

AD COR LOQUITUR

HISTORY THAT IS WRITTEN: A NOTE ON PATRICK BROWN'S 'SYSTEM AND HISTORY'

FREDERICK E. CROWE

In a fine article in the first issue of what promises to be a fine journal Patrick Brown has said much that I can only agree with.¹ Progress in ideas, however, is promoted more by disagreement than by agreement, and so when toward the end of his article he challenges a position I had taken some years ago, I can only welcome the opportunity to return to the question.

Dr Brown refers to two editorial notes, one of them explicitly mine, the other more implicitly so, in which I took the position in question. The first is an editorial endnote to Lonergan's essay, "Analytic Concept of History," where I wrote as follows, "Although the distinction [between the history that happens and the history that is written] is already clear to Lonergan, it is only the history that *happens* that concerns him at this early stage; he will never lose that concern, but it is the history that is *written* that is the focus of chapters 8 and 9 of *Method in Theology*."²

The other reference is likewise an editorial note:

¹ Patrick Brown, "System and History in Lonergan's Early Historical and Economic Manuscripts" (hereafter, "System and History"), *The Journal of Macrodynamic Analysis* 1:1 (Summer 2001) 32-76.

² "Editorial Notes" to Bernard Lonergan, "Analytic Concept of History," *METHOD: Journal of Lonergan Studies*, 11:1 (Spring 1993) 30-35, at 31, note 11.

“Lonergan does treat these topics [development in philosophy, dogma, and theology] in the final lecture, ‘History,’ in *Topics in Education* (see pp. 241-50). That lecture begins and ends by referring to the history that happens, but the entire treatment is in terms of the history that is written. Further, Lonergan does not there mention the two meanings of history.”³ Although the volume was co-edited, it was most probably I who contributed this note; in any case I accept it as stating my position.

Brown’s disagreement is expressed as follows: “... even a brief exploration of that topic [what Lonergan meant by historical analysis] may help to lay to rest the notion that the distinction between history as ‘what is written’ and history as ‘what is written about’ can be used to periodise Lonergan’s own thinking, that the first half of his life centred on the history that is written about, while only after *Insight* did his concern turn to the history that is written.” In note 112 to this text Brown states, “This contention appears, for example, in the editorial notes...” – here he refers to the notes to “Analytic Concept of History” and to “The Philosophy of History” that I quoted above.⁴

In undertaking to defend my position, I make a few clarifying notes. My position did not refer to periods in Lonergan’s thinking in general – many topics besides history would be involved in such a division, and various authors would divide in various ways, depending on their purpose – but to periods in his thinking on history; I daresay Brown understands that point in the same way I do. Next, it is the note to “Analytic Concept of History” that seems to be most directly the object of Brown’s critique, so it is that note I will most directly defend. Third, I will discuss the matter only as it regards the history that is written; the history that happens, as I shall explain, would require more than a short note. Finally, my approach is in the line of research rather than dialectic and

³ Bernard Lonergan, “The Philosophy of History,” in his *Philosophical and Theological Papers: 1958-1964* (hereafter, *Philosophical*), ed. Robert C. Croken, Frederick E. Crowe, and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996) 54-79, at 79, note 43. (Date of lecture, 1960.)

⁴ Brown, “System and History,” p. 68 and note 112.

the burden of my answer will be the simple but fundamental and, I think, effective way of merely collecting the data that led me to the position that Brown refers to.

What are the data that led me to take 1953 as a turning point in Lonergan's thinking on history? Several times in interviews on the history of his thinking Lonergan referred to the change in locale at that time as the cause or occasion of his changing views. Asked in 1970 about his new interest in meaning, he said: "Well, it was being sent to Rome and having to deal with students from northern Italy and France and Germany and Belgium who were totally immersed in continental philosophy – I had to talk meaningfully to them, and it involved getting a hold of the whole movement of the *Geisteswissenschaften* ..." ⁵ Asked a year later about his change in attitude between *Insight* and later years: "I was teaching in Rome. I had students from Germany, France, Belgium, Holland, Northern Italy, all very familiar with Existentialism and further, with an extension of Existentialism. As it occurs in Heidegger it is a prolongation of German historical thought." ⁶ Two years later: "A principal source of the difference between these two works [*Insight* and *Method in Theology*] is that I was transferred from Toronto to the Gregorian University in Rome in the summer of 1953." My students "were about six hundred and fifty strong and between them, not individually but distributively, they seemed to read everything. It was quite a challenge." ⁷ Some years after that: "While *Insight* had something to say on evolution and historical process, it did not

⁵ Lonergan, *A Second Collection: Papers by Bernard Lonergan, S.J.* (hereafter, *Second Collection*), ed. William F.J. Ryan, S.J. and Bernard J. Tyrrell, S.J. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press reprint, 1996), in "An Interview with Fr Bernard Lonergan, S.J.," 209-30, at 220. (Date of interview, 1970.)

