

*Joistings 20***Identifying Systematic Theology**

“If there is room for these three in this small piece of marble, why should I not be able to draw out of a large rock a whole sleeping race?”¹

Prologue

This essay is, as promised, a continuation of my reflection on Robert Doran’s new book, *What is Systematic Theology?*² I have, in the past months, envisaged many ways of continuing that reflection, involving this series of essays, *Joistings*. Five particular ways attracted me, each worth a mention here: [1] to enlarge the context of my previous reflections and then to enter into detail on the chapters in the book (1-6; 9,10) that I had not commented on previously; [2] to tackle the challenge of a functional interpretation of Doran’s book, [3] to move the discussion into the context of the dialectic program of page 250 of *Method in Theology*, [4] to tackle the book from the *Insight* perspective of the first principle of the third canon of hermeneutics, [5] to add a context from the neurosciences that would help mediate a fuller reflection on global psychic dynamics, [6] to make related issues in Doran’s two works on the topic, *What is Systematics?* and *Theology and the Dialectic of History*, part of my own final book project.³ These ways could well become part of a larger contribution to the question, indeed others may wish to contribute. But my final choice here was to go the way of popular communication, a mediation of the functional specialty Communications.

¹Rainer Maria Rilke, “The Man Who Listened to Stones”, *Stories of God*, Shambhala Publications, Boston, 2003, 64.

²University of Toronto Press, 2005. To be referred to below as **Doran**.

³Doran’s *Theology and the Dialectic of History* was published by University of Toronto Press, 1990. My own final work, *Lonergan’s Standard Model of Effective Global Inquiry*, is to appear on the Website in July, 2007.

So, my popular communication is the communication of what might seem a simple problem. Doran's overall program does not envisage explicitly a global division of labour that would ground the emergence of a new set of differentiations of academic consciousness. This is obviously a problem to me, since that is how I read Lonergan's achievement. I would like it to be an existential problem, eventually a practical problem, for you.

My best strategy here, then, is to keep my posing of the problem brief. The problem is posed in the context of my previous reflection on Doran's work in Part Three of *Molecules, Minding, Meaning*, but I do not ask you to enter into that context now. At all events the book is not as yet available.⁴ All I wish to say about that for the moment is that my reflection on chapters 7 and 8 of his work led me to a positive assessment of his effort: his effort fitted in with my own view - which I would consider to be Lonergan's - that the new functional specialist systematics would be a genetic systematics within the context of the larger system of theology. This view was expressed by me diagrammatically in a way that might help you get an over view, so I add that diagram, named W6, at the end of this *Joistings*.

All that being said, it would seem evident that allowance would have to be made for certain failures of nuance in my brief essay. There is a sort of Either/Or simplification involved. Indeed, such a simplification could be seen to carry us beyond Doran's book to the issue of an ethos of present Lonergan studies. Then my essay may be viewed as not an attack - which it is not - on Doran's efforts, which span thirty years, but rather a posing, with Doran, of a challenge to a general ethos of either light-weight implementation or neglect.

It seems best to pose that challenge in the context of Doran, so I restrict my references to his book even though he is representative of a large group of Lonergan

⁴It is in process of publication - to appear sometime in 2008 - by University of Toronto Press.

students. I go the usual unscholarly way of random quotations in nudging you towards the suspicion that Doran is not thinking of systematics as it is located in the diagram which I call W6.

Immediately, however, I wish to contradict myself. Indeed, I could and can say that Doran is thinking of systematics in a way that resonates with the diagram. This should certainly puzzle you. Why not turn that puzzle to our advantage? Let me, then, split my short reflection into four parts. The first part pushes you into sympathy with the view that Doran does not consider functional specialization to be a massive, relatively efficient, answer to the problem of Cosmopolis presented in *Insight*. The second part invites you, and Doran, to discover, that within his view as presented there lurks precisely the need for that rich view of functional specialization. The third part points briefly to a context that may help towards finding your own way to your own view. The final section talks of the challenge of standing in your own way.

