

Futurology 1

Suggestions about Heavenly Genitals

The title is attention-catching, and is meant to be so. There would probably be no rush to read this if I had put down my initial, and genuine, title, "Suggestions *de Novissimis*," where the topic of heavenly genitals occurs, at least in Thomas. The old theological tract "*De Novissimis*" dealt only in broad sweeps with bodily and bawdy functions. Thomas was right in there. But I'll come back to that in later essays.

Meantime, the primary suggestion is that this neglected area of theology is worthy of more serious interest, not only because it is a pastoral and personal issue, but also because it has the potential both to tune up our theological muscles considerably – also, of course, a personal issue – and to nudge us towards the division of labor called functional specialization.

As I think now of the personal pastoral issue I recall Karl Rahner's last address – spring of 1985 I think¹ – when he expressed his regrets about the undeveloped character of this part of theology. Do you share his regrets? I think also of Lonergan's first formal theological venture into the area, in the autumn of 1934, when he scribbled in Latin the following at the bottom of the first page of a codex which was used in one of his courses: *de Novissimis*.²

"A prior methodological question: why do we thus proceed? That you might better understand the theology itself? That you might better understand this tract? That you might know how to unite the bones of the dogmatic and speculative with preaching to little ones?"³

Now there, surely you notice, you have quite a decent nudge from the student Lonergan of second-year theology towards the question that fermented eventually into his transformation of *Insight's* halfway house, metaphysics, through the

¹ The address appears in English translation in *Theological Studies* around 2005.

² Archival item 48000DTL040/A48, some eighty typed pages, with handwritten additions by Lonergan. I may return to this text and to other like texts, *De Novissimis*, later. Citations to archival material are to the number assigned to documents on the Lonergan Archive website, <http://www.bernardlonergan.com>

³ This is my effort to translate the scribbles, the words of which I was able to make out as follows: "Quaestio praevia methodologica – cur sic procedamus / ut ipsam theologiam melius intelligatis / ut hoc tractatum melius intelligatis / ut sciatis unire ossa dogmatica et speculativa cum predicatione ad infantes." See the Appendix *De novissimis* on page 6 below. Some problems there: "hoc tractatum" is not good Latin, and "ipsam theologiam" would need "rem" in between to make better sense in Latin. "infantes" may seem odd, but it could be that Lonergan was thinking of 1 Peter 2:2, "Be like new-born babes, always thirsty for the pure spiritual milk, so that by drinking it you may grow up and be saved."

division of labor sketched in his scribbles of February 1965? Those scribbles answered his 1934 questions about the place of a tract such as *de Novissimis*. Until then he could not handle his own “quaestio praevia,” and he was aware of the incompleteness. He joked – but frustratedly – during Easter of 1961 in Dublin about the state of theology, “big frogs in little ponds,” and in that same week, to my question about dealing with the tract *de Novissimis*,⁴ he grinned and answered: “Oh, I leave the hard stuff to the other people.”⁵ His teaching chores were in the safer zones of Trinitarian theology and Christology, although his sideshows were always a matter of winding round within elements of his major puzzlement.

I mentioned just now him being aware of an incompleteness, but the leap of 1965 threw him forward to a more precise awareness. This shows in his discovery file of February 1965, where he chases back to the first question of Thomas’s *Summa Theologica*. Why? Because he was, I would say, surprised and delighted at the huge significance of his contribution to theological method: the axiomatics of Thomas was to be replaced by an anti-foundational cyclic system of systems of a data-sifting cyclic care.

But I have begun to write compendiously, like the articles in *Scientific American* regularly do. So perhaps I should have a pause, somewhat like Lonergan’s scribbled pause, with “a prior methodological question: why do we thus proceed?”

Yes, there is that parallel with *Scientific American*, which, in its *haute vulgarization*, can give a sense of understanding to some readers, yet give light regarding advanced work to professionals. The prior methodological question has been answered by me, pivoting on that 1965 leap, in my recent little book, *Futurology Express*.⁶ These essays are a follow-up in the mode identified there and elsewhere as **C₉**.⁷ But, thinking in the context of the matrix mentioned in note 7, they may be thought of as **C_{5X}**, where X can vary from 1 to 9. I am chatting in a loose foundational fashion about the needs of the future.

