

**Field Nocturnes 4:
Lonergan's 1954 View of Theology in the New Context**

The final paragraph of this strange essay locates this strange essay in the sequence! I feel the need to give the larger picture as I go along, but I leave it to the reader to judge when to skip. The existential problem that I am dealing with, which becomes more luminous as I struggle with this 300-page presentation, is the pressure on you and me to miss the full challenge of what we are attempting. We are attempting a crazy shift in the face of multiple crazinesses, multiple mis-representations of reality. Here I point to one of them: the nature of theology and of ontogenetic and phylogenetic theological growth. Again, *Field Nocturne 5* begins with the statement, "There is no easy solution to the complex of tasks that faces us", and I might well have turned aside there to another craziness, the craziness that I eventually am forced to tackle in *Field Nocturne 24*: the philosophic context that prevails at present regarding the seen and the perceived: think of Merleau-Ponty's last muddled work, *The Visible and the Invisible*, treated in that later Nocturne. Then there is the craziness of self-neglect with regard to the very existence of words about the seen and the perceived and the conceived etc.: the question about the foundations of language. Would that not have best been put up-front? Yet it seems best to leave it till later, as I do in this series. The hope is, of course, that you have by now - or by March 2009 - the full 41 essays, so that you can be selective in avoiding my weaving together pedagogical essays and contextual essays.

1. This Nocturne's Problem

In a 1954 May letter to Fr.Fred Crowe, Lonergan typed:

"The Method in Theology is coming into perspective. For the Trinity: Imago Dei in homine and proceed to the limit as in evaluating $[1 + 1/n]^n$ as n approaches infinity. For the rest: ordo universi. From the viewpoint of theology, it is a manifold of unities developing in relation to one another

and in relation to God."¹

I have had that letter for decades: Fr.Crowe forwarded it to me, I suspect because he thought I might make sense out of this paragraph, which is relatively isolated within the letter. I used that paragraph occasionally as a pointer to Lonergan's reach and his style of thinking, especially in the book *ChrIst in History*. But I have never attempted to elaborate on its meaning. It seems appropriate to tackle that task here and now, one might say as a **field** exercise.²

Or, as an exercise that illustrates a piece of research followed by interpretation, and so on into the recycling process of the global tower community. I have already noted such an illustration in drawing attention to Lonergan's claim about the ineffability of the light of human intelligence.³ I fancy that further advances will bring these illustrations together in an enriched cycling foundation of the Standard Model.

But we are back now with me, the interpreter within the present weak standard model, whose attention has been drawn, I suppose originally by the research of Fr.Crowe, to a peculiar anomalous statement in the data on theology, an unpublished Lonergan reaching. One may usefully think here of the oddities that led to a suggestion in physics of the neutrino or a hypothesis of a Higg's particle. If followed through, will my suggestion here shake forward the present model within the full field? At all events, an initial oddity has to be recognized by some expert: the adequate researcher works within the best present model as grasped by him or her, luminously. Luminously? A very significant part of viewpoint, *Praxisweltanschauung*, especially in a developing but

¹What I typed above is precisely what is in the letter I quote from a letter of Lonergan to Fr.Fred Crowe in May 1954.

²It is as well to recall the meaning of field: to be found in the index of *Phenomenology and Logic*.

³I refer here to the unpublished *The Incarnate Word*, University of Toronto Press, 2010 [?], points made early in Thesis 12. See *Prehumous* 8, "Foundational Prayer V: Placing Mysticism", section one, on the powerfully suggestive notion of the ineffability of the nature light of human intelligence."

indeed shabby science, is to be sufficiently luminous about where one stands in the twilight. So, Fred sends that letter to me, knowing that I have a better grip on sums than he.

And off I go, in my role as interpreter, to offer to the community, but most definitely to the community of historians of theological method, some elements of an integrative interpretation.