1. A Working Hypothesis About Systematics.

Doran refers to functional specialization regularly in the book. Perhaps his most positive comment is his pointing to “the period where theology is conceived more expansively in terms of eight functional specialties.”⁵ But it is not centre stage, and when it is a topic there is grounds for the suspicion that the division is regarded as mainly a useful component in the individual theologian’s approach to theology. The handy way of my drawing attention to this - am I being unfair? - is to notice the use of the word *one* in contexts that refer to the specialties. Three quotations must suffice.

“No systematic theology today, not even a systematic treatment of a single issue, is attempted before one has taken innumerable trips, as it were, through the spiral of functional specialties, appropriating and making one’s own certain elements from a

⁵Doran, 94.

long theological tradition.”⁶

“What is direct discourse in theology? Whether in doctrines or systematics or communications, direct discourse will be informed by and continuous with those achievements of the tradition that one judges genuine and that one wishes to carry forward. ‘Foundations’ as a distinct functional specialty names only part of the real foundations, for a major part is diagnosed by work in research, interpretation, history and dialectic. Anyone engaging in direct theological discourse must be always engaged as well in a continual *ressourcement*.”⁷

“One needs to have understood the tradition’s contributions in their own contexts, through the appropriate exegetical and historical methods or in reliance on others familiar with these methods. One needs to have objectified a horizon for appreciating the permanent significance of many of these contributions and for transposing and developing them in ways that will be intelligible to one’s contemporaries. One needs to derive requisite categories from that objectified horizon and to rely on that horizon for the appropriate categories of the tradition. And one needs constantly to be alert to the contemporary situation as source....”⁸

First I wish to note that we can view the above series of quotations, and the attitude that I attribute to Doran, in a positive manner. That is the meaning of my title. The Lonergan divisions can indeed help the individual to work forward. Indeed, that is what I have been at for forty years. Might this not be, then, an interim strategy, leading us to the emergence of the mature global enterprise of the distant third stage of meaning? If this were Doran’s view, then our views come closer and our ultimate objectives the global dynamic that I describe in *Method in Theology and Botany*.

At all events, I would make two comments on the individualistic use of the

⁶Doran, 30.

⁷Doran, 198.

⁸Doran, 200.

specialties. First, it does not deeply change the type of work that was going on before. It is really only a renaming of old style scholarship. Secondly, it does not help towards the transition, except when it is criticized constructively, perhaps through self-criticism, and the criticism is acted on. The key thing to note is that the effort to make the transition is an effort to foster a very difficult, and unacceptable, differentiation of consciousness. The long-term answer to our needs can emerge only through a luminous effort to shift towards humble communal collaboration. I have only recently tried to rise to such an effort myself⁹. Like cosmopolis, "it is not easy."¹⁰

2. The Long-term Answer to the issue of System in Theology.

The long-term answer to the problem of an efficient pragmatics of global progress has been my explicit concern since Lonergan presented me with his strategy in the Summer of 1966.

In the Summer of 1969 it became startlingly evident to me, as I sat in the small music library of the Bodleian in Oxford - it since has grown enormously - that musicology desperately needed the division of labour. But it has taken me forty years of multidisciplinary struggle to thematize the global collaboration in a concrete fantasy of spiraling slopes and circuits. In working on Doran's searching I find the nudges in his efforts that could seed the larger view. What strikes me as central in that struggle is his very illuminating grappling with the nature of the functional specialty systematics but it seems now to hold him back from getting to grips with a larger meaning of system. But he is one of the few Lonergan students who have broken through clearly from system as

⁹My effort is contained in a volume (*Journal of Macrodynamical Analysis*, 4, 2005) of such efforts, efforts to venture into the task of the functional specialty of interpretation. I was trying to interpret the meaning of the word *complete* in the canon of complete explanation.

¹⁰*Insight*, 241[266].

axiomatic to system as genetic.¹¹ Again, I use a few quotations to help reflection. The following brings out succinctly both his achievement and the problem that he rightly sees as lurking there.

