

Why Lonergan?

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The following is a transcript of the talk by Fr. Robert M. Doran at the Launch of the Bernard J. Lonergan Institute on November 16, 2006:

It is indeed a joy and an honor to be invited by Monsignor Liddy to help Seton Hall University open its new Lonergan Center. I feel as though I've been elevated by this invitation to a new position among Lonergan scholars, since this is the sort of thing that my beloved and revered colleague of so many years, Frederick Crowe, would once have been asked to do. It is a very special honor to be asked to do what Fred would once have done.

The first thing that I wish to say is that, with the establishment of the Lonergan Center, you are entering in a new way a large and growing international community. Let me give you some indication of the connections that you are establishing at Seton Hall by opening this Center.

First, there are many Lonergan-related enterprises around the world, and they do many different things.

- There are Centers more or less similar to the one you are opening here, and these are to be found in
 - Boston,
 - Los Angeles,
 - Toronto,
 - Sydney,
 - Melbourne,
 - Dublin,
 - Naples,
 - Rome,
 - Mexico City,
 - Tokyo,
 - Bogotá,
 - Montreal,
 - Manila.
- There is the Lonergan Institute for the Good under Construction in Washington, D.C.
- Also in Washington is the Woodstock Theological Center, whose projects are strongly influenced by Lonergan's work.
- There is the College of Professional Studies at Marquette University, where the curriculum in a leadership program is based in Lonergan.
- There is the newly burgeoning cyberspace Institute for Interdisciplinary Method, which will undertake the task of coordinating various efforts to develop and implement Lonergan's work and of promoting collaboration among the other Lonergan-related enterprises.
- There are at least nine distinct but interconnected Lonergan websites.

- There is the *Loneragan Studies Newsletter*, edited by Tad Dunne with help from Danny Monsour, with its quarterly review of Lonergan-related literature, lectures, workshops, and other activities.

Second, some of these Centers and projects are strongly or loosely connected with other enterprises. For example,

- at Boston College there is the annual Lonergan Workshop conducted by Fred and Sue Lawrence, a wonderful affair that has been going on since 1974 and that brings friends and associates together each year for a very stimulating and enjoyable week of lectures and conversations.
- Fred and Sue have also conducted two international Workshops, one in Rome and one in Toronto, and are now busy planning a third, to be held in Mainz, Germany, in early January of 2007.
- There is a publication called *Loneragan Workshop*, which publishes the proceedings of the annual Workshops, and it is produced at Boston College.
- The journal *Method: Journal of Lonergan Studies* is also published from Boston College (with the assistance of Mark Morelli from Loyola Marymount University, one of its original editors).
- Mark Morelli organizes his own annual West Coast Methods Institute at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, luring many of us east-coast and midwest snowbound types to the fair skies of L.A. in early spring.
- The Lonergan Research Institute in Toronto houses the Lonergan Archives and is publishing Lonergan's Collected Works with University of Toronto Press, as well as audio recordings on compact disc of many of his lectures and Institutes.
- There are bi-annual Australian Lonergan Workshops organized out of Sydney and Melbourne, with their own publication.
- The Centers in Rome and Naples are collaborating on the Italian translation of Lonergan's Collected Works, with the strong support of His Eminence Carlo Maria Cardinal Martini.
- There are Lonergan-related academic courses offered at such institutions as
 - Boston College,
 - Catholic University of America,
 - Loyola Marymount University,
 - Marquette University,
 - Your own Seton Hall University, with Monsignor Liddy, Fr John Ranieri, and Professor Stephen Martin, and
 - Regis College at the University of Toronto, to mention only a few.

Other important items of information are the following:

- Nearly 300 dissertations on Lonergan's work have been written and successfully defended.
- In addition to the Lonergan-focused journals that I mentioned earlier, other journals regularly publish articles on Lonergan. I think, for example, of
 - *Theological Studies* (arguably the leading theological publication in the English-speaking world) and
 - *International Philosophical Quarterly*.
- There is the participation of Lonergan scholars in other enterprises. I think in particular of the Colloquium on Violence and Religion, which centers around the work of René Girard, and which has invited the participation of Lonergan scholars at three international meetings: in Boston, in Koblenz, Germany, and in Ottawa.

