

FuSe 13
Contexts of Functional History

There are four sections in this essay. The first section is introductory to the question of context, but it moves quickly to what I might call an encouraging vista. The second section focuses on the work done by a key group on the task of functional interpretation. They worked in coordinated fashion to arrive at a hand-over to functional history that both illustrated generally the strategy of functional interpretation and at the same time provided a context for the story of these last six decades of Lonergan studies. The third section is simply a pointing to work done previously in the area of functional history. The final section is an effort to put in the simplest of terms how you might tune into the task of functional history, and for those who wish for such an immediate glimpse I would recommend making a beginning there.

1. The Previous Two Seminars

I do not need to repeat the points made in contextualizing the second seminar in *FuSe 10*, “Contexts of Functional Interpretation,” in its weave forwards from the first seminar on Functional Research. What I wish to do here and in the following section, rather, is to point to the advances made by the team of seven functional interpreters regarding the difficulty of seeding the emergence of the Standard Model. That was a key problem that emerged out of the first seminar: our shared *acquis* was just not representative of even the beginning of a science, much less paralleling a successful science.¹ How, then, could we do anything resembling scientific functional interpretation? The answer came from the team’s working in terms of, in the context of,

¹The context here is the nudges of the first pages of *Method* (3, 4, 5) regarding this parallel, and the character of a mature science in its yielding of “cumulative and progressive results” (*Ibid.*, 4, 5)

the symbolization of the heuristic. There is a sense in which that working parallels the shift of chemistry in the 1870s after the Berlin meeting where Mendeleev and Mayer put chemistry in the new context of the named periodic table. But what went on, goes on, in the work of the team, moves at deeper and more lasting levels.

Perhaps I can intimate the move by going back to an odd suggestion that I had been making earlier to seminar members. My key suggestion was about the value, and the challenge, of thinking of the Renaissance in terms of chemistry. It is, as you can easily - or not so easily - find, quite a stretch of the imagination, of foundational fantasy.

Perhaps it may help to put the question in the context of a re-reading of *Insight*. I have written about shifted contexts of such reading over the years. The one that springs to mind is the re-reading that would occur when one became luminous about the emergence of language, ontically and phyletically. Add that in here, if you like. The context I think of now is a much more complex context that I leave here in the penumbra of our venture. I simply ask you to read again, with some suspicion of my devious methods, the first seventeen words of the beginning of *Insight*, chapter one: "In the midst of that vast and profound stirring of human minds, which we name the Renaissance" The word *name* is there, but how different in meaning for you now if you have patiently and slowly climbed to grasp what Helen Keller grasped in her mind, profoundly and prolongedly stirred by the five hand-movements of Annie Sullivan? And how different, when you are positioned, poisioned in your psychic skin, is the reading of the first word, *In*. You are **in** the strange vast world of *eo magis unum*,² of the stirring neurochemistry of the **Home Of Wonder**, still without the later **HOW**-language of that home, yet stirred with the longing for it that can and may burst out into a new subtlety of lonely aesthetics.

Even if I lost you there, come with me to that seventeenth word, *Renaissance*,

²The Topic of *Verbum* chapter 5, section 3.

and imagine reading it as referring to, in spotlighting fashion,³ a vast and profound stirring of cosmic chemicals in their layered patterns of yearning.⁴ The spacetime end-zones need not be considered determinate: so you may handily restrict the dates and the landmasses. But your challenge is to come with me some distance in my fantasy, itself chemical, to arrive at what you earlier today, perhaps, would have fancied to be beyond the pale of reasonable reason. Yet in your first reading of *Insight* you were invited to that pale-shift, quite beyond the breathless⁵ mess fermented forward by truncated cultures for a millennium or nine. Beyond you too, then, because the pale-shift of minding was locked out by your present molecular cage. You might think of yourself as a diophantine student of olden days reading the solution to Fermat's Last Theorem. The *acquis* is/was, so to speak, too ex-quisite for the words of *Insight*.