“We know that we may ambition, not some grand synthesis that will stand securely forever, but only an ongoing set of genetically related successive syntheses, all of them incomplete, with the totality residing at a given time not in the mind of any single theologian, but in a collaborative community. Thus a methodological statement that clarifies that objective - What is systematic theology - and the open heuristic procedures of moving towards it - How is systematic theology to be constructed? - might increase the probabilities, not that the collaboration would come to rest in a completed *Summa*, but that it will become an ongoing enterprise, part of a movement in history, and indeed of a movement that in principle would continue developing indefinitely. In that case what will result will be, not some single system but an ongoing successions of systems genetically related to one another.”¹²

This states both the achievement and the problem magnificently.¹³ The surprise is that he does not advert to the answer in Lonergan’s achievement. Functional specialization offers a definite open “System of Theology”. Yet it is not a surprise, as I know from my own struggles. I was quite slow in fully recognizing that Lonergan’s achievement rewrites the first question of Thomas’ *Summa*, and of all attempts to thematize religious searching, local or global. I have tried to share that recognition in Part One of *Method in Theology and Botany*, but the best I can do here is to point you

¹¹Is there a manner in which genetic structure can be axiomatized if it is viewed from its terminal structure? This would lead to much richer view of axiomatics than is current.

¹²**Doran**, 89.

¹³I would note a refinement that is not evident in Doran’s presentation. Each systematics is to be internally genetic, so there is a genetic sequence of genetic systems. A helpful image here is the genetic sequence of multi-faceted accounts of the tree, itself a genetic sequence of flexible circles of ranges of recurrence-schemes.

again to the diagram at the conclusion that I name W6. There you see **The System**, systematic theology in its fullness, as generative, through its dynamics of recycling, of the sequence of genetic systems that is to be the seventh functional specialty, Systematics.

I do not think that Doran has arrived at that meaning of systematic theology, and certainly not at the complex manner in which the two meanings of *systematics* mesh.¹⁴ He poses the question of the genesis of the new systematics regularly,¹⁵ but when he comes to struggle towards some “complication of the basic structure” of such a genesis he slips past Lonergan’s functional complication in his struggle to advance certain categorial elements in Lonergan. But again I would note that this is not surprising. Lonergan’s listing of general categories does not list the central category of methodological reform, a category of functional collaboration which, I would say, might well have been listed as (10) on page 287 of *Method in Theology*.

So there is a false optimism in Doran’s “Concluding Summary”. Far from the initial general categories being “in place,” the fundamental category seems to find no significant place even in the Lonergan community. “If the complications of the basic structure that I have attempted here are correct, than the initial general categories are in place for work in the functional specialty ‘systematics,’ where the task is one of providing a theological synthesis in a theory of history.”¹⁶ That task is in fact one of system in the other larger sense, of implementing functional specialization, which is the heart of Lonergan’s theory of history, the presence in history of a methodological

¹⁴In chapter 6 of *Molecules, Minding, Meaning*, “Converging Systems in History,” I point to the manner in which the full system cycles and re-cycles the functional systematics, while the functional systematics concomitantly internalizes increasingly the full heuristic system. It is a complex dynamic of mutual self-mediations that is eventually to ground the unity and beauty of an effective replacement for inefficient and malicious patterns of the control of history’s meaning.

¹⁵Some clearer instances are to be found in **Doran**, 79- 82, 147-149, 152-6.

¹⁶**Doran**, 203.

cosmopolis.

3. The Globalization of Norms of Care.

I can be helpfully brief here. The problem can be digested by contemplating what actually is “in place”. Lonergan did that contemplation at the age of fifty and came up with the description of unintelligence and malice packed into section 8 of chapter 7 of *Insight*, “the monster that has stood forth in our day.”¹⁷ It was another decade before he solved Plato’s and Marx’s problem of a practical theory of history. History itself is coming up with the solution in the patterns of its fragmented, stunted, concern for progress: fragmented searchings screaming for ordered integral collaboration.¹⁸

The issue is theology in the fullest sense that includes all things in relation to God. The oddity of functional specialization as emergent is that it is through it that the norms of care are to be made manifest globally: the levels of consciousness are to be revealed and made operative by history’s implementation of the differentiated division of labour. Symbolically, *Method’s* cosmopolis project is to become the genetic source of *Insight’s* eventual “in place” achievement.

