

## SIMPLE LEADS FROM *THE INCARNATE WORD*

The previous essay ended with the introduction of what I identify as the central problem that emerges in the 17<sup>th</sup> chapter of *Insight*, placed before you in the phrase, “analogous to common sense there is a historical sense.”<sup>1</sup> Did it strike you as a huge central problem? Did you have a shot at either finding out why the phrase points to such a problem or finding an answer to it, perhaps following up on the analogy that Lonergan identifies?

My difficulty in moving forward now, a month later, is that there was little response to my suggestion that we face this challenge together. I shall return to that problem in the eighth essay, but meantime I solve the difficulty of going forward into the central problem by holding back on it till the seventh essay and picking up here on my earlier simpler suggestions about sequencing in some genetic way.<sup>2</sup> The pick-up should help those who are ready to struggle forward in that, in this essay, it links the genetic sequencing with points from *Insight* chapter 16.

My re-newed start takes off from the words “pure formulations” which occur three times in *The Sketch of Insight* 17.3.6. We are jumping ahead strategically here, and I do not suppose any competence in the intermediate material. Indeed, are we not honestly presupposing a sort of communal incompetence in dealing with this third section of *Insight* chapter 17?!

Best quote fully the relevant passages.

Thirdly, there are the pure formulations. They proceed from the immanent sources of meaning to determinate<sup>w3</sup> differentiations of the protean notion

---

<sup>1</sup> *Insight*, 587.

<sup>2</sup> The central Lonergan pointer is given as the final quotation of the second essay of this series, [Interpretation 2](#), “Some Contexts of the Interpretation Series.”

<sup>3</sup> The editors’ note, w, here is worth pausing over. It refers to correcting the first edition text, which has the shorter word ‘determine’. Both words fit, but the one Lonergan used, ‘determinate’ points beyond the subject to indicate the task of, so to speak, pinning down inner words and perhaps even outer words “addressed to an audience” (end of that paragraph).

of being. Such differentiations may be either the contents of single judgments or the contexts constituted by more or less coherent aggregates of judgments. In either case they are pure formulations if they proceed from an interpreter that grasps the universal viewpoint and if they are addressed to an audience that similarly grasps the universal viewpoint.<sup>4</sup>

So: two occurrences there of *pure formulations*. The third occurrence is in the “fifthly” paragraph. “The totality of pure formulations of contexts has to exhibit the sequence of developing human insights, the tendency of positions to unmodified survival, and the pressure on counterpositions to shift their ground or to accept their own reversal.”<sup>5</sup>

Here you might profitably pause and muse over the task of illustrating what is meant by *pure formulations*. I recall my own struggles in the late 1950s and the early 1960s. The illustrations I eventually focused on then were from *The Incarnate Word*, CWL 8: obviously, an earlier Latin version.<sup>6</sup> Let me add in immediately a single illustration. First I give the full bold-faced thesis title from CWL 8, then a later piece of the text: this gives us sufficient context—should I not say *sufficient sense of context?*—for brief pointing.

#### **Thesis 4**

**Even after the Incarnation there are in Christ two natures, unconfused and unchanged, the properties of each being preserved. This distinction between the natures is a real distinction, although it is not a major but a minor real distinction, drawn by analogy.**<sup>7</sup>

Later in the text we find the following, which I quote fully to give some sense of context.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> *Insight*, 602.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 603.

<sup>6</sup> I recall the odd luck of my having the same professor as Lonergan had—Fr. Bernard Leeming S.J.—for my course on Christology in 1962–3. I do not recall what text he used. Indeed, at that stage I was probably using classroom time to push on into Waddington’s genetic perspective in biology (See *Method in Theology, Revisions and Implementations*, part one): my first venture into our topic. In 1964 I thought of pursuing the doctorate topic of genetic development—nudged by Woodger’s work—but took the easier road of *Randomness, Statistics and Emergence*. Bernard Leeming’s lectures on Christology led Lonergan to a better grip on “is? is! is. Is”.

<sup>7</sup> *The Incarnate Word*, CWL 8, 253.

<sup>8</sup> You may note with a smile that I am skipping here past the problem posed at the end of the previous essay: “analogous to common sense there is a historical sense.” *Insight*, 587. “Some sense

### *The Problem*

1. The problem was twofold: it concerned (1) what is real and (2) what is distinct.
2. With regard to what is real, the problem was not serious. With few exceptions, and those with no great authority, it was quite clearly maintained that one and the same was Christ, true God, and true man with body and rational soul. For that is what follows from (1) rejecting Apollinarianism, (2) rejecting Nestorianism, and (3) accepting the Formula of Reunion (DB 5003, DS 272-73).
3. With regard to what is distinct, the problem was grave indeed, since what was at stake was a distinction that was not at the time clearly conceived – the real, minor, analogically drawn distinction set out in the present thesis.<sup>9</sup>

Our problem is to think these two passages into the context—that word again, and we will deal with it more seriously in essay nine, “Contexts and Situations”—of the passages on pure formulations. But how to do that thinking adequately?

