

## Fruitless Insights

I imagine Lonergan feeling a bit mischievous when he said, "Insights are a dime a dozen" (*Method*, p. 13). His point, of course, is that understanding begs verification by judgment, where the criterion is an absence of relevant questions. But how in the world can anyone know what the relevant questions are? In practical matters at least, I suggest that a highly relevant question is "Have we fully exploited the possibilities of the situation?"

Here's an example of how fruitless insights can lead to fruitful insights. It's a true story:

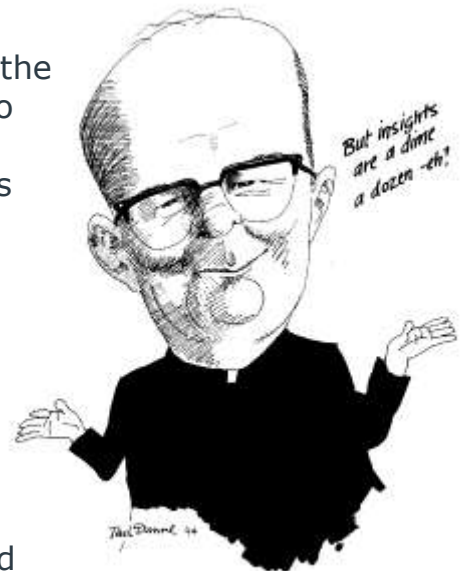
My family spent summers at a cottage on Burt Lake, up near Cheboygan, MI. We had a raft that was constructed from six 55-gallon oil drums strapped under a wooden platform. It was anchored by a chain to an 800-pound block of cement encased in a wooden frame underwater.

It so happened that as we kids were growing taller, the lake level was dropping. So we asked my dad how to move the raft into deeper water so we could dive without hitting bottom. He had an insight: He had us tie ropes to the big ring on the cement anchor underwater. He then had about 10 of us kids stading chest-deep in water, pulling on ropes tied to the anchor, hoping we could lift, or at least nudge the anchor into deeper water.

We pulled up on the ropes, but the anchor wouldn't budge. Then Dad had another insight: "Forget the old anchor. We can make a new cement anchor on the raft deck, move the chain from the old anchor to the new anchor, and slide the new anchor off the raft into deeper water." Seemed like a good idea. He drove off to Cheboygan, and returned several hours later, triumphantly holding bags of cement mix and some boards for the frame.

He was shocked to see that we had already moved the raft into deeper water and the anchor block with it.

It was my sister's boyfriend Lou who had the further insight. It required a screwdriver. "Everybody get on the raft." We got on. He pulled the anchor chain taut, and stuck the screwdriver through two links to keep it taut. "OK. Everybody jump off the raft!" We all jumped off. Now lacking about 1,000 pounds of people (10 kids), the raft popped higher, lifting the 800-pound



anchor off the bottom. We swam/pushed the raft to deeper water. Lou pulled the screwdriver out. The block anchor sunk to the new depth. We could now dive safely off the raft.

In short, Lou realized that we hadn't fully exploited the possibilities in the situation.

-Tad Dunne