- Special celebrations are being planned in Sydney and Rome in 2007, the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of Lonergan's *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*

These little bits of information will, I hope, give you some indication of what I mean when I say that with the establishment of the Lonergan Center, you are entering a very large international community in a new way. "Lonergan" is a going enterprise!

In another sense, however, "Lonergan" precisely as an "enterprise" is still something of a sleeper. It is a growing enterprise, but the growth is hidden, quiet, in some ways piecemeal, so that, despite all of these indications of how influential Bernard Lonergan's work has been around the world, people ask such questions as,

- Why, if Lonergan is as important as you say he is, hasn't he made more of an impact on the Church and the world?
- Why is his work not finding more resonance outside of strictly Catholic circles?
- Why is it not making any inroads into the secular academy?
- Why is it not more central in the messages that come from the Church's own teaching authority?

Sometimes, I admit, I find such questions exasperating. 'How much can you expect?' I want to ask. 'How many people have had this kind of influence, an influence which, just over twenty years after his death, is slowly growing in various parts of the world and is clearly going to continue to grow?' And the answer to that question is, 'Very few.' I would not be surprised if every day, somewhere in the world, at least one new person who has just discovered Lonergan's work is saying to himself or herself what I said to myself forty years ago: 'This is what I've been looking for.' Or even, 'This is worth a lifetime.' And this is the way in which, for the most part, what Fred Crowe once called "The Lonergan Enterprise" is growing, one person at a time.

But I also think the answer to such challenging questions is quite complex, and I will try to address that very briefly, for I think it is something that will always be with the Lonergan movement. For there is something about Lonergan's work that can awaken tremendous resistance. And I am not talking about the cerebral character of some (though not all) of his writings, for the resistance of which I am speaking is something other than the frustration we may feel when we are reaching up to the mind of someone who is clearly smarter than we are. (I recall the statement of Professor William Shea, who said that when he first heard Lonergan speak he realized that this was the most intelligent person he had ever met and probably would ever meet.) I prefer to call it a resistance to the prophetic character of Lonergan's work. Like the prophets of old, he is challenging his readers to conversion in everything he writes, to a conversion that is religious, moral, intellectual, and (in his late writings) affective. He is relentless in his challenge, a challenge reminiscent of Rilke's famous line, 'You must change your life.' And such a challenge can arouse not only resistance, but also resentment, or, to use the word that Lonergan borrows from the writings of Max Scheler, who took it over as a loan word from French, *ressentiment*. Lonergan was able to write about *ressentiment* in the way he did, I believe, because he was on the receiving end of it during his own lifetime, even, I'm sorry to say, from some of his Jesuit brothers. The same thing, of course, has been called by more familiar names such as jealousy and envy, and has been eloquently described by René Girard, who speaks of mimetic rivalry. It was aroused by the prophets of old. It was aroused by Jesus. (See, for example, Matthew 27.18 and Mark 15.10: Pilate 'perceived that it was out of envy that the chief priests had delivered him up.') It is aroused by those who are called to speak, in Jesus' name, God's call to conversion. It was aroused by Bernard Lonergan, and it will be aroused by those who attempt to preserve, promote, develop, and implement what he has left us.

But this brings me to the title of this presentation, Why Lonergan? What *has* he left us? Why are so many people so excited about his work? Why does his work show no signs of fading away? Why is it liable to be, in David Tracy's words, a classic and not a period piece? Why Lonergan? I'm sure that question has entered the minds of some people who have heard about the opening of this new Center, and that is why I have chosen to address it here this evening.

