

"A TREATISE ON THE MYSTICAL BODY OF CHRIST"¹

In various places Lonergan writes about the restructuring of theology.² Obviously the centerpiece of that restructuring will be the cyclic dynamics of the eight functional specialties. But I have pointed out in concluding the previous essay that there is a clear gap between doing theology and educating people into theology, be that educating at professional or seminary level, or at the more modest level of meeting the needs of the faithful. We would benefit from envisaging all those needs here in the general commonsense context of us all as wanting to glimpse where we stand in His story in history.³ That effort can lead us to find the centre of the centrepiece of future theology, scientific and commonsense.

The continuity with the previous essay is pretty evident. We continue to focus on the Incarnate Word here, but point to a leap towards glimpsing His effective weaving into history and the eschaton.⁴ In my most complete reflection on the topic I have used, in this context, the phrase "The Seamless Symphonic Christ,"⁵ and variants of that phrase occur elsewhere in my writings, e.g., "The Symphony of Jesus."

That should not bother you: you probably prefer to stick with the normal identification, "the mystical body of Christ." What is important is to take seriously the problem posed by

¹ *Insight*, 763, at footnote g.

² Best just limit myself here to my oft-repeated reference: those neglected first three paragraphs of chapter one of *Method in Theology*.

³ A great deal of my recent work concerns going a way different from that of Teresa of Avila. A way more familiar to me—from doing and giving his *Spiritual Exercises* and living in his Society of Jesus—is that of Ignatius. I am not considering his mysticism, but the ordinary way offered to his followers. Here I expect some outrage when I claim that that way is a way of common sense: the way forward demands of towering leadership something more, something that will be a standard model way beyond what Ignatius discusses in his exercise of the "Two Standards." A later culture will lift his *Spiritual Exercises* into a fuller kataphatic context that will course common sense.

⁴ I repeat a remark of note 13 of the previous essay, "Simple Leads from *The Incarnate Word*": "the historical causality of Christ is a huge zone of wonder and intimacy cauling to be matured. See note 56 on page 170 of *Allure*." Note 12 of that previous essay gives a larger Trinitarian context.

⁵ My solution to Lonergan's problem, quoted at the next footnote, is presented in *The Road to Religious Reality*, Axial Publishing, 2010. See pages 13, 17–22, 38.

Lonergeran in the Epilogue of *Insight*. “It may be asked in what department of theology the historical aspect of development might be treated, and I would like to suggest that it may possess peculiar relevance to a treatise on the mystical body of Christ.”⁶

With that problem you could profitably associate its secular version, “the problem of general history, which is the real catch.”⁷ But I see little value in pushing much further here with either problem or the solution I offer. The push is to come from our collaborative effort. Is it not, perhaps, sufficient to see the needed shift as one of somehow organizing our thinking about the seeding and flowering of history or of Christianity much as the care of flowers is organized slowly by the community of botanists over the centuries and into the future?⁸

I write of the flowering of history or of Christianity, but there is no opposition: what is involved is a distinction in mibox between general categories and special categories. It is on this zone that I wish you to focus during your reading of this short essay and during the decades to follow.⁹ But in these little beginning essays on chapter 17 of *Insight* I simply wish to draw your attention to the seriousness with which Lonergan took the genesis of the general categories. In later generations people shall puzzle about the sad fact that there was such a need, sixty years after the emergence of *Insight*. But, yes, the need is there, manifestly in the shallow fishing of Lonergan conferences round about the ocean of Lonergan’s meaning, a fishing that surely is growing to be increasingly dishonest and dishonorable, going manifestly nowhere?¹⁰ Might it happen that that ocean and its depths are to be discovered

⁶ *Insight*, 763.

⁷ *Topics in Education*, CWL 10, 236.

⁸ Two paragraphs further on I write of my own rambling climb through the 158 *Cantowers*. Curiously, our education by flowers is the topic of [Cantower 2](#), “Sunflowers Speak to Us of Growing,” and its initial prayer-poem is worth quoting here: Sun, flowers, Son-flowered, / Speak to us of growth / Seed cauled, cribbed, Kabod yet confined, / Crossed with dark earth, / Light-refined, / Rill opens a trill / Annotaste of Throat.

⁹ Obviously, I am thinking of a widening context, such as that offered by my *The Allure of the Compelling Genius of History*. But, as you will notice, my attention is now on the missing volume (see *Allure*, p. 3) that would weave together general and special categories of Hinduism.

¹⁰ I fear that this poise of Lonerganism must become a topic, refined in ways hinted at in the conclusion to the next essay, but here surely identifiable by you by musing honestly over the question, “What on earth has the flow of books and essays and lectures and conferences from this sick shrinkage of Lonergan’s vision to do with the present dire global needs?”

first perhaps by, say, a break-away community of the Hindu culture? Think about that, and how unlikely it is: but nonetheless revealing. It reminds me of a strategy I used each year in teaching young ladies about the transcendentalists: get them to focus on the challenge in another. I talked during the Friday class of their dates for that night; on Monday we returned to the topic to find that for many the date was inattentive, unintelligent, unreasonable, unadventurous, uncaring. Are the Hindu's even vaguely up for this new venture?

Are you?

That break-away, when it comes, perhaps in the next millennium, will slowly generate elements of the geohistory of the mystical body. But the breakaway would need to begin to meet the challenge of moving from a vague historical sense of pseudo-progress to a historical heuristics uplifting the best of human messing through the negative Anthropocene Age, picking its way courageously and gracefully forward out of “the one hundred and one ‘good things’ and their opposites.”¹¹ It was a task I expressed in that little essay, noted above (note 8) that became the second of the 158 *Cantowers* when, a week or so later, Ezra Pound's struggle nudged me to a parallel climb. It was a messy solitary climb. These next generations of Christians and Hindus and economists and historians may make the journey much better. But only if the likes of you “put spade to earth and move the first sod.”¹² Is the first sod you, in your contented little mibox of historical sensibility? “Is there not room for a measure of bluntness at this stage?”¹³

¹¹ *Method in Theology*, 250.

¹² I continually quote the great final 9 lines—from which this phrase is taken—of Frederick Crowe's *Theology of the Christian Word: A Study of History*, Paulist Press, 1978. It is perhaps worth recalling my years of struggling with that book, and my sow identification of it: see, for starters, [Cantower 38](#), “Functional History,” at section 4, and then go to the last five essays of the [Humus](#) series. One might do worse than strive to effectively envisage how to carry forward Crowe's commonsense hinting in that work.

¹³ Frederick Crowe, “The Exigent Mind,” *Spirit as Inquiry*, Herder and Herder, 1964, 27.