

FOURTEENTH AWARD OF THE AQUINAS MEDAL

TO REV. BERNARD LONERGAN, S.J.

A CITATION

It is easier to praise Bernard Lonergan in his absence than in his presence, for his modesty would visibly protest. We would much rather have him with us, but he has not yet learned the art of bilocation. He has had the same trouble before. Both Rome and his native Canada have had a hold on him and he has had to divide his time between them, since he could not divide his person. The same dilemma struck today, this time between California and Florida. We must admit that he chooses strong rivals to contest over him.

It was my good fortune in my waning middle age to have gone back to school to Father Lonergan when he had just reached his prime, in the very year of the publication of Insight. Wisdom is where you find it, and younger wisdom often teaches its elder incarnations, passing beyond their ken into realms unseen. It is a humbling experience to peer at a few flashes of light that come through to you from a mind that seems to dwell in luminous vision.

Bernard Lonergan combines in himself the older and the younger wisdom. His doctoral dissertation on operative grace led him back beyond the storms of the late

Renaissance to a rediscovery of Aquinas' serenity of view and rigor of method. His five articles on the Concept of Verbum in St. Thomas grounded him as a solid scholarly researcher, but also marks the point of rebound from the study of the past into independent and innovative thinking. The insights gained crystallized over the years into the monumental work called Insight, the reading of which is an intellectual experience few other books can match. You think that somewhere along those dark corridors of paragraphs labeled "twenty-fifthly", "twenty-sixthly", "twenty-seventhly" there must be lurking, ready to flare out at any moment, the blinding flash of insight promised by the book's title. At length you realize, by a small insight of your own, that you are not going to get any. The book is not so much an insight into things as into you, not a description of how reality is, but a long and comprehensive treatise on method, on knowing, on rational self-appropriation, an insight into insight itself. So we pass from level to level, bringing out within ourselves the inner word, the intelligible meaning, that is the finite counterpart of the Verbum God eternally speaks to Himself. With us it is done in history and so is never done in the sense of finished. You may say the latest word on something but you cannot say the last word, for there is no last word in human knowing. Insight follows on insight, but the end of insight is not in sight.

Plato has taught us, yet how much we could teach

Plato were he now among us! After we had taught him, how much more would he in turn be able to teach us! Perhaps it is fortunate that time's arrow is irreversible and that philosophy has a history. Were genius not portioned out over the ages, we would drown in the sudden flood. In his later thought Father Lonergan has become more and more conscious of historical consciousness. It takes a Janus-like stance to keep an eye on the past and one on the future, to be both conservative and progressive, a condition that is necessary for all growth. Thus he is able to react calmly to the changing horizons of our time. His thought remains forever young. Each new article of his testifies to the suppleness of his mind and the freshness of his interest, while growing out of the old stock of what seems to be his ineradicable Thomism.

It is impossible to express an adequate tribute in these few words. Father Lonergan's intellectual friends and admirers, many of them of our Association, presented him on his sixtieth birthday with a volume composed in his honor, entitled Spirit as Inquiry. It is our privilege this year to bestow on him the only distinction we ever award, the Aquinas Medal. We do so with congratulations for work well done and with earnest prayer for its long continuance.

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