

Essays in Systematic Theology 10: Reflections on Method in Systematic Theology¹

This paper presents some reflections on method in systematic theology, and more precisely on some of the relationships between the systematic ideal and the reality of history. The proximate collaborative context² to which these remarks are related is the one that takes its origin and inspiration from the work of Bernard Lonergan. There is, I believe, unfinished business in what Lonergan wrote about systematic theology, especially in *Method in Theology*, and it has largely to do with the complex relationships between system and history. That is what I wish to address. But I can do so only in part, as I will explain in a moment. I hope that these reflections might be of interest to theologians working in other contexts, and that dialogue on these issues will broaden and enrich the context in which I am working.

Lonergan taught systematic theology at two Jesuit seminaries in Canada in the 1940s and 1950s and at the Gregorian University in the 1950s and the early 1960s. Within the late Scholastic context of those institutions, he made remarkable contributions to systematic theology in his courses, especially through his own notes and texts. He also became increasingly aware during these years (most of which predated the Second Vatican Council) of the inadequacy of the entire late Scholastic context. *Method in Theology* established a related but also radically different context,³ in which systematics

1 First published in *Lonergan Workshop* 17 (2002) 23-51.

2 'Context' is understood as an 'interweaving of questions and answers in limited groups.' See Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006) 163.

3 The relation of the context of *Method* to the best of Scholasticism is genetic, not dialectical, but the difference can be explained only by appealing to the notion of a higher viewpoint as opposed to a homogeneous expansion.

becomes one of eight functional or operational specialties, with a complex series of relations to the other seven.

But the chapter on systematics in *Method in Theology* leaves a number of questions unanswered. I am not alone in regarding it as the weakest chapter in the book. The issue is not what Lonergan *does* say there (and elsewhere) about systematics. The issue is that further questions emerge and are not answered, thus revealing that more is to be said.

I attempted to address some of the questions that emerged for me in *Theology and the Dialectics of History*,⁴ where I argued that systematics should be a theology of history and tried to derive some of the principal general categories⁵ of such a systematics, drawing on but, I think, also expanding Lonergan's theory of history. Three articles on grace express a cumulative attempt to make more precise the transposition that Lonergan offers from the category of 'sanctifying grace' in a metaphysical theology to the category of 'being-in-love' in a methodical theology that takes historical consciousness seriously.⁶ And three recent articles in *Theological Studies* addressed, in succession, the relation between Lonergan and Hans Urs von Balthasar (and, less centrally, liberation theology) in their respective importance for the future of systematic theology; the contributions of

4 Robert M. Doran, *Theology and the Dialectics of History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1009, 2001).

5 'General categories' are categories that theology shares with other disciplines. See Lonergan, *Method in Theology* 285-88.

6 See Robert M. Doran, 'Consciousness and Grace,' *Method: Journal of Lonergan Studies* 11 (1993) 51-75; 'Revisiting "Consciousness and Grace,"' *Method: Journal of Lonergan Studies* 13 (1995) 151-59; "'Complacency and Concern" and a Basic Thesis on Grace,' *Lonergan Workshop* 13 (1997) 57-78. 2009: These are now the first three Essays in Systematic Theology on this website.

Lonergan's writings about methodological issues in systematics as well as the further questions that arise from these contributions; and the complexities of the relationship between systematics and history.⁷

In the present contribution I revisit some of the issues raised in these various works. I will employ the framework that I presented in the second *Theological Studies* article, which focused on Lonergan and the functions of systematic theology; but my presentation is governed by further questions that have arisen as I have tried to teach this material.⁸

⁷ Robert M. Doran, 'Lonergan and Balthasar: Methodological Considerations,' *Theological Studies* 58 (1997) 61-84; 'Bernard Lonergan and the Functions of Systematic Theology,' *Theological Studies* 59 (1998) 569-607; 'System and History: The Challenge to Catholic Systematic Theology,' *Theological Studies* 60 (1999) 652-78. These articles are now Essays in Systematic Theology 4-6 on this website.

