

## COMPARE AQUINAS AND LONERGAN

I add here another context to our central assignment, following the identification of the first major task: finding a pedagogy of aggreformism that involves an understanding of aggregates.

There are some helpful things I can say about this assignment in our new context.

Let us stretch our fantasy forward to, say, the end of this century, or this millennium: whatever turns you on. Perhaps to the end of this week, if you have some such assignment hanging over you and you wish to be innovative.<sup>1</sup>

The fantasy effort has us into the directives of page 250 of *Method in Theology* in a reasonably serious fashion. Moreover, I am presuming that our group of Christian theologians are in the ballpark of the Tower of Able: high-grade folk, then, like leading hot shots at a science convention presenting their latest ventures. This means that the group is up at the front edge of the best standard model. But, unless they are in the fourth level functional specialties, they may not be tuned to the full spread. A group meeting on precise topics of low-temperature physics would not have off-the-cuff serious suggestions about the Higgs particle. So, O.K., let us assume that we are talking here of dialecticians. Then we really are thinking about a full spread of methodological competence. Further—and this certainly stretches our fantasy—that competence is omni-disciplinary. Go figure.

Let us not push that for the moment. Suffice it to consider serious elders in a dialectic effort of Christian theology. Then their *Assembly*—depending how far ahead we are imagining—is of a refinement of some push in Lonergan’s work that has an equivalent in Aquinas. Note that this is altogether plausible. If the topic is some development in studies of Lonergan that has no equivalent in Aquinas, then the *Assembly*, bringing together the two thinkers for serious judgment regarding progress in the standard model would be fatuous. But

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<sup>1</sup> No need to repeat all the cautionary tales, such as Lonergan gave to me in 1968. “Give the guy what he wants.” Lonergan learned this lesson the hard way in a London University logic course.

here we are thinking of some zone that warrants what I may call a double entry in *Assembly*. So, we suppose that there has emerged, through the three first functional specialties, two streams that hover round the same topic. I pick a convenient topic: the psychological poise of a decision maker who is cherishing three possible plans for the selection of one to be implemented.<sup>2</sup> Let's call our topic *X*. Fresh work on the amygdalic chemistry of cherishing has led some interpreter of Aquinas to give a deeper read of the relevant area.<sup>3</sup> In another corner of the globe, there has been work done on the chemistry of hesitation that was fed into some piece of Lonergan's heuristics of discernment.<sup>4</sup> The dialectic group are gathered, at least virtually, to sniff out micro-shiftings of the standard model.

Let us think in a restricted way here about the standard model, so that we thus dodge the question of full standard model: to that I return at the end. So we have a piece of the standard model in the front-edge standard model that deals with that zone of data named by Aquinas in those "63 articles in a row,"<sup>5</sup> ascertained over the previous century to be sufficiently data-similar to sections in Lonergan's work.<sup>6</sup>

It is here that you need to nudge the chemistry of your fantasy: the four words of the title—*Compare Aquinas and Lonergan*—in this new context are massively displaced from present conventions.

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<sup>2</sup> You shall see, from note 5, that the context is 'Thomas' subtle musings hidden behind the text in the *Summa, Ia IIae*. I refrain from giving the precise piece I have in mind. Rather I would ask you to do what I call my menu exercise, which, amazingly gets you through the dozen steps of Aquinas as you move from receiving the menu from the waiter to returning it with a statement of your joy in selecting. Patient intussusceptive repeating reveals amazing weavings of the psyche and the horizon. This is a fine central illustration of the move from common sense to understanding common sense. It helps us in getting to grips with the compact doctrinal character of chapter 18 of *Insight*. Think of the poise over the poise suggested in the text. Three items of the menu resonate with your full subjectivity in history. They are savored, weaved into anamnesis and prolepsis. Then on my minding goes on this joy-ride of discernment.

<sup>3</sup> As we move forward in these essays and in the corresponding [Interpretation](#) forum we shall find fresh features of the up-to-date Standard Model. The previous essay gives decent hints regarding future expressions controlling more refined meanings. See further, note 10.

