

INTERPRETATION: WRIGHT TURN, RIGHT TURN

I begin, as I promised at the end of [Disputing Quests 7](#), from my quoting in that conclusion from a short article by Lonergan:

“‘Self-control’ is the last word in Lonergan’s essay on ‘Mission and the Spirit’—it ends his quotation of *Galatians* 5:22.¹ We get a convenient bridge to the meaning we are musing about here by quoting the starting sentence of that same essay.

‘As man’s being is being-in-the-world, his self-understanding has to be not only of himself but also of his world.’”²

I encouraged, there, a pause over its meaning for you, a pause that could well have involved a wintry climb. I wonder how many paused with me? “With desire have I desired”³ such a communal pause, but it is, I suspect contemplatively, a surge of the future, a much later vortexing into the positive Anthropocene Age.

Meantime, I have considered many helpful contexts, but found them to involve reaches far beyond the introductory move I wished to foster. At least the move seemed to me to be introductory. So I have cut back to indicating that move in a reasonably simple fashion in continuity with the efforts of *Disputing Quests 7* and [Disputing Quests 8](#). *Disputing Quests 7* gives

¹ “Mission and the Spirit,” *A Third Collection*, edited by F.E. Crowe S.J., Paulist Press, 1985, 33. In note 10 below I quote from the same very relevant volume. But I would add now, after concluding the essay and the series after that note, that I had begun here with the intention of moving forward in the collaborative creativity mentioned in the next footnote here.

² *Ibid.*, 23. I wrote then, in the parallel note 4 of that essay: “I shall return comprehensively to this opening line in *DQ 9*, early in 2017, hopefully nudged on by suggestions from you. Its present meaning for you is worth a long serious contemplative pause in the months between. Indeed this entire article provides a great lead into the problem of adequate interpretation that haunts in these present essays.”

³ I am recalling *Luke* 22:15: “With desire have I desired to eat this meal ...” But I sense now (see note 1 above) that such reduplicative desire is evolutionary sporting awaiting the communities of the positive Anthropocene age. It is to be mediated by a global commitment to “The Interior Lighthouse” ([HOW 13](#)) of kataphatic contemplation. That rest in, and wrestling with, being is to be “the leaven that leaveneth the whole mass” towards the “intussusception of all things into the Body of Christ.” (“Essay in Fundamental Sociology,” in Michael Shute, *Lonergan’s Early Economic Research*, University of Toronto Press, 2010, p. 37).

wide panoramic pointings; *Disputing Quests* 8 simply presented some texts from N.T. Wright's fairly recent book, *Surprised by Scripture. Engaging Contemporary Issues* (Harper, 2014). Here I give a few texts from an earlier work of Wright, *Justification: God's Plan and Paul's Vision* (Intervarsity Press, 2009). They have the same purpose as the texts given in *Disputing Quests* 8: to give you pause, to invite your serious pausing. But I place them here, frankly, with less hope of collaborative pausing. There have been few signs of any attention to my project or my interest in collaborating. Should this not surprise, granted the appeal for collaboration—a word occurring there more than thirty times in the final dozen pages of *Insight*? But let me first add the texts:

In our effort to understand Scripture itself – a never-ending quest, of course, but one to which each generation of Christian is called afresh – we are bound to read the New Testament in its own first-century context. That is a highly complex task, which keeps several highly intelligent people in full employment all their lives, but the attempt must be made. This applies at every level – to thought-forms, rhetorical conventions, social context, implicit narratives and so on – but it applies particularly to words, not least to technical terms.⁴

The rules of engagement for any debate about Paul must be, therefore, exegesis first and foremost, with all historical tools in full play, not to dominate or to squeeze the text out of the shape into which it naturally forms itself but to support and illuminate a text-sensitive, argument-sensitive, nuance-sensitive reading.⁵

