

## ONTIC AND PHYLETIC GROWTH

The concrete being of woman, then, is being in process. Her existing lies in developing. Her unrestricted desire to know heads her ever towards a known unknown. Her sensitivity matches the operator of her intellectual advance with a capacity and a need to respond to a further reality than meets the eye and to grope her way towards it. Still, this basic indeterminately directed dynamism has its ground in potency; it is without the settled assurance and efficacy of form; it tends to be shouldered out of the busy day, to make its force felt in the tranquility of darkness, in the solitude of loneliness, in the shattering upheavals of personal and social disaster.<sup>1</sup>

This paragraph is the centerpiece of Lonergan's magnificent reflection on the possible functions of satire and humor. I was inspired this morning to distort it by shifting from Lonergan's inclusive "man" to "woman." Switching it further to talk to you of "you" and the being of you as being in process was another option. It might have lifted the linguistic feedback.

Might light humor about misreading lift your linguistic turn in the turn of this third of three odd integral *Vignettes*? I think now of those Thursday mornings in the Spring of 1978 when I flew down to Boston from Halifax for Lonergan's first effort to present his economics. I would check in on him in his room in St. Mary's Hall, not for solemn preparation but to share a few laughs. He sometimes quoted the humor of his New Yorker to me; I regularly brightened his day with Celtic jokes. I recall his greeting on one such Thursday. "Phil: you heard about the last secret of Fatima getting out?" I knew the background of those secrets so was solemnly unprepared for his response to my "what was it?" "Close Lourdes," he said, with his broad guileless grin.

Might we close Lonerganism, with some less guileless grin?

Then there is the story of the newly monied Italian asking his architect to build and furnish for him a grand residence, with one condition, that he have a statue in every room. When he eventually travelled round the building with the architect he eventually came to

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<sup>1</sup> *Insight*, 648.

exclaim, in his quaint English, “what’s this, sculptures all over?” The architect replied that that was what the Italian asked for, a statute. The Italian gent waved his arms about, then swung one hand towards his ear in a familiar way: “Isthatyou! Isthatyou!”

The low-grade joke came to mind recently when I was asked by a poet to give some hints of the new poetry that would help move our molecules towards the third stage of meaning. I rambled a bit on the topic and then had a shot at a few low-grade poems to illustrate the effort. It is in the third of the three that old joke bears fruit.

But can those pattern letters grope their way to whet and fret your whatted Aye to my whatland’s upheaving of personal or social disaster? Is what your line? Is that you now, now here, here now, nowhere, know where?

This line  
Weaves round  
The molecules of mind,  
Helter skelter turning  
Burning bridges to  
What’s what  
To what’s  
What’s what  
My line?

Questions come up  
From print below  
The eye  
The I  
But can I  
Come up or in  
To them within  
With what’s what?

Seen statues  
Come to mind  
Minding my freshened molecules  
To ask  
Is that you  
Me?

I am weaving round here to draw the reluctant molecules of your attention to that brilliant paragraph of Lonergan, and weaving my effort around both humor and “the shattering upheavals of personal and social disaster”<sup>2</sup> that lurk in the emergence of Panini’s grammar and its follow-through in Alexandria and modernity. Is this print you or me?

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Here I deviate, in the manner pointed to in [Vignette 16](#): this becomes now the last of my *Vignettes*, and I wish to point to a definite focus on growth, or perhaps I should say two foci, to speak elliptically about our problem. And what is our problem? By hilarious coincidence, providentially hilarious to me as I re-opened this Vignette which was left dangling before the break, the question before the break raises beautifully<sup>3</sup> the focal problem of both ontic and phyletic growth. Might you find it hilarious? Recall our beginning paragraph and its claim that “her existing lies in developing. Her unrestricted desire to know heads her ever towards a known unknown.” *Mon cul!*

Muse first, then, THEN, with me, about a present possible leap in phyletic growth, and try try try again to rise to a fantasy of humanity heading effectively towards a global “kindliness”<sup>4</sup> that leaves behind “the antiquated sovereignty of the state.”<sup>5</sup> Weave round that musing a seriousness about the end of the essay referred to in that last note. Is this musing not a huge fantasy-strain on your crippled neuromolecular patterns? Heavens, you can’t even rise to resonate seed-fashion with the broad heuristic component that is

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Here I was distracted towards making points that are already densely made in the paragraph of note 1. But this closing Vignette needs to hold focus, yet the same time urge and nudge you to the slow contemplative fantasy that could carry you to the meaning, the beaming, of that paragraph and any other significant present address. Significance is generally meshed into a caul of beauty. Proustian poise is within that caul. What of my call here,  $\{\mathbf{M}(\mathbf{W}_3)^{0\Phi\mathbf{T}}\}$ <sup>4</sup>, a massively dense and, yes, beautiful symbol of an effectively caring global future? It is a cauling symbol of both ontic and phyletic growth, but how is it to take root? As I surveyed, this morning, notifications of conference contents throughout the summer, I sensed a massive closure to any root formation in their busyness. But you, soaking in this sad humor-twisting of Lonergan, might be the odd bird. Then, adult growth can take root and make you, monthly, a stranger to yourself of last month, even last night. I have written on adult growth in various places—for example in the concluding pages of *Lack in the Beingstalk*. Such addressing may help. I would have you find some of the nudges oddly beautiful, freshened molecules coming up within from print below to show that, yes, what’s my line.

