

**“IF LONERGAN” and “FOR LONERGAN”****Barriers to Critical Thinking and Self-Discovery****©Robert Henman****January, 2006****Halifax, NS**

“If theology is, as Lonergan described it....”<sup>1</sup>

“In Lonergan’s terms....”<sup>2</sup>

“...understood in Lonergan’s sense....”<sup>3</sup>

“This is because, for Lonergan, the....”<sup>4</sup>

This morning I took from my library shelves two textbooks on physics,<sup>5</sup> and one on an introduction to college chemistry.<sup>6</sup> I perused these texts for phrases such as the above that I have quoted. I found none. I looked over the section on Mendeleev and Meyer to see if the authors of the text made any such remarks as: ‘If Mendeleev and Meyer are correct...’ I found no such remarks.<sup>7</sup> D’Abro’s text was also without such phraseology.

I do not mean to highlight Dalton’s text as outstanding in this form of expression. It is a common approach when academics are commenting or comparing Bernard

---

<sup>1</sup> Anne Marie Dalton, *A Theology of the Earth: The Contributions of Thomas Berry and Bernard Lonergan*, University of Ottawa Press, 1999, p. 173.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 173.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 166.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 166.

<sup>5</sup> A. D’abro, *The Rise of the New Physics*(2 volumes) Dover Pub., 1951.

<sup>6</sup> Morris Hein & Leo Best, *College Chemistry: An Introduction to Inorganic, Organic, and Biochemistry*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Brooks/Cole Pub. Co., 1980

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.

Lonergan's work. Why is that so? Or, what do the words "in", "for" and "if" mean? Could they be manifesting an author's uncertainty about another thinker's insights? If so, why would such uncertainty exist? Let us return to our three previous texts. Such uncertainty is not expressed in these texts. There are admissions that the authors, and the particular fields of research are still working on this or that problem or that they are not yet too clear on this or that. But there are no expressions of uncertainty about certain advances. Now this is not to advocate some absolutism in science. It is an acknowledgement that some decent advance has been made, some foundations have been discovered that can serve as a direction for further advances.

Let us return to Dalton's line of thought and expression. Dalton's line of thought that follows depends on whether Lonergan's thought is correct or at least that Dalton has interpreted Lonergan correctly. And if Dalton's interpretation is wrong or if Lonergan is wrong, her entire line of thought is based on a mistake and will probably suffer the same position. The question begs, 'Why would anyone want to provide a line of thought based on an interpretation of someone else's work when they are not sure if that person is correct, or if their own interpretation of that person's work is correct?' The further question is, 'Why would a researcher not follow through to verify another person's insights before adding to that latter work?'

Again, if you check out any text in mathematics, physics or chemistry you will seldom, if ever, find a researcher basing their own work on the work of others of which they are uncertain. Yet, this form of expression is quite common in theology. Why am I focusing on the work of Lonergan to elaborate a problem in theological research?<sup>8</sup> First, I

---

<sup>8</sup> Lonergan is generally thought of as a theologian only, but in fact he worked in the areas of philosophy, and economics with a fair background in mathematics and physics. Economics was, in fact, a deep concern

have checked out some of the basic insights into understanding that Lonergan outlines in his book *Insight*<sup>9</sup> and found in my own experience that he is on the mark,<sup>10</sup> not unlike my experience of working through the texts I have in physics on Lorentz's orthogonal transformations, Einstein's work on relativity theory, quantum theory, and of course today, particle theory, and string theory<sup>11</sup>. There are intelligent and reasonable advances in those particular sub-topics that have a historical connection through an accumulation of insights that some very hard thinkers set out to verify. Secondly, Lonergan's work appears to be presented frequently in this uncertain manner.<sup>12</sup> To put it bluntly, any physicist who presented work in such a manner would never get beyond an MA in the field. In theology it is quite standard talk and written expression.<sup>13</sup> I am not going into the specific problems of theology but more so into the problems of minding, although, if the problems of minding were overcome, many of the problems in theological discourse would eventually be resolved or at least be moving in a direction towards resolution<sup>14</sup>.

In regards to Lonergan's work and thought there are a few important insights that are manifested as missed if one expresses their thought in Dalton's manner. 1)there is no

---

of his through out most of his adult life. In August of 1984, 3 months before his death, he and I had lunch together at the Jesuit Infirmary of Pickering and I proposed that he was probably taking it easy these days. He turned to me with those eyes of his and said, "Oh no, I'm still working on the economics." The areas of theology, philosophy, and economics were distinct for him but not separate. They meshed in his mind in an effort to express his view of, and his contribution to, history and progress.

<sup>9</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, University Press of Toronto, CWL 3, 1992.

<sup>10</sup> By this term I mean that when I verified the experience Lonergan was trying to convey to me in his print that I found the meaning to be coherent, intelligent, and verifiable.