⁸ This work has been accompanied by a parallel effort at interpreting Lonergan's own writings on systematics. The *Theological Studies* articles are, in the last analysis, statements in direct discourse: they state my own position regarding a number of methodological issues in systematics. But behind them lies a series of studies of Lonergan's own texts, and these studies continue to go forward. See 'The First Chapter of *De Deo Trino, Pars Systematica: The Issues*,' *Method: Journal of Lonergan Studies* 18 (2000) 27-48 and '*Intelligentia Fidei in De Deo Trino: Pars Systematica*,' *Method: Journal of Lonergan Studies* 19 (2001) 35-83. (2009: These are Essays in Systematic Theology 7 and 9 on this website.) As Lonergan found it impossible to include in the same volume both his interpretations of Aquinas on understanding and inner word and his own transposition and development of Aquinas's views in the light of contemporary issues, so I have found it necessary to assign to distinct texts work in indirect and direct discourse.

The principal questions that sparked this discussion were treated in seven distinct but related sections in the second of the *Theological Studies* articles mentioned in note 7. The third article develops in some detail a theme that runs through several of these seven sections, namely, the complex relationship of system and history. In the present paper I will speak briefly to some of the issues that I raised in discussing the first six of these seven areas, in light of the questions that have arisen in conversation and teaching subsequent to the publication of the articles. Limits on the length of a deliverable paper prevent me from discussing the section on ‘Anticipations,’ except very obliquely. Material related to and building on the other two *Theological Studies* articles will be raised as these six areas are discussed. The question of system and history runs through all of the points that will be treated, but I do not touch in detail on all of the emphases that were covered in the *Theological Studies* article expressly devoted to system and history. More precisely, in that article I raised four quite distinct but related issues: (1) adjudicating the past genetic and dialectical history of theological systems and including that history in systematics as part of a theology of theologies that would also include an ongoing appropriation of the religious truth of non-Christian traditions; (2) anticipating a future genetic sequence of related systematic achievements; (3) accepting history itself as the mediated object of systematics; and (4) purposefully facing the intimate relations between systematic thought and options regarding praxis. Here I will not focus on the first two of these emphases, though those themes do run obliquely through a couple of the issues. My stress will be rather on the notion of history as mediated object of systematics, on grounds or foundations that can govern that kind of emphasis, and on the social responsibility of a theology that knows that its task is to ‘[mediate] between a cultural matrix and the significance and role of a religion in that matrix.’⁹

⁹ Lonergan, *Method in Theology* xi.

Finally, I conclude this paper with a new question, one that was not raised in the articles on which the rest of this paper is based. It has to do with the respective extent of contingent and necessary predications about God and with what (unless I am missing something) seems to be a need for a development in the theory of relations.

I will begin here, however, as I did in the second of the articles in *Theological Studies*, by insisting on the importance of four emphases that can be found in Lonergan's writings about methodological issues in systematic theology.

1 Four Emphases from Lonergan

Lonergan's texts on systematics contain at least four emphases that I believe are essential to the discipline or functional specialty.

The first of these is stated most clearly in *Method in Theology*, where he states that the *principal function* of systematics is to promote the kind of understanding of the mysteries of faith that was recommended by the First Vatican Council, when the Council wrote that 'reason illumined by faith, when it inquires diligently, piously, soberly, can with God's help¹⁰ attain a highly fruitful understanding of the mysteries of faith both from the analogy of what it naturally knows and from the interconnection of the mysteries with one another and with [our] last end (DS 3016).'¹¹

Next, in *De Deo trino: Pars systematica*, in the fourth section of chapter 1, Lonergan recommends that the core or central problems of systematics are those raised by the defined dogmas; here is where the theologian will find those core meanings of the

10 *Deo dante*, perhaps to be translated more strongly ('by God's gift') to emphasize the element of grace in theological understanding.

11 Lonergan, *Method in Theology* 336.

Church's faith around which a systematic synthesis can most expeditiously and most faithfully be constructed.¹²

Third, in almost everything he wrote about systematics, Lonergan stressed that its proper order is what Thomas Aquinas called the *ordo doctrinae*. Lonergan provides perhaps as complete an explanation as we are likely to find of the difference between this 'order of teaching' and the order of discovery.¹³

12 The key passage here is Bernard Lonergan, *The Triune God: Systematics*, vol. 12 in *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, trans. Michael G. Shields, ed. Robert M. Doran and H. Daniel Monsour (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007) 32-37.

