

Class 6

We saw last week that chapter 5 proposes the structure of the mediation between a cultural matrix (meanings and values) and a religion, and we saw how Lonergan begins the chapter by simply listing 8 tasks, 8 sets of operations: research, interpretation, history, dialectic, foundations, doctrines, systematics, and communications. Theology is a collaborative process from data to results, and these sets of operations include everything that occurs in that process. They are successive stages in the process.

He did not yet articulate the grounds of the division, and that is where we begin today. Actually, we did get into it a bit with the question of whether acknowledging a fifth level would mean adding two more functional specialties. I think what L says about conversion would be part of a response to that question.

And we did see something of the grounds of the division in our first class.

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.

1968 experience

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. for all of the ensuing sets of operations.

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. In the course of reading this, we will see the role assigned to conversion, and can use what he says to answer the question about whether a fifth level requires more functional specialties.**

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

136: 'The need for some division is clear enough from the divisions that already exist and are recognized. Thus, our divisions of the second phase – foundations, doctrines, systematics, and communications – correspond roughly to the already familiar distinctions between fundamental, dogmatic, speculative, and pastoral or practical theology. Nor can the specialties of the first phase – research, interpretation, history, and dialectic – be described as sheer novelties ... What, however, is new is the conception of these branches of theological activity as functional specialties, as distinct and separable stages in a single process from data to ultimate results. Accordingly, what has to be explained is the need for the conception of the many existing branches of theology and for the reorganization that this conception brings in its train.' L distinguishes four reasons for the division.

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; of specialties, not of specialists: one and the same person may be involved in different tasks at different times. Functional specialization (136-37) 'arises, not to divide the same sort of task among many hands [e.g., all the exegetes doing exegesis] but to distinguish different tasks and to prevent them from being confused.'

Skip [Different ends are pursued by employing different means, different means are used in different manners, different manners are ruled by different methodical precepts.] 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. See 137: 'If these eight ends exist, then there are eight different tasks to be performed, and eight different sets of methodical precepts that have to be distinguished. Without such distinctions, investigators will not have clear and distinct ideas about what precisely they are doing, how their operations are related to their immediate ends, and how such immediate ends are related to the total end of the subject of their inquiry.'

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.'

Dogmatic
Exegetical
History

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

Theology is a subject in process of development, and so its unity will be dynamic, not static. Development is from an initial state of non-differentiation through a process of differentiation and specialization towards a goal in which the differentiated specialties function as an integrated unity.

5.1 Two major differentiations in the history of theology

The final section (‘A Dynamic Unity’) 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. See 138, ‘So initially ...’ 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, to distinguish it from other meanings, to guard itself against aberration. The shift to system is something that happens eventually in most cultural movements. In our case, religion and theology become distinct, but the distinction of theology is a withdrawal that always intends and effects a return to religion.

5.1.2 Historical consciousness and functional specialization

More recently, historical consciousness has forced theology to differentiate its two phases and its eight ends. 140: ‘... it is within these eight specialties that all theological operations occur.’ L discovers three interdependencies.

5.2 Interdependence in the first phase

The four tasks of the first phase are related to one another as (141) ‘successive partial objects in the cumulative process that inquiry promotes from experiencing to understanding, that reflection promotes from understanding to judging, that deliberation promotes from judging to deciding. Such a structure is essentially open. Experience is

given meaning
truth
encounter

open to further data. Understanding to a fuller and more penetrating grasp. Judgment to acknowledgment of new and more adequate perspectives, of more nuanced pronouncements, of more detailed information. Decision, finally, is reached only partially by dialectic, which tends to eliminate evidently foolish oppositions and so narrows down issues, but is not to be expected to go to the roots of all conflict for, ultimately, conflicts have their ground in the heart of man.'

Again outside of theology

The interdependence of the specialties in the first phase is reciprocal. 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 (142) '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. 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 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. These interdependencies create a general interdependence of the two phases.

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, as we will see.

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.’