

Assembling $[1 + 1/n]^{nx}$

The original context of what we are assembling is a piece of a letter written by Lonergan to Frederick Crowe in June 1954. Crowe and I began our long sharing of the struggle to understand Lonergan in the early 1960s, and sometime later he shared the letter with me, focusing on the passage that made little sense to him. Over the years I have struggled with its meaning and shared the struggle with others.¹ My climb led me eventually to the essay in the *Journal of Macrodynamical Analysis*, volume 10 (2018), 105–35, titled “[Method in Theology: From \$\[1 + 1/n\]^{nx}\$ to \$\{M \(W_3\)^{\theta\Phi T}\}^{4?}\$](#) ”. Since then there has been the struggle expressed in *Divyadaan: Journal of Philosophy & Education* vol. 30, no. 1 (2019), and the book of the summer of that year, [The Future: Core Precepts in Supramolecular Method and Nanochemistry](#), both of which efforts subtly pushed me towards the present problem of *Assembly* and my reach for an answer that could constitute my first and second objectifications of the *Lonergan’s 1833 Overture*.

Best add here and now the relevant piece of the letter, where I bold face the two bits of present interest:

The Method of Theology is coming into perspective. For the Trinity: Imago Dei in homine and proceed to the limit as in evaluating $[1 + 1/n]^{nx}$ as n approaches infinity. For the rest: ordo universi. From the viewpoint of theology, it is a manifold of unities developing in relation to one another and in relation to God, i.e., metaphysics as I conceive it but plus transcendent knowledge. From the viewpoint of religious experience, it is the same relations as lived in a development from elementary intersubjectivity (cf. Sullivan’s basic concept of interpersonal relations) to intersubjectivity in Christ (**cf. the endless Pauline [suv- or] sun- compounds**) on the sensitive (external Church, sacraments, sacrifice, liturgy) and intellectual levels (faith, hope, charity). Religious experience : Theology : Dogma :: Potency : Form : Act.

My struggle with Crowe’s struggle led me to work on the meaning of $[1 + 1/n]^{nx}$. What was Lonergan thinking of when writing “n” or “x”? I won’t go there now, since it leads into, e.g., a

¹ On this see Patrick Brown, “Interpreting Lonergan’s View of Method in May 1954,” [Seeding Global Collaboration](#), edited by Patrick Brown and James Duffy, Axial Publishing, 2016, 45–80.

musings over the oddity of e^x that is expressed in the equation $d/dx (e^x) = e^x$.² Indeed, my present poise exposes the focus on that first bold-faced piece as an unfortunate distraction. Lonergan, it seems to me now, was typing hurriedly in the mood of a thrilling grip on a possible genetics of expansion, an exponential bubbling, to which he was led by circling round—his early reading of Sullivan is in there—“the endless sun- compounds of Paul.” And, you may ask—that is the task of a first and second objectification in Lonergan’s Overture—what else is in there, for him then, for him eleven years later, for you now, for the millennial future of theology?

But first, a little help on the road: a pause over *The Letter of Paul to the Colossians*, verse 14 of chapter three. “Above all, clothe yourselves in love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.” If you have the Greek to hand, well and good, but no panic. The third last word in the Greek of the verse is “*sundesmos*.” There you have the sort of compound to which Lonergan was drawing attention. *Sundesmos*, as a noun, is a compound word comprised of *sun*, meaning “with” and *desmos*, meaning “a band, fetter, anything for tying”³ So: you have a, well, a Super-tying. How Super? Who Super?

?“anything for tying”? What flows through your W-enzyme here, what flights of fancy? What-flights of fantasy?⁴

How can I help forward my short appeal for an *Assembly* on $[1 + 1/n]^{nx}$, an Assembly on Lonergan’s excited passage, journey, of that piece of a 1954 letter?

I think, now, of two potential tyings-together, from previous efforts of mine, spanning fifty years. [A] There is the tying together of subjects in simple conversations talked of in my *Music*

² Pages 116–18 of the article mentioned in the first paragraph gives pointers on this.

³ I am relying on dictionaries here, as in my background puttering, but in that puttering I benefitted from sun-conversations with scholarly folk, in particular with Conn O’Donovan, who did oceans of Pauline research in our climbing.

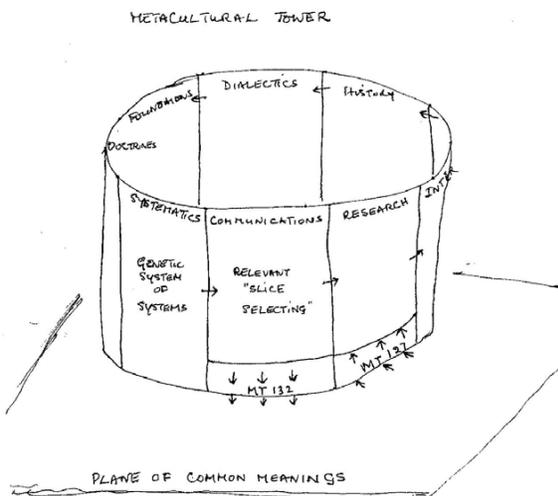
⁴ The effort here is best made integrally, compactly. A W-enzyme poise (see pp. 2–3 in [The Future: Core Precepts of Supramolecular Method and Nanochemistry](#) on the dense meaning of *W*) that anticipates the harmonies and genuinenesses mentioned in *Insight* 498–504.

