

Introduction to Systematic Theology

Class 4, 28 September 2007

Theology mediates between a cultural matrix and the significance and role of a religion within that matrix. A cultural matrix is the operative set of meanings and values informing a given way of life. The mediation is in the realm of meaning, and for the sake of the human good. We have discussed meaning and value, and now we turn to religion. What precisely is it that theology mediates with the other meanings and values that determine given ways of life?

1 The Question of God

1.1 *The Transcendent Exigence*

Among the exigences promoting us to realms of meaning beyond that of common sense, there is a transcendent exigence. It is discussed in chapter 3 on pp. 83-84: 'There is to human inquiry an unrestricted demand for intelligibility. There is to human judgment a demand for the unconditioned. There is to human deliberation a criterion that criticizes every finite good. So it is ... that [we] can reach basic fulfilment, peace, joy, only by moving beyond the realms of common sense, theory, and interiority into the realm in which God is known and loved.' There we reach what in *Insight* is called the absolute limit in the process of going beyond.

1.2 *Three Philosophic Forms of the Question of God*

That statement from 83-84 states three ways in which the very unfolding of our conscious intentionality is a question of God, prior to any formulated question, three ways, if you will, in which it provides the basic and fundamental meaning of the name 'God' (see 341: '... an orientation to transcendent mystery is basic to systematic theology. It provides the primary and fundamental meaning of the name, God'). We can make this orientation a formulated question of God by reflecting on our own questioning in the three dimensions mentioned in the quotation. Then there emerge *three explicit forms* of the question of God: Is there a ground of intelligibility, Is there a ground of existence, Is there a ground of value? These are *philosophic forms* of the question of God. We will see also a religious form of the question of God in the course of the chapter.

1.2.1 The ground of intelligibility

The first form of the question of God arises when we inquire about our inquiring. In raising questions for intelligence we are assuming that the universe is intelligible. This assumption is confirmed every time we reach intellectually satisfying answers. But could the universe be ultimately intelligible if it did not have an intelligent ground? That is one form of the question of God. More fully, p. 101: '... why should the answers that satisfy the intelligence of the subject yield anything more than a subjective satisfaction? Why should they be supposed to possess any relevance to knowledge of the universe? Of

course, we assume that they do. We can point to the fact that our assumption is confirmed by its fruits. So implicitly we grant that the universe is intelligible and, once that is granted, there arises the question whether the universe could be intelligible without having an intelligent ground. But that is the question about God.

1.2.2 The ground of existence

A second philosophic form of the question of God arises when we reflect on our reflecting. Just what happens when we marshal the evidence for pronouncing that this probably is so and that probably is not so? Our questions for reflection at times give rise to a grasp of the fulfilment of conditions required to pronounce a rational Yes. This grasp gives rise to what Lonergan calls the virtually unconditioned. The prospective judgment has conditions, but one grasps that the conditions are fulfilled. But is the fulfilment of conditions possible without an unconditioned reality that has no conditions whatever? Does a necessary being exist? Can there be mere matters of contingent fact without explanation, if in fact the universe of being is completely intelligible? That is another form of the question of God.

1.2.3 The ground of value

A third form of the question of God arises when we deliberate about our deliberating. Our questions for moral deliberation ask is X is worth while. But is it worth while to deliberate at all? Has 'worthwhile' any ultimate meaning? If so are we the only instance of moral agency in the universe? 102-103: '... is the universe on our side, or are we just gamblers and, if we are gamblers, are we not perhaps fools, individually struggling for authenticity and collectively endeavoring to snatch progress from the ever mounting welter of decline? ... Are cosmogenesis, biological evolution, historical process basically cognate to us as moral beings or are they indifferent and so alien to us?'

There is, then, a question of God implicit in all our questioning, and reflecting on our questioning makes it explicit. So the question of God lies within our horizon. 23: '... the objects of theology do not lie outside the transcendental field. For that field is unrestricted, and so outside it there is nothing at all.' 103: 'There lies within [our] horizon a region for the divine, a shrine for ultimate holiness. It cannot be ignored. The atheist may pronounce it empty. The agnostic may urge that he finds his investigation has been inconclusive. The contemporary humanist will refuse to allow the question to arise. But their negations presuppose the spark in our clod, our native orientation to the divine.'