13 The differences are spelled out most clearly and most completely in the first chapter of *The Triune God: Systematics*. This text can be filled out with a refinement that can be found in Part 3 of Bernard Lonergan, *The Ontological and Psychological Constitution of Christ*, vol. 7 in *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, trans. Michael G. Shields, ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007). The refinement has to do with the nature of the *priora quoad se* in theology, at least when one is making statements about God. In brief, while systematics begins with the *priora quoad se*, still, when such statements have to do with God, one is not talking about the causes of being, for God has no causes of being. In such statements, the *priora quoad se* and the *priora quoad nos* both have to do with the causes of our knowing. The *priora quoad se* are true statements about God that are the causes of our knowing other truths about God, or that articulate the ground of the truth of other true statements.

In this paper I will be adding several points to what I have already written about the relation of Lonergan to Hans Urs von Balthasar, and one of these is that there is some question of the extent to which Balthasar grasps, either in fact or with reflective explicitness, the distinction of *priora quoad se* and *priora quoad nos* or the

And finally, there is the stress on explanation, on theory grounded in interiorly and religiously differentiated consciousness, and on the employment of both general categories that theology shares with other disciplines and special categories that are peculiar to theology.¹⁴

corresponding distinction of *via doctrinae* and *via inventionis*. On the negative side of the ledger is the statement at the beginning of the third volume of the English translation of the dramatics in which he speaks disparagingly of ‘the usual textbook approach, which starts from an essentialist Christology that claims to have prior knowledge of Jesus’ essential nature as the Incarnate Word even before the action begins, only subsequently moving over to a dramatic soteriology (christological doctrine of grace).’ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, vol. 3: *The Dramatis Personae: The Person in Christ*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992) 13-14. The fact that a systematic Christology begins with the *priora quoad se* at least in the order of knowing is not *in itself* a legitimate ground for criticism, nor does it *in itself* warrant the charge of ‘essentialist.’ The proper beginning of a systematic treatise lies in what is *prius quoad se*. The statement probably reveals that Balthasar is moving for the most part in the *via analytica* or *via inventionis* rather than in the *via doctrinae*, and that he may not appreciate sufficiently the difference between the two procedures. On the other side of the hermeneutic ledger, however, Balthasar has his own *ordo doctrinae*, for when he has reached a turning point that enables him to return to the concrete data of revelation with an organizing principle (which is usually dramatic or aesthetic), he moves quite securely (some might say, dogmatically) in the ‘order of teaching,’ almost banning any further questions in the way of discovery.

14 On the categories, see Lonergan, *Method in Theology* 281-93. On theory grounded in interiority, the following statement is particularly significant: ‘For every term and

2 Mystery and Dogma

The first question that I will address will occupy more attention than the others, since it sets up the others and brings us into the area of the ‘foundations’ or grounds of what we are about. The question is, What is the relation of ‘defined dogmas’ and ‘mysteries of faith’? The point of this section may be stated at the outset. There are elements of Christian mystery that will best be understood by employing analogies from aesthetics and dramatic theory; on this point I am in agreement with Balthasar. On the other hand, Balthasar needs critical controls to keep his thought from slipping over into mythic consciousness, in the pejorative sense of that term, to ensure the explanatory significance of the analogies, and to highlight the social dimensions of the drama of the encounter of divine and human freedom. Those critical controls are found in Lonergan’s post-*Method* paper ‘Natural Right and Historical Mindedness,’¹⁵ complemented by the explicit affirmation of an aesthetic-dramatic operator.

Now let us proceed to the somewhat circuitous argumentation that leads to these affirmations. On my interpretation of Lonergan’s interpretation of the First Vatican Council’s doctrine about doctrine, a Church doctrine can qualify as ‘dogma’ only if it expresses a supernatural mystery that is otherwise so hidden in God that we could not know it at all had it not been revealed by God.¹⁶ Doctrines are of various sorts,¹⁷ but my

relation there will exist a corresponding element in intentional consciousness.’ Ibid. 343.

15 Lonergan, ‘Natural Right and Historical Mindedness,’ in *A Third Collection*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1985).