4. Taking a Stand

Again, I can be brief: I have written exhaustively - and perhaps exhaustingly, for writer and readers! - about taking a stand on the topic, the question, Is Lonergan’s division of labour worth doing, worth initially doing badly? I invite the community that considers his work of significance to make conversion to functional specialization a

¹⁷*Method in Theology*, 40.

¹⁸I heard such screaming as I paced through and pondered over, sampling various narrownesses, the entire collection of recent issues of Journals in a university library. I recommend this as an exercise in coming to grips with the need for new patterns of collaboration. For an introduction to the perspective on history as mother of functional specialization - with Lonergan as foster father -see chapter 1 of *Molecules, Minding, Meaning*.

topic.¹⁹ That seems to me to be the conversion of primary importance in this millennium. Your stand on the question may well be simply that of an interested bystander, otherwise non-involved because of circumstances, talent, whatever. But I hope that there would be some willing to place the problem of that stand existentially within the clear and brilliant program of page 250 of *Method*. And I hope that some of you would be up to the initial struggle to think and write functionally in a manner that would help the next generations²⁰ to move slowly towards the dawning of the third stage of meaning.

“And then things broadened out around God, and He lifted His face, which was over Italy, freely upward and he looked around Him: in their cloaks and miters, the saints were standing there and the angels were going about among the thirsting stars with their songs like vessels of glistening spring water, and to heaven there was no end.”²¹

¹⁹I echo here *Method in Theology* 253, on the functional of dialectic in making conversion a topic. Here I am reaching out towards a more popular, common sense, meaning of making this particular conversion a topic. It a much later stage of meaning it will be, with Lonergan’s rhythmic economics, an element in global cultural ethos.

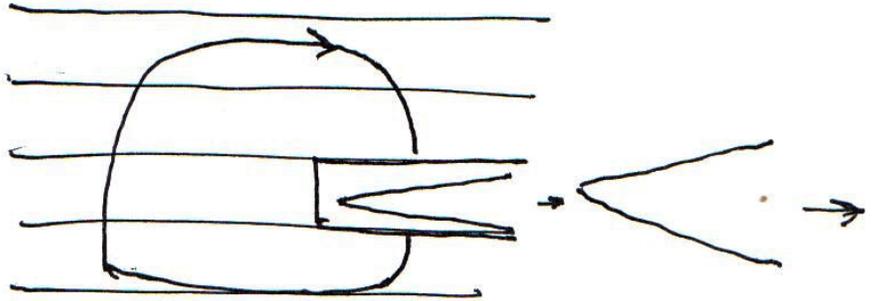
²⁰The series to follow this Joisting series, *Eldorede*, is geared to help generate the generators. *Quodlibet 8* provides an existential context, especially the conclusion.

²¹*Op. cit*, note 1; 66. The short essay quoted is in fact a story centred on Michelangelo. My short essay centres attention on the work that is Bernard Lonergan, and the work, however badly written, that crowned his efforts, *Method in Theology*. Is it not strange and wonderful to think of Bernard in the womb when Rilke, in Rome, April 1904, wrote the strange frontispiece to his *Stories*: “My friend, once I put this book in your hands, and you were fonder of it than anyone before you. So I have become accustomed to thinking of it as belonging to you.” I would like to think that I have put the book, *Method in Theology*, freshly in your hands.

Periodic Table in ongoing genesis of chemical system

Periodic Functional Cycling in ongoing genesis of genetic systematics

(Track... and baton exchanging) Quodlibet 2



(250) Dialectic Achievements:

versions of 286-7+

Foundational Reaching:

Fantasy and its Circulation

↳ "BATON" →

N.B. Foundational Acceptance of Tradition

