

## Q. 31 Destructive Disorientations of Lonergan Institutions

Q. 31. (March 17) This Question comes from James Duffy and it is the first to take seriously my request for larger puzzlings and suggestions. The key urgent problem is to reach people effectively, especially those who are in positions to restructure conferences and programs. I'll say no more for the present: this Question 31 does not have an answer from me here. It will have a series of answers emerging in these next weeks. James is on the ball: do take him seriously. Send in reactions, additions, objections, whatever. Here I list the directions from him for my own effort to deal with his suggestions:

Q.32 "I am part of the organizing committee for the Mexico City gathering, and my question regards what we might do in those couple of June days". [p.2, below, Q.31] "Since the theme of the Mexico City workshop is "The Human Good," I assume that we are about interpreting what that chapter is about, a matter not just of understanding the object or the words, for example the six words "what is good, always is concrete" (27) or the spread of eighteen words in the scheme on page 48, but of "understanding the author himself, his nation, language, time, culture, way of life, cast of mind" (160).[p.3, Q.31]

Q. 33 "I want to join you, and encourage others to join, in making FC a topic in workshops and other gatherings." [p.4, Q.31]

Q. 34 "After compiling the two lists, I see that they are not really two. In fact I moved some points from one list to the other, and I could just as easily move them back. Is not FS 8 lurking in performances and essays written by students? Is not the whole set of specialties hidden in the rewriting of high school and undergraduate texts as well as future rewritings and performances of Insight?" [p.7, Q.31]

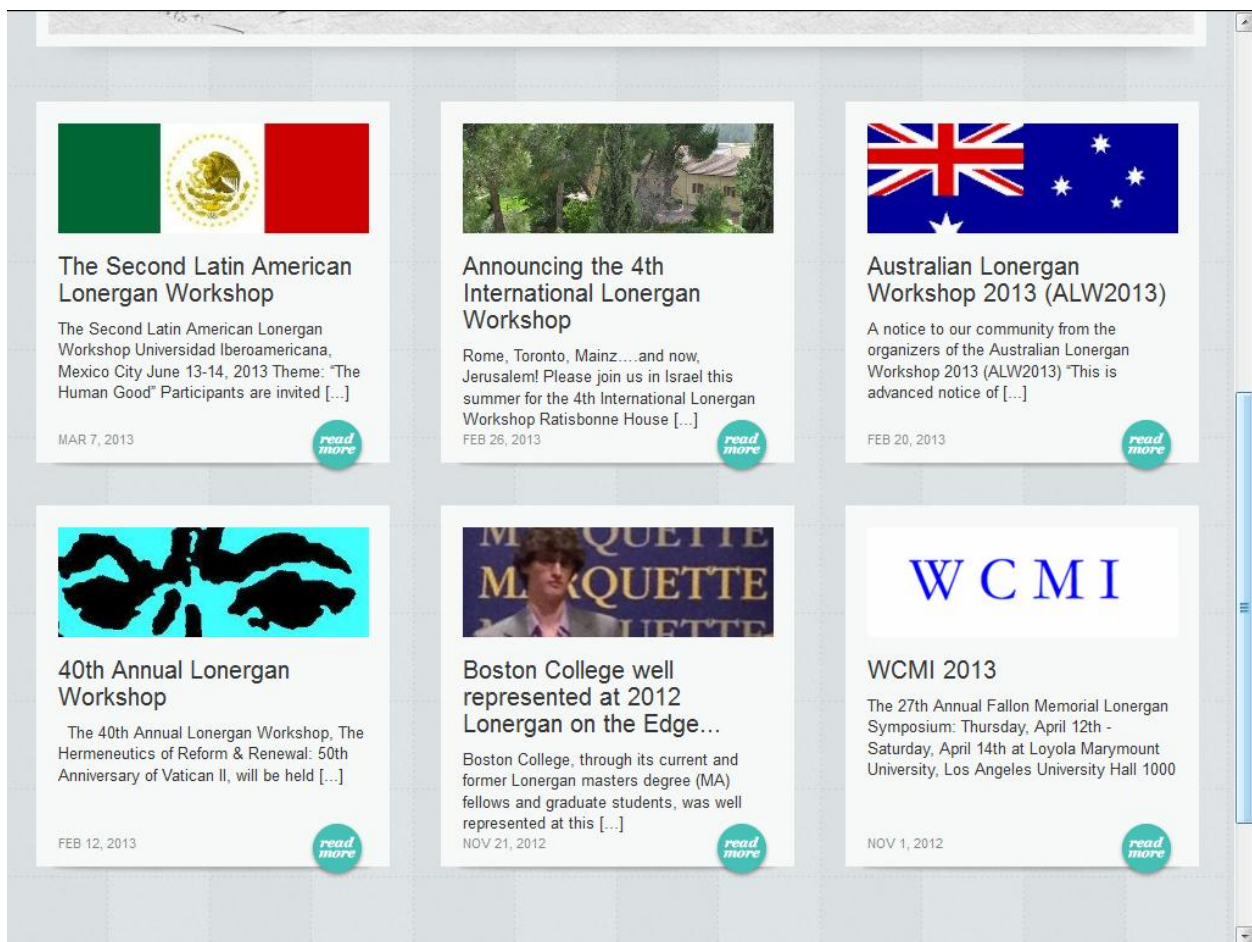
Q. 35 ["I am part of the organizing committee for the Mexico City gathering, and my question regards what we might do in those couple of June days."] "Implicitly my question regards what might be done in other gatherings, be they in Marquette, Melbourne, Toronto, Seoul, Los Angeles, Boston or Jerusalem." [p.3, Q.31]

