

Q. 8 (Michele Harland) Would you please relate functional talk to Scripture study, in an elementary fashion?

A. 8 (June 9) This, in fact, would have been my entry point for the second cycle of seminars (2013-14) had the project survived. Some of its drive may well emerge in these Q. and A. But here we are looking for some elementary pointers.

This can be surprisingly tricky. What I thought of as an elementary point was raised with me privately by a Lonergan expert: his difficulty in distinguishing the position of John's last supper discourse in relation to the analytic and the synthetic way of talking of trinitarian meaning. It was difficult for him even in the old context. Oddly, it may be less difficult for us in the new context.

But let us first get an elementary grip on analytic and synthetic: it can be got easily by simple illustrations. The analytic poise is a questioning stance over a problem: what, if any, is the connection between A and B? The connection, say C, is missing. The synthetic poise emerges when C, the connection, has been discovered: one talks differently **then**, first about how A connects with C, then about the connection of C with B, so that the answer to the puzzle is presented as obvious. My standard analytic presentations are shared puzzles, crossword puzzles for instance: A, "round the end of a season", is to be connected to a four-letter "blank", B. So: we mess around. The

synthetic way is to write down the four-letter word, C. Perhaps you notice immediately that the synthetic way knocks the fun out of the puzzle, and indeed – especially in more complex instances - knocks out the climb through little insights to the comprehensive insight. A simple illustration of this is my analytic stance is raising the question, regarding John's Gospel, what might be the connection between that magnificent entry-question of Jesus, A – What do you want? (1:38) – with B, the great final speech of chapter 17 ?

I don't "tell you" here, but note a distinction of functional talk: synthetic, somewhat deductive in presentation, at its best is a communication to experts, hurried towards the new point; at its worst, when used in classrooms, it promotes memorization.

Analytic is the mode of both searching and teaching, and here I must make a central point. In the new culture the analytic is to be luminous, or – as of now, must strive to be so. The point is contained popularly in my Childout Principle (see *Cantower* 41). In the present context it can be suitably stated "when teaching children John's Gospel one is teaching children children". The unpopular version – and I mean unpopular in several senses! – is that of Lonergan's full statement of generalized empirical method, given at the top of 3rd *Collection* 141. I won't repeat that: it sort-of says that you can't leave yourself in the dark

when you are trying to get light on an object (and twist that the other way!).

How does this fit in with reading John's Gospel? This point badly needs a new small commonsense book. But let us just pause over the reading of John 1:38 : "What do you want?". The question is attributed to Jesus, an expression of his minding. Even though it is pitched at his visitors, your understanding of the pitch requires that you know what it is to ask, "What do you want?" But that requires, does it not, that you know what you mean when you ask "what do I want?"

Now you know quite well what you mean by "what do I want?", but normally only in a commonsense fashion. The Childout Principle asks your teacher and you to attend to that, and let me stay at the moment with the notion of an improved commonsense fashion. The encouragement to tap into one's loneliness becomes built into the exchange, even with young children. But are we not at the heart of the simplest answer to the elementary reading of scripture: the twist is that that reading needs a getting to grip with your "elements", and as we'll see more and more, as the culture changes, the gripping is a growing self- and scripture- appreciation.

Next, put that encouragement into a fuller social context – the one sketched on page 48 of *Method in Theology* – and you find that you can imagine a lift of level of the whole spread of

words, even though we focus now on the word **task**. I won't repeat the spread but only note that it includes the words task, personal relations, roles and institutions, strategically placed.

The **task**, at its best, finds its place in a massive change of **roles** and **institutions**. But for the moment think of the words, ***personal relations***.

And it is useful to add a curious distraction here, about the great conductor Herbert von Karajan. Having recorded during a summer in the 1970s the full 9 symphonies he was heading off to Salzburg to conduct one of them in a concert. A friend suggested that he would be bored. "Oh no", said von Karajan, "for me it will be a new symphony." The point relates to staying human, to growing up and up, to not letting **personal relations** remain stuck in a bogus familiar, "the usual".