⁶ *Curiosity at the Center of One's Life: Statements and Questions of R. Eric O'Connor* (hereafter, *Curiosity*), ed. J. Martin O'Hara (Montreal: Thomas More Institute, 1984) 385. (From conversation with O'Connor, March 30, 1971.)

⁷ *Second Collection*, in "Insight Revisited," 263-78, at 276. (Date of lecture, 1973.)

tackle the problem of critical history. But with this issue I was confronted in its multinational form when I was assigned to a post at the Gregorian in Rome.”⁸

It was of some importance to multiply that list, for the issue regards a change in a focal interest of Lonergan and the repetitions indicate how prominent in his memory was the struggle from 1953 on with a new sphere of thought.

But why were these *Geisteswissenschaften* such a challenge to Lonergan? Because they were something new to him, something new in the thinking of his church, and indeed relatively new in the history of thought. On this we have his comprehensive statement: “There is the history that is written and the history that is written about. Today the history that is written is the work of an ongoing community of professional specialists ... History in this contemporary sense largely was the creation of the nineteenth century, and its acceptance in the Catholic church has occurred only slowly and gradually in the present century.”⁹ He is quite blunt on this new thinking; “History was discovered in the 19th century and it was applied first of all to early European history, the 13th century on. And then to classical history ... and then to biblical history, the Old Testament and the New Testament.”¹⁰ Late in life (1981): “It was the German historical school which introduced historical thinking, defined it.”¹¹

⁸ “Reality, Myth, Symbol,” in Alan M. Olson, ed., *Myth, Symbol, and Reality* (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980; hereafter, Olson), 31-37, at 36.

⁹ *A Third Collection: Papers by Bernard J.F. Lonergan, S.J.* (hereafter, *Third Collection*), ed. Frederick E. Crowe (New York: Paulist Press, and London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1985), in “Christology Today: Methodological Reflections,” 74-99, at 80. (Date of lecture, 1975.)

¹⁰ *Curiosity* 425-26. (“Conversation” of March 1980.)

¹¹ *Caring about Meaning: Patterns in the life of Bernard Lonergan* (hereafter, *Caring*), ed. Pierrot Lambert, Charlotte Tansey, Cathleen Going (Montreal: Thomas More Institute, 1982) 25. (Date of interview, February 1981.) The repetition is important, but can be tedious; let me relegate a selection of other texts to this footnote.

“History as a scientific subject had its principal development in the nineteenth century” (*Philosophical*, “The Philosophy of History,” 55).

“In the nineteenth century new conceptions and procedures were introduced into philology, hermeneutics, and history” (*Second Collection*,

We are studying the trend of Lonergan's thinking on history, and once again the point is clear and the repetition impressive. He had to come to terms with the achievement of the German Historical School and, as we shall see, it was a long, hard struggle. We may wonder that in a thinker of his stature the struggle should be so long and so hard. But on reflection we will perhaps realize that a thinker of his stature does not merely read and learn, as pupils do in grade school; they must also modify and integrate. There was a need, he states, "of integrating nineteenth-century achievement in this field with the teachings of Catholic religion and Catholic theology."¹² Further, Lonergan had his own positions on which he had thought long and deeply and these had to be integrated into the new thinking on history; it was just because of his stature that the integration was so difficult.

The course of his 'long, hard struggle' is well documented. History can minimize attention to meaning and values or, "In contrast, it can embrace the ideal of the German Historical School defined as the interpretative reconstruction of the constructions of the human spirit"; and that is Lonergan's choice.¹³ "The new challenge came from the *Geisteswissenschaften*, from the problems of hermeneutics and critical history, from the need of integrating nineteenth-century achievement in this field with the teachings of Catholic religion and Catholic theology. It was a long struggle that can be documented from my Latin and English writing during this period and from the doctoral courses I conducted *De intellectu et methodo*, *De systemate et historia*, and eventually *De*

in "The Response of the Jesuit as Priest and Apostle in the Modern World," 165-87, at 183-84). (Date of lecture, February 1970.)

"In a brilliant definition the aim of *Philologie* and later the aim of history was conceived as the interpretative reconstruction of the constructions of the human spirit." The constructions: "man's making of man." "The interpretative reconstruction of those constructions was the goal set itself by the German Historical School in its massive, ongoing effort to reveal, not man in the abstract, but mankind in its concrete self-realization" (*Third Collection*, in 'Natural Right and Historical Mindedness,' 169-83, at 171). (Date of lecture, 1977.)