Q. 36 "O.K. Here I stand. There is no room for repudiating functional collaboration, and the predominant de facto repudiation is a sad abomination." [p.4, Q.31]

Q. 37 Jerusalem 2013, too, the "Announced 4th International Lonergan Workshop" is on my problem list.

### James' questions, his suggestions, his own answers:

As you know, a second Latin American Lonergan Workshop is in the works for June 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup>, 2013, at the Universidad Iberoamericana in Mexico City. The website manager of the Lonergan Institute at Boston College was kind enough to post the announcement next to five others: the 4<sup>th</sup> International Lonergan Workshop in Jerusalem; the Australian Workshop, May 2013; the 40<sup>th</sup> Annual Workshop at Boston College; a report of the "Lonergan on the Edge" Conference, at Marquette University, September 21<sup>st</sup>-22<sup>nd</sup>, 2012; and the 27<sup>th</sup> Annual Fallon Memorial Lonergan Symposium: Thursday, April 12<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> at Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles.



I am part of the organizing committee for the Mexico City gathering, and my question regards what we might do in those couple of June days. Implicitly my question regards what might be done in other gatherings, be they in Marquette, Melbourne, Toronto, Seoul, Los Angeles, Boston or Vancouver.

What might we do? “Being intelligent includes a grasp of hitherto unnoticed or unrealized possibilities” (*Method in Theology*, 53).

Of course “What might we do?” depends on who “we” are and what we are “about” or “up to.” In Mexico City we will be: undergraduates and graduates, as well as professors, of education, philosophy, and theology; a few kindergarten teachers; a handful of high school teachers, some of them in the area of math-physics; and at least one professional mathematician who teaches undergraduates.

What are we about in Mexico City and elsewhere? I assume we are about promoting progress and reversing decline. I also assume that, as Aquinas wrote, “We cannot walk without walking somewhere,” or as Lonergan wrote: “there is no room for choosing the part and repudiating the whole, for choosing the conditioned and repudiating the condition, for choosing the antecedent and repudiating the consequent.” (*CWL* 3, 625)

I also suppose we are about understanding and promoting understanding in ourselves and our loved ones, be they students, colleagues, or significant others, in our workplaces and our rest places. I assume that some but not all (this is important: Is there a way to leave aside in-house jargon?) of those who will gather in Mexico City have at least one eye on the legacy of Lonergan, his invitation to embrace the “crucial issue [is] an experimental issue ... to [make] a personal, decisive act ... [to] pluck my general phrases from the dim world of thought to set them in the pulsing flow of life” (*CWL* 3, 13), perhaps, with great enough effort, to discover a “need of discovering what an Augustine took years and modern science centuries to discover” (*ibid.*, 17).

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His mind casting in *Method* included a recognition of the blindness or “one-sidedness from the middle ages to the present day” (137) that results from considering one specialty the whole, and added that “only a well-reasoned total view can guard against its continuance in the present and its recurrence in the future” (*ibid.*).