I'm not going to get into the odious business of drawing comparisons. To ask, Why Lonergan? is not to ask, Why not Rahner? or, why not von Balthasar? There are Centers in various parts of the world devoted to the study of these and other great theologians, and I am firmly convinced that one of the worst mistakes that Lonergan scholars can make is to move far too quickly onto the offensive and to demonstrate why they think Lonergan is more important or better than, for instance, Karl Rahner or Hans Urs von Balthasar. Whenever I find this sort of thing, I try to point out that every reference that Lonergan makes to Rahner in his published work is positive, telling us what he learned from reading Rahner: in particular, the meaning of the Ignatian 'consolation without a preceding cause,' and the meaning of the technical term 'sublation.' He does not refer to von Balthasar in his published writings, unless I am mistaken, but there is at least one positive reference in a letter to Frederick Crowe, and I have tried in my own work to argue that Lonergan and von Balthasar need one another. In any case, Lonergan once responded to someone who asked him, 'How should we read a book?' by saying, 'Go for the insights! What are they onto?' David Tracy once said to me in a conversation, 'Lonergan was a very generous reader.' His primary concern in reading and interpreting other authors was to advance their insights, not to denounce their mistakes. He firmly believed that the mistakes would fall away of their own accord as the genuine insights were advanced. He wanted his students to show the same respect and trust.

So what is it that he does offer? What is unique about Lonergan's work, so unique that it is able to inspire the formation of Centers and other projects all over the world, so important that it inspired the formation of the Lonergan Center at Seton Hall University?

I'm going to answer that question by appealing to a phrase that occurs in the introduction to Lonergan's great work, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*. For there he speaks of providing a common ground on which people can meet. I'm going to try to mine this expression 'common ground,' and hope that it gives us a way of organizing an answer to the question, Why Lonergan?

Now, I've written about this before, in a piece called 'Common Ground,' and I'm not going to repeat what I wrote there, because what I wrote there was fairly technical, and my guess is that 'technical' is not what you are looking for tonight. I'm going to try to reorganize what there I expressed in somewhat technical terms, so as to make it very clear what the significance of Lonergan's work is, not only for academic life but especially also for our everyday lives in our various communities and in our interchange with one another.

Let me turn first, though, to the *Spiritual Exercises* of St Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the religious order in which Lonergan spent his entire adult life, the Society of Jesus. For I think Lonergan's work of providing common ground on which people of good will can meet was a response to a vocation, and I suspect that it is the *Spiritual Exercises* that will give us the clearest indication of what that vocation may have been.

In the meditation on the Kingdom of Christ in the *Exercises* St Ignatius proposes to us that we consider the call of the eternal king: "It is my will to win over the whole world, to conquer sin,

hatred, and death – all the enemies between human beings and God. Whoever wishes to join me in this mission must be willing to labor with me, so that by following me in suffering, he may follow me in glory.”

All those who are set on fire with zeal to follow Christ, Ignatius says, will not only offer themselves for mission but will act against anything that would make their response less total. They will express their commitment in “some such words” as the following: “Eternal Lord and King of the Universe, I humbly come before you and, supported by your mother Mary and all your saints, I offer myself by the help of your grace to you and to your work. I profess that it is my earnest desire and my deliberate choice, provided only it is for your greater service and praise, to imitate you in bearing all wrongs and all abuse and all poverty, both actual and spiritual, if you, my Lord and King, would want to choose and admit me to such a state and way of life.”

For Bernard Lonergan the response to that call took the form of a profound and far-reaching intellectual commitment, a commitment to the total reconstruction of Catholic philosophy and theology in the contexts set by modern science, modern historical scholarship, and modern philosophy.

The reconstruction of Catholic philosophy, he came to discover, would help modern (and now postmodern) men and women to transcend the fragmentation of knowledge, not along the lines of the medieval and Renaissance ideals of mastering the content of all there is to be known, which of course is impossible, but rather along the lines of discovering the common procedures that cut through all instances of human knowing. ‘What am I doing when I am knowing?’ thus became the first question to be asked and answered in this reconstruction of Catholic philosophy. And the crisis that proceeding in this way would meet is not insubstantial. ‘... the world,’ Lonergan writes, ‘lies in pieces before [us] and pleads to be put together again, to be put together not as it stood before on the careless foundation of assumptions that happened to be unquestioned but on the strong ground of the possibility of questioning and with full awareness of the range of possible answers.’

Now, I ask you to keep in mind the phrase, ‘the strong *ground* of the possibility of questioning,’ while I proceed to point to something analogous as the basis of the reconstruction of Catholic *theology*. The philosophical appeal is to something utterly concrete: ‘What am I doing when I am knowing?’ You cannot get more concrete than that. The answer consists in assembling an account of the concrete operations that we actually perform. So too for theology, the key to the total reconstruction that is demanded in our time is utterly concrete.