It strikes me that it might help you if I recall my first encounter with these various distinctions: major, minor, etc. Perhaps indeed it will bring to mind your own undergraduate days of theology or religious studies? In my case it was my first year of philosophy, although I came to it from graduate studies in mathematical physics. It was the autumn of 1956, and we were plunged into metaphysics, in Latin. Straightaway we were into a first thesis that claimed that “*ens dicitur essentiam in ordine ad esse*,” and on we went solemnly towards such baffling distinctions. Yes, they were meant to be profound pointers at the mysteries of being, but obviously memory helped us along so that eventually they could be tossed about in the final end-of-year oral examination. There was a second course that year, one in epistemology, believe it or not given by a Fr. Lonergan: his background was a German tradition and we homed in on Thomas’ *De Veritate* q. 1, a. 9, where we endlessly hovered over the text: “truth is known by the intellect in view of the fact that the intellect reflects upon its own act—not merely as knowing its own act, but as knowing the proportion of its act to the thing.” We made massive efforts at perceiving our intellects twisting around in and on itself. Luckily, through a strange silent genius, Fr. John Hyde, teaching philosophy of God in the same place, I was led to the early version of *Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas*, CWL 2, so I had my

---

of context”? Is it not a historical sense? Is it more? How good is it in your mbox (see note 10 below) as a cherishing of *The Problem*? We move to that issue in the seventh essay.

<sup>9</sup> *The Incarnate Word*, CWL 8, 281.

suspicions about the twisting. Still, metaphysics went on its mysterious way, and perhaps you too had such a journey in undergraduate philosophy or theology or religious studies? I recall now Bernard Lonergan talking about a type of Trinitarian theology summed up in the slogan, “four relations, three persons, two processions, one God, no mystery.”

I am trying here to recall a mood, a naïve seriousness, and perhaps you too can recall a seriousness in working through an introductory text, like *The Incarnate Word*, pausing over texts such as the two I quoted above. Let us take a Proust-pause over these workings and those memories, a reach for a freshening self-appreciation.

The stuff about distinctions was certainly not hard to remember, nor the adjacent material: exam-prep was far from murderous. Still, a bent or a bright professor might push one towards searching in some muddled way. Were the distinctions related to types of questions? In my case, not in those classes. I suspect that only the very rare person like Lonergan would reach significant leaps of meaning in such classes. The normal reaction might be described thus: ‘O.K., no sweat: a distinction in me or in Jesus between essence and existence.’

Did I go further? Did you? I recall asking Lonergan, in one of our dozen evenings drinking together in Dublin, 1971, “when did you figure out the meaning of “is” (meaning, vaguely: is? is! is.) His reply: “when I got that far in *Insight*.” How far further in meaning did you get, or will you get, in the thirty years after first being introduced to real distinctions?

How far further did you get when you got that far in *Insight*? When you arrived at the first section of chapter 16? Do you carry forward, in your mibox,<sup>10</sup> a lively self-luminous meaning of ‘Act’?<sup>11</sup> Did you go on to grapple with the push beyond Thomas regarding the

---

<sup>10</sup> The heuristics of mibox was introduced in [Disputing Quests 16](#), “Detailed Disputes: Doran,” where I begin by presenting the diagram first given on page 41 of [Wealth of Self and Wealth of Nations](#). The middle box (mi-box!) of the box in the centre is to be thought of as the what-box, your what-box, your “mi-horizon”: “The field is *the* universe, but my horizon defines *my* universe.” The task of our series is to carry the content of mibox to and beyond the “come-about” of *Insight* 537 (11 lines from end) to the new towering control of meaning needed in the positive Anthropocene Age.

<sup>11</sup> “‘Act’ denotes the component of proportionate being to be known by uttering the virtually unconditioned yes of reasonable judgment.”(*Insight*, 457, lines 22–23). See the following note.

distinction between the primary relativity of a relation and its secondary determinations?<sup>12</sup> It is most unlikely that you paused over the weave of *The Incarnate Word* round such secondary determinations of your pilgrimage as those now twirling round your present neuro-dynamics.<sup>13</sup> And have you memories of the cliff-hanging of the first 25 pages of that chapter 16 of *Insight* that brought you to the Ever-unrest of mid-537, somehow out of space and out of time: as “it comes about that the extroverted subject visualizing extension and experiencing duration gives place to the subject orientated to the objective of the pure desire to know and affirming beings differentiated by certain conjugate potencies, forms and acts grounding certain laws and frequencies.”<sup>14</sup>

And, heavens, how far away were you in your mibox, are you now in your mibox, from recognizing in the book, *The Incarnate Word*, the mibox poise of a controller of the pure formulations of the climb pointed to by Lonergan in his **Thesis 4**? Lonergan, of course, had no illusions about the reception of his presentation. Nor was he straining to rise to “a grasp B’ of the anticipated audience’s habitual intellectual development C.”<sup>15</sup> Indeed, as he told me in conversations about the stress of his Roman teaching, he held to a poise of addressing the likely top group in the class: some stuff would then trickle down. Whereas if he addressed the bottom level of the class, he’d lose the bright guys.