<sup>11</sup> I have for the most a high school background in some of these areas. I did venture into these areas more deeply some years ago when struggling with chapter 5 of *Insight* but found it very tough going. But that did not shift my thought into one of being suspect about the written expression. But it did offer an insight into my own ability and into the complexity and difficulty of serious science.

<sup>12</sup> I am not going to list texts but one can find a list online or any university library and do the empirical work as an exercise in verification at least.

<sup>13</sup> I work in the area of pastoral theology and there is a pious tone in the spirituality of such work that dominates much of the literature creating a block to discovering our self-caring assets or the emergence of a larger context to view pastoral work.

<sup>14</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, Darton, Longman & Todd, 1972 for a discussion of functional specialization as a way of recycling our present state of inadequacy. See also Philip McShane's website [www.philipmcsane.ca](http://www.philipmcsane.ca) for various articles on initiating such a project.

verification of Lonergan's insights, in other words the 'Is' question was not asked, 2) there may have been no insight into what Lonergan was expressing since the researcher did not feel compelled to ask the 'Is' question, 3) there may not have been a serious push of the 'What' question since no insight seems to have occurred, and 4) there may not have been any advertence to one's own inner dynamics since no 'What' question appears to have been asked. Now, I listed these inner elemental dynamics in reverse order that we might end with the first step that Lonergan invites the reader, to advert to one's own experience of one's own acts of consciousness.<sup>15</sup> That is a basic invitation of Lonergan's work and if that is missed, the whole text is missed, more importantly, the reader is missed.<sup>16</sup>

Lonergan has been thought of as being a bit arrogant in his style.<sup>17</sup> Is it arrogance or is it like the physicist that he checked out his insights before expressing them? I recall in Boston at the Lonergan conference of 1978, I believe, Lonergan being asked a question concerning anthropology and he quite comfortably directed the questioner to an expert in the field.<sup>18</sup> Lonergan had not spent time thinking that particular question out. I recall

---

<sup>15</sup> In as much as Dalton represents a particular mental stance to scholarship, Lonergan scholarship also struggles with perhaps what might be understood as an acceptance without understanding. This is often common in religious circles perhaps due to the cultivation of a deficient understanding of acceptance. See my article "Obedience and Self-Creation" on this website, also published in the online journal Quodlibet for a discussion of what I now call self-possession. There is the further issue of the flood of articles, thesis, and works on Lonergan's thought that, as Philip McShane has often stated, miss the reading of Chapter One of *Insight*.

<sup>16</sup> Anne Marie Dalton spends a bit of time outlining her understanding of Lonergan's expression on emergent probability. I cannot help but wonder what she understands by that since that view is grounded in one's own appreciation of one's way of knowing reality. And that perspective is exemplified in the few opening quotations of this article.

<sup>17</sup> I have heard this comment a few times over the years. One often does have to suffer in what might be viewed as odd ways of surviving groups. I am thinking of Lonergan's survival of the Jesuit order. Their comments have been portrayed to me over the years as polite bits of conversation.

<sup>18</sup> There seemed to be little pretentiousness in Lonergan or the need to validate his work to others. I recall when I first met Lonergan in June of 1978 (as we shared a glass of scotch) telling him that I thought he offered quite a challenge to the future, his reply: "Well, it's up to you now." He seemed to manifest a comfortability with a division of labour, a sign perhaps of his incarnation of functional specialization.

reading Aquinas' treatise on feelings and I very quickly was drawn into my own experience and knew that Thomas had thought this out within the context of his own experience of feelings. These types of thinkers understand not only what they know, but also what they don't know because they take the time to think it out but also, more importantly, they know what it means to come to understand. They have checked it out in their own experience.

I have focused this website, for the most part, on the topics of education, parenting, and therapy. This article may appear as a diversion but in fact it does focus on a central issue in research-thinking. So, as many of my articles spoke of the 'what' question in relation to parenting, child growth and therapy, they did so with a push to adverting to our own thinking dynamic. I recently completed reading Anne Marie Dalton's book and over the last 25 years I have often come across this "if" and "for" type of expression in texts about Lonergan. This morning I understood that form of expression in a new way<sup>19</sup>. Such expression manifests a non-thinking stance towards reading. I pondered how one might help a reader overcome that stance and yet I too, struggled with that and still do. So, I have some personal experience upon which to draw. But will I? That's the key question, will I draw on my experience to seek some insight into the problem and have something to verify so that I have something worth putting in print? Is there any worth in publishing a text or article that admits to premises that the author has not verified. Now much of science advances through belief and if a researcher had to verify every previous insight in a field no advance would be possible. But that is not what

---

<sup>19</sup> This is something Phil McShane has been advocating for over 25 years, that we grow slow if we want to grow at all, and it is perhaps well exemplified in his observation that the self he was last week would not understand the self he is this week. It is a perspective on growth but it also intimates in a profound way, that growth is possible if one is willing to work at it. That's not the perspective of the academy.