His emergent mind casting was oriented towards reversing decline and promoting progress. Early on in life he wrote about his attraction to methodology: “I felt there was absolutely no method to the philosophy I had been taught; it wasn't going anywhere.”<sup>1</sup> Years later he would tiredly write about a method that is “not make believe,”<sup>2</sup> a method that recognizes individuals with plastic and perfectible capacities that “admit the development of skills and, indeed, of the very skills demanded by institutional roles and tasks” (*Method*, 48).

Is it possible that institutionalized roles and tasks, our traditional ways of meeting, greeting, and delivering papers in Mexico City, as well as around the globe, are not working? Sure, it is possible. Is it actually happening?

OK, here I stand: There is no room for repudiating functional collaboration, and the predominant *de facto* repudiation is a sad abomination. It is immoral to greet my students and my colleagues as if all were well in the highways and byways of the universities where I currently teach, or in the gathering in Mexico City. And, I confess: I am guilty. It has been and continues to be a royal pain in the ass to ask myself: “James, what is your role? What functional specialty are you, could you, would you like to live and die in?”

Phil, you yourself have confessed just how hard it is to do any of the eight specialties. You have written about rambling in random dialectics, and the brutal difficulty of line-by-line control of words. Whatever FC is, it cannot be easy. ☺

I do not want to weigh in on the debate between Bob Doran and you whether there are eight or nine functional specialties. Rather I would like to join the two of you in making FC a topic in workshops and other gatherings. There is nothing wrong with the common sense “that does most of the world’s work,” but if in Mexico City next June our “whole mode of thought is just the commonsense mode,” (MiT, 304), how can we interpret chapter 2 of *Method*? Oops, so much for the progress of Cosmopolis.

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<sup>1</sup> *Caring About Meaning: Patterns in the Life of Bernard Lonergan*, edited by Pierre Lambert, Charlotte Tansey, and Cathleen Going, Montreal: Thomas More Institute, 1982, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> In January of 1935 he wrote in a letter that the Catholic philosopher “always tends to express his thought in the form of a demonstration by arguing that opposed views involve a contradiction. The method is sheer make-believe but to attack a method is a grand scale operation calling for a few volumes.” See Pierrot Lambert and Philip McShane, *Bernard Lonergan: His Life and Leading Ideas*, Vancouver, Axial Publishing, 2010, p. 153.

I do not believe that anyone needs a PhD in philosophy or theology to recognize that local, regional and national news is mostly bad news. What is needed to resonate minimally with the claim: “a serious contribution to one of the eight is as much as can be demanded of a single piece of work”? (*Method*, p. 137)

How do we take this short snippet from chapter 5 of *Method* seriously in our various gatherings? Might we ask for evidence of working in one or other specialty? Might we also ask for indications of being aware that other complementary specialties exist? (see bottom of *Method* 137 and the top of 138)

I do not have a magic solution to the mess that we are in, but I do have some suggestion about changing the ethos of gatherings:

- ✚ *Experto crede.* Yes, but we need analogies, for example the story of the family on vacation.<sup>3</sup> Would it be useful to tell such stories? Maybe act out the parts?
- ✚ Review essays, articles, even books with questions in mind:
  1. What FSs does this suggest?
  2. Does this deserve cycling? Maybe a part? Why? Why not?
- ✚ Prepare short, one-to-two page papers on what I think merits cycling in CWL
- ✚ Take a humble shot at narratively positioning myself in a footnoteless monologue regarding the “level of the times”
- ✚ Reports of teaching or pastoral experiences, frustrations, doubts, etc. and how these experiences intimate sets and sequences of differentiated consciousness
- ✚ Encounter groups<sup>4</sup> of those teaching: What are we doing? How is it going? What kind of “teacher trickery” is required if we are to survive unlivable

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<sup>3</sup> A Spanish version of the story is available at: <http://eltoquehumano-humanistas.blogspot.mx/2011/11/vacaciones-familiares-en-acapulco-una.html>

<sup>4</sup> F. Crowe writes of encounter groups, challenging and being challenged to self-scrutiny, and the un-imagine-ability of inviting colleagues to participate in a discussion where the spirit of the meeting would be self-revelation in *The Lonergan Enterprise* (Cowley, 1980), 92-93. In this same work he wonders if a “great silence” would occur if many were infected by Lonergan’s breakthrough (39) to a division of tasks and roles that includes “an Augustinian confession of what we have been, of the past that has made us what we are” (91). There very well might be a profoundly axial reason to maintain silence. I opt for helping each other dance to a different tune, holding hands the way pre-school kids do when they cross the street, or when they sing and play at recess.

