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*Loneragan on the Edge*  
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“With Love to the Lonergan Community on Moving Past Silence: Response to M. Shawn Copeland, Jon Nilson, and Bryan Massingale”

I am very glad to be here, but how does one respond to such a great panel? After much thought I concluded that the best course of action would be to stand on their shoulders, and join them in breaking the silence. More specifically, I will start where Dr. Copeland ended, while incorporating the papers by Dr. Nilson and Fr. Massingale and my training in black theology.

Copeland ended with a frank estimation of the situation—the boat has been missed—but she also has some hope for the future. Far from assured, the theoretical future is fragile and fraught with difficulties. The thrust of my response here is to highlight important points on the road forward, in hope that an eventual, adequate response by Bernard Lonergan’s heirs can play a role in confronting and redeeming US Catholicism’s abysmal failure on race.

The Lonergan community will have to re-examine much about Lonergan and itself, warts and all, because it certainly will be engaged by black theology through a hermeneutic of suspicion.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, questions and concerns by black theology toward Lonergan and his heirs will be thorough going, in part because black theology or racial issues are not an accessory to ‘real’ theology, as Massingale and Copeland emphasized. To do any less than a full excavation avoids truth only achieved through honesty, or one might say authenticity.

While the hermeneutic of suspicion can be painfully sharp, it is not without warrant. To date, the context for race in Lonergan studies is nearly nonexistent; indeed, as Dr. Copeland

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<sup>1</sup> I do not intend to give the impression that black theology is monolithic, far from it. However, here I am sticking to the basics in both content and method. And while there are even sometimes disagreements over fundamental points, what I say here is generally regarded as central to black liberation theology.

noted, this is the first *formal* discussion on Lonergan and black theology. As such, this is at least an encounter with a ceiling, if not also denoting little awareness of or attention to the black voices, like James Cone, who stressed in class, “You’ve got to talk about it!”<sup>2</sup>

Thankfully this panel breaks the formal silence; however, silence is the “symptom of a far deeper malady.”<sup>3</sup> To get us beneath the problematic context of silence is the question: what is the source or sources for the silence? Is there, as Massingale used Lonergan's terms, major inauthenticity at work? In other words, how much of the reason for silence is rooted in Lonergan’s work itself, how much is it the failure of the Lonergan community, and why?<sup>4</sup>

Of course there are plenty of reasons for why there has been no formal talk: the Lonergan community is small, Lonergan’s distinctive contribution was not so much directly about social issues like race, there is not much money in Lonergan studies to free pursuits, etc., but in the US and US Catholicism, *not* talking about race is often the result of white privilege, which goes deeper than limits that appear innocuous, resulting in the suspicious absence of black bodies.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The class was ST 103, Fall 2006 at Union Theological Seminary in NYC. In some respect, the silence may not be surprising, but even more disappointing considering, as far as I can tell, the first sizable work on Lonergan and feminism was in 1994, and little has been done since. See Cynthia Crysdale, “Lonergan and Feminism,” *Theological Studies* 53 (1992) and ed. Crysdale, *Lonergan and Feminism* (Toronto, Canada: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1994).

<sup>3</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., “Beyond Vietnam,” in *A Call to Conscience: The Landmark Speeches of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*, eds. Clayborne Carson and Kris Shepard (NY: Warner Books, 2001), 139-164.

<sup>4</sup> “Racism has been a part of the life of the Church so long that it is virtually impossible for even the ‘good’ members to recognize bigotry perpetuated by the Church.” James H. Cone, “The White Church and Black Power” in 2nd ed. rev. *Black Theology: A Documentary History Volume One: 1966-1979*, eds. James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 73.

<sup>5</sup> My own unpublished work has argued that US Catholic historiography, at its best, treats race like an afterthought. But my own work is far from alone, see for example Massingale, “The Systematic Erasure of the Black/Dark Skinned Body in Catholic Ethics,” in *Catholic Theological Ethics Past, Present, and Future*, ed. James Keenan (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2011), 116-124. Also, I realize the Lonergan was a Canadian, but that does not mean there is no operating white privilege in Canada. One look at the Canadian treatment of Native Americans dispels any pretense of innocence on race.

The point of voicing the following questions is so they are actually articulated, meditated on now, and are fully addressed in the future, rather than to bludgeon or pick a fight. Why these questions? Besides being directed at uncovering and addressing bias and are concerns of black theology, they are the first step in clearing space for a fruitful discussion with black theology.

Nilson and Massingale touched on whiteness, which makes normative the identification and establishment of white people as a privileged group over and above other groups through seen and unseen structural forces.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, in whiteness, where “white people are dominant, white culture is transparent to them” and other cultures or racial factors are simply unseen or seen to be deviant, defective, subpar, backwards, or primitive.<sup>7</sup> Whiteness thereby creates a double consciousness in those not in the established norm—making nonwhites think White—and double consciousness is so thorough that the oppressed are coerced into being active agents of their own inauthenticity against their own self-appropriation.<sup>8</sup> Having been on the negative end of whiteness and double consciousness, and seeing the silence in the Lonergan community, black theology will pose the question explicitly or implicitly: is Lonergan and the Lonergan community ‘White,’ with a capital W? Is Lonergan and/or the Lonergan community operating within whiteness?