But here I must return to the issue of shabbiness and immaturity in theology. In recent years, especially in *Loneragan's Standard Model of Effective Global Inquiry*, I have using as a convenient symbolic measure of this transition period the state of theology in 2011 as compared to a possible - probable? - state in 2111. The heart of the standard model of 2111 is to be the general categories named by Loneragan on those two pages of method - 286-7 - with the addition of a number (10) that would pull functional specialization into the model. Those categories are not categories of a present community, but the achievement of the solitary climber of 1953, with (10) added from his achievement of 1965. I write this *Field Nocturne* precisely because of this problem, to a Loneragan community that desperately needs the lift "to the level of the times"⁴ that Loneragan battled towards and tried to share. So, my writing would seem to fall into the zone that may be called "Output of Communications"⁵: I am writing to a community that, in the main, shows no serious interest in functional specialization. My purpose here, then, is to pick up somehow on what Loneragan expressed in that brief statement of 1954, and use its meaning to persuade some within that community to take the new context of collaboration seriously in a pragmatic sense.

The most immediate pragmatic sense is obviously personal, and this leads me to a strategic lead into the meaning of the statement of 1954. It is a matter of giving those

⁴A regular refrain of Loneragan, picked up from his early reading of Ortega y Gasset. See *Method in Theology*, 350.

⁵The output is described in the paragraph of *Method in Theology*, 132, marked "(8)".

not competent in mathematics a glimpse of the meaning of $[1 + 1/n]^{nx}$ as n goes to infinity. That limit is named e^x , and we have met it before in relation to the problem of personal growth in meaning. Let us go back to one presentation of that, both in order to help us forward on that topic of personal growth and to open up our reflections on phylogenetic growth.

How to go back to a previous writing of mine, and carry forward? That is a puzzle that belongs within the present problem. Of course, an analogy with the presently-maturing science of physics is not really much help to the present Lonergan audience, but it helps me help myself to help that audience. The maturing of physics is neatly summed up in the title *The Dawning of Gauge Theory*.⁶ In theology we have the pre-dawn light of a new gauge, the *nomos* of cyclic collaboration. In that book Lochlainn O’Raifeartaigh builds into the text earlier papers and comments on them creatively to tell the story of a dawning associated with the work of Herman Weyl. Might I not do somewhat the same here? So, rather than taking pieces of past writing, even perhaps compacting one or two incomprehensively, why not simply add in here a relevant past writing, which then carries into the creative commenting and integrative advance of section 3?

2. Going Back, Reading Forward⁷

Eldorede 4 Meaning-Growing

I am not optimistic about plain speaking here. There are various ways that I might go about shifting the slim statistics of existential communication. We are, for one thing, dealing with a huge axial problem, where I mean **axial** in a sense quite beyond Jaspers, something I have pretty clear on for more than twenty years; but that topic

⁶Lochlainn O’Raifeartaigh, *The Dawning of Gauge Theory*, Princeton, New Jersey, 1997.

⁷I quote, without change, - except of course the footnote numbers which go up by 7 - the previous essay, *Eldorede 4*.

needs plain speaking also, since my previous writing and speaking on the topic has generated little interest.⁸

I must first note that I am talking principally about full and fulsome growth in meaning, of the type, then, that Lonergan mentions in what for me is a key statement of the book *Insight*, quoted already in these *Eldorede*, “Theoretical understanding seeks to solve problems, to erect syntheses, to embrace the universe in a single view.”⁹ I am writing, then, of norms in the new luminous culture of meaning that is to emerge in some future century.

Still, there are analogies to which I have appealed over decades that can help, and I should repeat them as simply as possible here. But first, a plain statement of a normative formula for growth, to which I add the warning that the present ethos, in most areas of culture, is firmly against anything like it.

Please do not take fright at my formula: indeed, I simplify it shortly for communicative purposes. So, here we go. Let the state of growth of an individual be generally given by e^x .¹⁰ Then one gets a glimpse of the reality and of the problem of growth by considering the rate of change of that function. It is equal to itself, or in symbols, $d/dx (e^x) = e^x$.

Might I take some of the possible, probable, fright out of the last sentence by going back to elementary calculus: and at the same time illustrating here and now -

⁸A plain note may help. Instead of Jaspers’ Axial Period of 600 B.C. - 200 B.C. I propose a longer Axial Period, let’s say roughly 6000 years, around the Incarnation. The axial period separates the two times of temporal subjectivity mentioned in Lonergan’s *Systematics of the Trinity* and also the first from the third stage of meaning discussed in *Method in Theology*. 3000 A.D. may be too optimistic for the beginning of that new control of meaning: the date depends on you.