academic life? What are small, doable steps to move from “filler” to something filling and satisfying<sup>5</sup>

- ✚ Encounter groups of those directing theses: What can I do to help my graduate students (and myself!) get in tune with timely differentiations of roles and tasks?
- ✚ Self-interpret a teaching practice, a text, a publication with a friendly eye on reversal<sup>6</sup>

There are other possibilities, relating to the possibility of promoting the very slow occurrence of self-appropriation through a struggle with “spirobics,” if not the exercises of *Insight*, then simpler exercises. (see *Method*, 7 note #2, also the long paragraph on the middle of page 260):

- ✚ Garden, campus, or zoo (*Method*, 83) walkabouts, followed by sharings, perhaps including a “show and tell” of heuristics;<sup>7</sup>
- ✚ Performances of teaching day #1 or day #2 in some area, be it algebra, chemistry or economics; feedback from the audience on the GEMlyness of such performances;
- ✚ Sharing essays written for students (or colleagues) that invite and cajole self-appropriation;
- ✚ Smaller sessions of those involved in teaching, divided by level/age, asking: “How might I change my teaching?”
- ✚ 50-minute classes and appropriate homework assignments, then participants go back to their rooms and try them; next day we compare notes!
- ✚ Song and dance, joke sessions, poetry recitals: If “explanation does not give man a home” (CWL 3, 570), much less do pseudo-explanation and post-systematic chatter (*Method*, 304). Should we be dancing more, and speaking less? “You should be dancing, yah / You should be dancing, yah” (Bee Gees)

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<sup>5</sup> In my experience teaching philosophy, both in the United States and in Mexico, I have seen and spoken with students who wonder if I “have a clear and distinct idea about what precisely I am doing” (*Method*, 137). Well, I don’t! The Spanish phrase for the undifferentiated mess, not just in philosophy but pretty much across the humanities curriculum, is “de relleno,” which means “filler” or “stuffing.”

<sup>6</sup> “I am interpreting my talking of 1977, and puttering around with my sorry story of presentations of thirty years after that. I am musing about reversing my presentational position.” Philip McShane, *FuSe* 18, “Ways to Get Into Functional Collaboration,” available at: <http://www.philipmcshane.ca/fuse-18.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Last term I did this with a group of M.A. students in an education program. The assignment was to somehow symbolize one of their students. It was interesting and revealing how they tried to represent/image their students. One of my students, a high school teacher of statistics, came up with a diagram marvelously unintelligible to the rest of the group!

The existential problem with the first list is that it requires an assent to the first two pages of *Method in Theology*, or a dissent: “Theology is just as successful as chemistry. And I have found evidence of progress in *Theological Studies* in the last 50 years.”

The existential problem with the second list is that the “scaffolding of mathematics, science, and common sense” (CWL 3, 20) of a “sufficiently cultured consciousness” is quite a tall order for those who were not fortunate enough to learn enough math and science to really read chapter one of *Insight* ... or page one!

After compiling the two lists, I see that they are not really two. In fact I moved some points from one list to the other, and I could just as easily move them back. Is not FS 8 lurking in performances and essays written for students? Is not the whole set of specialties hidden in the rewriting of high school and undergraduate texts as well as future rewritings and performances of *Insight*?

My rather urgent question “What to do in the Mexico City workshop?” – implicitly, how do we interpret chapter 2 of *Method* efficiently and beautifully – as well as the list of possibilities, suggests that there is room for improvement, if not an about-face, a philosophic displacement<sup>8</sup> towards the efficiency and beauty of *Method*, 137, lines 10-14.

If I do not know what to say about the basis of my thinking-living, I drift along. “In that case, Kant says, what we have is a plaster cast of a man” (CWL 5, 35). And what if I do not know what to say about what I am doing, as a teacher, scholar, and/or organizer of a workshop, and how my operations are related to certain ends and to other operations? Am I, James, a plaster cast man organizing a workshop without the character to assent or dissent? No: I assent to holding hands and figuring out, as best we can, how to implement functional collaboration... I believe in order to understand.

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<sup>8</sup> “However, the difference between the scientific and the philosophic is that in the case of the philosophic the subject is also one of the objects. The subject can accept the transformation of the object only if he effects a transformation in his own living.” B. Lonergan, *Topics in Education*, CWL 10: 96. I would suggest reading this pre-*Method* quote with a post-*Method* attitude, replacing “philosophic” with “methodic” or “hodic.”