First, a pause over the notion of follow-up. You might push me to admit that really the topic I raise, End Times, is a very central topic to *Futurology Express* that I

⁴ The tract *De Novissimis* was, in fact, one of the courses of my first year of theology, which I was surviving that year. So the topic was on my mind.

⁵ I assumed he was joking at the time but now it seems to me that he was serious about “hard.” Consider the demands noted in the next four essays of this series.

⁶ *Futurology Express* is to be available in September 2013 as an e-book, or from Axial Publishing: <http://www.axialpublishing.com/>

⁷ There is the 8-by-8 Matrix of internal communications within functional collaboration, to which I add output like **C₉**. See the full diagram on page 108 of my book *A Brief History of Tongue. From Big Bang to Coloured Wholes* (Axial Press, 1998).

oddly omitted. And that indeed is correct from a full heuristic perspective that takes in terminal value in the fullest sense possible.⁸ But *Futurology Express* was a strategic book, like *Insight*, pushing along in secular and genetic fashion towards an effective glimpse of the new science, the *scienza nuova* that Lonergan wrote of in 1956.⁹

The key word there is *effective*, just as the key problematic word in *Insight* is *implementation*, without which “there is no fruit to be borne.”¹⁰

Now the issue of this series of mine on *Futurology* is effectiveness. Such effectiveness is, I have claimed in that recent little book, the desired ethos of human thinking in its full existential globality. In *Futurology Express* I stressed the possibility – a shadow of the schedule of probabilities – of effectiveness through a communal focus on present economic chaos. Here I add a second focus, one more internal to present theological goings-on. The focus is on what I may call “end-of-life happenings.” It can be a focus such as is normal in old-style theology in which there is little that is existential: think of those old texts *de Novissimis*, or even of the cool musings of Thomas. But I would prefer if it took on the vitality of the questions Lonergan posed about death,¹¹ but now involving a slow difficult climb through generational cycles.¹² For a beginning we might tune into commonsense interest as it ferments at present in death as a “Tunnel to Eternity.”¹³

⁸ Think in terms of the spread of words on page 48 of *Method in Theology*. Think of “destiny” as mentioned there on page 291, line 11; and again on page 292, line 16.

⁹ “I am led to suggest that the issue which goes by the name of a Christian philosophy is basically a question on the deepest level of methodology, the one that investigates the operative intellectual ideals not only of scientists and philosophers but also, since Catholic truth is involved, theologians. It is, I fear, in Vico’s phrase, a *scienza nuova*.” *Shorter Papers*, CWL 20, 223. Lonergan was reviewing books on Christian philosophy. He was still a decade away from his discovery of “the deepest level of methodology.”

¹⁰ *Method in Theology*, 355.

¹¹ “We all have to do our own dying.” *Phenomenology and Logic*, CWL 18, 239. See also pages 232, 295. Ideally, one should ingest the drive of chapters 10, 13 and 14 of that book. They lead one to the struggle with the ethos of a theology that dances within the luminosity of subject as subject to which I pointed in the *Posthumous Essays* 14-21 (available at: <http://www.philipmcshane.ca/posthumous.html>), or more compactly in the epilogue of *Futurology Express*. That is a pretty long, slow, and – at present – solitary climb.

¹² I simply add a qualification to the previous note, when the climb becomes a communal cycle: “That circle – the systematic exigence, the critical exigence, and the methodical exigence – is also a genetic process. One lives first of all in the world of community and then learns a bit of science and then reflects, is driven towards interiority to understand precisely what one is doing in science and how it stands to one’s operations in the world of community. And that genetic process does not occur once. It occurs over and over again. One gets a certain grasp of science and is led onto certain points in the world of interiority. One finds that one has not got hold of everything, gets hold of something more, and

But what I would wish my readers to do is to tune in in the manner in which Lonergan faced the text of his class of 1934: how might this stuff hit me and my street enlighteningly and effectively? Helen Keller wrote in *Light in my Darkness*, her 1927 spiritual autobiography, "Swedenborg's message has been my strongest incitement to overcome limitations." Might a freshened *De Novissimis* become, for Christian theologians, a strong incitement to overcome limitations?