Loneragan is advocating. He is inviting the reader to experience and hopefully get insight into foundational events in you and I that are common to all science, to all human knowing. Why would a researcher not notice that or fail to take up the challenge?<sup>20</sup> Now I must admit that without a good teacher I would still be reading as I always had, ignoring the reading of myself. In fact, even with a good teacher, it took me some years to even begin to read in that manner. Fragmentation can be quite brutal and somewhat deeper than we might first suspect.<sup>21</sup>

What might some of the barriers be to a critical stance<sup>22</sup> towards reading any text, and for our purposes, Lonergan's work *Insight*. There is the unacknowledged confusion of dysfunctionality, emotional disturbances, neurotic distractions and perhaps more importantly our time and state of historical process. Global culture is simply not there yet, in other words, we are not there yet. And we will not get there through a course, a reading of a text, or even a Pauline rapture. But, perhaps in appreciating that there is a gap, we might ease the neurotic tension in the cosmos towards finality. It is one thing to acknowledge the inhibitions to personal growth but the focus of practicality need be towards our own self-development, our own self-luminosity.

Returning now to Dalton's text,<sup>23</sup> and texts that offer some analysis of ideas, what contribution can such works make towards dialectic<sup>24</sup> if the foundations that the work

---

<sup>20</sup> This question could be viewed as naïve. I put it out there, not rhetorically, but for anyone who might actually wonder about that. Are you curious as to why a researcher might do that? It raises questions about the university and whether or not one learns within such an environment.

<sup>21</sup> I do find that new forms of interference or fragmentation surface with time and living, and then one's experience of one's own 'liberated' molecular sensibility suddenly does not feel so liberated. This experience can oscillate around our lonely desire towards growth.

<sup>22</sup> J. Benton, A. Drage, & P. McShane, *Introducing Critical Thinking*, Axial Press, Halifax, 2005.

<sup>23</sup> If I sound overly critical of Dalton, I am not excluding the academic venture in general. People also need to make a living. That is concrete in all stages of history and groups such as the university oscillate around that function leaving education as a secondary function.

purports to stand are either not understood or not held as fact?<sup>25</sup> Dialectic deals with conflict. What do I mean, or Lonergan mean, or you mean by conflict? Can we take a stand on our worked-out meaning of the process of dialectic? My meaning excludes work, thought, print that is outside the conflict if by conflict I mean what has the possibility of development. So, my existential stance and focusing on the questedness of human nature in my previous work is an effort to orientate fragmentation towards what is foundational in the researcher, in you and me. In that effort, might some few come to a small appreciation of their foundational orientation towards the cosmos. We are not answers, but in our desire for understanding, our questedness, we manifest that we would like to be. It is a dynamic in you and I that gets very little exercise in a global culture dedicated unknowingly to the non-cultivation of our basic luminosity. I have outlined in my previous articles in different manners how one might work at resurrecting some glimpse of their basic dynamic and I will not repeat those efforts here.

A few remarks on what might lift the purpose of Dalton's thesis from a common sense horizon towards an explanatory account placing her effort within the dialectical process of history are in order. The aim of the text is to outline how *A theology that participates in and is constitutive of cosmopolis would meet the problems that Berry critiqued as stemming from a creation-denying, individualist, other-worldly and totally*

---

<sup>24</sup> I am thinking here of Lonergan's foundational perspective on functional specialization. There is the need to begin where we are and texts such as Dalton's do point to our present state of scholarship as vacuous of serious thinking. How can one recycle such work? Lately, I have wondered about the value of recycling such literature. Can it make any contribution to our present state and is it worth the effort of interspersing such work into the process of functional specialization? In the concrete all is within that process. Unfortunately, much of that activity can be an inhibition to the control of meaning and would perhaps better serve the library shelves.

<sup>25</sup> *Insight*, pp. 306-308 for a discussion of judgments of fact.

*human-centred understanding of redemption;*<sup>26</sup> This thesis is insightful, practical, and Dalton's inclusion of a discussion of intellectual conversion<sup>27</sup> is appropriate. The approach of that discussion of intellectual conversion, unfortunately, keeps the reader within their own common sense horizon. This form of expression dominates theological discourse as well as much of the literature on Bernard Lonergan's work. A chapter in Dalton's text inviting the reader to 'puzzle' about intellectual conversion would be a nice addition, but, unfortunately, that too would not necessarily draw the reader into their own foundations. Lonergan's invitation is a gradual project towards the emergence of the objectification of human subjectivity through the linguistic feedback that can result from a functional recycling of our present state of inadequacy.<sup>28</sup> My own teaching and writing over the past twenty years or so as well as my own slow struggle in becoming at home in the "Transcendental Method"<sup>29</sup> have revealed the difficulty of assisting a person in grasping a grounding in their own dynamics. Is there a possibility of being drawn into expressing our own subjectivity as subjective in a form of expression such as Dalton offers? Does this form of expression bring the reader to notice and grapple with their own questing dynamic and all the inhibitions that can be an intrusion or distraction to its proper functioning? And finally, does this form of expression initiate a turn to the subject, to one's interior life, where an account of the explanatory basis of intellectual conversion is made possible? I hesitate to answer these questions for they are attempts to mediate a desire in the reader, a desire to ask questions, to notice question's dynamic, its object, its