And yet. There is a swell, a surge, an incipient flood tide, which sweeps through and between the sand dunes of history and soaks into acre after acre of the evidence, whether it be the cynical Politian Josephus or the wild sectarians scribbling the scrolls, whether it be the agonized visionary who wrote the book we call *4 Ezra* or the wonderfully detailed lawyers' minds revealed in the early rabbinical traditions.⁶

The Church can and must, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, develop words, concepts, discourse of all sorts, out beyond the narrow confines of exegesis. That is what happened with Athanasius, holding out for the non-biblical term *homoousion* to express, against Arius, the radically biblical view of

⁴ *Justification*, 47.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 57.

the divinity of Jesus Christ. We cannot reduce the task of theology to that of biblical commentary.⁷

These four quotations come from “Part 1: Introduction,” which has four chapters, the last, titled “Justification: *Definitions and Puzzles*.”⁸ It is worth adding here the first paragraph of that chapter, which indeed leads me to my conclusion, to my concluding:

What is the question to which the ‘doctrine of justification’ is the answer? What do the different views of justification say about that question and that answer? How do these concerns relate to Paul’s central concern in his letters? And how do these specific concerns of Paul relate to the rest of the New Testament, not least the Gospels? Why is the doctrine of justification divisive, and in what sense is it to be seen, as Luther saw it, as an article by which a church stands or falls? To answer these questions properly would take, of course, entire books on their own, quite apart from my main task here; but we must at least acquire some sense of the terrain before we try to walk across it in terms of examining Paul’s letters themselves.⁹

I pointed to that problem of acquiring some sense of the terrain in the title of [*Disputing Quesets 7*](#): “‘Self-Control’ in the New Testament and in the Economics of the Positive Anthropocene Age.” But the topic is undeveloped there.

My pause here has been one of many days: how do I convey effectively, with some statistical success, the paralleling to the sciences of physics or psychology that has to take hold of the investigation of the data called scripture? I have been pointing for decades to the elements of the answer in Lonergan, spelling it out especially, but compactly, in terms of the meshing of *Method* chapter 7 and the third section of *Insight*, chapter 17.¹⁰

⁷ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 79–108. Obviously the previous quotation is from this chapter.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 79.

¹⁰ There are, of course, the large meshings of *The Allure of the Compelling Genius of History*. And always the context can be broadened way beyond the messy beginnings of these past millennia and centuries, escaping the “static equilibrium” (*A Third Collection*, 89) Lonergan contextualizes in the quoted article there, “Christology Today: Methodological Reflections,” escaping David Friedrich Strauss and company in a manner that is to sublimate wondrously Schweitzer’s *The Psychiatric Study of Jesus*. Always the context is to be the geohistorical weave of a cyclically-controlled ever-blossoming *Comparison*, the story of the stories of Jesus weaving towards our eschatological destiny. This will carry us unimaginably beyond the “commonsense contributions to our self-knowledge” of “Augustine, Descartes, Pascal, Newman” (*Method in Theology*, 261) and the over-reaching commonsense of present “academic disciplines” (*ibid.*, 3) and of readings of *Insight*. Some further

I am back to the appeal of the beginning of this series. The series has stirred no interest, no more than the appeal of my report to the Lonergan Leadership Gathering of June 26.

There has been no serious response to my appeal of this series, so it seems best to end its present bent. Why not end it here with that same report that ended [Disputing Quests 1](#)? Then, perhaps,¹¹ in [Disputing Quests 10](#) I can tackle a fuller version of the question “how do I convey effectively, with some statistical success, the paralleling to the sciences of physics or psychology that has to take hold of the investigation of the data called scripture?” The tackling is to reach a heuristics of such conveying during the next generation.¹²

Now, on with my repeated report to the Boston Meeting of June 2016.

“The report concerns a dismal failure needing a serious discussion. We have all failed to take the challenge of Lonergan’s canons of hermeneutics seriously: instead we putter along in the mode of “academic disciplines” (*Method*, end of the first page of chapter one), condemned by Lonergan on the next page of *Method*. The leadership leads in the stale outdated way. Doran

comments on the struggle forward are given in the following note. But now, having built in this footnote ramble, I can shuffle along to the abrupt conclusion of the text.