I have been rambling a bit here about the new culture of self-attention both as it is to develop the Tower of Able, of Care, and as it is to fermented in common sense globally by that global collaboration. It is to be a deep shift in Christian culture, echoing the hopes of 1 Cor 2: 16 and Phil 2:5: getting to grips with the minding of Jesus, which is like yours, a "what do you want?" minding.

The new culture is not yet with us. In Lonergan studies it is excluded by "pseudo-metaphysical myth-making" (*Insight*, 528) and out of tune with the giant effort of the giant Aquinas who

wrote 50 pages of puzzling about the question, “What do I want?” in the *Prima Secundae*, qq 6 -17, “sixty three articles in a row” as Lonergan counted them (*Grace and Freedom*, 94). You pass through all the dozen stages pointed to in those articles by Thomas between the moment you receive a menu in a restaurant and the satisfied moment of returning it, with “I’ll have Chicken Kiev”. John in his Gospel offers you a menu and a symphony: wouldn’t it be better to know what you are at, perhaps even now finding that it is a new symphony, a fresh personal relating with both John, Jesus, and yourself?

So far, I have been relating one-sidedly, and, alas, in the mode of classical culture. I have been puttering along in not very functional talk. I started with us and a text, and got round to talking about that text in a global fashion which may well be effete (*Method in Theology*, 99, line 10) [who, sez you, a Buddhist in Tibet, is von Karajan, and what is a symphony?!]. “Never has the need to speak effectively to undifferentiated consciousness been greater” (*Ibid*, last lines).

The Tower Person is one who wishes us all to meet that **need** (*Ibid.*, 48, line one of the Spread), together, effectively. The Tower does not yet exist, nor is its heuristic fragrance sensed in “the usual” of Lonergan studies. Like my shabby effort above, but missing the Giants Causeway of Thomas, present persons tend to go from some discovery to the sort of short-cut talk

that I described in my reflections on Alpha's talk in Q/A 5 and Q/A 7.

But now let us imagine, with strained chemicals, the person that identifies the function of researching, savoring A, newly heard in symphonic context (we'll get back to that context-problem in the next Q. and A.) The problem is to connect A's possibilities with B, the global common sense. But what is C? The person that I speak of has already a sense of this C, this X or C that is Cosmopolis: SO that person struggles to speak functionally, cycling the suggestion so as to speak effectively from the village that was the starting place – John's community might have been northeast of present Israel – to a global range of villages or campuses of the present and the future. At present that speaking is, even on campus, to a pretty-well undifferentiated consciousness [THAT is a tricky topic regarding commonsense linguistic sophistications and *haute vulgarization!*].

But I wish to speak of the speaker's deeper problem, what the speaker wants, what the Tower person wants, ultimately, ultimatey, what Jesus wants. There is the want that, in some sense, wants it all, even if reluctantly and culture-trapped. It is such a want that gestated the communal *Upanshads* and that fermented forth, in the thirteenth century, the solitary *Shobogenzo*. That want, in its emergent fulsomeness, wishes to

“fuse into a single explanation”(Insight, 610), wishes to “embrace the universe” (Insight, 442) that shelters our little globe. That wanting person needs the spiral, Pound’s Vortex, Flaubert’s unwritten *La Spirale*, extravagantly transposed, a cyclic functional talk, to sustain Simmel’s *Die Wendung zur Idee*. The Gospel of John needs to be spun cyclically, “swung around in a circle”(Insight, 571) into the chemical zeal of billions of years if C is to flash forth in adequate mystery light.

Best halt here: I have been wandering away from the simpler answer to the question, from what you did want to “what do you want?” Cyclic functional talk, seeding lightsome village strangeness in Tower and town, had best be left to further questions. And we have an immediate lead in the next question.