

SURF 10

Stirring Up Research Fragments: The Second Canon of Hermeneutics

Curiously, the title, which may seem concocted merely to be cute about the series, SURF, is powerfully accurate. We are in the zone of *Insight* that is perhaps the most elusive of the book, that third section of chapter 17 which climaxes in the canons of hermeneutics.

What am I doing in this essay, a key essay in the entire Project? And it is, for me, an essay in the old accepted sense: I am trying out, out loud as it were, with you. I am stirring up names and descriptive fragments so that they may, for both of us, at least give fresh hope of them coming to “fuse into a single explanation.”¹

It reminds me - and it is very relevant to ingest this slowly - of a previous effort to do something similar. It was in the winter of 1963-64, and I was battling forward towards the essay “Insight and the Strategy of Biology” that eventually appeared in *Spirit as Inquiry*. The grappling involved at one stage a stirring up of fragments that could lead me to light on: well, on what living meant, for you and me and little organisms. I have told the story before, so I am brief here. After 20 or so pages of messing there was the fusing: I **had** it sufficiently to say it. I said it in a sentence! Who was I talking to? What idiot way was I thinking?: all the more idiot in that I dumped my 20 pages of messing. What I had been messing with was, I supposed, even more compactable: there is the invented word, *aggreformism*; less compact, there are the ten words from Aristotle that are the frontispiece of *Insight*.

And so on: lengthier expressions could be added as illustrations? Whatever that means. But you are not without some notion of what I am at. And my going on about it here, briefly or even at some length, would it not duplicate the problem? Instead of **living** one might home in on that living that is named *person*, home in even on the person that is, say, you cherished companion in life. “This is my partner, Alex” you say; the reply, to Alex, of the person addressed, “pleased to meet you”. When you met Alex first you began to stir up research fragments, and perhaps now the name Alex is fused into a reasonably integral meaning: but can

¹*Insight*, 587[610].

you tell this third person; can you even tell Alex? So, I tell you and the audience of 1964, quite baldly badly, “this is **living**” and Lonergan tells, reasonable badly, what he means by the second canon of hermeneutics. You may already have wandered, or fiercely focused, through his first two dense paragraphs on the topic and ended the second paragraph with a reading of five wonder-words, “fuse into a single explanation.”² Try a focused wondering wander now.

Did the three elements fuse for you? After exactly fifty years of reading that paragraph they have not fused for me. Yet Lonergan types on, knowing the fusion is **mine**³, and luminous, self-luminous, that it is within a larger fusion, “eo majis unum,”⁴ and so he echoes Thomas who - what a twist here! - badly compacts, in a short few pages, my reach for the meaning of **living** with the problem of the meaning of **person** in God. “In the *Contra Gentiles* Aquinas considered in turn minerals, plants, animals, men, angels, and God to show that in perfect intellectual reflection principle and term are identical without an elimination of the reflection and so without an elimination of the procession.”⁵ “Fuse into a single explanation”, then, reaches to, can lift us, can “show”⁶ - Lonergan’s word regarding Thomas - that all reality, finite and infinite, is fused into the Explanation that is the Word.

Does that paragraph of **mine** startle you? Does it freshen the question, What is it to read “the canon of explanation”? Where does it lead, this canon? Obvious, you would agree, to the next canon, after another paragraph: the canon of successive approximations. What are these successive approximations? “The totality of documents cannot be interpreted scientifically by a single interpreter,”⁷ yet they can in divine triplicity of singleness, spoken in a single

²*Insight* 587, 4th last line [610, 9th line].

³I am recalling here the scribbled line at the bottom of the “discovery page of February 1965”, where Lonergan wrote ‘vital, intelligent, mine ...’, with *mine* doubly underlined.

⁴*Verbum* 204-208.

⁵*Verbum*, 206.

⁶“to show”, in the previous quotation. One might say that the problem of chapter 17 is to give heuristic meaning to that challenge, **to show**.

⁷*Insight*, 588[610].

word, **Mine**. So, *fuse* takes on the still larger meaning that I have mentioned before. But should not the heuristics of that larger meaning be part of the Standard Model as the Tower of Care comes to maturity, in some later century or millennium?

You are now familiar with this turn of intention that reaches through these SURFs. The cut-off in each from the complexities originally envisaged leaves the appeal of the SURF series, and The Project that dominates it, starker and simpler. But to that appeal I would add a note of optimism. I am confident that together we can move towards such a communal grip on the canons of hermeneutics that we can give rise in this century to the *scienza nuova* that Lonergan sought in the mid-1950s. I have associated that new global perspective with a new name, one that bubbled up in the context of considering the challenge of that second paragraph of Lonergan's consideration of the second canon. **Fusionism** hints at a coming together that is not associated with Lonergan or with any school of thought, but with a global merging that nonetheless has local colour, a village that is 10,000 villages. What it means in the fullness of its reality in history and in the everlasting, that certainly is not a topic for a single individual's expression of aspirations: it is a topic for a global fusion of the searchings of one and all.