⁹*Insight*, 417[442], the **Tomega Principle**.

¹⁰ For those unfamiliar with this odd use of the letter e, I draw attention to the fact that it is not at all mysterious. It is not some general function, some vague mathematical thing. It is a definite number between 2 and 3. Of course, raising it to a power which is “loose” in its meaning is a tricky thing, but at least you can think of something definite like “the square of”.

there and then to one of us now! - the challenge of growth? I can rename e^x by using a longer name given by an equation. For those with sufficient mathematical

sophistication, of course, there is more than a renaming involved. Here you have it:

$$e^x = 1 + x + \frac{x^2}{2} + \frac{x^3}{(2.3)} + \frac{x^4}{(2.3.4)} + \dots + \frac{x^n}{(2.3.4\dots n)} + \dots$$

Even with only a technical knowledge of the rules for differentiation you figure out, by using the rule $d/dx (x^n) = nx^{-1}$, that $d/dx (e^x) = e^x$. O.K? In popular terms the rate of change of this thing is equal to its size.

Now before I go on - since this sort of thinking is not only discouraging but perhaps discouraged, disliked, even disdained, by philosophers and theologians - it seems a useful strategy to appeal to Lonergan's use of something similar. How similar? The knowing will smile at the result of getting the value of $[1 + 1/n]^{nx}$ as n approaches infinity, to which Lonergan appeals. But the point is that he, like I, is searching for a way to convey a genetic result; where his problem is phylogenetic, mine is ontogenetic. And do not the problems mesh? The meshing lurks in the knowledge of the result I mentioned. Here, at any rate, is his view at the age of 50:

"The Method in Theology is coming into perspective. For the Trinity: Imago Dei in homine and proceed to the limit as in evaluating $[1 + 1/n]^{nx}$ as n approaches infinity. For the rest: ordo universi. From the viewpoint of theology, it is a manifold of unities developing in relation to one another and in relation to God."¹¹

I ended the previous *Eldorede* with some compact reflections on such manifolds of developing unities in a manner that coaxes towards phylogenetic openness.¹² Here the topic is the norm of growth of the individual.

Further, when I ended the last *Eldorede* a little while ago, I paused and puzzled at my failure to hold to simplicity. Perhaps I should have held to the statement that there

¹¹I quote from a letter of Lonergan to Fr.Fred Crowe in May 1954.

¹²With that coaxing I have regularly associated the 14th chapter of Joyce's *Ulysses*, entitled "Oxen of the Sun". See "Features of Generalized Empirical Method" in *Creativity and Method*, M.Lamb (ed), Minnesosa Press, Milwaukee, 1982.

is an important type of prayer that is simply hard thinking and leave it at that!

But the pause makes me wiser in my revision of this *Eldorede*. I should have a shot at ending it in four clear pages!

So, let me add a simpler image of growth. Suppose your mind is like a balloon and suppose, further, that the normative rate is a unit of radius (a centimeter, say) per unit of time (a day, a month: it does not matter). Now you don't need even to work out the geometry to make sense of the claim that the larger the balloon the more air it takes in through a one centimeter expansion.

This raises huge questions about human communication, including the communication and progress suggested by Lonergan. But let us keep to one point regarding **telling** or **sharing**.

Start with me or with you. If, this past week, I make significant progress (which, of course, is part of my contemplative norm) then I could not tell **me** of last week the content of that progress. Certainly I can help the climb of the likes of me: AND that helping is related to historic progress.

Let me go back now to my favorite analogy for all this: teaching mathematical physics, as I did one year, both to a first year group and to a graduate class. The first year group grew in the relevant meaning through struggling with texts and exercises, week by week. The growing was accelerating: this is a quite accepted fact. In second year they would grow at a faster pace: like the balloon image illustrates. The graduates grew at a much higher pace. And so on: where that "and so on" is, I expect, problematic for you: does the n^{th} year of thinking in an area really pace up from the $(n - 1)^{\text{th}}$ year?!¹³

Dealing with that problem helps us further along : where **dealing** in the present situation is me talking briefly and you taking a lot more time. This is a difficulty of

¹³What then of, say, the 40th year? A perspective on this is presented in my contribution to Mike Vertin's "Retirement *Festschrift*": "The Importance of Rescuing *Insight*", *The Importance of Insight. Essays in Honour of Michael Vertin*, University of Toronto Press, 2007, pp. 339-376.

present cultures of telling and teaching, but let us not complexify what so far seems pretty successful plain, if incomprehensible speaking. Incomprehensible? Well, the words are plain, but I am proposing a strange theorem of incompleteness and openness. And here we are, heading plainly into page four, with a tunnel at the end of this light.