How, then, did the team climb towards a sense of the new functional science of interpretation? By taking seriously, as I said earlier, the heuristic diagrams that had been laid out much as Mendeleev's table was laid for chemistry in 1869. But now there is no point in going on here about that. The achievement is visible there in the hundred-page *Fuse* 11, "Attempts at Functional Interpretation," too invisible for visible words, yet forwarding food for a first supper.

2. The Climb of the Seven Interpreters.

The previous paragraph sets the task. Might we think of it as a distant aerial shot of the challenging Everest, climbed first in the summer of 1953, when Lonergan was climbing towards the peak of the third section of chapter 17 of *Insight*?

"An interpretation is the expression of the meaning of another expression."⁶ One

³The text on *Verbum* 238, about the context of spotlighting, lifts one's thinking here.

⁴"that order's dynamic joy and zeal"(the final words of *Insight*, 722).

⁵*Insight*, 755.

⁶*Insight*, 608.

can move the camera up closer to Everest, so close indeed that it needs be replaced by an electron microscope, so that one ends up with - what? - an image of snow-dropped water. And in that image “one can go on”⁷ to read the climb, as one reads a painting of that mountain, or of any mountain: perhaps Cezanne’s *Mont St. Victoire*? But let us go back to that quotation at the beginning of this paragraph, and read it back in, into, its home paragraph at the beginning of Lonergan’s presentation of “Some Canons for a Methodical Hermeneutics.”

“An interpretation is the expression of the meaning of another expression. It may be literary or scientific. A literary interpretation offers the images and associations from which a reader can reach the insights and form the judgments that the interpreter believes to correspond to the content of the original expression. A scientific interpretation is concerned to formulate the relevant insights and judgments, and to do so in a manner consonant with scientific collaboration and scientific control.”⁸

The task of the seven interpreters was the challenge of a strange mix, literary and scientific, pointing to a distant dream of “scientific collaboration and scientific control”. It was, of course, already a collaboration of the eight of us, seeking to give an impression of a science of history, heart-held by Lonergan. But note here already the difficulty of an ambiguity: history as humanly expressed, history as being lived, lived being. Both were heart-held by Lonergan, heart-held in the chemistry of his genetic climb. What he embraced was that he did not understand history, but that he could might be able to set up guide posts for a long human group-climb to better understand and better not understand.

What is killing present efforts to understand history is the absence of a sufficient ethos of “not-understand”. “Most of all, what is lacking is knowledge of all that is

⁷*Method in Theology*, 287.

⁸*Insight*, 608.

lacking, and only gradually is that knowledge acquired.”⁹ Gradually: step by step, incarnately, so that one sees, and is seized by, this Everest, in the touch of the snow-flake at the top. And we, all of us, come to see and seize, chemically, that set of patterns of cosmic chemistry. What is the road to that season for all mankind? If it is true that “one can learn more about Byzantine life from the churches of Ravenna than from reading all the books on the topic”¹⁰, then might we aim to build seven churches, scattered sufficiently in the city of print to invite others to build further in the dark prime potency of human minding? This was my invitation, my mysty revelation, to “the seven spirits” of “the seven churches”¹¹: if we are to intimate the core climb, the Tower climb, towards

answering what “is perhaps the fundamental problem in the concept of history”¹² and “the problem of general history which is the real catch,”¹³ and to do so in a tasteful tasted heuristics of human chemistry, that would break beyond the seeming barrier of conceptualizing the IT of finitude’s exigence? “History, which is a conceptualization, is not going to be able to conceptualize IT. IT can only describe IT, intimate IT, communicate IT artistically.”¹⁴

Briefly, bluntly, ineffectually, what was to be communicated was The Standard

⁹*Insight*, 559.

¹⁰*Topics in Education*, 255.

¹¹The allusion is to the beginning of *Revelations*.

¹²*Topics in Education*, 236.

¹³*Ibid.*

¹⁴*Topics in Education*, 253. The capitals are mine.

Model as a heuristic aspiration, IT making IT, "Common Sense as Object,"¹⁵ critically self-lifting to make pre-critical history, in its ethical aesthetics of explanation, a dynamic of history quite beyond facticity.¹⁶ Might we pull forwards in our eight hearts an intimation of a parallel with the success of the simplest of sciences in its getting from Galileo to Gauge Theory, an expression of the task of getting from a kinematic history to an effective dynamics of finitude?

