

Q. 25: Functional Collaboration with Hermeneutic Canons

Q. 25 (Bob Henman: February 22nd). You have written in recent Answers of the failure of the Lonergan community to tackle *Insight* 17.3. Do you have suggestions as to how to remedy that, and indeed about how to shift that part of *Insight* into functional talk? In particular, how can the canons of hermeneutics become part of the operations of functional collaboration?

A. 25. I start at the end of this very good and compact question. Let's see how far we can get in a page or so. Our talk, here, I would note, is hovering round the sixth specialty – as indeed most of *Insight* and *Method* is – and so we are mapping climbs: only the climbing-effort can make serious sense of the mapping that is doctrinal writing.

The problem of making the canons operative, and so increasingly intelligible, is meshed with the problem of implementing functional collaboration. It seems to me that the key link in this is the linking of the second canon of hermeneutics with the meaning of *Comparison* on page 250 of *Method*. The linking is clear to me from the long climb to identifying the problem of the thesis of the mystical body (*Insight*, 763-4) with the larger problem of envisaging – it can be simply genetic, genetical-dialectic, or more fully geohistorical – the sequence of such theses in history. Further I would note that it can be secularized: then one thinks of the sequence of theories of history. But I would note that *theory* has a much more complex meaning than any contemporary meaning. One gets a glimpse of that complexity by going back to *Insight* 489 ff and thinking out the sequential understanding of the sequential dynamics of flower or frog. And please pause over the complexity of the meaning of “sequential”: there is the sequence of understandings that corresponds to the sequence of operating systems in the genetic reality; there is the sequence of historical efforts to understand e.g. the sequence of systems e.g. of the growing flower. One moves only slowly to lifting this to a heuristic grip of the growing cosmos: that is the centerpiece represented by *Comparison* on page 250 of *Method*: for the secular or general-religious functional, a theory of history; for the Christian, a theory of Christing. But always here there is the need to hold heuristically to the interlocked meanings of *sequence*.

This is all too dense. The challenge is to develop a pedagogy of it, and this is perhaps best done by attempting sequencing in either sense in smaller cases or doses. Obviously, the effort would be greatly helped if there were advances in e.g. the case that is the rose or the sunflower or the oak. But this zone is a present mess: see *Method in Theology: Refinements and Implementations*, Part One, where I dealt with botany. One can leap up to Lonergan's Trinitarian theology and get a glimpse of two types of sequencing: CWL 11 gives a sequencing of understandings; CWL 12 nudges towards a sequencing of growing insights re the Trinity in Lonergan's 20th century understanding of the Trinity. The sequencing of CWL 11 is more relevant to our efforts here, but CWL 12's sequencing weaves into it and indeed points beyond the 20th century.

The start that I made in *The Road to Religious Reality*, however, seems the most attractive. I gave an initial meaning to *Comparison* by talking of a television show called *House*, in which a group of experts sought to figure out the sickness and the way to health of an individual. No need to have seen of the show: think of a group of expert doctors studying the patient and sharing their forward-insights. But first think of their expertise. Let's say that they have a fair grip on the history of medicine – recall Lonergan re the competent historian of mathematics. They understand, at least between them, the various efforts in global history to understand health and its cultivation. That understanding is **The Basis of Comparison**: it includes content + heuristics. This is a key point to think out. We can think of that basis as **The Standard Model** in medicine.

What is the procedure of the group? They have accumulated – think of *Assembly*, the last word on *Method*, p. 249 - all the information etc that they can about the present state of the patient. They brainstorm to come up with leads forward. Their talk is dominated by their common Standard Model: they listen thus to each others' suggestions.

This image of collaboration seems to me to be a decent starting point for the venture into the canons in that it points gently towards how we could make the canons operative in the new context of functional specialization. The clue here is in the introduction to the third canon, the “canon of successive approximation. The totality of documents cannot be interpreted scientifically by a single interpreter or even by a single generation of interpreters. There must be a division of labor, and the labor must be cumulative.” (*Insight*, 610, end). Fifteen years later he would write of “cumulative and progressive results” (*Method*, 4) and hint, in the first note of the chapter on Interpretation (ibid., 153) of the recurrence of ideas from *Insight* 585-617 in different specialties. In particular he mentions the reach for the universal viewpoint in dialectic, but we'll get to that later.

So, where do we stand in terms of practical possibilities at this stage? First, we should now think in terms of the second canon's second paragraph – one that I have been pointing to regularly in the past decade – and this first paragraph of the third canon. secondly we must associate this third canon paragraph with the beginnings of functional research as I have sloganized it: “X deserves looking into, cycling” where X can be an author or a topic or a set of events. X might be Derrida or Dilthey, or it might be a volume, Volume X, of conference papers. Thirdly – and here is the crucial step to which Lonergan is in practice solidly opposed – we have to appeal to the simple *House* analogy to glimpse how to handle Dilthey or Volume X. We are back here at the challenge of thinking out, even vaguely, the meaning of Comparison either for Dr. House – the lead character of *House* – or for Lonergan on page 250 of *Method*.

Envisage, therefore, the talk of the medical experts. One of them may recall a previous doctor, D say, – even in the distant past of China – who had a definite view on a similar sickness. In their talk, what is their Nomos? It is their common appreciation of the history of such views and their fate and their effectiveness. D is assessed by the expert group in that context, the context I have called **The Basis of Comparison** or **The Standard Model**. Dr. D's view is not compared to Dr. A's or Dr. W's. It is checked out by each according to their grip on The Standard Model. It may help you here to think in terms of physics standard model and procedures of labs and theory, but I stick with medicine here.

What is true of reflection on Dr. D's view is true of the view in Volume X. Further it is true of bright ideas that come from the individual experts, and indeed in the program *House* this was the regular direction of searching. Further, the dialogue around such searching regularly illustrated what I have said. The experts are “at home in modern science” (*Method*, 350) each “on the level of one's times” (*Ibid*), and the experts did not tolerate second rate efforts among themselves.

I won't enlarge on this, but leave it to your talents of **Comparison** to compare regular Lonergan work on comparison with this perspective, these Norms. “The fundamental need is for reliable principles of criticism that will select what is satisfactory and will correct what is unsatisfactory in any contributions that are made” (*Insight*, 610) and Lonergan goes on to spell out four principles. I avoided talk of those in my three-point suggestion. That three point suggestion is practical in that it can lead to a stumbling start. The experts are, however implicitly hunting for the front line of a genetics of healing. When we shift to theology we find that the genetics is either missing or shabbily present. It seems to me that that situation warrants, not an erudite focus on the subtle achievement of Lonergan in section 3 of *Insight* chapter 17, but a shift

towards a beginning of a functional research that would nudge people to take note of their own heuristic perspective, their Basis of Comparison, their Standard Model. This is a very humble and humbling beginning, quite a contrast from the silly “Loneragan and Snoopy” comparisons, where no one seems to ask themselves about the Comparer.

I have gone on too long for a single answer but I hope that it is a helpful start. You or others may follow up after a little experimenting.