Can you tunnel your way round and through the following parallel? If you don't like it, skip to the last paragraph!

Fermat made a simple statement which he claimed to be true and which can make sense to you as you now read it:

$x^n + y^n = z^n$ is not true for integral values of x, y, z , when n is greater than 2

The Proposal is called *Fermat's Last Theorem*: whether he "had" it or not is a debated issue. But there you "have" it: a nice suggestive pattern of words: $x^n + y^n = z^n$ **is not true for integral values of x, y, z , when n is greater than 2**. The pattern kept Andrew Wiles busy for 10 years, and talking it out "clearly" took three lectures (June 21-23, 1993, in Cambridge University, England) and 100 pages, both for a very well-up audience.¹⁴

In the later post-axial culture that I envisage, both Wiles and the audience will be in, within, constituted by, a quite larger world of meaning, generated by a Tower commitment to the **Tomega Principle**. And part of that larger world will be a luminous recognition of Lonergan's claim about any particular progress in insight and concept. "The conceptualization of understanding is, when fully developed, a system the concept emerges from understanding, not an isolated atom but precisely as part of a context, loaded with the relations that belong to it in virtue of a source which is equally the source of other concepts."¹⁵ We are struggling here with an enlargement of this view, especially within the third definition of generalized empirical method, loneliness,

¹⁴The basic paper is Andrew Wiles, "Modular Elliptic Curves and Fermat's Last Theorem," *Annals of Mathematics*, vol. 142, 1995, 443-551.

¹⁵*Verbum. Word and Idea in Aquinas*, U. of T. Press, 1997, 238. See also *Joistings 21*.

“an infinite craving,”¹⁶ tuned to its source. Then a shift in one zone’s insight-system is a ballooning of meaning throughout the dominant inner word and world: one becomes a stranger to oneself of yesterday.

3. Methodical Theology Coming Into Perspectivism¹⁷

Back then to section one, and suggestively forward. The change in the title from Lonergan’s first sentence of that quotation with which I started, “The Method in Theology is coming into perspective,” seems to me, indeed, to be sufficiently suggestive for the present. So I shall be brutally brief here, and - as you will find - brutally lengthy in the *Field Nocturne* to follow.¹⁸

I wish only to add the possibility of enlarged reflections regarding history and eschatology. First regarding eschatology. In the past twenty years I have been musing over the failure of theology to generate anything like a serious eschatology. So I throw in here a tantalizing suggestion: might there not be an eternal genetic perspectivism, even one analogous to the growth dynamic of e^x ? The vision in God, of God, is beyond the human mind, even the mind of the Incarnate Word. How far beyond? One may usefully think of the infinity of the fractions between zero and 1 as compared to the infinity of the decimals: might we not, indeed, call in thinking of the infinite series of

¹⁶B.Lonergan, “Finality, Love, Marriage”, *Collection*, U. of Toronto Press, 1988, 49.

¹⁷This final section is tantalizingly short. It points to the massive communal project of lifting “perspectivism” (see *Method in Theology*, 216-18, 224, 246), into the full context named *comeabout* (see note 32).

¹⁸I leave this as originally written, but since then I have revised the notion of single presentation to that of a series of vignettes, quite parallel to my treatment of page 250 of *Method in Theology* in the two series, SOFDAWAREs and *Quodlibets*. What is involved is a sustained effort to tune the theology of these past centuries, incarnate in the Lonergan community, into an effective fantasy about its “unenviable position of always arriving on the scene a little breathless and a little late.”(*Insight*, 733[755]).

transfinite numbers as we search for less than a fractional grasp of incompleteness of comprehension?

Secondly, it seems appropriate to envisage the *ordo universi* as fully as present cosmology and anthropology permit. So I add a suggestive map, in an appendix to this essay.

