

Introduction to Systematic Theology
Continuation of Class 5, October 5, 2009

1 Introduction to chapter 5

I would propose the following affirmations as stating where we should be as we move into chapter 5. Some of these points require further explication beyond what I've been able to do thus far.

(1) Theology is a mutual self-mediation and mutual self-constitution of religion and culture.

(2) The two constituents of culture and of religion are meaning and value, studied respectively in chapters 2 and 3.

(3) The human good is also the goal of the mediation, and the mediation occurs in the dimension of meaning.

(4) The constitution of the authentic religion that theology would mediate with culture is a being-in-love that fulfils the self-transcendent thrust of human intentionality.

(5) The foundations of the mediation lie in interiorly and religiously differentiated consciousness, which provide the 'rock' on which we can build in an age of historical consciousness that relativizes every other supposed foundation. Interiorly differentiated consciousness is the anthropological component of foundations, and religiously differentiated consciousness is the specifically theological component. They replace, respectively, the notions of metaphysics and the supernatural, but without denying the validity of either of these.

Chapter 5 has to do with the structure of the mediation: the 'set of related and recurrent operations cumulatively advancing' toward a goal.

For Lonergan, theology is a **process from data to results**, and so its method and structure distinguish **successive stages in that process**. The **result** is communication to a contemporary cultural matrix in the interests of the human good.

Other conceptions of theology either divide and subdivide data (positive theology, field specialization) or divide and subdivide results (dogmatic theology, subject specialization), and show no connection between positive and dogmatic theology.

Lonergan, by contrast, distinguishes stages in a process from data to results, where 'results' always entail **contemporary mediation** in 'the larger context of Christian living and ... the still larger process of world history' (144).

2 An eightfold division of tasks

The process from data to results is a set of interrelated sets of operations. Part 2 of the chapter sets forth the division of the steps, but without articulating the grounds of the division – that is left for section 3, and is basically something that we covered in this course at the very beginning.

2.1 Research

The process begins with making the data available, whether on a particular question (special research) or in principle on everything (general research). The ideal goal of research is a complete information retrieval system.

2.2 Interpretation

Next, the data have to be understood (interpretation). The relevant data for theology are carriers of meaning, and so understanding the data is understanding what was meant. But that has to be done (127) ‘in its proper historical context, in accord with its proper mode and level of thought and expression, in the light of the circumstances and intention’ of the writer or speaker or artist or symbol producer or group or agent. Questioning that context is left to dialectic.

2.3 History

Next, meaning is subject to cumulative development and decline. It is ‘going forward,’ in process, in some ongoing context. So history is concerned with these movements that at their core are movements of meaning informing ways of living. Special history studies specific cultural, institutional, or doctrinal movements. General history studies, in the limit, all movements in history. The ‘substantial concern’ (128) of history as theological is ‘the doctrinal history of Christian theology with its antecedents and consequents in the cultural and institutional histories of the Christian religion and the Christian churches and sects.’ But not in abstraction from general history.

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2.4 Dialectic

Next, the movements of Christian history have been involved in conflict, and so too have the historical accounts of these movements and theological interpretations of them. So there must be an attempt at mediating and resolving such conflicts: dialectic. Dialectic aims at the ‘high and distant’ goal of ‘a comprehensive viewpoint,’ a ‘single set of related bases’ for understanding the character of the many viewpoints, their oppositions, and

their relations. From that viewpoint one would be able to ascertain (129) ‘just where differences are irreducible, where they are complementary and could be brought together within a larger whole, where finally they can be regarded as successive stages in a single process of development.’ Thus dialectic is (130) ‘a generalized apologetic conducted in an ecumenical spirit, aiming ultimately at a comprehensive viewpoint, and proceeding towards that goal by acknowledging differences, seeking their grounds real and apparent, and eliminating superfluous oppositions.’ Advancing positions and reversing counterpositions, but in an ecumenical spirit, not an adversarial one.

