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**REVIEW OF LONERGAN'S QUEST: A STUDY OF DESIRE IN THE AUTHORIZING OF
"INSIGHT". BY WILLIAM A MATHEWS.**

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The 1906 attempt to create a labor union in Buckingham, Ontario—Bernard Lonergan's hometown—resulted in the death of two strikers and the arrest of many others. Mathews incorporates this kind of detail in coming to understand Lonergan's unfolding desire for understanding, in this case understanding the strains of economic activity. M. also successfully employs Ira Progoff's notion of key "stepping-stones" to understand the unfolding of this desire in Lonergan's life up to the 1957 publication of *Insight*. Family background, economic instability, world wars, scientific discoveries, philosophical schools—all these accompanied the unleashing of Lonergan's deep desire to understand. M. chronicles Lonergan's early life in Canada, England, and Rome, and his deeply serious engagement with the modern sciences and with the Catholic tradition, especially embodied in Augustine and Aquinas. Such engagement led to a serious crisis in Lonergan's early life as he realized that his understanding of Aquinas conflicted with reigning interpretations.

The first part of M.'s book, with its assiduously researched historical detail, is impressive. It highlights Lonergan's early dream of writing a metaphysics of human history as he sought to hear the call of being in his studies of Aquinas and in his detailed analyses of modern scientific consciousness. M. highlights an illuminating analogy with Edmund Husserl's engagement on similar problems: "Husserl was groping towards an understanding of the pathologies of reason, of the illnesses of the political and cultural mind, but without the redemptive categories of Lonergan" (81).

Notable is M's research into the various books Lonergan read leading up to the writing of *Insight*, works such as Newman's *Grammar of Assent*, J. A. Stewart's *Plato's Doctrine of Ideas*, Christopher Dawson's *The Age of the Gods*, A. Franklin Shull's *Evolution*, Cassirer's *Substance and Function*, Einstein's *Theory of Relativity*, Toynbee's *A Study of History*, and so on. As he himself was to say of metaphysics, he was seeking the whole *in* knowledge, not the whole *of* knowledge.

M. faced the excruciating ~~choice~~ choice of sticking to a highly narrative format or of going deeply into *Insight*. He chose both. His middle chapters explore "the thing" itself, that is, the subject matter of *Insight*, in order to reconstruct the history of its authoring correctly. Like *Insight*, he challenges the reader to engage in the therapy of understanding understanding correctly, only here the understanding is the history of the writing of *Insight*. From my own wrestling with *Insight* and my reading of the historical evidence, I find M.'s reconstruction of the writing of *Insight* to be correct. My conjecture is that this work will be "in possession" for years to come, not easily superseded. It now stands as the definitive work on Lonergan's early history and the writing of *Insight*.

Lonergan's Quest can be read with great profit after reading *Insight*, or it can be read

along side *Insight* as an aid in contextualizing and understanding what Lonergan was getting at. M. captures that process well. “Before a creative work has actually been performed it is vulnerable and insecure. It is all in the bud, and we don’t in the bud know the kind of flower we are going to get” (78). So Lonergan’s early life unfolded as a dialectic of hope and anxiety as each new work, each new problem, is “off-center” in relation to the previous work because new questions arise and new transformations of understanding are needed.

This book could only be written by someone who understands Lonergan well. Some sections prove as difficult as Lonergan’s writing themselves—because it *is* Lonergan. With Lonergan’s help many of us have discovered something of that desire to know in ourselves, and that it needs cultivating, not least through ascetical and spiritual practice. Here we see it contextualized by Lonergan’s life and times. We see the Holy Spirit sparking in his soul that life-shaping desire to know the truth. Lonergan was very aware of divine providence working in and through his desire to write *Insight*. It is strikingly different from ordinary desire. It sparks a quest that takes years to satisfy, with never the guarantee of success. As Lonergan once put it, referencing the puppeteer in Plato’s *The Laws*, “The pull of the golden cord doesn’t force you; you have to agree, make the decision. But the jerk of the steel chain, that’s what upsets you. That viewpoint is Ignatius and it is the whole ascetic tradition of the discernment of spirits (30).”

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