I do not wish this first essay in the series to get overly long. Suffice it, then, to say that a theological seriousness about our post-mortem reality would lift us way beyond the reaches of Moltmann's *Theology of Hope*¹⁴ or Pannenberg's eschatological views.¹⁵ But the lift requires that we spiral humbly round and across the "natural bridge over which we may advance ... to an examination of common sense"¹⁶ and the lurking aspiration of common sense "that we do not go quietly into the night."¹⁷

My series seeks to bring into effective evidence that we desperately need, as a community of global care, to tackle the issues of a terminal future with and through the dynamic cycling defined in *Futurology Express*. But that making evident cannot occur without our puttering together round and about all realms of aesthetic, scientific and technological meanings towards the messy beginnings of making effective Lonergan's answer to his 1934 question of addressing the newborn. "Rid yourselves, therefore, of all evil; no more lying, or hypocrisy, or jealousy, or insulting language. Be as new-born babies, always thirsty for the pure spiritual milk so that by drinking it you may grow up and be saved. As the scripture says, 'you have tasted the Lord's kindness.'"

so on. It is a process of spiraling upwards to an ever fuller view." *Early Works on Theological Method*, CWL 22, 140.

¹³ I am recalling here the book by Leon Rhodes, *Tunnel to Eternity. Beyond Near-Death*, with a foreword by Kenneth Ring (Chrysalis Books, 1997). Chrysalis books express the searchings of the Swedenborg Foundation. There are various other traditions, Eastern and Western, in the same ball park. Best known, perhaps, is the work in the tradition of Kübler-Ross.

¹⁴ Jorgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope. On the Grounds and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology*, Harper, 1965. I shall return to Moltmann, in functional research style, in *Futurology 5*: "The Genesis of Hope Stories."

¹⁵ Pannenberg's views enter into the topic of *Futurology 3*, "Pannenberg, Space, Time, and Eternity" and *Futurology 7*, "Time and Eternity." The basic text that I refer to in relation to Pannenberg is Robert John Russell, *Time in Eternity. Pannenberg, Physics, and Eschatology in Creative Mutual Interaction*, University of Notre Dame Press, 2012.

¹⁶ *Insight*, CWL 3, 163.

¹⁷ I quote a key line of the film *Independence Day* which represents a prevalent human mood regarding survival: of the race, of the nation, of the family.

My way of bringing forth effective evidence, in the next five essays, is to tackle the problem of functional research's requirements in five areas. There is the area whose data is summed up in the phrase "out of body experience." There is the area that is generated by modern cosmologies. There is the area that comes with re-visiting Aquinas's efforts. Fifthly, there is the area of modern theological struggling that has little grip on heuristic canonical needs. Finally there is the area named in the first sentence of the quotation from Peter's Letter: the area constituted by the evils of explicit misinterpretations of Lonergan's methodological leap. Six essays, then, before we push for a broader context in Futurology 7, "Time and Eternity."

Appendix
De novissimis

Tractatus de Deo Fine Ultimo, Beatificante

10. De fine consequendo	
16a Beatitudo essentialis	160
17a Beatitudo accidentalis	168
20. De termino quo finitur status viae	
18a Mors omnibus subeunda	171
19a Quam seculi iudicium part.	174
30. De iudicio condemnatorio	
20a de peritorio	180
21a de inferno	186
22a de poenis inaequalibus	191
23a de poena damni et sensus	193
40. De novissimis mundi	
24a de resurrectione corporum	197
25a de iudicio generali	201-3

Notio centralis in toto tractatu est finis qui beatitudine attingitur sive ab individuo sive ab omnibus hominibus in caelum receptis

Est finis eo sensu temporis decursu hoc sit propter aliud et non est finis eo sensu quo Deus semper et in omnibus perfectionem suam manifestat

Unde statuitur limes, mors, inter statum viae et statum termini

Unde etiam statuitur poena non attingendi finem

Haec ergo notio finis est accurate apprehendenda, tum quia per totum tractatum tanquam fundamentum subsiacet, tum quia variae sunt difficultates sive ex male intellecta natura theologici muneris, sive ex male concepta notione beatitudinis.

Quaestio praevia methodologica - cur sic procedamus

et prae via methodica melius intelligatur

et hoc tractatum melius intelligatur

et omnia prae via omnia sequentia et praesentia cum

particulariter ad infantem