹

But you need “to take your eyes off the page”²² and your bum off the bench and do some Walkabout. In 2004 I did such a walkabout after that fiasco in Toronto commemorating Lonergan’s centennial. I walked around Dublin for a week, puzzling about the failed revolution, expressing the crisis and the failure and the hope in *Quodlibet* 8, “The Dialectic of My Town, *Ma Vlast*.” It could be a start to your own Walkabout.

I see no point in continuing this: shouting into the great silence of Lonerganism. The new reach for the Kingdom proposed by Lonergan is quite beyond the stale neurochemistry of the leadership’s axial superegos, which “in adult life can cause a hell of a lot of trouble.”²³ I can only hope that “satire breaks in upon the busy day,”²⁴ their busy daze. But “satire laughs at, humor laughs with,”²⁵ and I would prefer a blossoming popular tradition that could humbly laugh at the sick and critical cluster-clog we have made of the Lonergan X. Such laughter in the Lonergan leaders might surely “hurry them to their destiny of bringing about their own reversal.”²⁶

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² A favorite remark of Gaston Bachelard. See note 29 of my website book (1975) *Wealth of Self and Wealth of Nations*, chapter 10 (available at: <http://www.philipmcshane.ca/wealth.pdf>). As it happens, that chapter, “The Notion of Survival” was one of my early appeals for functional collaboration, and it is no harm to conclude with its initial quotation from Robert Heilbroner: “It must be clear that the first essential is not a change in policy so much as a change in point of view. We must lift ourselves out of our accustomed American frame of reference and catapult ourselves across a distance wider than the oceans that separate us from the continents in which the struggle for development is taking place. To repeat a phrase we have used more than once, we must learn to see the Great Ascent as it is, and not as we would like it to be.” (*The Great Ascent*, 148)

²³ Quoting from the 13th of 129 letters of Lonergan to Crowe, dated December 27, 1955. I considered this topic in *Humus* 2, “*Vis Cogitativa*: Contemporary Defective Patterns of Anticipation” (available at: <http://www.philipmcshane.ca/humus-02.pdf>).

²⁴ *Insight*, 649.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*