2.5 Foundations

Dialectic will reveal that truly irreducible differences are rooted in contradictory, mutually exclusive orientations in the realms of religion, morality, and cognitional presuppositions: the presence or absence of religious, moral, and intellectual conversions. I will add psychic and social. But it is left to the distinct specialty of foundations to detail what these dimensions of conversion are. Foundations, in fact, has the twofold task of objectifying conversion and deriving the categories to be used in a methodical theology.

It is simply a fact, then, that in the last analysis any theologian’s own positions and categories will be a function of who he or she is in the realm of religion, morality, and implicit or explicit presuppositions on knowing and the known, plus awareness of psychic and social-cultural bias. This is what determines one’s horizon, and one’s horizon determines one’s positions, one’s categories.

Foundations, then, is not a set of doctrines – the old fundamental theology – but the objectification of the horizon within which the meaning of any doctrine can be grasped. It does have a doctrinal component, however. And because horizon is a function of conversion, foundations is an objectification of conversion.

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2.6 Doctrines

Conversion and its objectification enable one to stand on one's own in relation to the communal and historical set of movements known as Christianity, and to determine to what extent one is going to carry it forward and to what extent one is going to change it. From this decision spring my own judgments of fact and judgments of value, one's doctrines. 132: 'They stand within the horizon of foundations. They have their precise definition from dialectic, their positive wealth of clarification and development from history, their grounds in the interpretation of the data proper to theology.'

2.7 Systematics

On doctrines there arise further questions: questions for coherent, systematic understanding and conceptualization.

2.8 Communications

Finally, theology returns to the concrete mediations that are its objective: to its external relations (1) within other disciplines, (2) with particular cultures, enabling transpositions to take place, and (3) with the diverse media of communications.

Here the process continues, since further data are provided for a future theology to do research, interpretation, history, etc., on us.

Also, it is because of communications that the situation becomes as much a source as the tradition, and that theology is a mutual self-mediation.

3 Grounds of the division

How was this division derived? Two principles were involved.

3.1 Two phases

The first principle is that (133) 'theological operations occur in two basic phases. If one is to harken to the word, one must also bear witness to it. If one engages in *lectio divina*, there come to mind *quaestiones*. If one assimilates tradition, one learns that one should pass it on. If one encounters the past, one also has to take one's stand toward the future. In brief, there is a theology *in oratione obliqua* that tells what Paul and John, Augustine and Aquinas, and anyone else had to say about various questions. But there is also a theology *in oratione recta* in which the theologian, enlightened by the past, confronts the problems of [his or her] own day.' Theology is not just studying history, but also making history.

3.2 *Four sets of objectives in each phase*

The second principle is that intentional consciousness unfolds on four distinct levels of conscious and intentional operations, each with its own proper achievement and end.

In everyday experience the four levels function in a global fashion, seeking the composite result of the ends of all four levels. Functional or operational specialization occurs when (134) 'the ends proper to particular levels ... become the objective sought by operations on all four levels.' 134: 'So the textual critic will select the method (level of decision) that he feels will lead to the discovery (level of understanding) of what one reasonably affirms (level of judgment) was written in the original text (level of experience). The textual critic, then, operates on all four levels, but his goal is the end proper to the first level, namely, to ascertain the data. The interpreter, however, pursues a different goal. He wishes to understand the text, and so selects a different method. Moreover, he cannot confine his operations to the second level, understanding, and to the fourth, a selective decision. He must apprehend the text accurately before he can hope to understand it, and so he has to operate on the first level; and he has to judge whether or not his understanding is correct, for otherwise he will fail to distinguish between understanding and misunderstanding.' Etc.

So four levels yield four ends, and two phases yield eight functionally related specialties. See the spelling out of the entire structure, bottom of 134 to top of 136.

4 Why this division, i.e., why a functional conception of the many existing branches of theology and why the need for this reorganization?

4.1 *Distinguish tasks, prevent confusion*

First, we need to distinguish tasks and prevent them from being confused. The division is of tasks, not of persons: one and the same person may be involved in different tasks at different times. Know what you are doing, and how to do it.

4.2 *Fact: theology is specialized*

Once theology reaches a certain stage of development, it is a fact that there are these eight ends, all contributing to the total end of the mediation of religion and culture.