Lonergan asks whether in the realm of religious experience there exists any unassailable fact, and with the French psychologist of religion Olivier Rabut he finds the answer in the existence of love. “It is as though a room were filled with music though one can have no sure knowledge of its source. There is in the world ... a charged field of love and meaning; here and there it reaches a notable intensity; but it is ever unobtrusive, hidden, inviting each of us to join. And join we must if we are to perceive it, for our perceiving is through our own loving” (*Method in Theology* 290).

Thus the first set of categories in a reconstructed theology will come from an analysis of such experience, just as the first set of categories in a reconstructed philosophy came from answering the question, What am I doing when I am knowing? “There are needed studies of religious interiority: historical, phenomenological, psychological, sociological. There is needed in the theologian the spiritual development that will enable him [sic] to enter into the experience of others and to frame the terms and relations that will express that experience” (*Method in Theology* 290).

Now all of that is a bit technical, so let me fasten on the concrete, which is the meaning intended in all that I have quoted from Lonergan here. The common ground on which people can meet in our time is twofold. There is a common structure of consciousness shared across cultures, a structure of operations through which we come to know and through which we proceed from knowledge to action. That common structure Lonergan expresses in a shorthand vocabulary as consisting of the four levels of experience, understanding, judgment, and decision. To each of these levels he attaches a precept or an imperative.

- Experience: Be attentive.
- Understanding: Be intelligent.
- Judgment: Be reasonable.
- Decision: Be responsible.

Human authenticity consists in consistent fidelity to these precepts or imperatives. And anyone who wants further details on what it is to be intelligent, reasonable, and responsible will find enough material in Lonergan's writings to keep one occupied for a long time to come. (He is less abundant on 'experience' and on 'being attentive,' and that is something that I and others are attempting to fill in.)

This, then, is one of the reasons for the widespread enterprise that we may call the Lonergan movement. The writings of Bernard Lonergan disclose people to themselves. They have given people a purchase on what it is to be genuine or authentic human subjects. From the structure that Lonergan provides of experience, understanding, judgment, and decision they can, if they wish, go on to construct a unified structure for the whole of human knowledge, and Lonergan shows us precisely how to do this in his chapters on emergent probability, things, and the elements of metaphysics. They can also, if they wish, go on to construct a scale of values that will provide a clue to the intelligibility (or lack of intelligibility) of human historical process. Now I'm not going to go into such things here tonight. I simply want to indicate that these ramifications or implications are part of the answer to the question, Why Lonergan? or again, to the question, Why are so many people so excited about this man's work?

But, of course, as a faithful Catholic and Jesuit and professor of dogmatic and systematic theology, Lonergan knew that this was not enough. For none of us, left to our own resources, is consistently attentive, intelligent, reasonable, responsible. In fact, none of us, left to our own resources, *can* be consistently attentive, intelligent, reasonable, responsible. There is built into the concrete historical situation of humankind what Catholic theology begins to address under the rubric of 'original sin' and what Lonergan, following Aquinas, calls "moral impotence." It is only insofar as we join that 'charged field of love and meaning' that is God's gift of God's own love to the world that we are lifted above our weakness and sin and into the realm of some (still relative) integrity. I say "still relative" because, as Lonergan insists, "authenticity is never some pure and serene and secure possession. It is ever a withdrawal from unauthenticity, and every successful withdrawal only brings to light the need for still further withdrawals. Our advance in understanding is also the elimination of oversights and misunderstandings. Our advance in truth is also the correction of mistakes and errors. Our moral development is through repentance for our sins. Genuine religion is discovered and realized by redemption from the many traps of religious aberration. So we are bid to watch and pray, to make our way in fear and trembling. And it is the greatest saints that proclaim themselves the greatest sinners, though their sins seem slight indeed to less holy folk that lack their discernment and their love" (*Method in Theology* 110).

The basic answer, then, to the question, Why Lonergan? lies in the fact that the writings of this great philosopher and theologian provide us the most essential ingredients of the common ground on which all people of good will, all people who wish to make a real difference for good in this world, can meet.