To confront the bias of whiteness, Nilson is correct that it is through encounter, but encounter is ultimately through solidarity wherein the black voice is free to speak and listened to

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<sup>6</sup> For the definition, see Gary Dorrien, *Economy, Difference, Empire: Social Ethics for Social Justice* (NY: Columbia University Press, 2010), 406.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> For double consciousness, see W.E.B. Dubois, *Souls of Black Folk* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2007), 136, and James W. Perkinson, *White Theology: Outing Supremacy in Modernity* (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 87-114; for making the oppressed to turn on themselves, see Traci West, *Disruptive Christian Ethics* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 75-111, and especially 108-111.

on equal terms.<sup>9</sup> This may be uncomfortable because some of black theology could call Lonergan White. In black theology there is strong suspicion of the white, European male who established a seemingly abstract and philosophical project, and often outright rejection of the work when its white particularity is universalized. It is possible that Lonergan would be seen as another figure in a colonizing mindset.<sup>10</sup> However, Lonergan, at his best, may avoid this. If universal as a category is not inherently wrong, his recognition of universal reason in every human can be understood as a positive affirmation of everyone's entire humanity. Thus, whether or not Lonergan is White is complex, and needs thorough investigation. Perhaps a more existentially difficult question is whether the Lonergan community is White, much less inhospitable to black theology or philosophy.

As one can see, the question of whether one is White is indicative of the direction of examination, but initially it can sometimes be too broad and lack the necessary subtlety—it can be too black and white. Cornel West, among others, has shown a generous propensity to know and work with White philosophy, while at the same time confront the hegemony of whiteness.<sup>11</sup> Yet, in order to value articulated truth bound up in whiteness, required is a more nimble way of framing and engaging whiteness. Thus the equally prevalent framework of complicity: whiteness, as making normative the privileging of some and disadvantaging of others based on

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<sup>9</sup> This is part of the reason why I would push back on Nilson's comment about "'encounter' need not always be face-to-face – and perhaps it should not be." Teel, via Nilson, is correct that turning the relationship into more work (even a burden) via teaching is problematic; however, it is not through inadvertent segregation but solidarity that we move forward *together*. I am sure Nilson would agree, but it should nevertheless be stated for utmost clarity.

<sup>10</sup> If Lonergan is providing theory, and it is understood that black theology can be pointed to as a praxis of the theory, we would be dealing with a colonizing mindset that does not see the depth of black theology exemplified in Massingale's paper.

<sup>11</sup> One could simply list any or all of West's works, but for simplicity sake, see Cornel West, *Keeping the Faith* (NY: Routledge, 2008).

skin color, can make one a participant in something they may not even realize or desire. Myself, a white male without a choice in the manner, am complicit in whiteness at least inasmuch as I do not always or initially have a choice that society bestows privilege on me through which I profit—even though I may desire to reject the privilege or profit. No matter whether one is active, passive, or even resistive to complicity, complicity conscripts.

Evidence for Lonergan's focus on liberation need go little further than Nilson's exposition on bias, Massingale on authenticity, and Copeland on Lonergan's affirmation, although it is interesting to note that even writing a second economics was at the behest of Gustavo Gutiérrez.<sup>12</sup> This liberative trajectory indicates that Lonergan was resistant to the logic of whiteness; however, he does seem to have been at least complicit in whiteness by omission, and perhaps more.<sup>13</sup> Now, in some respects, it is absurd to condemn a scholar for having undeveloped portions of thought or not having touched entire subjects. Nevertheless, omission itself is dangerous, and in time it can continue to hide problems or even make space for larger dangers—like little to no ground to easily work with black theology. For instance, questions from black theology related to omission expose the weakness of silence. Can or how well does Lonergan, and the Lonergan community, reckon with the suffering that has been wrapped up in black existence? What can Lonergan's decision-making subject do when the assumption of

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<sup>12</sup> See Bernard Lonergan, Archive, 34930DTE070. Notes from TH 860, Spring 1979: Macroeconomics and the Dialectic of History. Can be retrieved from <http://www.bernardlonergan.com/archiveitem.php?id=1950>.