16 ‘[T]he dogmas of DS 3020 and 3043 refer to the church’s declarations of revealed mysteries’ (Lonergan, *Method in Theology* 322). ‘The meaning of a dogma is not a datum but a truth. It is not a human truth but the revelation of a mystery hidden in God’ (ibid. 323).

concern has been to explore some implications of a twofold differentiation. First, among the Church's doctrines some express mysteries of faith and some do not. Second, among the Church doctrines that express mysteries of faith, some have received dogmatic status and others have not. Viewed in this way, dogma is a subset, twice removed, of the category 'Church doctrines.'

Systematic theology, the synthetic and technical understanding of the meanings constitutive of the Christian Church, is organized around that subset. Lonergan not only recommends this procedure; he also provides a systematic statement that could qualify as a synthetic distillation of dogmatic meaning around which an entire systematic theology could be organized. I quote from *De Deo trino: Pars systematica* 234-35 (*The Triune God: Systematics* 470-73) the following quite remarkable four-point systematic hypothesis.¹⁸

... there are four real divine relations, really identical with the divine substance, and therefore there are four very special modes that ground the external imitation of the

17 Lonergan distinguishes primary sources, church doctrines, dogmas, theological doctrines enunciated in distinct traditions, methodological doctrine, and finally those theological doctrines that one selects by applying a methodological doctrine to the multiple choices presented in dialectical encounter with all of the other varieties (and, I might add, with the situation that prevails in one's own cultural matrix). See Lonergan, *Method in Theology* 295-98.

18 I am not claiming that Lonergan intended this hypothesis to have the centrality that I am recommending we grant to it. In fact, there is no explicit evidence that he did. 2009: This footnote was written before I had an opportunity to study Lonergan's notes for a course on sanctifying grace that he taught in 1951-52. In these notes the hypothesis already appears and is granted the status of being the foundational statement in a theology of grace. See www.bernardlonergan.com at 20500DTL040.

divine substance. Next, there are four absolutely supernatural realities, which are never found uninformed, namely, the secondary act of existence of the incarnation, sanctifying grace, the habit of charity, and the light of glory. It would not be inappropriate, therefore, to say that the secondary act of existence of the incarnation is a created participation of paternity, and so has a special relation to the Son; that sanctifying grace is a participation of active spiration, and so has a special relation to the Holy Spirit; that the habit of charity is a participation of passive spiration, and so has a special relation to the Father and the Son; and that the light of glory is a participation of sonship, and so in a most perfect way brings the children of adoption back to the Father.

The statement expresses a synthetic understanding of the mysteries affirmed in dogmas regarding the Trinity, the incarnation, grace, and the life everlasting, and so it is equipped, at least in principle, to serve as a basic systematic theorem and eventually, with further additions and qualifications that I will mention later, as the core statement of a systematic construction.

We can grant all this and still realize that systematic theology is more than an understanding of dogmas. Let me attempt a definition. Systematic theology is the ordered, coherent, hypothetical, gradually developing, structured, synthetic, and in places analogical and obscure understanding of the realities intended in the meanings constitutive of the community that is the Church. Lonergan emphasizes, I believe correctly, that it is centered on the mysteries so hidden in God that we could not know them at all unless they were revealed, and more precisely on those mysteries of faith that have received dogmatic status in the Church. Its other functions are subordinate to this one. Still, the correlation of dogma and mystery is a one-way correlation. That is, 'dogma' is limited in fact as well as in principle to certain affirmations, and at times (as in the conciliar definitions establishing Christological and Trinitarian dogmas)

clarifications, of mysteries of faith. But the ‘mysteries of faith,’ even some of those included in the creed, include more than the realities affirmed and clarified in explicitly dogmatic pronouncements.¹⁹ While dogma is dogma because and only if it affirms mysteries, mysteries extend far beyond what has been clarified or perhaps ever will be (or even can be) expressed in dogmatic statements, and this in at least two ways. First, there are elements of revealed mystery that have received and perhaps will receive no dogmatic status. Second, and just as important, the element of mystery is a permanent feature even of those elements of Christian constitutive meaning that *have* received such status. If we agree with Lonergan that systematics does best to draw its central problems from dogmatic statements, we must also ask about the rest, and in asking about the rest we are asking about the meaning of the category ‘mystery of faith’ itself. What grounds the synthetic inclusion in systematic theology of elements of the Christian mystery that have not been and perhaps never will be formulated in dogmatic pronouncements?²⁰ Are there

