

Q. 44. (May 4th) Your *Posthumous* series – very difficult reading and very remote from the culture of Boston College theology – seems to end at a new beginning with comments on the first words of *Method*: “Thought on method is apt” to which you give a Trinitarian meaning. Could you write more on this new beginning and on the difference between this approach and what is presently going on in Boston and elsewhere?

A. 44. Perhaps I had better split the answer, here talking about a fresh context for the new different approach and in the next answer, A 45, talking of the Trinitarian context, the remoteness of the required work and its difficulty in the present context for the questioner, for you the reader. All these issues raise huge cultural questions. I must be brief, doctrinal, about them.

So yes, there is the difficulty of a novel reading of self, of one’s times, of the book *Method in Theology*. The problem of moving from such doctrinal writing as the *Posthumous* Essays – really the territory of a mature sixth specialty¹ – to a new self within the culture and the church and the classroom is much more than the problem of strategic descending that was very roughly hinted at in my “Systematic, Communications, Actual Contexts.”² It involves deeply detecting the plausible madness of the present ethos of church and theology and classroom and conference. It involves being a character for the times in the sense of the first paragraph of the *Magna Moralia*. The remark raises question of one’s blooming life that must be left aside here, though you will find that the blooming life comes back to haunt at the end of the next answer. But one clear hint in my essay of nearly 30 years ago may lead to a general helpful re-reading of those first words of *Method*. The final chapter of that book finds thus a new context and points us towards a helpful sense of the cultural difference that is present, points to the massive straining shift that is needed in theology in these next decades. What is that clear hint? – well, not too clear! It invites a psychic shift in reading the fourth section of *Method*’s final chapter.³

¹ This is a worthwhile question to brood about. It is quite possible that your view of doctrines is relatively unrefined, that you have little grip on the great gap between doctrines as meant and talked about in the sixth specialty and doctrines that are to be the talk of what I call C₉, the output to common meaning that emerges from the eighth specialty. Note that the gap is neatly represented by the shift from section 1 to section 2 of chapter 14 of *Method*.

² The article first appeared in Volume 6 (1986) of the *Lonergan Workshop* Volumes but is now available as chapter 7 of *Christ in History* (available at: <http://www.philipmcs Shane.ca/christinhistory.html>).

³ First, it is as well to quote the nudge given in “Systematics, Communications, Actual Contexts” regarding the first section of *Method* 14: “What, for instance is meant by the brief initial section of chapter 14? Could it be read profitably under an alternate title such as ‘passionate subjectivity in the lucid closed options of the finality of implementation?’ ...” (pp. 146-7 of the original version; p. 5 of chapter 7 of *Christ in History*). I would note that “psychic shifting in reading” was a dominant ethos of my writing of the *Cantower* series, and in this context it is useful to draw attention to the lengthy (38 pp.) *Cantower* 14, of exactly a decade ago (May, 2003) which gives a lift to both chapter 14 of *Insight* and chapter 14 of *Method*. (This paralleling was a regular strategy in the *Cantowers*). *Cantower* 14 is

The freshening of reading: that is our giant problem of theology and, in particular, of Lonergan's. To help in glimpsing that freshening freshly, as well as to answer part of your question in doctrinal suggestiveness, I want to invite a communal push into parts of that 14th chapter of *Method*.

Back, therefore, to those first five words of *Method*'s first chapter, "thought on method is apt" and forward now to a linking of them with five words of the final sentence of *Method* chapter 14: "the possible expression is collaboration."⁴ A month-long contemplative pause over these ten words could very well put you in another world of reading "the level of our day."⁵ But here I wish to turn you back to musing over Lonergan's frustration of 1966, when Lonergan and I talked of the problem of writing a first chapter to a book on *Method in Theology*.⁶ I had no answer then to his frustrated puzzling, but now, nearly fifty years later, it seems to me that one answer would have been, yes, to start with those brutal four introductory paragraphs in chapter one, but then, instead of section one's "A Preliminary Notion", to enlarge on the mess named in those first paragraphs by going straight to a version of section 4 of chapter 14, "The Christian Church and Its Contemporary Situation."⁷