2 Self-transcendence

2.1 *At each level*

These questions for intelligence, reflection, and deliberation manifest our capacity for self-transcendence. It is in self-transcendence that we achieve authenticity 104: 'One can live in a world, have a horizon, just in the measure that one is not locked up in oneself. A first step towards this liberation is the sensitivity we share with the higher animals. But

they are confined to a habitat, while [we live] in a universe. Beyond sensitivity [we ask] questions, and [our] questioning is unrestricted.’

Each successive ‘level’ of intentional consciousness represents a greater degree of self-transcendence. See 104.

2.2 Fulfilled in being in love

But that capacity is *fulfilled* to the extent we are in love. 105: ‘That capacity becomes an actuality when one falls in love. Then one’s being becomes being-in-love. Such being-in-love has its antecedents, its causes, its conditions, its occasions. But once it has blossomed forth and as long as it lasts, it takes over. It is the first principle. From it flow one’s desires and fears, one’s joys and sorrows, one’s discernment of values, one’s decisions and deeds.’

2.2.1 God’s love flooding our hearts

Loneragan consistently speaks of three kinds of being-in-love: the love of intimacy, usually manifest in the family; love in the community; and ‘the love of God with one’s whole heart and whole soul, with all one’s mind and all one’s strength ... It is **God’s love** flooding our hearts through the Holy Spirit given to us’ (Romans 5.5), grounding Paul’s conviction that ‘there is nothing in death or life, in the realm of spirits or superhuman powers, in the world as it is or the world as it shall be, in the forces of the universe, in heights or depths – nothing in all creation that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord’ (Romans 8.38-39). And (105) ‘as the question of God is implicit in all our questioning, so being in love with God is the basic fulfilment of our conscious intentionality. [It] brings a deep-set joy that can remain despite humiliation, failure, privation, pain, betrayal, desertion. [It] brings a radical peace, the peace that the world cannot give. [It] bears fruit in a love of one’s neighbor that strives mightily to bring about the kingdom of God on this earth. On the other hand, the absence of that fulfilment opens the way to the trivialization of human life in the pursuit of fun, to the harshness of human life arising from the ruthless exercise of power, to despair about human welfare springing from the conviction that the universe is absurd.’

3 Religious Experience

This being in love with God is the basic component in religious experience. As experienced, it is being in love in an unrestricted fashion, without limits, qualifications, conditions, reservations. Just as unrestricted questioning is our capacity for self-transcendence, so being in love in an unrestricted fashion is the proper fulfillment of that capacity.

It is not the product of knowledge and choice, but a gift that dismantles present horizons and sets up a new one that transvalues our values and transforms our knowing. It is a conscious dynamic state of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, goodness, fidelity, self-control (Galatians 5.22). It can be conscious without being known, and so without being called ‘being in love with God.’ It is an experience of mystery, of the holy.

It is being grasped by ultimate concern. It is consolation with a content but without an apprehended object.

In *Method* it is the fulfilment of the fourth level of intentional consciousness, (106-107) 'as having undergone a conversion, as possessing a basis that may be broadened and deepened and heightened and enriched but not superseded, as ready to deliberate and judge and decide and act with the easy freedom of those that do all good because they are in love.' It is particularly clear in Q&A sessions at the Lonergan Workshops in Boston that Lonergan came to acknowledge the entire realm of love as a fifth level, one dimension of which is this relationship of love with God.

It is, he says here, what is really meant by the term 'sanctifying grace,' but that reality is here spoken of in the language not of theory but of interiority. Thus here is one theological significance of the discussion of stages of meaning. 107: 'The gift we have been describing really is sanctifying grace but notionally differs from it. The notional difference arises from different stages of meaning. To speak of sanctifying grace pertains to the stage of meaning when the world of theory and the world of common sense are distinct but, as yet, have not been explicitly distinguished from and grounded in the world of interiority. To speak of the dynamic state of being in love with God pertains to the stage of meaning when the world of interiority has been made the explicit ground of the worlds of theory and of common sense. It follows that in this stage of meaning the gift of God's love first is described as an experience and only consequently is objectified in theoretical categories.'