19 ‘On the third day he rose again from the dead.’ ‘For us and for our salvation,’ etc., etc., etc. The relationship between creed and dogma is complex. Some of the elements are treated in Bernard Lonergan, ‘Theology as Christian Phenomenon,’ in *Philosophical and Theological Papers 1958-1964*, vol. 6 in *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, ed. Robert C. Croken, Frederick E. Crowe, and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996) 262-69, where conciliar dogmas are presented as clarifications and delimitations of the meaning of creedal statements, required because of particular historical circumstances. Thus the Apostles’ Creed left itself open to an Arian interpretation, and this was one of the reasons that the Nicene dogma was necessary.

20 In ‘Bernard Lonergan and the Functions of Systematic Theology,’ I used the examples of the scriptural doctrines on both resurrection and redemption, and of the theological doctrines found in many forms in the church’s tradition with regard to the meaning,

aesthetic and dramatic analogies that can function in systematic theology? If so, how can they be made explanatory?

At this point I wish to go a bit beyond what I wrote in the previous articles, first by suggesting the category of ‘permanently elemental meaning,’ and second by integrating it with some themes in Lonergan’s ‘Natural Right and Historical Mindedness.’

From a descriptive point of view, permanently elemental meaning is meaning that will always be carried in bearers or carriers of meaning other than technical language: in primordial intersubjectivity, art, symbols, and the incarnate actions of persons and groups; in the symbolic, aesthetic, dramatic terms of scripture, literature, and drama, and not in the quasi-technical, post-systematic, metaphysically influenced formulation that characterizes most of the Church’s dogmatic pronouncements.

For a more explanatory understanding of what permanently elemental meaning might be, we may turn to Lonergan’s discussion of elemental meaning in the context of

the immanent intelligibility, of both resurrection and redemption. Resurrection and redemption are both core elements in the Creed. But there is no explicit church dogma that does for either of these mysteries what Nicea and Chalcedon do for the mystery of the incarnation, the divinity of the incarnate Word, and the ontological constitution of Christ. And yet the resurrection and the redemption are at the core of the constitutive meaning of the Christian community, and they are there precisely as mysteries of faith. Thus, while dogma defines mysteries of faith, the mysteries of faith extend beyond what has been or will be formulated in explicit dogmatic pronouncements, and systematic understanding must include these mysteries as well as those that have been dogmatically affirmed. If systematics is an understanding of the mysteries of faith, it includes an understanding of these nondogmatic elements. A methodological statement on systematics must account for such understanding.

his treatment of *art* and *symbols* as carriers of meaning.²¹ Permanently elemental meaning would be meaning that resides permanently in an ‘experiential pattern’ that does not intend something other than itself. Again, it is meaning that, like a dream symbol, ‘has its proper context in the process of internal communication in which it occurs,’ or like a smile or a gesture finds its proper context in a process of intersubjective communication, and not in some subsequent analytic interpretation.²² It is always possible to set elemental meaning more or less adequately within a conceptual field – there are art critics and dream interpreters and social psychologists – but never by so doing to reproduce the elemental meaning itself. ‘The proper expression of the elemental meaning is the work of art itself.’²³ The proper context of the elemental symbol, such as the dream, is the developing or declining conscious intentionality (and, I might add, nonintentional consciousness) of the imagining or perceiving or dreaming subject.²⁴

If we may grant the possibility of permanently elemental meaning, we must ask about the relation to such meaning of systematic theology. To speak of the permanently elemental meaning of some mysteries of faith is not to claim that systematic theology must reproduce elemental meaning in the manner of a work of art or a dream or a

21 Lonergan, *Method in Theology* 63, 67.

22 See *ibid.* 67.

23 *Ibid.* 63.

24 See *ibid.* 67. The addition of ‘nonintentional’ is important. Nonintentional feelings and states are far more significant than might be gathered from Lonergan’s brief discussion (*Method in Theology* 30). To give but one illustration, if consolation without a cause is consolation with a content but without an apprehended object, then it is a nonintentional state. (2009: I have subsequently qualified this, as will be clear in other essays in this series.) On consolation without a preceding cause, see Lonergan, *Method in Theology* 106.

dramatic portrayal. Systematic theology is technical discourse, and technical discourse can never reproduce elemental meaning. The issue is rather one of remaining faithful to the elemental meaning, not distorting it, and the relevant question for systematics is, Whence are derived the analogies that will render such technical discourse possible? More precisely (to link the discussion with the work of Balthasar), can some systematic analogies be drawn from aesthetics and dramatic theory? Again, in terms quite familiar to Lonergan and his students, how do we derive the appropriate categories? Or again, if we may employ aesthetic and dramatic analogies, how can we ensure that they achieve an explanatory significance?