Now we are ready, perhaps, for a fresh reading of Lonergan's 1954 statement, fresh in an attempted inclusion of the new context of functional collaboration:

"The Method in Theology is coming into perspective. For the Trinity: Imago Dei in homine and proceed to the limit as in evaluating $[1 + 1/n]^n$ as n approaches infinity. For the rest: *ordo universi*. From the viewpoint of theology, it is a manifold of unities developing in relation to one another and in relation to God."

How are you to think of the n or the x ? Does n refer to the number of humans or to a period of time? Does x refer to a measure of vision at some stage? Well, at least I leave your curiosity astir!

Theology as essentially methodical, and indeed in the third stage of meaning, the second time of the temporal subject, luminously so, foreshadows the historic fullness of the *ordo universi*, in that order's third-stage normativity of exponential growth-dynamic bred in each individual by the geohistorical flexible cycles of ranges of global recurrence-schemes of minding. From the viewpoint of cyclic theology as a region in history,¹⁹ a Tower of Able, the manifold of unities has a topological unity of ongoing development analogous to a new global neural netting of spirits, the Tower radiating, through all global regions, a "psychic force that sweeps living human bodies, linked in charity, to the joyful, courageous, whole-hearted, yet intelligently controlled

¹⁹A region of complex topology, quite different from the usual regions of regional history that Lonergan writes of in the final chapter of *Topics in Education*. The difference is relevant to the solution of the problem of history that Lonergan raised in that chapter.

performance of the tasks set by a world-order in which the problem of evil is not suppressed by transcended.”²⁰

But this is all too doctrinally compact: its systematic presence in an adult-grown e-minding is something to hope towards for the years beyond 2111 A.D. What, for instance, could possibly be meant by neural netting of spirits within flexible recurrence-scheme cycles of global minding? The possible meaning is to be the result of the study of the organism that is that global minding in its present lack of any such beautiful cycle.²¹ So we must humbly go back to re-assess and self-apply Lonergan’s suggestions about an elementary analogue of such organic growth. So we turn to *Field Nocturne 5* with its few hundred pages focused on the powerful suggestion of that single glorious paragraph of *Insight* which begins: “Study of the organism begins”²² I began these *Nocturnes* by noting two key and neglected pages in Lonergan’s works: page 250 of *Method in Theology* and page 464[489] of *Insight*. I already wrote a couple of hundred pages on that single page of *Method*, in the hope of fostering collaboration.²³ Very little happened in the way of collaboration. But perhaps a few hundred pages on a single paragraph will catch some attention?²⁴ Their positive content, however, is the revelation of one piece of the massive explanatory heuristic that came from the mind of

²⁰*Insight*, 723-4[745].

²¹The remedies are treated at some length in *Method in Theology: Revisions and Implementations*, but the point of unity and beauty and effectiveness come from the single line 16 of page 160 of *Topics in Education*: “

²²*Insight*, 464[489].

²³That effort began as a sincere interest of an Australian group in collaborating on the topic of collaboration. It led me to abandon the *Cantower* project two-fifths of the way through. But it also led me to push forward in my commentary on that single page of *Method*.

²⁴See *Insight* 733[755] for Lonergan’s attention-seeking remark about shabby Catholic thinking, one that did not get serious attention. One might consider the next long *Field Nocturne* as a another longer shot at a wake-up call about what he talked of to me in Easter 1961, of the closure of Catholic minding after Trent, of “big frogs in little ponds”.

the man who invented the **comeabout**²⁵ that is to dictate the standard model of methodical thinking in the millennia to come.

I add the odd diagram on the next page because it stretches the imagination regarding the millennia to come. We may have another 2 billion years of earth-time before we are “overpowered” by the sun: that is represented by the 2000 at one end of the centre-line. The 12,700 + the extra 1000 at the back of the line represents the time from the beginning :13.7 billion years. Why the big circle? It represents the earth, with its distance across of 12,700 kilometers.

The little figure with the spear: that represents the usual old mentality about time-scale.

²⁵*Insight*, 514[537]. That key text is worth recalling: “So it comes about that the extroverted subject visualizing extension and experiencing duration gives place to the subject orientated to the objective of the unrestricted desire to know and affirming beings differentiated by certain conjugate potencies, forms, and acts grounding certain laws and frequencies.”