That is Soundless;⁵ [B] there is the potential tying together [yes, long run e^x!] of the conversing community that was Lonergan’s Dream of 1965.⁶

[A] The basic question to raise is, *when did I last⁷ have a real conversation?* That question must be asked in an authentic personal memory search, and its answer is aided by its threefold specification: *when was I last understanding, understood? When did I last speak? When did I last listen?* The process is an effort to locate personal data – and one may honestly find that one has little or no data. Some people pay their psychiatrist \$100 an hour to attempt conversation – no one should assume that they achieve it every day. Contemporarily, for instance, real conversation rarely occurs in an institutional context: if this seems an exaggeration it is no worse than the psychologist Maslow’s contention that less than one per cent of adults grow. In so far as one has se experience of real conversation – indeed even if the question raised produces only a glimpse⁸ – one has data for the understanding of conversation. But only data, only a beginning, as the Epilogue reiterates.

⁵ The extract [A] is on p. 7–8 of the third edition, *Music That is Soundless: A Fine Tuning for the Lonely Bud A* (Axial Publishing, 2005). The book originated in 1968.

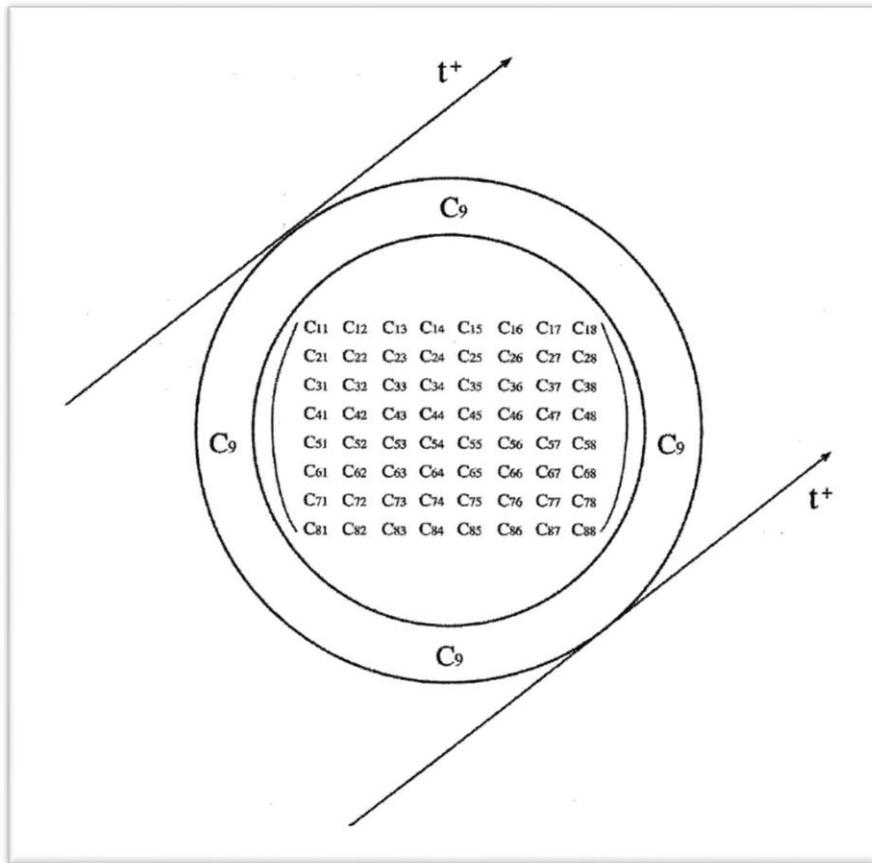
⁶ I have regularly symbolized Lonergan’s dream as a tower:



⁷ [Notes 8 and 9 here are in the original text]. The word *last* here might seem superfluous. Its use relates both to the strategy of attention to a concrete particular (*Insight*, 274) and to the rhythm of the question. “This rhythm of language is a mysterious trait that probably bespeaks biological unities of thought and feeling which are entirely unexplored as yet.” (Susanne Langer, *Feeling and Form*, Scribners, New York, 1953).

