

Q.20 (Bob Henman, February 12th). In Answer 18, you made a point, in the quotation with which I end, regarding obediential potency. Would you please say more about it, and again give some idea of beginnings of building it into our work towards functional collaboration and talk? Here is the direct quotation from your answer, which really, I suppose, is about everything that we are dealing with in theology, so it is a very broadly-significant statement: "we are dealing with absolutely supernatural goings-on, something which requires unlimited contemplative ingestion."

A.20 I won't enter further into the topic being pushed by Bill Zanardi: the enlargement of the viewing of obediential potency. Best just focus on the requirement that I mentioned, unlimited contemplative ingestion". My simplest guide to thinking out this is an invitation to read freshly the pages 746-750 of *Insight*, "In the thirtieth place", "In the thirty-first place". And perhaps it is worth pausing recollectively over your first reading of those pages, indeed your first reading of the words "absolutely supernatural" on line 14 of page 748. Did you halt, startled? The honest answer, perhaps, is 'you must be joking!' And now I throw you back to your reading of another two words, exactly 600 pages earlier: "Emergent Probability" (the last line of page 148).

My point in this twist is to get you to pause over the likely fact that you were not really ready for those two words, 600 pages earlier. (on understanding probability, see *FuSe* 20Z, "Regarding Foundational Issues", beginning at note 5.)

Back we go, then, to the discomfiting words at the end of page 147 that carry over the sentence "To grasp that emergent probability is an explanatory idea is to know what is meant when our objective was characterized as a generic, relatively invariant, and incomplete account of the immanent intelligibility, the order, the design of the universe of our experience".

The sentence that you asked me to comment on is an effort to bring that discomfort into the Lonergan culture, to generate an ethos that would carry us, with some humble luminosity, out of the dismal failure of the past 55 years. I suspect that not too many Lonergan scholars could write down a probability function, and that most of them think of the theorem of the absolute supernatural in terms not much more complex than Philip the Chancellor's thinking of 800 years ago. What I mean, then, by "unlimited contemplative ingestion" is quite simply the scientific attitude that reaches beyond limits in, say, the frontline workers in physics. Perhaps I may be allowed to symbolize that attitude by *Insight's* chapter five, where struggles with the simplest meaning of the space-time of the Incarnation "form a natural bridge from which we can advance from our examination of science" (*Insight*, 163) to a serious grip on what happened in the villages of Galilee.

There is no point in summary development of this – what, indeed, would present theology make of summary expressions of the shift from e.g. schedules of Poisson to Normal distribution dynamics in an obediential finitude of molecular patterns? - so let us wind back to "the thirty-first place" and note that I am focusing on a single aspect of the "heightening of tension" (*Insight*, 747) that meshes with the challenge of the "absolutely supernatural" (*ibid.*). Read those pages and identify Lonergan's expression of my focus: it is the realized danger of these first thousands of years of Christianity that subtly rejects serious explanatory thinking, and, as we enter the third millennium, manages to have no idea of what Lonergan meant when he made the startling claim, "Theoretical understanding seeks to embrace the universe in a single view" (*Insight*, 442). This is all the more sad in that the view in question weaves on, in probability schedules, from that of the Galilean Villager, and the embrace in question has the lift of the absolutely supernatural in the dynamic presence of The Embrace ever-ready "to guide you into all truth" (*John* 16 : 12). The ever-readiness of The Embrace needs us now, in the beginnings of

serious science – which has not yet hit either the humanities or economics – “to advance to an adapted and specialized auxiliary ever ready” (*Insight 747* again) to recycle the seeds of the ethos of humble patient thinking that we are talking about here. But for the moment functional talk about it, foundational here, needs to be made manifest by younger people stumbling around Socratically, commonsensically, at meetings and papers and discussions, asking such questions as “what precisely do you mean by *probability*, or by *supernatural*?” The honest answer may be embarrassing and generate a sense of helplessness but the issue in the present generation of older Lonergan students is, not the impossible task of becoming explanatory, but the simpler one of admitting entrapment in centuries-old conventions of description, and following that admission with effective efforts to steer the next generations into explanatory functional thinking and talking.