- We all raise and answer questions for intelligence: What is it? Why is it so?
- We all raise and answer the further questions for reflection: Is that so? Have I got it right?
- We all raise and answer the questions for deliberation: Is this truly or only apparently worth while? What is to be done?
- And we are all – and this is a very important statement from the perspective of the dialogue of world religions – we are all on the receiving end of God's offer of the gift of God's own love.

Any line of thinking that can clarify that common ground so that people can find it in themselves and claim it as their own and find it in others and honor it when they so find it will be of incredible benefit to our world. And it will also be a most generous response to the call of Christ that Lonergan himself heard in his prayer as a Jesuit when he made the *Spiritual Exercises* of St Ignatius: 'It is my will to win over the whole world, to conquer sin, hatred, and death – all the enemies between human beings and God. Whoever wishes to join me in this mission must be willing to labor with me, so that by following me in suffering, he may follow me in glory.'

I wish now, if I may, to focus briefly on the current status of the Lonergan movement in the world, and to situate what might become the mission of Seton Hall's Lonergan Center in this mission.

During my five years as Director of the Lonergan Research Institute in Toronto, I managed to articulate a mission for the Institute that we employed as we reached out for help and support: to preserve, promote, develop, and implement the work of Bernard Lonergan. The Lonergan Research Institute in Toronto has been doing a good job in its more than twenty years of existence in preserving and promoting Lonergan's work, but the Institute has not had the resources to do more than a small bit in the area of developing and implementing that work. The preservation and promotion of Lonergan's work occurs at the Institute in Toronto through the Lonergan Archives, the library of the Institute, the publication of Lonergan's Collected Works with University of Toronto Press (now twelve volumes, but eventually twenty-five), and the production of audio compact discs with recorded reproduction of Lonergan's own voice in what will be over 500 hours of lectures. But there is a tremendous amount of work to be done in developing and implementing what Bernard Lonergan has left us, and I am now convinced that these tasks are not going to be accomplished by any one Center, but by all of the Centers and other Lonergan-related projects, workshops, conferences, and publications working together.

More precisely, I think that the complete mission that I once articulated for one small, financially challenged institution – to preserve, promote, develop, and implement the work of Bernard Lonergan – is really the mission of all of the Lonergan Centers, projects, workshops, conferences, and publications in the world, whether these be in Boston, Los Angeles, Toronto, Sydney, Melbourne, Dublin, Naples, Rome, Mexico City, Tokyo, Bogotá, Montreal, Manila – or, we may now add, South Orange, New Jersey. Every one of these Centers and projects will be making its own contribution, large or small, to the step-by-step, progressive, and cumulative spread of a very important intellectual, religious, and cultural movement, a movement that in my view and that of Monsignor Liddy will probably qualify Bernard Lonergan one day for the title of Doctor of the Church.

You are well poised here at Seton Hall to make your contributions to this movement.

- Monsignor Richard Liddy's work has been most helpful to a large number of people in understanding what Lonergan was about, especially in *Insight*, and so in promoting Lonergan's own work.
- As for development and implementation, Professor John Ranieri has done extremely creative and important work in relating Lonergan's thought to that of René Girard, and in so doing to help us unpack the dynamics of that terrible aberration of feeling and dramatic living that Lonergan, following Scheler, called *ressentiment* and that Girard further differentiates under the rubric of mimetic rivalry and violence.
- And Professor Stephen Martin had the courage, as a doctoral student at Marquette University, to tackle in his dissertation what I believe is the most difficult of all of the contributions that Lonergan made, namely, his macroeconomic theory. If what Lonergan managed to do in philosophy and theology, namely, to redraw the maps of these entire disciplines, is any indication as to what we might expect when people finally come to terms with his economics, we may anticipate a tremendously fruitful contribution to the promotion of social and vital values in a world that is currently suffering a near total collapse of the integral scale of values.

Perhaps I can close with a plug for collaboration. And it is the work on Lonergan's economics that Professor Martin has studied that gives me my segue into these final remarks, for I am going to propose that this is one of the major areas where Lonergan's work needs development and implementation.