<sup>13</sup> For work on the general category of complicity by omission there are many sources to cite, but for simplicity sake, see James Cone, *Risks of Faith: The Emergence of a Black Theology of Liberation, 1968-1998* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1999), 130-137, and Cone, "The White Church and Black Power," *Black Theology: A Documentary History Volume One: 1966-1979*, 80-84. As for Lonergan, he may even have had a subtle bias. In a conversation with Fr. Ogbonnaya, he pointed to Lonergan using problematic examples, namely 'primitive community' (see both *Collection: Insight*, 5th ed., rev. aug., *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, Volume 3, eds. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2005), 237 and "The Role of a Catholic University in the Modern World," *Collection: Papers By Bernard Lonergan* 2nd ed., rev. aug. *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, Volume 4, eds. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2005), 109). For more, see Ogbonnaya's forthcoming book, *Lonergan, Social Transformation, and Sustainable Human Development*.

agency is purposefully undercut by oppression that denies agency and lobotomizes intelligence, which would block experience outside of whiteness, dismiss understanding, overwrite judgment through double consciousness, and obstruct decision making? Can or how does double consciousness, much less the complexity of racism on the whole fit, into Lonergan's dramatic, individual, group, and general categories of bias? This kind of question, I believe, was or is intimately connected to the issue Massingale was pointing at towards the end of his paper.

In sum, to begin discussion between Lonergan and black theology, the first step is examining the legacy of history, along with concern that the present may be even more far afield. Is the silence of the Lonergan community out of blindness to an issue because it was underdeveloped by Lonergan, and/or is the Lonergan community further misappropriating Lonergan? Furthermore, at the level of DNA so to speak, black theology is going to be concerned with whether or not there is an inherent trajectory within Lonergan's method towards dealing with the social issues like race—is there even a place to meet? Said another way, if one were to spend a life time on Lonergan, would his work alone push one into grappling with a social issue like race? Is there an inherent direction in the basics of Lonergan's work toward social issues like race?

I have an answer, but I put it forward to accept full correction. I answer probably yes, that indeed studying Lonergan should lead to social issues like race, but only if one reads Lonergan's distinctive contribution in the fullness of his project. This the theologians tend to do, like Fr. Doran's work on social grace and Dr. Michael Shute, but the philosophers in the Lonergan community maintain a crippling narrow discussion on epistemology or Lonergan and a similar

kind of philosopher.<sup>14</sup> Too selective of appropriation does not seem very much like Lonergan and will obstruct forward moving discussion with black reality, whether it is in theology or philosophy.

One last note, I have only one addition to many major voices in the field of black theology already noted by the panel, either in the body of their papers or excellent footnotes. For the Lonergan community—so heavy on epistemology and method—see Stacy M. Floyd-Thomas's *Mining the Motherlode*.<sup>15</sup> It is still, as far as I can tell, the only book-length, systematic treatment on womanist methodology in theology.

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<sup>14</sup> One answer could be: no, Lonergan's method is only tangentially related to liberation. Despite that Lonergan's work is on the whole oriented in a direction towards liberation, it still tends conceive of parallels to social issues, like how bias parallels racism, rather than one lead into the other. Here Lonergan's general, heuristic method seems create a subtle rupture in his own work—otherwise Nilson's and Massingale's papers could have been quite different—and the lacuna has been further propagated in the Lonergan community. Never mind that there is a distinct lack of engagement with social issues on the whole, like feminism noted above. Yet, while interesting and perhaps poorly articulating a real issue, Lonergan's work on bias and authenticity, Fr. Robert Doran's work on social grace, which may be an answer to Massingale's criticism (see *Essays in Systematic Theology 35: Social Grace* and *37: Social Grace and the Mission of the Word* here: <http://www.lonerganresource.com/book.php?1>), and Copeland's paper alone show that there is an inherent direction towards social issues, it just simply needs of more development.

The affirmative answer, that Lonergan's method has an inherent trajectory towards liberation, would then mean that the problem is misappropriation or fatally selective appropriation. While there is this problem for the community as a whole, there are gradations, and I believe one can even see this in publications by the Lonergan community. As I went through lists like the *Lonergan Studies Newsletter*, and then double checked in journals like *Method* and *Lonergan Workshop* and various books on Lonergan, when I encountered a work about how an aspect of insight or method fits into Lonergan's larger project, the article was almost always by a theologian. (For example, Michael Shute "Economic Analysis Within Redemptive Praxis: An Achievement of Lonergan's Third Decade," *Lonergan Workshop* 14 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 243-264.) When I looked into the authors of works that focused almost exclusively on epistemology to the neglect Lonergan's wider project—which seemed to be the majority of the articles on epistemology (broadly defined)—it was generally by philosophers. Of course theologians and philosophers will work in each other's 'space' and there are some that fit in between, but they seemed to be outliers. The general end result is that philosophers do philosophy and theologians do it all. I mention these ways of reading Lonergan because I suspect that the tension between philosopher and theologian in the Lonergan community will hinder getting beyond simply breaking the silence over race. If Lonergan has a general trajectory in his thought towards liberation, it will not do to have one entire group, of a small community, remain silent. I see no legitimate reason for silence to continue, because, even for philosophers in the Lonergan community, there is epistemology in black theology (it is bound up in black experience) and black philosophy.

<sup>15</sup> Stacy M. Floyd-Thomas, *Mining the Motherlode: Methods in Womanist Ethics* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2006).