

**Quodlibet 1**  
**A Fresh Beginning**

**March 2004**

**Q1a**

I wish to make this series, Quodlibet 1,2,3 etc as manageable as possible: the subdividing, then, is not a sign of complexities to follow. It is part of my Fresh Pragmatism. Likewise the footnoting is to be used in a new way: unless you wish for interesting side-tracking, skip them.<sup>1</sup> I shall also advise occasionally about skipping a section, or even a Quodlibet: one reason for using the numbers and the subdivisions a, b, c.

I am avoiding, as best I can, dependence on previous writings of mine, in particular the Cantowers and the SOFDAWAREs. [These two series are, as you know, on the same Website as this.] One obvious dependence I draw attention to now is the dependence of this entire Quodlibet venture on the project sketched in the final, eighth, SOFDAWARE, which was a single page. That project is the reason for this effort: the project of trying for a collaborative effort in relation to Lonergan's suggestion about dividing up any serious cultural work. By serious I mean hard-thinking as opposed to popular exchange.<sup>2</sup> By cultural I mean anything that has given rise to a serious literature: mountaineering comes to mind, but we normally think of the arts and sciences or philosophy or theology. So you don't even have to go back to check SOFDAWARE 8 about the project. The invitation is to join me in seeking ways of implementing the division of labour recommended by Lonergan. His initial discovery was in relation to theology and it is the topic of chapter 5 of *Method in Theology*, (1972,

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<sup>1</sup>Your curiosity got the better of you? The "Fresh Pragmatism" is the central topic in the third chapter of my odd book, *Pastkeynes Pastmodern Economics: A Fresh Pragmatism*, Axial Press, Halifax, 2000.

<sup>2</sup>Only very slowly will there emerge ways of effecting a transformation of popular exchanges through the suggested collaboration.

2000), but it is a division that is being quietly screamed for in every serious area.

You may contact me at [pmcshane@shaw.ca](mailto:pmcshane@shaw.ca) . Why me, at this late stage in my searchings? We will muse over that in the next paragraph. What about? Clearly, about us getting into the collaboration recommended by Lonergan. You may have questions about that collaboration, about how to get into it within your present interests, needs, obligations. Those interests may bring in particular questions about Lonergan's writings: such questions are welcome. You may have suggestions about strategies, about gatherings, about zones that are either needy or fertile. Whatever. What if thousands contact me? Since no serious interest in functional specialization has emerged in the past 35 years, I really don't expect a rush. The contact can be as confidential or as public as you wish. I expect some are in perilous positions: trying to get through a thesis, or to find a job, and as you may gather from the next sections, association with me may not be to your advantage.

But why me? I have, after all, been sidelined by the Lonergan movement.<sup>3</sup> So, paradoxically, I say that it need not indeed should not, be me. I articulated recently a policy of annoyance<sup>4</sup>: I would be delighted if I annoyed Lonergan disciples into taking a serious shot at functional specialization. Then I could go back to working on modern physics, future eschatology.

Why me? As I wrote my way through 12 Cantowers associated with the twelve months of this centennial year I had hopes that the year would show fresh interest in Lonergan's main life-project. What is taking place at various centres is however, in my view, just the same old same old ineffective scholarship. Perhaps that very claim will annoy folks to change gear? Good! But I cannot wait any longer for such stirring within

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<sup>3</sup>On this, see note 80 of SOFDAWARE 1.

<sup>4</sup>In *Lack in the Beingstalk*, see "The Prologue", note 20 and note 2 of chapter 2.

Lonergan decadence.<sup>5</sup>

### Q1b

Even close colleagues have been puzzled about my shift of perspective since the beginning of February 2004. I was by then 400,000 words out in a million word project called Cantowers. At that stage I was collaborating with two groups: the group that eventually gave rise to volume 4(2004) of *Journal of Macrodynamical Analysis*, and an Australian group who were beginning work with me on reading page 250 of *Method in Theology*. The Cantower project had brought me, by number 41, to the edge of a new focus: on up-to-date meta-physics, on metalinguistics, on cosmology, all these leading to a final [2011] shot at an up-to-date eschatology. I spelled out in SOFDAWARE 1 the reasons for the shift to the essays under that title: roughly, it was that the times demanded of me, not a very solitary climb into those difficult regions, but an effort to get people into trying to do specialist work, into the salvific way of the future, into the beginning of a metaphysics that is unified, efficient, beautiful: an answer to Plato's dreams.

What of the Cantower project? It should become part of the new collaboration in so far as some people take seriously the challenge of doing generalized empirical method within contemporary physics: very tough work, but already there are collaborators. The same can be said of the task of metalinguistics and the emergence of collaborators. But regarding the eschatology: there seems to be a strange lack of interest in facing in a contemporary fashion the question, Where are we and the material universe heading? Of course, that question cannot be tackled with the old-style cosmology, theology, and metaphysics. And what of the SOFDAWARE? It moves right

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<sup>5</sup>On my way home from the International Florida Lonergan Conference, with the burden of editing the equivalent of six volumes of papers (only two were published: *Foundations of Theology and Language, Truth and Meaning*, Gill MacMillan, 1972), I already sensed that all was not well with "the following of Lonergan". But now there are solidly established patterns of decadence.

into this larger interest: it began with an interest in the functional specialization, dialectic: but it spreads easily to the full eight.