Metaphysical analogies characterize the Scholastic search for theological understanding. Even in a dimension that is as laden with dramatic significance as the theology of grace, Aquinas demonstrated the power of metaphysical analogies. He understood sanctifying grace by analogy with the habit as understood in Aristotelian metaphysical analysis. He understood actual grace, or what he called *auxilium divinum*, by analogy with operation, again as understood in Aristotelian metaphysical analysis.²⁵ But Lonergan, who studied with meticulous precision Aquinas's texts on grace, nonetheless says in the Epilogue of *Insight*, '... the theologian is under no necessity of reducing to the metaphysical elements, which suffice for an account of this world, such supernatural realities as the incarnation, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and the beatific vision.'²⁶ The basis of this statement is 'a very relevant distinction between the more

25 See Bernard Lonergan, *Grace and Freedom: Operative Grace in the Thought of St Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 1 in *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000) chapters I-3 and I-4.

26 Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, vol. 3 in *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran (Toronto:

detailed metaphysics of proportionate being and the generalities that alone are available a priori on ... supernatural elements.’²⁷ Balthasar has great respect for the theological significance of the metaphysics of Aquinas.²⁸ But he insists as well that the analogies that would best enable a properly theological understanding of at least some of the mysteries of faith will be drawn, not from that metaphysics, but from aesthetics and dramatic theory.²⁹ In this I want to agree with him, without at all calling into question the parallel

University of Toronto Press, 1992) 756.

27 Ibid.

28 ‘The metaphysics of Thomas is ... the philosophical reflection of the free glory of the living God of the Bible and in this way the interior completion of ancient (and thus human) philosophy. It is a celebration of the reality of the real, of that all-embracing mystery of being which surpasses the powers of human thought, a mystery pregnant with the very mystery of God, a mystery in which creatures have access to participation in the reality of God, a mystery which in its nothingness and non-subsistence is shot through with the light of the freedom of the creative principle of unfathomable love.’ Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, vol. 4, *The Realm of Metaphysics in Antiquity*, trans. ed. John Riches (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989) 406-407.

29 See the example in *Theo-drama*, vol. 3, p. 35, which is the sort of thing Balthasar would build into a full-scale dramatic analogy: ‘Even at the purely human level, it is the case that a freely given grace can bring happiness and liberation to the one who receives it, but, if the latter is proud, he can be humiliated and oppressed by it. In the former case, the recipient’s liberated freedom unites with the freedom of the proffered grace; in the latter case, paradoxically, the one who refuses grace, which (alone) could bring him fulfillment, tries to be free and self-fulfilled and fails.’ And on the next page: ‘It is from this dramatic dimension immanent in human nature that the entire

need for as much metaphysical monitoring of theological meaning as we can achieve. But while agreeing with Balthasar on this question, I also want to emphasize that a concern for method in theology is a concern for some critical control over the process of deriving such analogies and their categories, and to suggest that Balthasar does not always explicitly manifest that control. I have already mentioned the ambiguity in his work regarding the distinction of the way of discovery and the way of teaching. Two other problems, more theological than methodological, are (1) the fact that his trinitarian dramatics is sometimes dangerously close to mythic consciousness;³⁰ and (2) the absence from his work of any appropriate general categories for discussing the peculiarly *social* dimensions of the human and theological drama.³¹

Such problems do not deter us from facing the question of deriving aesthetic and dramatic analogies for the systematic understanding of some of the mysteries of faith. What could dogma expressed in post-theoretical or post-systematic language do, for example, for the truth of the redemption? It could perhaps protect that truth against error

action of the theo-drama, with regard to the individual and mankind as a whole, will be developed.'