But it seems to me that he lost the bright guys anyway. Even I, a bright guy doing a Proust revival 60 years later, am lost before this outreach of the evolutionary sport, Lonergan, as I try to detect, in those “practical chores, that you have to do if you’re teaching a class of 650 people”<sup>16</sup>—do you sniff here my geohistorical poise?—the good, the bad and

---

<sup>12</sup> In the autumn of 1960, the first year of theological studies, I began my effort to come to grips with chapter 16 of *Insight*. There were hours spent contemplating two pencils of equal size. Would breaking one of them resonate through the finite? Only forty years later did I come to the higher flights of some grip on secondary determinations within the interpersonal understanding—imaged in the Father’s speaking at the baptism of Jesus, heard by us in Grace—of the infinite notional act of Cherishing that dominates finitude, that locates that Caul in the central tower prayer: “Double You Three in me, in all, Claspings Cherishing, Cauling, Craving, Christing.”

<sup>13</sup> The previous note is obviously relevant. But 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*.

<sup>14</sup> *Insight*, 537, eleven lines from the end.

<sup>15</sup> *Insight*, 585.

<sup>16</sup> Lonergan, *A Second Collection*, “An Interview with Fr. Bernard Lonergan, edited by Philip McShane,” 211. The Interview was part of the Florida Conference of Easter 1970.

the ugly. “There are chunks in those books that I think are permanently valid. But having to write the book at all was totally invalid—yet necessary concretely.”<sup>17</sup>

I carry on that detecting in the following essay, but let us pause now to take stock of our puttering with the problem of interpretation. There was surely present a sense of history and indeed biographies: Jesus, you, and I in a Hebrew-Christian tradition, or more. In what sense was it a sense? Was there a sense of sequencing and getting control of sequences of events, including biographical events?<sup>18</sup> Was there a sense of not having grown sufficiently in the meaning of is? is! is. IS? How luminous was that sense of growth or non-growth, of story, of self? Was the Jesus-story haunted by the fifteenth chapter of *Insight*, with a reach for “the eros of his mind,”<sup>19</sup> and the puzzle, imported from chapter six, of whether in him then, or differently now, “an ego with a message for mankind is linked to a diffident shadow.”<sup>20</sup>

Here I am only skimming over odd points of the contemplative challenge of *Insight*, still to be faced by the Christian tradition. But do the odd points make a point in your mibox, a neuro-vibrating sense of “all that is lacking”?<sup>21</sup>

Also I would console you with the fact that focus here is on *The Genesis of Adequate Self-knowledge*<sup>b22</sup> in what I call, and would caul, *The Tower People*: “for an explicit and adequate metaphysics is a corollary to an explicit and adequate self-knowledge.”<sup>23</sup> Is your ambition to be among that population of that central mediation of the task of Futurology, a population

---

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

<sup>18</sup> Again—see note 2—a help here is to return to the final quotation—at note 10—of [Interpretation 2](#), “Some Contexts of the Interpretation Series,” where Lonergan writes of the development of an understanding of the story of mathematics in a mathematician.

<sup>19</sup> *Insight*, 398.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 217. The editors’ note o, marked above, notes a crossed-out manuscript piece, ‘It would seem to be ultimately the same phenomena that are named ambivalence by the Freudians, bipolarity by Stekel, and alternation of opposites by Adler.’ My interest here is in shaking up your mibox. Certainly, there is quite an explosive lift in thinking of the shared neurodynamics of Jesus and perhaps more than 100 billion of us in an *Eschaton*, where botanical and zoological being is no more than a cherished memory of sunflowers and windhovers and petted beasts. See section 20, ‘Eschaton’ of my article “*Insight* and the Trivialization of History,” *Diyadaan: A Journal of Education and Philosophy*, Volume 28, no. 1, 2017, 125–27.

<sup>21</sup> *Insight*, 559.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 558: the title, in italics, of a key two-page section of chapter 17. The editors’ note, b, calls attention to its odd conjunction-beginning, which suits us nicely here.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

that is to be perhaps one fortieth of the total human population by the year 9011? Then you shall have to have more than a sense, in your mibox, of all that is lacking. Do you wish to care for the emergence of the Whole Christ of history? “Never has the need to speak effectively to undifferentiated consciousness been greater.”<sup>24</sup> “But to communicate one must understand what one has to communicate. No repetition of formulas can take the place of understanding. For it is understanding alone that can say what it grasps in any of the manners demanded by the almost endless series of different audiences.”<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> *Method in Theology*, 99.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 351.