

IF NOT FUNCTIONAL COLLABORATION, WHAT?

Again, we face this question in some version of the 1833 Overture: you may face it in a quite commonsense fashion, but stretching commonsense the way Lonergan invited when he wrote, 80 years ago, about the beginning of the second chapter of *Isaiah*, where there is talk of spears being turned into sickles. “Is this to be taken literally, or is it figure? It would be fair and fine, indeed, to think it no figure.”¹ That optimism carried forward right through his life, talking in his last years to Val Rice about leaving to his disciples the task of functional collaboration.² It haunted *Insight*, coming out clearly in his missing X-Factor of the last section of chapter 7, showing up in his inclusion of implementation in metaphysics, turning up in the end of *Insight* in his 30 or more repetitions, in those last pages, of the word *collaboration*, coming out in the final pages of *Method* in his clarity about effectiveness, about fruit to be borne by theologians: otherwise they work “in vain, for they fail to mature.”³

In my own positioning I pose a question to you, at the end of 1833, to which my own answer, like that of Lonergan, is yes. Yes, even if it takes millennia to get on the road, to move from the negative Anthropocene age to the positive Anthropocene age when the **it** of every global heartbeat lives in the cultural call of this **must**: “**it must** glory in its deepening, in the pure deepening that adds to aggregate leisure, to liberate many entirely and all increasingly to the field of cultural activity.”⁴ The question is, “**Do you view humanity as possibly maturing—in some serious way—or just messing along between good and evil, whatever you think they are?**” And if you, too, tilt towards yes: if not functional

¹ “Essay in Fundamental Sociology,” *Lonergan’s Early Economic Research*, Michael Shute (Toronto; University of Toronto Press, 2010), 44.

² These substantial interviews, gathered by me after Val’s death, are, as far as I recall—having donated them—in the Bapst Library Collection of Lonergan Works in Boston College.

³ *Method in Theology*, 355. “They become effete” (*ibid.*, 99), “a slum,” where “the slum is not properly simply a poorer quarter, but a place where there congregate the failures of our industrial society.” *Topics in Education*, CWL 10, 253.

⁴ *For a New Political Economy*, CWL 21, 20.

collaboration, what? What? Do you cherish that center of you sufficiently to contemplate its phyletic maturing so that the phyletic maturing is an ontic maturing of viewpoint in you? “The emergence of humanity is the evolutionary achievement of sowing what among the cosmic molecules. The sown what infests the clustered molecular patterns behind and above your eyes, between your ears, lifting areas—named by humans like Brocca and Wernicke—towards patterned noise-making that in English is marked by ‘so what?’”⁵

Do you wish to join the effort to sow what through functional collaboration? And if not, what else do you have in mind to sow what? Do you wish to continue just messing along between good and evil, whatever you think they are?

If we were into the full culture of the 1833 Overture, then I would have your position to brood over, but I do not have it: there are no explicit personal positionings emerging from the Lonergan School. The general unexpressed position seems to be a matter of keeping academic heads comfortably and suffocatingly up arses an embarsing doctrine. “Doctrines that are embarrassing will not be mentioned in polite company.”⁶ I am not polite company anymore. Our stage in history is the stage in which the negative Anthropocene has taken slimy possession of our graceful what. Lonerganism is comfortably and disgracefully allied to its cosy putterings in “academic disciplines.”⁷ “This is rather bluntly said, I am afraid, but is there not room for a measure of bluntness at this stage?”⁸

⁵ I am quoting the first paragraph of my recent book, *The Allure of the Compelling Genius of History* (Vancouver: Axial Press, 2015), 3. The Compelling Genius is, of course, Jesus. Do you wish effectively, want “to import his compelling genius to the problems of this later day”? (The final words of *Insight’s* Epilogue). The book *Allure* weaves together *Insight* and functional collaboration into the challenge of Jesus.

⁶ *Method in Theology*, 299.

⁷ The last two words on the first page of the first chapter of *Method in Theology*. The next pages faces immediately the problem of cutting off that tail of “the monster that has stood forth in our day” *Ibid.*, 40. How my elder colleagues manage to live with the non-reading of those first four paragraphs of *Method*, well, is quite freaky. How have you been reading them? What in heaven’s name does Lonergan mean by “some third way must be found even though it is difficult and laborious.” *Ibid.*, 4. He certainly does not mean the present Lonerganist goings-on that are in gross continuity, in conferences and collections of essays and teaching-patterns, with the monster’s murderous ways.

⁸ F.E. Crowe, “The Exigent Mind,” *Spirit as Inquiry, Studies in Honor of Bernard Lonergan S.J.* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1964), 27.