In all of his earlier, more Scholastic and more metaphysical treatments of this reality, Lonergan distinguished sanctifying grace and charity. He explicitly admits in one Q&A at Boston that he has here amalgamated them. If you have a chance to come to my lecture on October 29, you will hear an argument for re-visiting that distinction and assuming into the stage of meaning governed by interiorly and religiously differentiated consciousness. I equate sanctifying grace with being on the receiving end of God's unqualified love, and charity with the love of God in return.

The last paragraph on 107 is also important (and can be made to align with my distinction).

4 Expressions of Religious Experience

4.1 In general

108: 'Religious experience spontaneously manifests itself in changed attitudes, in that harvest of the Spirit that is love, joy, peace, kindness, goodness, fidelity, gentleness, and self-control. But it also is concerned with its base and focus in the *mysterium fascinans et tremendum*, and the expression of this concern varies greatly as one moves from earlier to later stages of meaning.' In earlier stages outward occasions are what make religious experience something determinate and distinct for human consciousness. There result the gods of the moment, the god of this or that place, the god of this or that person, the god or

gods of different groups. Such identifications can perdure in later stages, as when we think of certain places as holy places. In 'Sacralization and Secularization,' there are further comments on movement from undifferentiated to more differentiated expression.

4.2 What's the Evidence?

On 108-109 Lonergan says there is no clear-cut evidence that religious experience more or less universally conforms to this model, 'apart from the antecedent probability established by the fact that God is good and gives to all [people] sufficient grace for salvation.' In 'Religious Experience' he calls this question a large and open question. In the least it is what Christians will bring to the dialogue of world religions, to that coming convergence of world religions that Lonergan seemed to affirm. But here and elsewhere he finds some support in the work of Friedrich Heiler, who has found seven areas common to the major world religions: (1) there is a transcendent reality, (2) it is immanent in human hearts, (3) it is supreme beauty, truth, righteousness, goodness, (4) it is love, mercy, compassion, (5) the way to this reality is repentance, self-denial, prayer, (6) the way is love of neighbor, even of enemies, and (7) the way is love of God, and bliss is knowledge of God and union with God. [Girard would insist that the link to the transcendence of violence is essential to authentic religion and that this is progressively revealed in the Bible.]

On p. 109 he shows how his model fits Heiler's analysis, how these seven common features are implicit in the experience of being in love in an unrestricted manner. 109: 'To be in love is to be in love with someone. To be in love without qualifications or conditions or reservations or limits is to be in love with someone transcendent. When someone transcendent is my beloved, [that someone] is in my heart, real to me from within me. When that love is the fulfilment of my unrestricted thrust to self-transcendence through intelligence and truth and responsibility, the one that fulfils that thrust must be supreme in intelligence, truth, goodness. Since [that one] chooses to come to me by a gift of love for [that one], [that one] must be love. Since loving [that one] is my transcending myself, it also is a denial of the self to be transcended. Since loving [that one] means loving attention to [that one], it is prayer, meditation, contemplation. Since love of [that one] is fruitful, it overflows into love of all those that [that one] loves or might love. Finally, from an experience of love focused on mystery there wells forth a longing for knowledge, while love itself is a longing for union; so for the lover of the unknown beloved the concept of bliss is knowledge of [the beloved] and union with [the beloved], however they may be achieved.'

On p. 290, Lonergan is less hesitant about the evidence for his basic model. '... I do not think the matter is in doubt. In the realm of religious experience Olivier Rabut has asked whether there exists any unassailable fact. He found such a fact in the existence of love. It is as though a room were filled with music though one can have no sure knowledge of its source. There is in the world, as it were, a charged field of love and meaning; here and there it reaches a notable intensity; but it is ever unobtrusive, hidden, inviting each of us to join. And join we must if we are to perceive it, for our perceiving is through our own loving.' This experience will provide foundations with its first set of special categories.

5 Religious Development Dialectical

At any stage of meaning there can be more or less authentic manifestations of religious concern. Lonergan conceives this as the fact that 'the seven common areas or features listed above will be matched in this history of religions by their opposites' (110). See 110-11 for details. In general, there can be a loss of the personal dimension of ultimate mystery, an overemphasis on transcendence, an overemphasis on immanence, the cult of a God that is terrifying slipping over into demonic destructiveness, an exultant destructiveness of oneself and of others.