Obviously, I am not going to summarize, much less re-write, those six pages at the end of chapter 14. I am appealing to my readers for a slow fantastic re-reading of this section of *Method* as a follow-through from the shocking demands, "difficult and laborious",⁸ of the "third way"⁹ of Lonergan's introductory stuff. Think of it in terms of the usual stuff taught in theology¹⁰ that really does not vibe with "the church as an out-going process. It exists not just

titled "Communications and Ever-ready Founders" (available at: <http://www.philipmcshane.ca/cantower14.pdf>) and invites a fresh "walk around the town" as does *Quodlibet* 8, "The Dialectic of My Town, Ma Vlast" (available at: <http://www.philipmcshane.ca/quod-08.pdf>). But I would note in particular section 3 of *Cantower* 14 (pp. 27-38), "Founders of New York," which was the result of a week's walk about New York, from the Bronx to Coney Island, musing on the problem of mediating cultural changes. This is the sort of attitude I have in mind here when I ask for a fresh reading of either *Method* chapter 14 or the Epilogue of *Insight*. The problems that Lonergan is dealing with are not in classrooms or libraries.

⁴ *Method in Theology*, 368.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 367. A regular phrase from Ortega y Gasset. See also *Method* 350 and 351.

⁶ He had already made attempts at a first chapter, beginning with a version in the "discovery file" of February 1965. But his general bent was not to go back to consult his previous efforts.

⁷ *Method in Theology*, 461-67.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ My questioner has this background, as you will. For decades I have managed to stay tuned into what is being taught by Lonergan people through communications with students who consult me, and regularly find it disconcerting that many teachers move past Lonergan all too swiftly to venture into various other views, a new version of the old tradition that I myself suffered through in the early 1960s. This relates to the crisis named at the bottom of page 3 of *Method in Theology*.

for itself but for mankind.”¹¹ Think of it in terms of the challenge to the church and its theologies “to remove from its action the widespread impression of complacent irrelevance and futility.”¹² Think of it – and this is lurking in those pages as well as in Lonergan’s leaps of February 1965 – in terms of replacing the narrowness and descriptiveness of Thomas’ *Summa Theologica* with the operative presupposition “that preachers and teachers enlarge their horizons to include an accurate and intimate understanding of the culture and the language of the people they address.”¹³

Such prolonged, shared thinking, gestating into “an aesthetic apprehension of the group’s origin and story,”¹⁴ would bring a fresh critical tone into the beginnings of a struggle to lift theology, as my questioner has painfully experienced it, out of its position as a low-grade “academic discipline”¹⁵ into a “theology that is elitist, difficult as also are mathematics, science, scholarship, philosophy. But the difficulty is worth meeting. If one does not attain it, on the level of one’s age, one will be simply at the mercy of the psychologists, the sociologists, the philosophers”¹⁶ and, of course, of economists, and of the bureaucrats of banks and businesses and governments. If the beginnings of the struggle “bears fruit”¹⁷ and is not to “fail to mature”¹⁸ then the teachers of theology are faced existentially with “the far more arduous task (1) of effecting an advance in scientific knowledge, (2) of persuading eminent and influential people to consider the advance both thoroughly and fairly, and (3) of having them convince practical policy makers and planners both that the advance exists and that it implies such and such revisions of current policies and planning with such and such effects.”¹⁹ This orientation was foreign to the theology that Lonergan entered as a young man in the 1930s and left, sick and tired, in 1965. It is, alas, just as foreign to the theology being taught by most of his disciples. More on that discomfiting remark at the conclusion of A. 45.

Yet have I at least given you a nudge towards a new potentially-effective version of chapter one of *Method in Theology*, one that is in better continuity with the cries of the Epilogue of *Insight*?²⁰ In that summer of 1966 Lonergan remarked to me, somewhat discouragedly, “I can’t put all of *Insight* into chapter one”. But the above direction, instead of the direction he took of

¹¹ *Method in Theology*, 363-64.

¹² *Ibid.*, 367.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 362.

¹⁴ *Topics in Education*, 230.

¹⁵ *Method in Theology*, 3.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 351.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 355.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 366-67.

²⁰ I think especially of the mood from page 765 on.

“compendiously”²¹ treating the operations, might have had the effect of waking the theological community out of its doctrinal and commonsense slumbers. Indeed, are we not here hear hearing the message of the last sentence of *Method*? We might put a hold on debating opinions on intellectual, moral and religious conversions, “and while we await cognitive agreement, the possible expression is collaboration in fulfilling the redemptive and constructive roles of the Christian church in human society.”²²

²¹ See *Method in Theology*, 7, note 2.

²² *Method in Theology*, 368.