30 What controls does Balthasar offer to prevent the drama of the Trinitarian processions as portrayed in the section on the dawn of divine freedom in the second volume of *Theo-drama* from collapsing into an affirmation of the contingency, and so creaturehood, of Son and Spirit? Nothing except dogmatic affirmation, which is not enough in *systematic* theology, where dogmas are to be *understood*. See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-drama*, vol. 2, *Dramatis Personae: Man in God*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990) 243-60.

31 I pointed to this problem in 'Lonergan and Balthasar,' but it is much more fully developed in Thomas G. Dalzell, 'Lack of Social Drama in Balthasar's Theological Dramatics,' *Theological Studies* 60: 3 (1999) 457-75.

or aberration by insisting that a revelational soteriology, while perhaps the beginning of a theology of redemption, is not enough. It might perhaps clarify the meaning of the creedal 'for us and for our salvation' in the context of the dialogue of the world religions. But *what* it would be clarifying (he died for our sins and was raised for our justification) may perhaps never be able to receive the kind of quasi-technical, post-systematic, metaphysically governed, dogmatic-realist meaning that *homoousion* expressed in response to the questions that it was formulated to answer. *Homoousion* responded to an exigency for positive conceptual clarification that could not be satisfied without the move to at least a 'tincture of systematic meaning.'³² But it may be that the best articulation of the mystery of redemption remains forever the symbolic expression of a 'position' or the aesthetic and/or dramatic presentation of a truth that, affirmed as truth, is constitutive of the community of believers. The issue is not one of metaphysics or science of any sort, but rather one of getting the story right, of not distorting what is essentially a narrative of the relations between divine freedom and human freedom. Again, and beyond what I suggested in the *Theological Studies* articles, there is a distinct possibility that an adaptation of René Girard's work on violence and the sacred can contribute to soteriology, but the adaptation will not consist in moving *from* symbolic to metaphysical categories. It will consist, rather, in an explanatory employment of the symbols themselves, a further immersion in the symbolic categories so as to be able to employ them in a fashion that grasps the relations *to one another* of various elements in the drama. Metaphysical categories will go only so far in elucidating drama. The explanation of drama, that is, the relating to one another of the moments constitutive of the drama, has to look beyond metaphysics for the framework that will make possible what we are looking for.

32 Lonergan, *Method in Theology* 329.

Such questions must be faced in a methodological prolegomenon to systematics, and they push us back to the grounds or foundations of systematic understanding. Lonergan was prepared to admit that those grounds at times have to do with ‘the refinement of human feelings,’³³ with the emergence of a Christian religious sensibility, with the aesthetic and dramatic constitution of Christian living. And if that is so, then he was perhaps anticipating a dimension to theological foundations that he did not expressly articulate until after *Method in Theology*, namely, the dimension that I have attempted to indicate in speaking of a ‘psychic conversion.’³⁴

If these questions are at all on target, then what is at stake is the expanded normative source of meaning that Lonergan presents in some of his later writings, and especially in ‘Mission and the Spirit’ and ‘Natural Right and Historical Mindedness.’ It is this expanded normative source of meaning that will enable us to answer the questions, How is mystery preserved in systematic theology? What are the grounds that will enable systematic theology to articulate an understanding of a mystery that can be expressed best, not in technical language, but in the other carriers of meaning?

In ‘Natural Right and Historical Mindedness,’ the issue is whether, once historical consciousness or ‘historical mindedness’ is acknowledged and embraced, there are still norms that can be specified to govern, not so much the behavior and performance of the individual subject, but the collaborative responsibility of communities, social institutions, and societies themselves. Lonergan responds to the question by focusing on meaning; he

33 I refer here to his discussion of the Marian dogmas. See *ibid.* 320.

34 The most complete articulation to date of what I mean by psychic conversion is found in *Theology and the Dialectics of History*, chapters 2, 6-10 *passim*. The notion is developed further in the present contribution, introducing the notion of an aesthetic-dramatic operator; here new dimensions are suggested beyond those expressed in *Theology and the Dialectics of History*.