"Although future historians of Physics will remember the first part of the twentieth century for the emergence of Relativity and Quantum Mechanics they will remember the rest of the century for the emergence of gauge theory. Indeed they may argue that the emergence of gauge theory qs the principle behind the fundamental forces was the more fundamental discovery of the century on the grounds that it complete the drama."¹⁷

Did we succeed a little to tell all? To invite a better-than-was-the- reality climb from the leaning Tower of Galileo's Pisa to way beyond the Pisan Cantos of Pound? The final paragraph-pointer of the previous section became a century of pages pointing to a distant gauge theory of cosmic zeal.

3. Previous Efforts at Figuring out Functional History

I say a few brief things about Lonergan's own presentation of the problem of doing history functionally at the start of the next section. Here I simply give some indication of the efforts of Fred Crowe and myself: Fred's effort is one of doing it in an initial way, "Some day, I hope, theology will be reconstructed according to a mother that operates on the level of our times; this book is meant to be a spadeful of earth in the

¹⁵The title of chapter 7 of *Insight*.

¹⁶On the precritical history that thus needs sublation see *Method in Theology*, 185. Beyond facticity? See *Ibid.*, 250, the text at note 10.

¹⁷Lochlann O'Raifeartaigh, "The Emergence of Gauge Theory", *Mathematical Physics towards the 21st Century*, Eds. R.N.Sen and A.Gersten, Ben Gurion University Press, 1994, 74.

moving of a mountain.”¹⁸ My own efforts, in the context of his work, was to figure out procedures.

That figuring out, in the context of Crowe’s effort, began in *Cantower 38*, but I list previous *Cantowers* that venture into history, though not functional history. *Cantowers 1* and *33* are on the list, though they may seem off the point. But *Cantower 1* is a definite transition point in my effort to separate Lonergan from Lonerganism, and *Cantower 33*, written for the hundred year anniversary of his birth, points to the difficulty of picking up on his meaning and carrying it forwards into history.

You may well skip all these are have a shot at our topic on your own. We are going to mess along together - the mess accumulated in *FuSe 17* - and see what seeds we can identify and sow, the seeing to be partially expressed in *FuSe 18*.

What of the list of essays immediatly below, especially as they relate to Fr.Crowe’s efforts? My final decision about treating them further in commentary here was that this would be a distraction, beyond my saying that my first venture in *Cantower 38* contains less positive results than my second venture in the *Humus* series. There I began to see Crowe’s effort as “better than was the reality” in that it nudged me to consider his effort more as research. My own efforts then helped me towards arriving at the strategy suggested in *FuSe 1*, to focus on Lonergan as a way of discovering what functional research is. Should anyone want to discuss Crowe’s work further, we can do that in the seminar, and build results into *FuSe 14* and *15*.

Cantower 1: History and Function

Cantower 11: Lonergan: Interpretation and History

*Cantower 13: Functional Specialization and Chapters 17 and 18 of *Insight*.*

Cantower 24: Infecting History with Hodology

Cantower 33: Lonergan and Axial Bridges

¹⁸F.E.Crowe, *Theology of the Christian Word. A Study in History*, Paulist Press, New York,1978, 149, the concluding words of the book..

Cantower 38: Functional History

Humus 8: Crowe's Theology of the Christian Word

Humus 9: Frederick Crowe and Ourselves as Researchers

Humus 10: Fr. Crowe's "The Christian Message Begins"

Humus 11: "The Word of God As Truth"

Humus 12: Crowe: Possibilities of Methodical Collaboration

4. Some Pointers

The three previous sections invited the contemplation of larger contexts rather than the nitty gritty of having a shot at doing functional history. Here I turn to the matter of stumbling beginnings.

You will have noticed that I have not talked of Lonergan's own work regarding this task, nor his own efforts to do history. There are the two chapters in *Method* on history,¹⁹ his engagement with history in his various works, and an abundance of research material in lecture notes from Rome and private jottings available in Archives. I skip all these sources here, apart from casual mention here and there, because I am interested in simple pointers regarding [1] functionality, [2] differentiation of thinking and expression [3] conceiving heuristically, if vaguely, of a mature stage of functional history as a help to getting our show on the road. I want to be as brief as possible, since we have been dealing with these topics right through our seminars' struggle. Now am I going to take the three topics in sequence. Indeed, the help from number [3] is our best starting place.