---

<sup>26</sup> Dalton, p. 167. I was originally drawn to this text, 1) because of my interest in Lonergan's thought, and 2) I have been interested in Berry's work for sometime by his existential respect for the sacredness of creation.

<sup>27</sup> Dalton, p. 156 ff.

<sup>28</sup> In other words, functional specialization. See *Method in Theology* pp. 88 & 97 on linguistic feedback.

<sup>29</sup> Philip McShane, *The Shaping of the Foundations: Being at Home in the Transcendental Method*, University Press of America, 1980.

function in self-discovery. Emergent probability, the unfolding of history, is inclusive of Berry's proposed shift in the cosmic story. The implementation of Berry's vision within the process of history will need to be grounded within the slowly emerging objectification of human subjectivity if it is to have any contribution to history and progress. It has been seven years since Dalton published her text and one might wonder as to its contribution to either Berry's vision or Lonergan's work. Contribution is something that occurs as in the sciences I referred to earlier in this article. An advance is possible if some basic foundations have been discovered. "If" theological research "ifs" its way through history, is a contribution possible? Does such an approach create the required intellectual stance to shift an exploration of human possibilities into probabilities?

Earlier I mentioned that I had been reading expositions of Lonergan's work for 25 years noticing the "If's and only in the reading of Dalton's text did it occur to me in a new way how the *elemental dynamics* explored in *Insight*, were not explored *in* the author.<sup>30</sup> That provided me with a deeper understanding of the inhibitions to the dialectical process. In other words, a bit of linguistic feedback has occurred, the possibility of discourse occurring within conflict emerged. History unfolds even within the context of our own inadequate self-unfolding. In between the writing and teaching there is and will always be the need to withdraw and do self-research that recycles our inadequacy towards a deeper reading of the self that reads.<sup>31</sup> Within my context Dalton's

---

<sup>30</sup> Philip McShane, "Insight and Method: Beginners' Books?" *Joistings* 2, p. 1. [www.philipmcshane.ca](http://www.philipmcshane.ca)

<sup>31</sup> Philip McShane, "The Discouraging Cultural Ethos" *Qoudlibet* 15, p. 2. [www.philipmcshane.ca](http://www.philipmcshane.ca)  
 "...against those who have no notion of self-reading, the truncated still-present still present culture. You and I are in that culture, our molecules "half people and half bicycles," in the sickness of sin and decline and dangling conversations."

book offered a small contribution to my growth although in a somewhat twisted fashion perhaps. Within the context of the culture it offers little or no hope.

This article points towards a problem in the dialectical functioning of research and scholarship.<sup>32</sup> Am I advocating that researchers give up their work, their writing, their teaching to sit around adverting to their own dynamics? We all have to eat but is there any desire within us to enter seriously into the process of history, into the self that you are, to move forward not just through time and space, but experientially through the self-transformations of your own self-glimpsing? Even the smallest of glimpses offer the possibility of a cosmic disturbance in the statistical probabilities of reorienting the human story towards a connection of presence to oneself and the cosmos where, in Thomas Berry's words, "man discovers the wonders of himself in all the world."<sup>33</sup> You and I are, in a "...Inside-Out of Radical Existentialism"<sup>34</sup> manner, "all the world."<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup> *Method in Theology*, pp 235 ff. See especially pp 247-249 for a discussion on the absence of theoretic thematization, "There results a babel", p. 247. A rather blunt comment by Lonergan and until one develops some appreciation for the differentiations of common sense and theory it remains so.

<sup>33</sup> Thomas Berry, "Affectivity in Classical Confucianism," Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Asian Studies (1973), *Riverdale Papers III*, 22.

<sup>34</sup> Philip McShane, *Wealth of Self and Wealth of Nations: Self-Axis of the Great Ascent*, exposition Press, NY, 1975, The above quote is the title of chapter 5 of this text. This text is to be republished with Axial Press, Halifax, in the near future.

<sup>35</sup> This comment is not advocating that there is no response in the cosmos to our orientation, but that too is a discovery, not an invention. See Philip McShane, *Music That is Soundless: An Introduction to God for the Graduate*, University Press of America, 1977, p. 31. To be republished with Axial Press, Halifax, 2006.