⁸ This parallels Lonergan’s point in “Christ as Subject,” *Collection*, CWL 4, 174. “If anyone cares for clarity on this issue, he can begin from the statement, ‘*non si riesce a comprendere*’ (one fails to understand). He can contrast that experience of not understanding with other experiences in which he felt he understood. Then he can turn his efforts to understanding and not understanding.”

[B] Below is the matrix of Communications presented in chapter 16, “Communications and Metaphysics as Science,” [*The Allure of the Compelling Genius of History*](#).⁹



Now pause over another of *Colossian*’s verses: 1:17. “He himself is before all things and in him all things hold together.” The verse in Greek ends with the word “*sunesteken*.” A *sun*-hold. Does the Son hold and host and hoist the molecules of our conversations in a symphony of words in which “God is not an object”?¹⁰

In both [A] and [B] you are invited to sun-hold together the spooky sun-hold together of networked and networking conversations. And have I not intimated that this is the invitation of finitude, a holding-together mediation of the holding together that is the oneness of minding, the

⁹ It occurs on page 188, in chapter 16, “Communications and Metaphysics as Science.” Note the meshing of chapters of *Insight* and *Method in Theology*, a strategy of illumination. The eight specialties are paralleled to *Insight* eight chapters, 9–16.

¹⁰ *Method in Theology*, 342, line 2 [316, line 15].

minding of oneness?¹¹ Can you hear here hear the finger-springing Interior Lighthouse¹² of Lonergan's end-typing of *Method in Theology* in the early 1970s? It points to "the fruit of Christ's prayer: ' . . . may they all be one . . . ' John 17, 21).¹³

Networking conversations: about pushing the "all be one" of all of the mediating situation rooms of all the homesteads and hovels and hotels of humanity's trek towards the home-stretch of the Eschaton.

These few pages, of course, are an invitation to group's Assembling $[1 + 1/n]^{\text{mx}}$ so that the invitation of Lonergan's Overture to converse freshly with oneself in the first two of three objectifications would bring your living as a theologian "from being a sort of vegetative living to being a conscious living."¹⁴ There is the seed of carrying theology, *From Mild Mess to Wild Bliss*. Here hear here: if only some significant few would leap out of the messy vegetable garden into guarding the *sun-* garden of Paul and Jesus.¹⁵ More about that guarding in the next essay. Meantime, I leave you dangling in the second last footnote of [*The Future: Core Precepts in Supramolecular Method and Nanochemistry*](#).¹⁶

My stare at you is incomplete, and the final note will put that incompleteness in context. But here I think of the short-term context, the context of my brief introduction (above, p. 28) of Aristotle and Drucker as pointing to the stairs inadequately, (R, I, H and D_{oc} S C) and my pointing inadequately there to the bridge between them (D_i, H): a context for the *Duffy Exercise* that is to dance round the third chapter of this book. The short-term fuller context to my "Openers of the positive Anthropocene" in the book is your picking up on my nudgings given in the repeated mention of problems associated with the words *intersubjectivity* (xiv, xvi, 8, 9, 34–5, 40, 54–5, 80, 92, 96, 103) and *spooky* (3, 8, 13, 17,

¹¹ Pause now over the word "with" in the end line of *Insight 722*: "Good will wills the order of the universe, and so it wills with that that order's dynamics joy and zeal". A fresh reading for you? Recall our focus on that page and its difficulty in [*LO and Behold 9*](#), "Assembling *Insight*."

¹² I have elaborated abundantly on The Interior Lighthouse, a tradition of Kataphatic Prayer. For beginning reflections see *Disputing Quests* 14 and 16. The challenge was expressed earlier in the five (4–8) [*Prehumous*](#) essays on "Foundational Prayer."

¹³ *Method in Theology*, 367[338].

¹⁴ *Philosophical and Theological Papers 1958–1964*, "The Mediation of Christ in Prayer," *CWL* 6, 179, lines 9–10.

¹⁵ This is a massive challenge. It obvious relates to facing the challenge of the second canon of hermeneutics and that turn of a page and a culture of *Insight* 609–10. Helpful leads are [*Disputing Quests*](#) 10, "Paul's Epistles and Functional Systematics," and the three [*Disputing Quests*](#) essays titled 4, 5, and 8 "Turn Wright".

¹⁶ Note 50, page 111.

66, 116) and the 6 repetitions (xiv, 8, 34, 54, 80, 103) of Lonergan's 1954 challenge regarding the future of theology. You find now, perhaps, that you did not climb in each occurrence to a fresh meaning of the word or the challenge? Such a climbing in reading belongs to the positive Anthropocene. But we need to climb towards that climbing: try climbing over the stile named by my repetitions, my petitions, Lonergan's petition. I return to your aid in "On the Stile of a Crucial Experiment," *Divyadaan: Journal of Philosophy and Education*, vol. 31 (2020). That is to be followed by the aide-mémoire, *The Future as Life Stile: From Mild Mess to Wild Bliss*.