

TÊTE-À-TÊTE

The obvious source of my general title are Lonergan's uses of shades of it in *Method in Theology*.¹ The final reference given below in that note—it is the last line of page 329 of the first edition—talks of “consciousness unmitigated by any tincture of systematic meaning,” and I might make my offensive—in all senses—start from there. Indeed, a little sad humor might help us along, even if it annoys some Americans by putting “Tom and Dick”² and Mary in “the unfamiliar roles”³ of loosing territory with some historical inevitability. I am thinking of my push in this series as a Tête offensive, thinking of us being fifty years away now from the Tet Offensive of January 1968 by North Vietnam. Why these gimmicks? Because I have failed to get any tête-à-tête conversations about serious systematic work in theology and philosophy since I began work in the area in the 1950s. The exception is Lonergan: we did have some serious exchanges during over twenty years, though we preferred swapping jokes. At all events, at this late stage in my anti-Lonerganism, I need some slogans, some neat insults. One insult that occurs to me is quite neat as a piece of trickery. I recall a conversation with Lonergan in the late 1970s, about one of the leading experts in Lonergan studies where Lonergan remarked: “He has no system.” Since I leave the expert unnamed, the survivors of that time can pause: Was it I? Is it I? But the pause I want now is yours. Do you have a system?⁴ Might you tell me, us, about it, and how it promises to be “a resolute and effective intervention in this historical process”?⁵

¹ *Method in Theology* 278: “a slight tincture” of “theoretically differentiated consciousness;” 309: “a slight dose of systematic meaning;” 329: “those, finally, whose consciousness is unmitigated by any tincture of systematic meaning.”

² *Insight*, 649. We are in Lonergan's reflections on the functions of satire and humor.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ It is as well to add in here the need to muse over where you stand with regard to *CWL* 6, 121, 155, on your own story of getting quite decently beyond common sense and then beyond Newton and company to a normative 8-fold view of effective science.

⁵ *CWL* 18, *Phenomenology and Logic*, 306.

Now, that request is not a gimmick. It is, quite accurately, Lonergan's tête offensive or what I call *Lonergan's 1833 Overture*. Should I not quote the offensive piece? It is the second of three objectifications that he requires in *Dialectics*. "A further objectification of horizon is obtained when each investigator operates on the materials by indicating the view that would result developing what he has regarded as positions and by reversing what he has regarded as counterpositions?"⁶ Surely a plain enough tête attack? Perhaps I should have called this series *Lonergan's Tête Offensive*.

I had best cut this short. I could reference some few who share my suspicions about Lonerganism, but the point here is to get you—on the fence, or on the defensive—to share them effectively, thus to talk or walk them out. The 24 [Vignettes](#) of earlier this year failed to get any serious attention, circling round, circling you round, Lonergan's tête offensive. Perhaps you are a beginner, being led into thinking that you are studying Lonergan, not your contemporary self in these terribly sick times of both the sacred and the profane. Your

existing may be authentic or inauthentic, and this may occur in two different ways. There is the minor authenticity or unauthenticity of the subject with respect to the tradition that nourishes him. There is the major authenticity that justifies or condemns the tradition itself. In the first case there is passed a human judgment on subjects. In the second case history and, ultimately, divine providence pass judgment on traditions.⁷

Lonerganism will lose its meager territory with some historical inevitability. But when?

Think of yourself, yourself thinking yourself now, as growing in growing history. My aim in this series is to bring forth an ethos of growing, ontic and phyletic intertwined. So, we are coming back and round again to that neglected third section of *Insight's* chapter 17. That circling is geared to bring us all forwards to effective respect, town and gown, for functional collaboration. But our convenient start here seems to me to be—and here I am heading us to the first move of Lonergan's normative dialectic—*Assembly*.

⁶ *Method in Theology*, 250.

⁷ *Method in Theology*, 79–80.

I *Assemble* for us, then, Lonergan's positioning of himself at the age of 29. Read it in its completeness and in your *Completion*. Don't bother with the other four capitally italicized components of his strategy. Leap over the page to the challenge of your positioning regarding this Essay in Fundamental Sociology. Pause over his generous but unsystematic answer to the shambles of his time. Here you have it:

Charity is an eternal fire of optimism and energy, dismayed at naught, rebuked by none, tireless, determined, deliberate; with deepest thought and unbounded spontaneity charity ever strives, struggles, labours, exhorts, implores, prays for the betterment of the unity action of man, for the effective rule of sweetness and light, for a fuller manifestation of what charity loves, Wisdom Divine, the World made Flesh.⁸

Is this stuff of madness, or of Christian hope? Lonergan goes on to quote Isaiah's hope of such a rule of sweetness and light (Isaiah 2:2–4) and concludes his essay thus: "Is this to be taken literally or is it figure? It would be fair and fine, indeed, to think it no figure."

My regular appeal, in this past decade, echoes Lonergan's hope in my stand of a positive answer to the question I pose to you now, quietly, privately, tête-à-tête. What is your stand in this question of mad hope?

*Do you view humanity as
possibly maturing
— in some serious way —
or just messing along
between good and evil,
whatever you think they are?*

If your answer is yes, even a tentative yes, might you move on to share, in some small or grand way, Lonergan's life-long search for a system that would be effective in climbing slowly towards that pilgrim goal?

⁸ Michael Shute, *Lonergan's Early Economic Research*, University of Toronto Press, 2010, "Essay on Fundamental Sociology," 43.