<sup>4</sup> See note 3 of *Vignette 24*.

<sup>5</sup> *Essay in Fundamental Sociology*, 32, end.

{M(W<sub>3</sub><sup>0ΦT</sup>)<sup>4</sup>. And now, in the previous *Vignette*, I have pitched in, in skimpy sketch, a piece and peace of that heuristic that is the life-blood of a hope-filled operation of that reach for global kindness: the stretch to a vision of destiny, of object, of objective, of a fusing<sup>6</sup> into a Single Explanation that is not the God of Abraham nor the God of philosophers except in shared initial meaning, a richly-disguised mess and mesh of prime energy.

But note how this stretch and sketch shifts swiftly and compactly to you, reading here of a heuristic and scientific madness, while, yes, “enslaved by convention” in a “vegetable bondage of the blood.”<sup>7</sup> The prime and primal energy is Clasped by the Desire of the Everlasting Hills, but yet that Clasp is a Clasp of your heart of the matter. The Christian of the positive Anthropocene Age, crew and cargo, must needs share in the reach of that desire, and release it into global religiosity. There is the challenge to the present section of humanity to meet an astonishing apokataphatic shift. Its book of common prayer, I would claim, is a text for present graduates: *Insight*. Might we rise, a converging of world religiosity, to hear the mad caul of its paragraph 60910, and let it come to seed the beam in children’s eyes?

“The present section, accordingly, is concerned exclusively with the formulation of the notion of God.”<sup>8</sup> You are that present section<sup>9</sup> of the great pilgrimage. “. . . each member, indeed our whole host and its great pilgrimage, is only a wave in the eternal stream of human beings, of the eternal strivings of the human spirit towards the East, towards Home . . .” My

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<sup>6</sup> I am obviously echoing here that central paragraph of *Insight* named 60910, which ends with “fuse into a single explanation.” The road to that fusion is to seek and follow and kataphatize that Single Explanation, leaning on the Clasp of Grace. “Grace, Grace, Grace, attune us to the Allure of the Scent of a Nomen” (*Allure*, 199–200, 223), “until eventually we are in radiant unified vortex flight, a cosmos ‘without flowers or trees or fauns or bees,’ (P. McShane, *The Everlasting Joy of Being Human*, p. 125, footnote 86) many more than one hundred billion of us, in the shared neurodynamics of the Scent.” *Allure*, 247.

<sup>7</sup> The quotations are from Ezra Pound’s poem, “Commission.” It is quoted at length in my *Music That is Soundless, A Fine Tuning for the Lonely Bud A* (3<sup>rd</sup>, edition, Axial Publishing 2005), p. 29.

<sup>8</sup> *The Allure of the Compelling Genius of History*, 227. The sentence, with its twist of meaning—“you are the present section”—is central to that 19<sup>th</sup> chapter, “The Well of Loneliness.” The 20 chapters of the book parallel the twenty chapters of *Insight*, but the book is a revisioning of *Method*, whose specialties are paralleled with the eight chapters—9 to 16—of *Insight*.

<sup>9</sup> The challenge of the twist is to read *Insight* freshly so as to glimpse a quite new future theology. A help towards that glimpse is given in note 14 on *Allure* page 223, where there are listed the eleven occurrences in *Insight* of “the present section.” Here they are, just in case you are eccentric and sane enough to suffer this twist of you into *Insight*, a twist lurking there in Lonergan’s pointer of *Method*, 260: “not only to read *Insight*, but to discover oneself in oneself”: 76, line 26; 204, ll.26–27; 276, l.12; 304, l.17; 363, l.4; 366, ll.9–10; 408, l.2; 664, ll.35–36; 680, l. 36; 725, l.24.

fellow Irishman, Dominic Crosson, with whom I share only initial meanings, wrote a book twenty years ago whose title can be cherished freshly in the poise of the present section: *The Birth of Christianity: Discovering What Happened in the Years Immediately After the Execution of Jesus*.<sup>10</sup> My Epilogue to *The Allure of the Compelling Genius of History* winds itself round that book, so it seems appropriate to cut off my Vignette focus on *Lonergan's 1833 Overture* by repeating the challenge that ends that Epilogue and that book.

We should meet in that great opening and openness of his 1833 Overture. We, who claim to think of culture and history, must begin to meet there, in a general categorial question. As with Crosson, so with me, it is “a very basic question that pervades this book. It is always between the lines or behind the scenes. How do you understand a human being?”<sup>11</sup> And Crosson and I agree: the answer, in its fullness, comes from the Sent of Yahweh. But we are only agreeing about initial meanings. And alas, many, in town and gown, are caught in twirling endlessly and ineffectively around initial meanings of the mysteries named *life* and *resurrection*. The slim effective salvific answer to the question of adequate meanings demands that we go beyond twirlings to the structured vortex of Cosmopolis and its Tower surrealism. We are, thus, in a fulsome subtle sense, at the birth of Christianity.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> John Dominic Crosson, San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1998.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, xxxi.

<sup>12</sup> *The Allure of the Compelling Genius of History*, 250–51.