### Q1c

What of my writing here, at least in these initial three Quodlibets? My initial talk can be taken to be commonsense communication, but you may identify it as talk that is a random dialectic reaching for foundations. It doesn't take a too heavy reading of page 250 of *Method* to identify me as an "investigator" who is taking a stand: the simple stand for the moment is that functional specialization is a desperate need if we are to get out of the present mess of theology, and in particular out of the present mess of Lonergan studies. My stand includes not only a stand on the need for functional specialization as a global collaboration but a stand on the present state of Lonergan studies. The latter stand, as I noted already, does not make me popular. For instance, people do not like my drawing attention to the fact that *Comparison* has a definite place and meaning in Lonergan's new project: there it is on page 250 of *Method*. If you want to do pop-Lonergan work then O.K., carry on the usual ineffective "Lonergan and X" stuff: but don't claim that you are taking Lonergan's lifework seriously.

As I already intimated, this stand of mine effects your pattern of collaboration with me: if you are still "in the system", looking for a job or a doctorate, then you had best be discrete, and I would respect all requests for confidentiality. Perhaps you may even want just to quietly express interest - I would like to know that - and stay for the present on the sideline, or just benefit from my cunning advice about how to play the system and get a doctorate while staying sane! But there are surely some few who sense the global and historic power of the structure that took 40 years for Lonergan to pin down accurately. And there must be some, crazy, like me, who wish to reach for adult growth, for the modern version of Aristotle's theoretic life, for a road to enlightenment that sublates the struggle of the Zen master Dogen (1200-1253).

Already I have a few interested: obviously those who appear in volume 4 of

*Journal of Macrodynamic Analysis*. How it all might emerge and scatter creatively I cannot at present say. But a beginning should be made.

So: I am taking a foundational stand, perhaps a little like Luther, outside the Orthodox Lonergan Church. If you wish to share that stand, well and good. If you do not, or are even hostile, still, you can delve into the next two Quodlibets and get a glimpse of two key features of that stand.

Finally, you may be curious about my choice of the name *Quodlibet*.

### Q1d

The young Thomas Aquinas began the *Disputationes de Quolibet*, or Quodlibet<sup>6</sup>, in the mid-1250s, 750 years ago, to handle conflict. Now certainly there are conflicts in present Lonergan circles, and the aim both of these Quodlibets and of functional specialization is to bring them out into the open. You might say, if you know your history, that what is occurring in Lonerganism is more like what happened later, when gradually there emerged correctors and correctors of correctors of Brother Thomas. But I would like to think that it is early days yet, that we have yet to try Lonergan's fundamental suggestion, that, so to speak, he is young yet. And besides, the correctors within his recurrence-scheme are to be self-correctors. So, best to start with whatever-you-please. But I get first innings with my own questions, and so I write the next two essays on topics that please me, Quodlibet 2 on "Convenient Images of Creative Control of Meaning" and Quodlibet 3 on "Being Breathless and late in talking about Virtue".

While on the topic of names, I should add a comment on other convenient names that I wish to use: if you don't like them, use your own. I risk calling that new

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<sup>6</sup>*Quodlibet* is now an accepted English word and I treat it that way, e.g. with plural *quodlibets*. *Libet* is 3<sup>rd</sup> person, singular, present, of *libere*, to please. *Quodlibet* has an interesting second usage which suits our venture: a humorously incongruous musical medley.

metaphysics *hodics*: it gets us away from the old name and reputation of metaphysics; it also gets us away from cumbersome talk about ‘functional specialization’.<sup>7</sup>

But, of course, we have to muse about these, and especially, in a preliminary fashion, about **function**: that we will begin to do in Quodlibet 2.<sup>8</sup> So, friend or foe, after a ramble through these three Quodlibets that give my mood and my stand, address me as you please, but not anonymously. Mood and stand, of course, put us on page 250 of *Method* in a random way. I would obviously like you to take a stand, indeed to take a stand regarding my stand: that is what the end of that great page 250 is all about. More about this as we get the show on the roll.

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<sup>7</sup>Another possible shift in terminology is worth mentioning, one I suggested in chapter 4 of *Process. Introducing Themselves to Young (Christian) Minders* (written in 1989, available on the Website). There I brought out the grounds in Lonergan for the change: instead of *conversion*, the word “displacement”. The change both avoids the religious overtones and gives a broader range: displacement includes reversion, perversion, etc etc.

<sup>8</sup>What is necessary is a prolonged brooding over the meaning of **function** when one is thinking of a beautiful, efficient, unified, metaphysics. Quodlibet 2 gives helpful images, but for fuller help to prolonged brooding there are the eight Cantowers that focus on **function**: numbers 34-41.