6 The Word

There is a difficulty in expressing religious experience, and it is the difficulty of moving from the 'withdrawal from objectification' in the 'unmediated experience of love and awe' (or the 'mediated return to immediacy' [77]) to the 'word' that enables religious experience to enter the world mediated by meaning and regulated and motivated by value. Think of Teresa of Avila. This 'word,' strictly speaking, is any expression or embodiment – intersubjective, artistic, symbolic, linguistic, incarnate. '... since language is the vehicle in which meaning becomes most fully articulated, the spoken and written word are of special importance in the development and the clarification of religion.'

Prior to entering the world mediated by meaning, especially by the spoken or written word, religious experience is a 'prior word' spoken by God flooding our hearts with love. That prior word pertains to a world of immediacy. It (112) 'withdraws [us] from the diversity of history by moving out of the world mediated by meaning and towards a world of immediacy in which image and symbol, thought and word, lose their relevance and even disappear.' But often there is the return from that immediacy by the word, a return to the world mediated by meaning, and then religious experience enters the world mediated by meaning, endowing it with its deepest meaning and highest value.

Now, that subsequent word is not just an incidental expression. It is constitutive of the religious situation, personally and socially and historically, just as the word of love between two human beings is constitutive of their being in love. 113: 'Ordinarily the experience of the mystery of love and awe is not objectified. It remains within subjectivity as a vector, an undertow, a fateful call to a dreaded holiness. Perhaps after years of sustained prayerfulness and self-denial, immersion in the world mediated by meaning will become less total and experience of the mystery become clear and distinct enough to awaken attention, wonder, inquiry. Even then in the individual case there are not certain answers. All one can do is let be what is, let happen what in any case keeps recurring. But then, as much as ever, one needs the word – the word of tradition that has accumulated religious wisdom, the word of fellowship that unites those that share the gift of God's love, the word of the gospel that announces that God has loved us first and, in the fullness of time, has revealed that love in Christ crucified, dead, and risen.'

Such a religious word is, first, personal, announcing what is congruent with the gift of God's love; but also it is social, bringing people together who respond to the same mystery; and it is historical, moving through the stages of meaning and speaking in its different realms.

The word of religion will differ in different stages of meaning. Lonergan's concern is with what this word has to be in the third stage. It cannot be confined to common sense, and so, while it will draw on the power of symbols to suggest or evoke what cannot adequately be said in any other way, it will have to do more than this. It cannot be content with adding theory, for without self-appropriation theory gives rise to controversies that it cannot resolve, and bogs down in the contrasts and tensions between common sense and theory. 115: '... the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is set against the God of the philosophers and theologians. Honoring the Trinity and feeling compunction are set against learned discourse on the Trinity and against defining compunction. Nor can this contrast be understood or the tension removed within the realms of common sense and of theory [the realms of almost all theology studied in the first phase]. One must go behind them to the realm of interiority. For only through the realm of interiority can differentiated consciousness understand itself and so explain the nature and the complementary purposes of different patterns of cognitional activity.' The realm of interiority has today become the realm that grounds direct theological discourse, enabling theology to speak a new mediating word. Very little theology, of course, is actually doing this, and it is indeed very difficult to do, as anyone will discover who tries it.

7 Faith and Beliefs

In the sections on faith and beliefs (7-8) Lonergan returns to the basic model of religious experience and expression, and fills it out.

7.1 Faith

Love, then, gives rise to a knowledge that one would not, could not, have if one were not in love. And faith is the knowledge born of religious love. For Lonergan, faith, as contrasted with specific belief, is summarized in Pascal's statement, 'The heart has reasons which reason does not know.' 'Reason' here means experience, understanding, and judgment, knowledge on the first three levels of consciousness. 'The heart' is consciousness on the fourth level when that consciousness is wrapped up in the dynamic state of being in love. 'The heart's reasons' are feelings responding to value. 115: '... besides the factual knowledge reached by experiencing, understanding, and verifying, there is another kind of knowledge reached through the discernment of value and the judgments of value of a person in love.'