Over the greater part of the last decade of his life, Bernard Lonergan envisioned establishing what he called the "Institute for Method in Theology." The purpose of the Institute would be

- to develop and implement the generalized empirical method whose "basic terms and relations" he had presented in his books *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* and *Method in Theology*,
- to bring that work into dialogue with other movements in the Church and the academy, and
- to promote the collaborative creativity that his method would foster and facilitate.

When in 1984 I first proposed the idea of what became the Lonergan Research Institute to Fr William Addley, S.J., Provincial of the Upper Canada Province of the Society of Jesus, these purposes were uppermost in my mind. Still, it was clear before long that, prior to developing and implementing Lonergan's work in this way, the Institute had to guarantee the preservation of that work, through the publication of Lonergan's Collected Works, the digital preservation of his recorded word, and the archival preservation of his papers. As I have already said, these tasks have consumed and will continue to consume the resources of the Lonergan Research Institute, which has now chosen to downsize and, in effect, focus exclusively on preservation, thus leaving development and implementation to other groups and individuals.

It is now time, I think, to plan for realizing Lonergan's dream, and I would like to call on the Lonergan Center at Seton Hall to be part of that. Because of Lonergan's insistence on the crucial relation of theology with other disciplines, his concern was not limited to theology narrowly conceived. The books that he started to collect for his prospective Institute included a number of volumes in the human sciences and philosophy. For this reason, I propose a networking of all the various Centers, projects, conferences, and publications under some such name as "Institute for Interdisciplinary Method" or "Institute for Generalized Empirical Method" or "Institute for

Interiority and Method.” Such a networking would be digital. It would exist in cyberspace. It would be accessible to anyone and everyone who accesses the Internet.

Thus the digital age rather completely changes the nature of what Fr Lonergan had in mind and greatly facilitates it. By and large, we can begin by networking the various Lonergan Centers and projects around the world, including this new Center at Seton Hall, into a better organized collaboration, by pooling intellectual resources, and perhaps eventually by establishing policies and plans that exceed the limited missions of the individual Centers. And we need to think about how we might establish a Bernard Lonergan Foundation, whose resources would be put at the disposal of all the Centers and individual projects as they collaborate in the task of developing and implementing Fr Lonergan’s work.

Thus, as we celebrate the opening of the Lonergan Center at Seton Hall, perhaps we can focus as well on the formalized networking of the various Centers, on a planned coordination of collaborative projects, and on an electronic linking of both written documents and recorded lectures, conferences, and workshops. I hope it is not inappropriate to close my remarks by asking the Center at Seton Hall to reflect on its own participation in this networking. And perhaps I can suggest some ways in which you might do this.

I would currently identify three major ongoing projects along the lines of developing and implementing Lonergan’s work: the collaborative construction of a contemporary Catholic systematic theology, the development of Lonergan’s macroeconomic theory, and the work of interreligious understanding and dialogue. I can envision the work of Professor Ranieri contributing to the third of these, for it is becoming increasingly clear that the central problem emerging in the field of interreligious understanding has to do with the relation of religion and violence, and no one has made a more profound contribution to unpacking the dynamics of that relation than René Girard. And obviously, the work of Professor Martin would be central to the work of developing Lonergan’s macroeconomic theory. And the very establishment of this Center in this area of the United States, with your easy access to large metropolitan environments – that is, the work of Monsignor Liddy – is what makes it possible for this institution to play a vital role in the international networking of something that is far bigger than any of us considered singly and in isolation from the rest.

In one of his most important papers, ‘Natural Right and Historical Mindedness,’ Bernard Lonergan focused on the issue of collective responsibility. He makes the rather startling statement at the beginning of the paper that “collective responsibility is not yet an established fact.” But, he suggests, “it may be a possibility. Further, it may be a possibility that we can realized. Finally, it may be a possibility that it is desirable to realize.” Let my final words, then, be an exhortation to Seton Hall University and its newly established Lonergan Center to be part of the dream of realizing this possibility of collective responsibility for our world, for our Church, for the future of humankind, the possibility that the work of Bernard Lonergan has done so much to promote.

I thank you.