¹² *Second Collection*, "Insight Revisited," 277.

¹³ *Third Collection*, in "The Ongoing Genesis of Methods," 146-65, at 163. (Date of lecture, March 1976.)

methodo theologiae."¹⁴ Again: "So I found myself with a twofold problem on my hands. I had to extend my theory of knowledge to include an account of critical history, and then I had to adjust my ideas on theology so that critical historians could find themselves at home in contributing to theology. Finally I managed to publish a book on *Method in Theology* in 1972."¹⁵ Also, explaining in an interview why *Method* took a long time to complete: "I had to go into history and interpretation, and into *Verstehen*."¹⁶

An important influence in this development was Peter Huenermann. "There is a book on that school: Huenermann's *Der Durchbruch geschichtlichen Denkens im 19 Jahrhundert*. I had been interested, but I learned about it from that book, and what I have to say on it in *Method* is mostly in reference to Huenermann."¹⁷ Again, answering the question, "Did you study them in order to complete the section on history in the Functional Specialties, or had your study of history preceded *Method*?" he said: "Both. I had to get Huenermann's book."¹⁸ There is surely an important experience behind that remark, "I had to get Huenermann's book," but details are lacking. The book came out in 1967,¹⁹ when Lonergan had already gone a considerable distance in that 'long struggle' he speaks of; his first reference in print to the book that I have noticed is in 1969;²⁰ and he submitted his MS to his publisher only two years later, so what exactly did Huenermann's book do for him in that short two-year interval? The question is worth study.

It is time to introduce some moderating and qualifying affirmations. For one thing, though the history that happens

¹⁴ *Second Collection*, "Insight Revisited," 277.

¹⁵ "Reality, Myth, Symbol," Olson 36. Add: "German contribution to thought, the contribution worked out in the nineteenth century ... has been the main influence on my own thinking on this issue" (*Philosophical*, in "Time and Meaning," 94-121, at 95). (Date of lecture, 1962.)

¹⁶ *Caring* 26. Then, *ibid.*, 59 (February 1971), answering the remark, "still it was a long work from *Insight* to *Method*": "Yes, because I had to master interpretation and history and dialectic and get them in perspective."

¹⁷ *Caring* 25.

¹⁸ *Caring* 26.

¹⁹ The date 1957 in *Second Collection* 136 seems to be a typo.

²⁰ *Second Collection* in "Theology and Man's Future," 135-48, at 136. (Date of lecture, 1968.)

and the history that is written are distinct, “quite different things,” they are very closely interwoven. They are quite distinct: “Two quite different things can be meant by ‘history’: the history that is written, and the history that is written about. My first point is history that is written: history as a subject, as a specialized field of inquiry...”²¹ But they are closely interwoven: “... the community mediates itself in its history. ... The history that is written about is the mediation, the revelation, of the common sense of the community; the history that is written is the fully reflective product of that self-manifestation. The two are continuous. The community reveals what it is in its living and reflection on the living itself, in its problems, its successes and its failures, reveals the quality of the common sense that constitutes the community. A written history, then, a history that attempts to think things out is the full stage in the reflection, the manifestation, of what the community is.”²²

A second qualification: history did not start *ex nihilo* with the German Historical School: “You have modern history with the Maurists and with ... the Bollandists in Belgium. But the way of doing history in a university seminar spread to all universities of the world; that is one aspect of the German responsibility for history.”²³

A third: Lonergan does not always do himself justice. He was not absolutely dependent on the German Historical School. His graduate courses at the Gregorian University reveal his personal input. I have quoted him as saying “German contribution to thought, the contribution worked out in the nineteenth century ... has been the main influence on my own thinking on this issue” – main influence, then, not sole. More specifically: “In a practical way I had become familiar with historical work both in my doctoral dissertation ... and in my

²¹ *Philosophical*, “The Philosophy of History,” 54-55.

²² *Philosophical*, in “The Mediation of Christ in Prayer,” 160-82, at 172-73. (Date of lecture, September 1963.) Further, there is reciprocal influence: every history that is written is also ipso facto a new event in the history that happens. Still further: we would not know a great deal of what happens unless written history in at least some rudimentary form brought it to our attention.

