

Fusion 14

Members of the New Society

That new Society has already been named in various places, but best repeat that name : “repetition is the mother of convention”. It is The Society for the Globalization of Effective Methods of Evolving; it is designated as **SGEME**, pronounced scheme with the obvious overtones of that word.

This Fusion was intended to be a move towards listing members, and indeed it remains that. But actual listing, and its form, is something that needs more time and more advisory interchanges.¹ The present essay, then, is a move towards helping people identify their possible role as members.

What came to mind this morning as I mused on this problem: my experience in teaching for some Summers in the 1990 in the Iberoamerica University of Mexico City. The groups involved were quite varied in their interests, talents, occupations. There were chairs of departments and there were people working with poor natives at the two ends of Mexico. There were beginners in self-discovery and there were those who had battled forward for more than a decade. My advice and my strategy with such groups was to help people to find their level. For many, the need was for a solid commonsense grip on self-attention, enough to turn their work - teaching, preaching, healing, whatever - towards the seeding of self-luminosity that would also be the seeding of a new community. To that ‘many’ I reach out here, with an added twist.

The twist relates to a commonsense attitude towards Lonergan’s final achievement. The dozen years after writing *Insight* was for him a sad time of lonely searching for the answer to the mess of contemporary minding. That mess is to be illustrated by the next Fusion, on the mess of Voegelin studies. But it is a mess that

¹Eventually it seemed to me better to end this fusion series, going out with the bang of Fusion 18, “Sorting Out the Second Canon of Hermeneutics,” that points tantalizingly to the solution to the pilgrim problem of holding description in the tweezers of metaphysics. So the list is to emerge gradually, first in Fusion 16, then in the first essay of a new series, suitably named **SGEME**.

screams at us - or in us - from politics and economics, education and therapy, warped arts and wayward crafts. The answer that he came up with - that history is coming up with across that board of interests - is a division of global effort.

The division that he envisaged, that is being seeded by history's muddlings, is quite subtle: yet there is a minimal sense in which it is as evident as the division of labour in a pin factory. That minimal sense is what I would have you attend to in your interest in membership of the New Society. Have you a sense of the mess, the global mess, the mess in your own area of inquiry, the mess in your own area of living and partly living? Might you trust Lonergan's discovery, published forty years ago, as a possible way out, something worth trying? Then join us, like the ladies who held hands around the airdromes in Britain, or like the trees huggers of India, in a grassroots effort to take our evolving to a new level of self-control.

The predominant membership of the New Society might then, paradoxically, not be those who seem academically competent, the published and the professorial, but people with some sense that the final great achievement needed, and needs, to be hugged, cherished, handheld and heartheld. Nor need that sense be a comprehending sense, but simply the plausibility that a genius battled towards the notion for twelve years after 1953 and was quite convinced that he had the core of the answer in his creative burst of February 1965. What he had was not a new filing system but a program for a massive shift in global redemptive inquiry. The published and the professorial of the Lonergan tradition do not think so, or if they do think so they hide it well by staying with the old effete inefficient ways.

The following essay illustrates the effeteness of those ways in the case of Voegelin studies. But the same holds true of the study and implementation of economics, the arts, the lower sciences and their technologies.

It seems best to cut this essay short. It simply supplements the appeal of Fusion 7 for an effort of marketing. Might we embarrass the professorial and the published by drawing attention to this last doctrine of Lonergan? What might our equivalent of tree-

hugging be? And how are we to get our hands round the air-droning of conferences without a sufficient membership concerned with toxic waste of time and pollution of minding?

So do, please, ye beginners and strugglers after daily meaning, think of joining this ragged revolution.

And, as the next Fusion indicates, some may not be beginners but hugely competent in some area like Voegelin studies.

Finally I would note that my invitation here is not to become a student of Lonergan - whatever that might mean - but to tune, in commonsense fashion, into the level of our times.²

And this brings me to a key final point in my appeal to commonsense people as potential members of a societal surge. Lonergan has a curious passage in *Method in Theology* in which he praises common sense, the common sense of great men such as Pascal and Newman that many would think of as operating in a quite refined and differentiated mode. The passage is worth brooding over because of that twist: "The Greek achievement was needed to expand the capacities of commonsense knowledge and language before Augustine, Descartes, Pascal, Newman could make their commonsense contributions to our self-knowledge."³

So, here, I turn to a commonsense contribution to our self-knowledge that is made by Jose Ortega Y Gasset: "The need to create sound syntheses and systematizations of knowledge, to be taught in the 'Faculty of Culture,' will call out a kind of scientific genius which hitherto has existed only as an aberration: the genius for integration. Of necessity this means specialization, as all creative effort inevitably does;

²Lonergan wrote of the need to be at the level of the times, and it would seem that he got the expression from Ortega Y Gasset, indeed from the book quoted in note 4 below. Curiously, it is likely that the copy I am using is the copy that Lonergan read. This is the opinion of Fred Crowe who kindly loaned me the book, a discard from Regis College Library.

³*Method in Theology*, 261.

but this time, the man will be specialized in the construction of the whole. The momentum which impels investigation to dissociate indefinitely into particular problems, the pulverization of research, makes necessary a compensative control - as in any healthy organism - which is to be furnished by a force pulling in the opposite direction, constraining centrifugal science in a whole organization."⁴

I am not going to go into refinements about the differentiations of consciousness that are present in such men as Newman or Ortega Y Gasset. I would simply say that his little book is sound common sense, as the passage that I quoted here is. Yes, as Ortega Y Gasset says, it take genius - or history - to find a way out of idiot patterns of researching, gathering, writing, publishing, conferring, whatever: but cultured common sense can smell the rat or the rot in much of present effete goings-on. "The better educated become a class closed in upon themselves with no task proportionate to their training. They become effete."⁵ The next Fusion will risk offense in my suggestion that the meetings of the Voegelin Society manifest patterns of such effeteness, but the organizers may be forgiven in that Voegelin genius did not rise to a "construction of the whole". But I am writing here mainly to people interested in Lonergan and the tragedy is that Lonergan's life was devoted to such a "construction of the whole" and at the age of sixty he broke through to such an empirically operable construction. Why, then, a commonsense beginner might ask, does Lonergan studies "dissociate indefinitely into particular problems", a dissociation manifest in its gatherings and publications?

Such a beginner might well move to the view that perhaps what is being missed by settled patterns of scholarship is the discomfoting "aberration: the genius for integration." Such a beginner might well move towards joining our merry band that has tired of the old effete ineffective patterns of Lonergan studies.

⁴Jose Ortega Y Gasset, *Mission of the University*, translated with an Introduction by Howard Lee Nostrand, Princeton University Press, 1944, 91.

⁵*Method in Theology*, 99.

So I would hope to produce a substantial list of people that sense that Lonergan, after all, had a global point in his leap to the need for a systematics of collaboration. The list may appear in various places, but it is certainly to be the substance of Fusion 16 on my Website in December. It will be a list of names and e-mails. What to do if you are interested? Simply e-mail to me [pmcshane@shaw.ca] your intention of being a member, however passive. Then I shall include you in the list, and I shall up-date you regularly on the state of the revolution.

It seems appropriate to conclude with a cautionary comment. If you are a struggling student of Lonergan's works, say battling towards the acceptance of a thesis or looking for a job in some Lonerganesque department, then I would advise that you remain off such a list as I propose until such time as you are safely placed academically or economically!