Let us suppose, then, that we are in a later century, with a pretty solid body of agreed history of the type that is forward leaning; factual, yes, but bent towards revealing - or facilitation the detection of - progress. The functional historian, at that

¹⁹A context here is chapter 12, “Research, Interpretation, History, His Story”, of Pierrot Lambert and Philip McShane, *Bernard Lonergan. His Life and Leading Ideas*, Axial Publishing , 2010.

stage, is tuned to refine the dynamics of progress within the cycle that starts with anomaly-discoveries in research, and is moved forward to novel meanings by the community of interpreters. We are in deep water here, but I would only point out in this context that the meanings are novel as cherished by individuals, cherished as possibilities of the later story of humanity. This may recall for you the function of Cosmopolis, to cherish neglected ideas.²⁰ Notice, however, that the cherish ideas may have been around previously - think of Aquinas' notion of understanding been prior to concept - or the cherished idea may have bubbled forth in the present cycle. In either case the functional interpreter is passing a baton of possible operative meaning to the historian. A neglected idea, whether of ancient times or of last week, is to be built into "what is/was going forward" by the community of functional historians in a manner that reveals new possibilities of past, present and future. Now here I would ask you to push fantasy so that the notion of maturity holds sway. We are fantasizing about a massively refined heuristic, held together by geo-historical imaging. So, for example, we may have started with the research of a faulty or a fresh insight operative in a village of, say, medieval India or present-day Peru. The circulation round the specialties makes possible the application of the result to the villages of the globe, and the expansion to that applicability is not just an expansion that starts with, say, systematics.²¹ But the key point is that mature functional history, however thin and heuristic, is to be a stable achievement: the parallel again is with the use of the Standard Model in physics.

There is an obvious point to be made regarding meaning as attention to it divides between interpretation and history: it may not be obvious to all of us in the seminar. There are two senses of the statement, *The Meaning of Karl Marx*. There is the

²⁰*Insight*, 264.

²¹On the expansion at that stage see my "Systematics, Communications, Actual Contexts", *Lonergan Workshop*, 1985. The essay is also available as chapter 7 of *ChrIST in History*, on the Website.

meaning to be investigated by an interpreter; there is the meaning interpreted by the historian. Note that my pointing to interpretation in both cases helps to remind us that Lonergan did not distinguish history and interpretation in his discussion of interpretation in *Insight*. That is something to be sorted out. At all events, the interpreter is getting at Marx's meaning from his texts; the historian is getting Marx's meaning from the effects of Marx's minding-meaning on the historical process.

To those few broad pointers I add the usual comment about the difficulty of holding to, or for us struggling towards, a personal ease in thinking and writing differentially. It is an achievement for another generation, as Fred Crowe's gallant attempt shows. It is something of a tight rope walk for us to try to keep the focus, sentence by sentence, on history, on *what is going on*. Finally, the focus is functional, baton-charged. By this I mean that the functional historian is heading towards effective talk to the dialectic community with the effect, e.g. in the village of Carmel of innovations by Mayor Clint Eastwood,²² in mind, in global minding. The effect has been identified more broadly within the full human story, with an invitation to figure out what might have been had the idea been had and spread at a convenient earlier stage of group-living. We teeter here towards the task of envisaging the past better than it was, of reversing lacks of insights.

Enough for the present: let us putter into our limited task, which is to pick up on the work of the seven interpreters that took the lead in the previous seminar and view the meaning of Lonergan in the past sixty years. It is, of course, the historical meaning of Lonergan, largely associated with what we call *Lonerganism*. None of us are competent in that story, no more than we are competent in the other meaning of Lonergan. Think of it as a ramble in pre-critical history.²³ But, as we ramble together these next weeks we will find that our efforts are disconcertingly critical.

²²Richard Schicktal, *Clint Eastwood*, Alfred A.Knopf, New York, 1996, 414-17.

²³See note 16 above.