That knowledge is faith, when the love is God's love flooding our hearts. The value it apprehends is transcendent value, and the apprehension (115) 'consists in the experienced fulfilment of our unrestricted thrust to self-transcendence, in our actuated orientation towards the mystery of love and awe.' This is what he means by 'religious values' in the scale of values. That fulfilment finds objectification, mediation, in those who speak of (116) 'a clouded revelation of absolute intelligence and intelligibility, absolute truth and

reality, absolute goodness and holiness.’ And then there occurs the question of God in a new and non-philosophic form. 116: ‘Will I love [God] in return, or will I refuse? Will I live out the gift of [God’s] love, or will I hold back, turn away, withdraw? Only secondarily do there arise the questions of God’s existence and nature, and they are the questions either of the lover seeking to know [God] or of the unbeliever seeking to escape [God]. Such is the basic option of the existential subject once called by God.’

What does this knowledge born of love do? See and read 116, par. ‘As other ...’ It makes God the originating value, the entire universe the terminal value, encompassing the human good. And it enables us to engage in the pursuit of the human good with a new energy and efficacy. 117-18: ‘Without faith, without the eye of love, the world is too evil for God to be good, for a good God to exist. But faith recognizes that God grants [human beings] their freedom, that [God] wills them to be persons and not just ... automata, that [God] calls them to the higher authenticity that overcomes evil with good. So faith is linked with human progress and it has to meet the challenge of human decline ... Faith places human efforts in a friendly universe; it reveals an ultimate significance in human achievement; it strengthens new undertakings with confidence ... Most of all, faith has the power of undoing decline. Decline disrupts a culture with conflicting ideologies. It inflicts on individuals the social, economic, and psychological pressures that for human frailty amount to determinism. It multiplies and heaps up the abuses and absurdities that breed resentment, hatred, anger, violence. It is not propaganda and it is not argument but religious faith that will liberate human reasonableness from its ideological prisons. It is not the promises of [human beings] but religious hope that can enable [people] to resist the vast pressures of social decay. If passions are to quiet down, if wrongs are to be not exacerbated, not ignored, not merely palliated, but acknowledged and removed, then human possessiveness and human pride have to be replaced by religious charity, by the charity of the suffering servant, by self-sacrificing love.’ Etc., etc., and more in *Insight* 20.

7.2 Beliefs

What Lonergan writes of faith is common to all realizations of religious love, and it is not limited to any one tradition. But in addition there are the specific beliefs of given traditions. Their basis, if they are authentic, lies in faith and love, but they add the further judgments of fact and of value made by given religious communities in history. The value of believing the word of religion is one of the values that faith discerns. The gift of God’s love can be given to many, and the many can recognize in one another a common orientation. From their common communion with God, a religious community originates. That community will express itself in many ways, including in beliefs.

Now if the beliefs of a community are derived within the horizon opened by the gift of love, those beliefs may themselves be from God, the result of a personal entrance of God into the world mediated by meaning, ‘the advent of God’s word into the world of religious expression’ (119). Then ‘not only the inner word that is God’s gift of ... love but also the outer word of the religious tradition comes from God.’ Christians believe this is true of what has come to them from the religion of Israel and from Christianity.

7.3 *The significance of the distinction of faith and beliefs*

Lonergan regards this distinction as fruitful as a basis for dialogue and encounter among the religious traditions. It displays a deeper unity in religious love. 119: 'Beliefs do differ, but behind this difference there is a deeper unity. For beliefs result from judgments of value, and the judgments of value relevant for religious belief come from faith, the eye of religious love, an eye that can discern God's self-disclosure.' The distinction also enables each tradition to specify what is distinct about it.

4 Interiority, transcendence, and theology

The final section enumerates six consequences for theology of the turn to interiority and transcendence as the foundational realms of meaning.

First, there is the transition from 'sanctifying grace' to the dynamic state of being in love, that is, from the metaphysical foundation of an entitative habit, absolutely supernatural, infused into the essence of the soul, to an experience from which a theology of grace is derived.

Second, there is the transition from faculty psychology to intentionality analysis, allowing for a developmental approach to the concrete subject, where love can precede knowledge and be disproportionate to its causes, conditions, occasions, antecedents, and where the dangers of 'pure intellect' and 'arbitrary will' are overcome.

Third, the Christian theological problem of the salvation of non-Christians is reduced.

Fourth, the Christian apologist's task is clarified: it is to aid others in integrating God's gift with the rest of their living.

Fifth, what was called *lumen fidei* and faith in the older theology becomes faith and beliefs in this proposal: a transposition of terminology that also changes the older position.

And sixth, to be developed: the acknowledgment of a knowledge born of love opens on a twofold movement in consciousness: healing and creating.