



JESUIT COMMUNITY BOSTON COLLEGE CHESTNUT HILL MASSACHUSETTS
December 31, 1976 02167

Mon cher M. Lemieux,

Your letter of the beginning of December was forwarded to me here, where I now am teaching. I shall try to answer your questions not directly but by an orderly account of the nature of my development.

I studied philosophy in the latter part of the 1920's and took away with me two convictions: (1) that what is significant is not the abstract universal but the concrete act of understanding; and (2) Acts 28, 26 f.

From (2) there followed my doctoral dissertation on Gratia operans and from (1) my study of Aquinas on verbum. Both were historical works intended to recover what the vetera really were, for I had come to see that the great age of scholasticism ended with the Augustinian-Aristotelian controversy at the close of the thirteenth century.

Insight marks the shift from (3) the Aristotelian-Thomist mode of cognitional theory in metaphysical terms to (4) to the modern mode of the same theory (essentially) in terms of the data of consciousness. It is the shift not taken by Maréchal or Rahner or Coreth who remain in the line of Erkenntnistheorie.

If now you will revert to the opening paragraphs of "Dimensions of Meaning" in Collection you will find that I affirm, not that meaning is more important than reality, but that the priority of reality may be accompanied by an oversight, namely, an oversight of the fact that meaning (among other functions) also is constitutive of human reality (not indeed exclusively but in so far as human reality is awake, intentional, cognitional, volitional). This, of course, is sound Thomism: the form of moral action is intentional; the form of instinctual action is

natural.

However, developments have ragged edges. Insight though it moves out of metaphysically conceived to empirically conceived cognitional theory, none the less failed to break thoroughly from faculty psychology: it speaks of the potencies or faculties of intellect and will. That has been dropped pretty thoroughly in Method.

Again, Method was not a new idea. I was aware of the mess theology was in and considered the transposition from the question of the "nature" of theology to the "method" of theology to be the essential step. The work I did on verbum and in Insight was just two stages in a program towards writing on method in theology. Indeed from 1949 to 1952 my work on Insight was conceived as the first part of my Method in Theology. But in 1952 I was told that I would be teaching at the Gregorian from 1953 on, and that prompted me to publish Insight as a separate work. It was finished in 1953 but it took four years to get it on the market.

Certainly I have been influenced by the Geisteswissenschaften: primarily of course by the profound influence that they have exercised on Catholic biblical, patristic, medieval, and later periods of theological investigation; secondarily because it was my intention to discriminate between what has been sound and what has not in the traditions set up by the German historical school; and in the third place, necessarily, by a study of what the GHS did, achieved, suffered.

As to semiology, I am inclined to find it badly infected with positivism. Reasons for a different approach that is concrete in its inspiration may be found in George Steiner, After Babel, Oxford U. P., Paperback 1976, First published 1975. Steiner from infancy was polyglot, is professor of English and of Comparative Literature at the University of Geneva, etc., etc. I suspect you might enjoy him.

With every good wish,

Bernard Lonergan