

LONERGAN – CONSULTATION

- Topic: Freedom
 Convener: Erica Siu-Mui Lee, Holy Spirit Seminary College of Theology and Philosophy
 Moderator: Robert Elliot, Boston College
 Presenters: Jeremy Blackwood, Sacred Heart Seminary and School of Theology
 Christopher Krall, SJ, Creighton University
 Eric A. Mabry, University of St. Thomas (Houston)

This session was comprised of three papers, approximately 20-25 minutes each. We paused for five to ten minutes of questions after each paper, and then concluded with a short group conversation, lasting roughly five minutes.

In his paper, “Graced Freedom as *Memoria* in Conversation: Developing Lonergan with Doran and Lawrence,” Jeremy Blackwood brought together into a fruitful dialogue two of the most significant Lonergan scholars in theology, Robert Doran (d. 2021) and Frederick Lawrence. The focus of Blackwood’s dialogue was Lonergan’s theology of triune grace. Where Doran primarily elaborated (by way of *memoria*) upon what is called Lonergan’s “four-point hypothesis” in which various dimensions of supernatural grace are related to the four distinct trinitarian relations, Lawrence draws out the theme of the Triune God as conversational (Speaker–Word–Listening), emphasizing instead the two trinitarian processions (the intelligible emanations of Word and Love). Blackwood convincingly used Doran’s notion of a dialectic of contraries in which the two poles of the dialectic must be held in a harmonious tension (as opposed to a dialectic of contradictories, in which the position must be advanced and the counter-position reversed) in order to relate Doran and Lawrence to one another. According to Blackwood, as two harmonious poles, Doran’s relational theology of *memoria* and Lawrence’s processional theology of conversation together cultivate a more thorough understanding of the human person’s freedom in grace that may withstand both the individualist and the collectivist errors of our age. Blackwood’s paper made an important contribution to Lonergan studies by bringing two central figures into dialogue who are sometimes seen as representing opposing perspectives on Lonergan’s trinitarian theology. Blackwood also made an important contribution to the interpretation of Lawrence’s work by explicitly connecting many of the dots Lawrence leaves implicit in his theology.

In his paper, “‘The Truth Will Set You Free’: The Freeing Power of the Virtue of Humility Backed by the Neuroscience of Self-Esteem,” Christopher Krall, SJ, brought together moral theology, Ignatian spirituality, and neuroscience to argue that humility is a valuable path to freedom and well-being. Using Bernard Lonergan’s theology of grace and modern neuroscience studies on self-esteem, Krall argued that humbly acknowledging our weakness (both our mortality and our proclivity to sin) is humanity’s strength. Krall began his paper with the notion of humility as a way of returning to the ground of our being (God), which sets the conditions for liberating conversion and enables the human person to face existential threats with greater freedom. Central to Krall’s paper was his retrieval of the centrality of living-in-tension as essential to human freedom—Aquinas, Thomas á Kempis, Ignatius of Loyola,

Lonergan, and neuroscience all confirm that an authentic human person is most free when in tension. Drawing on another dialectic of contraries, Krall demonstrated that “the dialectic of humility and magnanimity allow a person to let go from achieving and doing perfect actions by humbly admitting weakness, sinfulness, and vulnerable dependency while seeking holiness and greatness for the glory of God.” Rather than seeing humility and magnanimity as opposed, he argued that they belong together, and using neuroscience, suggested that this harmony is a healthy self-esteem.

In his paper, “*Deliberatio Christi*: Did Christ Decide Which Parables would be Best?”, Eric Mabry asked whether Jesus Christ was free in all the ways that we are free. Despite the development of Christological doctrine, which affirms that Christ is like us in all things but sin and that Christ has a human will and human freedom, theologians have still exhibited a reticence to affirm *deliberation* within Christ’s human will. According to Mabry, even Bernard Lonergan maintained that deliberation would be “superfluous” in Christ. Drawing on Thomas Aquinas and Bernard Lonergan, Mabry sought to go beyond each of these theologians by arguing that Jesus deliberated and addressing how to understand Jesus’ deliberation in relation to, especially, Jesus’ beatific knowledge as human.

The questions that emerged after each paper were fruitful and encouraged each presenter to push their thought further. For example, Grant Kaplan suggested in response to Blackwood’s paper something to consider is the fact that Doran wrote multiple books whereas Lawrence never wrote a book and instead his writing took the form of essays. Kaplan also suggested it would be important to look at Doran’s other influences (Heidegger and Jung) in comparison to Lawrence’s (Gadamer), and think through how these influences might contribute to the different paths each Lonergan scholar pursued. Vincent Strand asked Krall about the how the third degree of humility in the *Spiritual Exercises* connected to what Ignatius says about the Father, and suggested ways for Krall to clarify this point. Jay Martin asked Mabry a question about deliberation in relation to wonder and appreciated Mabry’s account of Aquinas on Christ’s knowledge as human.

JENNIFER M. SANDERS
Saint Louis University
St. Louis, Missouri