

SURF 7

Loneragan Research as a Functional Specialty

Over the past decade I have struggled forwards towards a more adequate meaning of the specialty **Research**. The main point, made again in a previous essay, SURF 4, regarding my approach to it in the case of the financial crisis, is that I see a way forward towards the emergence both of functional specialization and of what I call The Standard Model in the cycling of those specializations. The Standard Model should eventually be a respectable and respected presence in all the specialties as they operate in the creative cycling, “a normative pattern of recurrent and related operations yielding cumulative and progressive results.”¹ This description can be little more than words to most of my readers: the task is to lift the words forward through fantasy. But a fantasy that is aided by selective illustrating of the process.

I have already identified myself as operating, at least in stumbling undifferentiated fashion, as a functional researcher. You have already got hold of my paralleling of physics and theology, a paralleling that is made in those first two pages of *Method in Theology* from which I just quoted. And I have mentioned more than once that present physics is my source of the phrase Standard Model. I can even identify, or identify with, a role model from that area: Richard Feynman. First, Feynman was amazingly versatile in his competencies, even in competent presentations.² But also he managed to have the temperament and curiosity of a researcher. He had the habit of keeping up with the data-output from the giant machinery of research of his day, but he

¹*Method in Theology*, 4.

²The next note gives a broad survey. See also note 4. Later, perhaps, we may have an opportunity to reflect on the pros and cons of his 3-volume popular *Lectures in Physics*, his popular work on light, and the drive of his technical work on relativity and quantum physics. Joistings 25, “Rescuing Quantum Mechanics” makes abundant use of his masterly volume 3, *Lectures in Physics*, on elementary quantum mechanics.

also could trouble shoot at less sophisticated levels. The most famous instance of that is well-known but perhaps it is worth recalling as indicating what Russell Baker and I are attempting in **The Project**.

The Project that Feynman came in on - and more than rumour has it that he was not welcome - was that of investigating what went wrong with the launching of Challenger.³

Feynman does not bring in or up the twist that is given to research by functional specialization.⁴ Indeed, our problem in venturing to attempt such specialization is that it is shockingly novel. There is to be a way of talking, and of controlling that talk, associated with each specialty, that involves a fresh set of differentiations of consciousness and expression. Sentence by sentence the flow of meaning is to be controlled by the specialist's luminosity regarding the place of his or her effort in the cycling. Nor can I say more about such precisions and differentiations at present: we have to venture forward badly. Here I am recalling again that saying from the 1970s: "if a thing is worth doing, it is worth doing badly", a saying that highly amused Fred Crowe when I first mentioned it to him. His own pushy question at that time was "What specialty are you working in?" And there is the modification of that due to Tom Halloran in Australia: "To whom are you talking?". This question is a right-on question when posed regarding functional talk. But let us not get ahead of ourselves.

The cut-off is similar to that of the previous SURF, but here there were several sections illustrating and anticipating lines of collaboration, beginning with Fred

³See John Gribbin and Mary Gribbon, *Richard Feynman. A Life in Science*, Plume (Penguin Group), New York, 1998, 228-236, 252-3.

⁴See the text here, after the cut-off. There are ways in which Feynman's life-style, versatility and output point to directions of collaboration, but I do not follow up on them here.

Crowe's effort in his *Theology of the Christian Word*.⁵ Now it seems to me better to invite people to envisage possibilities that would be to their own advantage. You are envisaging a topic for a thesis or an article: might there be strategies of collaboration that would both shorten your labours and lead to more significant work? You are presented with the challenge of teaching X: is there an angle on the teaching of that subject that would benefit you, the students, the future of the globe, that would lift us out of a present prevalent effete⁶ teaching dynamic? But I would hope to focus in my own role of functional researcher if and when the collaboration begins the strategy touched on in footnote 4 here would blossom into effective dialogue, shift us gradually, statistically, from effete to efficient.

⁵Frederick E.Crowe S.J., *Theology of the Christian Word. A Study in History*, Paulist Press, New York, 1978. Cantower 34, "Functional History", section 4, give a reflection (written in 2004) on this text that brings out the defects precisely as functional history. Later work and an acceleratingly larger context in 2007 led me to a positive take on the work when it is considered as research. This work pushed me towards the present position on functional research. However, as I note in the text, the topic became too complex for simple treatment here. But the reflection on Crowe's work is a useful start. It is expressed in four essays: *Humus 9*, "Frederick Crowe and ourselves as researchers"; *Humus 10*, "The Christian Message Begins"; *Humus 11*, "The Word of God as Truth"; *Humus 12*, "Crowe: Possibilities of Methodological Collaboration".

⁶*Method in Theology*, 99.