¹¹ I leave the “perhaps” as I re-read this now, knowing that it is most unlikely that I would pursue this further. The task named in the question that ends the sentence above is indeed the task of the entire *Divyadaan* 2017, no. 2, volume edited by me, the second of two volumes focused on the 60th anniversary of the publication of *Insight: Divyadaan. Journal of Philosophy and Education*, 2017, (28), no. 1 and no. 2. In that second volume we took up the challenge of functional collaboration passed over in the first volume. In note 4 of my own contribution to the second volume, “*Insight and the Interior Lighthouse, 2020-2050*,” I quoted nudges towards a larger view from N.T. Wright’s latest book, (Harper, 2016) *The Day the Revolution Began: Reconsidering the Meaning of Jesus’s Crucifixion*. They may help reflection on the drive here towards your glimpsing genetic systematics to pause over the last chapter, “The Powers and the Power of Love,” of N.T. Wright’s recent book (Harper, 2016) *The Day the Revolution Began: Reconsidering the Meaning of Jesus’s Crucifixion*. Two great flawed comments to pause over: “It is all too easy for us, in our individualized Western world, to jump at once to the ‘personal’ meaning of this and ignore the larger whole.”(384); “It is comparatively easy to name yesterday’s idolatrous systems. It is much harder to point to the equivalents in today’s and tomorrow’s world” (393). Notice the echo of the title suggested for *Disputing Quests 10* in the title of my contribution to the *Divyadaan* volume. My contribution to the first volume is also relevant: “*Insight and the Trivialization of History*.” Detecting creatively, scientifically, and effectively the nudges in the two great flawed comments of Wright: that is a task that I leave to later generations.

¹² Note 11 points to my retirement from this reaching. But a final word comes from a paper presented at the Loyola Marymount University West Coast Methods Institute Conference of Easter 2017, “Paul’s Epistles and Functional Systematics.” It is available as [Disputing Quests 10](#).

swoops thus on *CWL* 11 and 12; Lawrence sweeps thus through German thinkers; McShane swaps thus one discipline for another repeatedly without tackling the genetic hermeneutics of any; etc. etc. Is it not time that we paused to be effectively embarrassed by a central doctrine? (“Doctrines that are embarrassing will not be mentioned in polite company.” *Method*, 299) The embarrassment is in finding ourselves among those mentioned by Lonergan on *Insight* 604, in the flow of presenting his view of the needed serious science of interpretation. Being diligent and specialized is not enough.

One may expect the diligent authors of highly specialized monographs to be somewhat bewildered and dismayed when they find that instead of singly following the bent of their genius, their aptitudes, and their acquired skills, they are to collaborate in the light of abstruse principles and to have their individual results checked by general requirements that envisage simultaneously the totality of results.

The issue, the central doctrine we have dodged, is the emergence, across the board, of genetic systematics, an emergence packed into the genius paragraph (*Insight*, 609–10) of the second canon of hermeneutics:

The explanatory differentiation of the protean notion of being involves three elements. First, there is the genetic sequence in which insights gradually are accumulated by man. Secondly, there are the dialectic alternatives in which accumulated insights are formulated, with positions inviting further development and counterpositions shifting their ground to avoid the reversal they demand. Thirdly, with the advance of culture and effective education, there arises the possibility of the differentiation and specialization of modes of expression, and since this development conditions not only the exact communication of insights but also the discoverer’s own grasp of his discovery, since such grasp and its exact communication intimately are connected with the advance of positions and the reversal of counterpositions, the three elements in the explanatory differentiation of the protean notion of being fuse into a single explanation.

I note, in conclusion, first, that the point is made clearly in my two-page essay [HOW 6](#), “The Pullet’s Surprise”; secondly, that the issue I raise is not one of functional collaboration, but of a blatant dodging of Lonergan’s pointers, in *Insight*, regarding genetic development.”