4.3 *Need to curb totalitarian ambitions*

137: 'Each of the eight has its proper excellence. None can stand without the other seven. But the [person] with the blind-spot is fond of concluding that [his/her] specialty

is to be pursued because of its excellence and the other seven are to be derided because by themselves they are insufficient. From such one-sidedness theology has suffered gravely from the middle ages to the present day. Only a well-reasoned total view can guard against its continuance in the present and its recurrence in the future.'

4.4 Resist excessive demands

Finally, one needs to resist excessive demands on oneself and on others. 137: '... a serious contribution to one of the eight is as much as can be demanded of a single piece of work.' Such a contribution will be done in the awareness of what is to be added to one's statements in the light of the evidence available to other, distinct specialties. Theology is a collaborative enterprise.

5 From the division to a dynamic collaborative unity

5.1 Two major differentiations in the history of theology

The final section explores the potential contribution of *functional* specialization to the development of theology, locating it in the history of theology. That history has exhibited two major differentiations, and now is moving towards a goal in which the differentiated specialties function as an integrated unity.

5.1.1 The shift to system

The first major differentiation was the very emergence of theology from religion. It was completed with the medieval development of a theological system. It was necessary: differentiated consciousness demands systematic understanding on the level of its time, and any movement whose principal part is concerned with meaning will be forced to reflect on its own proper meaning.

5.1.2 Historical consciousness and functional specialization

More recently, historical consciousness has forced theology to differentiate its two phases. But this has raised the question of whether there is any bridge from indirect discourse to direct discourse. Functional specialization is the answer to that question. In fact it makes possible three distinct interdependences.

5.2 Interdependence in the first phase

The four tasks of the first phase are related to one another. Interpretation depends on research, research on interpretation; history on both research and interpretation, but research and interpretation on the contexts provided by history; dialectic on history, interpretation, and research, but interpretation and history on the heuristic structures that will be revealed by dialectic. Thus in collaborative teamwork (142) 'the first phase rises

from the almost endless multiplicity of data to an interpretative, then to a narrative, and then to a dialectical unity.'

5.3 Interdependence in the second phase

The second phase 'descends from the unity of a grounding horizon towards the almost endlessly varied sensibilities, mentalities, interests, and tasks of [humankind].' The descent is not a deduction, but a succession of transpositions to ever more determinate contexts. These two notions of transposition and context are important. 142: 'Foundations provides a basic orientation. This orientation, when applied to the conflicts of dialectic and to the ambiguities of history, becomes a principle of selection and rearticulation of doctrines. But doctrines tend to be regarded as mere verbal formulae, unless their ultimate meaning is worked out and their possible coherence revealed by systematics. Nor is such ultimate clarification enough. It fixes the substance of what there is to be communicated. But there arises both the problem of the creative use of the available media and the task of finding the appropriate approach and procedure to convey the message to people of different classes and cultures.'

But again, the interdependence is reciprocal: 'Questions for systematics can arise from communications. Systematic modes of conceptualization can be employed in doctrines. The conversion, formulated as horizon in foundations, will possess not only personal but also social and doctrinal dimensions.'

5.4 Interdependence of the two phases

The dependence of the second phase on the first is clear: it confronts the present and the future in the light of what has been assimilated from the past.

Lonergan is very cautious about the dependence of the first on the second. An influence this way can destroy the proper openness of the first phase to all relevant data. By interfering with the first, it cuts itself off from its own proper source and ground, and it blocks the way to its own vital development.

Nonetheless, (1) one cannot write a history of a doctrine without understanding it (doctrines and systematics); and (2) accounts of conversion will add to the work of dialectic as the latter sorts out conflicts.

I would add two further points: (1) communications influences the questions one will study in the first phase; and (2) the results of interpretation and history depend on one's foundations.

So the dynamic unity of theology today is 'a unity of interdependent parts, each adjusting to changes in the others, and the whole developing as a result of such changes and adjustments.' And all of this 'within the larger context of Christian living and ... the still larger process of human history.'