²³ *Caring* 120. (Date of interview, February 1981.)

later study of *verbum* in Aquinas. *Insight* was the fruit of all this. It enabled me to achieve in myself what since has been called *Die anthropologische Wende*.²⁴

I have limited my topic to Lonergan's post-1953 thinking on the history that is written. It is a precise topic, more easily isolated for study, and clear in its results. Although I agree with the historians that facts never really speak for themselves – always someone is presenting them with a meaning – still, the data I have assembled come about as close as they can get to speaking for themselves. And what do they say? That in the move to Rome in 1953 Lonergan was presented with a new challenge, that the challenge came from the German Historical School, that it had to do with the history that is written, that Lonergan had a long struggle as he tried to come to terms with these new ideas, that it so occupied him that he could say – with exaggeration, yes, but with a solid core of truth – “All my work has been introducing history into Catholic theology,”²⁵ that the outcome of the struggle is recorded in chapters 8 and 9 of *Method in Theology*.

I do not think this phase of Lonergan's thinking will turn out in the long run to be his most significant contribution to human thought on history. Of course I do regard it as significant, with the promise of multiple applications; most promising, it may be, is its application to the myriad cultures we now have available for study. It is an exciting time, with exciting prospects before us, and exciting guide-lines to follow. But in the long run it will level off in Lonergan studies.

In fact I believe that in the long run even the great achievement of the German Historical School itself will level off in the ranks of human development and human achievement. Lonergan liked to quote Butterfield who said of the scientific revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that it “outshines everything since the rise of Christianity and reduces the Renaissance and Reformation to the rank of mere episodes, mere internal displacements, within

²⁴ *Second Collection*, “*Insight* Revisited,” 276.

²⁵ *Curiosity* 427. (“Conversation” of March 1980.)

the system of medieval Christendom.”²⁶ I believe that the achievement of the German Historical School will, a century or so from now, be similarly ranked as a mere episode within the history of ideas, and that what will take central stage in this theatre is the history that happens. But that is far too vast a topic to be treated in such a short note as I have devoted to the history that is written; I will conclude with a word in explanation of that.

The history that happens began with Adam and Eve, or thereabouts, and will continue till the crack of doom. In the theatre of Lonergan’s work it was an early and absorbing interest. I believe that that is the history he had in mind when, beginning his career, he wrote his Religious Superior asking whether he might pursue his studies on the philosophy of history.²⁷ I believe it is a main interest in the papers of File 713 that Dr Brown has studied so diligently,²⁸ papers that are contemporaneous with that letter. In mid-life, Lonergan pinpoints the apostolic need of a theory of history; referring to liberalism, Marxism, and Nazism, he says: there has been “a vacuum of meaning in that merely day-to-day aspect of human living which these modern philosophies of history are attempting to fill. When they fill it, they obtain stupendous results, stupendous influence over human life in all its aspects, as is illustrated by nineteenth-century progressivism – it goes on well into this century – and the influence of Marx at the present time.”²⁹ In old age he again declared his long-standing concern: after pointing again to the domination of theories of history like liberalism and Marxism, he stated, “It has long been my conviction that if Catholics and in particular if Jesuits are to live and operate on the level of the times, they must not

²⁶ *Third Collection*, ‘The Ongoing Genesis of Methods’ 147.

²⁷ Letter from Dublin to Rev. Henry Keane, dated ‘10 August 1938’: “As philosophy of history is as yet not recognised as the essential branch of philosophy that it is, I hardly expect to have it assigned me as my subject during the biennium. I wish to ask your approval for maintaining my interest in it, profiting by such opportunities as may crop up ...”

²⁸ Lonergan left a large number of files, including one on ‘History’ numbered 713. For a list of its contents, see Brown’s “System and History,” pp. 35-36, note 16.

²⁹ *Philosophical*, “The Philosophy of History” 76-77.

only know about theories of history but also must work out their own.”³⁰ I believe this was Lonergan’s underlying passion throughout life, continually breaking out in penetrating remarks and applications.³¹ I believe it is where the future of our Lonergan studies lies. With such an estimate of the history that happens and of the place it has in the life and work of Lonergan, I hope I am not shirking the present task if I decline to present my case on this in the compass of a short note.

Frederick E. Crowe is Professor Emeritus at Regis College, Toronto. He is the founder of the Lonergan Research Institute and, with Robert M. Doran, general editor of the *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*.

Comments on this article can be sent to
jmda@mun.ca.

³⁰ Lonergan, in “Questionnaire on Philosophy: Responses,” *METHOD: Journal of Lonergan Studies* 2:2 (October 1984) 1-35, at 14. (Responses to a questionnaire circulated in preparation for a symposium of Jesuit philosophers held in Villa Cavalletti, near Rome, in 1977. Lonergan did not attend but sent this response in 1976.)

³¹ See my paper, “The Future: Charting the Unknown with Lonergan,” to appear in a forthcoming volume of *Lonergan Workshop*, ed. Fred Lawrence.