<sup>4</sup> I leave this loose. Perhaps think of some form of scotosis (*Insight*, 215–7, 625, 722).

<sup>5</sup> *Summa Theologiae Ia IIae*, qq. 6–17. The reference is to *Grace and Freedom: Operative Grace in the Thought of St. Thomas Aquinas*, CWL 1, 94.

<sup>6</sup> See the note 4. Obviously, Lonergan's work reference in note 5 could provide a zone of interest.

Our attention is on the discomfiting new meaning of *compare*, on the sophisticated meaning of *Comparison*. What is this new meaning of *compare*, *comparison*? **The comparing is done to the standard present genetic integral perspective on the topic.** Now there is a sentence worth bold-facing! Perhaps you need to go back to Lonergan’s page of reflections on a genetic integral perspective on mathematics?<sup>7</sup>

Here you have to imagine, and draw sets of diagrams, all with crazy self-attention, to help you hold together the geohistory of views that contextualize the process we call X. There is, then, a genetic sequence of views running from ancient times in different cultures through a globe containing Thomas in thirteenth century Europe and Lonergan in his more complex topology of searching for meaning. The two pieces of the *Assembly* are now matched into that genetic structure. The group of dialecticians, in subgroups or individually, seek partial isomorphism along the sequencing. Partial? Best slide over that morass of pure formulations, hypothetical expressions, descriptive blocks etc.: perhaps just lean on the canon of statistical residues for the present.

I am obviously not spelling out in any way for you, fantasy or fact-like, this process. It would be like talking about a Maxwell experiment or a Feynman diagramming to Galileo. But do have a shot at adding details and then chuckle over Lonergan’s comment:

One may expect the diligent authors of highly specialized monographs to be somewhat bewildered and dismayed when they find that instead of singly following the bent of their genius, their aptitudes, and their acquired skills, they are to collaborate in the light of abstruse principles and to have their individual results checked by general requirements that envisage simultaneously the totality of results.<sup>8</sup>

Are you up to relating what we are at to that final phrase, “results checked by general requirements that envisage simultaneously the totality of results”? The checking is the work we are homing in on slimly here. Stuff attracts attention in the first specialty, either through research or through present efforts of outreach through the final specialty. The research slogan, then, “this is worth cycling,” refers to both sources. But note that always, in any specialty, the totality of results are envisaged. “This is worth recycling” is informed only if the researcher is

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<sup>7</sup> The page is reproduced at the end of *Interpretation 2*, “Some Contexts of the Interpretation Series.”

<sup>8</sup> *Insight*, 604.

poised in the standard model. And so on round. Before we pause over that standard model in theology I had best make my main point.

I began with the usual “compare” question, with two or more authors or sources involved. But in future the proficient style will be expressed by the odd requirement, “Compare Kierkegaard.”<sup>9</sup> That sounds pretty odd, unless you have the new notion of a basis of comparison in the standard model. The effort of all involved is to add effective details to an uncorrected model, to correct the model in a major or minor way. As it happens the pair we picked, Aquinas and Lonergan, represent solid paradigm shifts in theological method and those shifts are embedded in the standard model by which either of them is judged in any new revelations of their achievements. Lonergan, even now, is to be fitted into a larger genetic context than that in his mind during the 20th century.<sup>10</sup>

I close with a final pause over the standard model. I can be short. It has already been descriptively and briefly identified in *Interpretation 6*, “A Treatise on the Mystical Body of Christ.” That treatise is to be, dominantly in its front-edge member of the sequence, the controlling ethos of the culture of the time.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Realistically, stuff of Kierkegaard has to show up, attract attention, in some zone of the full matrix of communication. Then the research question may emerge: we should check such-and-such a piece of Kierkegaard, recycle. It may be that the piece is already present in the cycle, say, in a pure formulation mode, yet, the expression is telling: telling some community better about something. So the Kierkegaard piece goes through the vortex.

<sup>10</sup> See note 3 above and the concluding paragraph of this text.

<sup>11</sup> There is a tricky balance here of the global reach of general categories in Christian thinking.