restates his familiar theory of history (progress-decline-redemption) in terms of meaning; and he states that there is a *normative* source of meaning in history, as well as a total and dialectical source of meaning. The normative source is expanded beyond his more familiar earlier presentations, to yield a twofold reality. The normative source consists, first, of the operators of conscious intentionality: questions for intelligence, questions for reflection, and questions for deliberation. But these several principles of integrity and authenticity are ‘but aspects of a deeper and more comprehensive principle,’ and it is this deeper and more comprehensive principle that is the expanded normative source: ‘a tidal movement that begins before consciousness, unfolds through sensitivity, intelligence, rational reflection, responsible deliberation, only to find its rest beyond all of these,’ in ‘being-in-love.’³⁵ This tidal movement is an ongoing process of self-transcendence that in another paper from the same post-*Method* period, ‘Mission and the Spirit,’ is called ‘the passionateness of being.’³⁶ Lonergan says that what he is calling the tidal movement or the passionateness of being has a dimension all its own, distinct from but intimately related to the operators and operations of intentional consciousness, a dimension that underpins, accompanies, and reaches beyond the operations of intelligent, rational, and responsible intentionality. As underpinning intentional consciousness, the passionateness of being or tidal movement is an operator that presides over the transition from the neural to the psychic, the unconscious to the conscious. As accompanying intentional consciousness it is the mass and momentum, the color and tone and power, of feeling. As reaching beyond or overarching intentional consciousness it is the operator of community.³⁷ In its totality it is a series of operators that I propose we call aesthetic-

35 Lonergan, ‘Natural Right and Historical Mindedness’ 175.

36 Lonergan, ‘Mission and the Spirit,’ in *A Third Collection* at 29.

37 In ‘Philosophy and the Religious Phenomenon,’ Lonergan speaks explicitly of ‘operators’ at the ‘lowest’ and ‘highest’ levels (more tentatively regarding the lowest

dramatic. These join with the intentional operators (questions for intelligence, questions for reflection, and questions for deliberation) to yield the normative source of meaning in history. What I have, for better or for worse, called psychic conversion is the link between the two sets of operators; it is a turning of intentional consciousness to its aesthetic-dramatic counterpart. Psychic conversion is, if you will, a generalization, indeed a habituation, of *conversio ad phantasma*. It is from the ongoing clarification and appropriation of the aesthetic-dramatic operators that the *explanatory* use of aesthetic and dramatic categories and the development of aesthetic and dramatic analogies will be possible in systematic theology. It is such a habituation of the *conversio ad phantasma* that will keep systematic theology in touch with the mystery that it is attempting to understand.

level, quite confidently regarding the highest). See Lonergan, 'Philosophy and the Religious Phenomenon,' posthumously published in *METHOD: Journal of Lonergan Studies* 12:2 (1994) 125-46, and reprinted in vol. 17 of *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan, Philosophical and Theological Papers 1965-1980*, ed. Robert C. Croken and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005). In other works, found in *A Third Collection*, he limited himself to speaking of quasi-operators at both the primordial symbolic level and at the upper level of community, solidarity, and love. From the beginning of my discussion of psychic conversion, I insisted on speaking of an 'operator' at the 'lowest' level. Moreover, there is mention of a sensitive operator in the treatment of mystery at the beginning of chapter 17 of *Insight*. ('Philosophy and the Religious Phenomenon' is important in other respects as well, not the least of which is the mention of six levels of consciousness, four of which are intentional.)

3 Theological Doctrines

A second area of development or expansion has to do with the notion of theological doctrines. While systematics is centered in an understanding of the mysteries of faith, it is not limited to such mysteries, even when the notion of ‘mysteries of faith’ is taken in the more inclusive sense that we have just indicated. Systematics is an understanding of doctrines, yes, but there are other doctrines, both theological and ecclesial, that systematic theologians attempt to work into their synthesis, besides those that directly express the mysteries of faith. In particular, there are *theological* doctrines that one receives from the tradition or from one’s contemporaries, or perhaps that one has developed on one’s own. Moreover, these appropriated theological doctrines themselves have systematic implications. Thus elements of other *systematic* syntheses are part of the *doctrinal* inventory of a contemporary systematic theologian.

This position has support in some statements in *Method in Theology*. The clearest expression of the point is made near the beginning of the chapter on doctrines, when Lonergan writes that the doctrines ‘meant in the title of the present chapter’ are ‘theological doctrines reached by the application of a method that distinguishes functional specialties and uses the functional specialty, foundations, to select doctrines from among the multiple choices presented by the functional specialty, dialectic.’³⁸ Theological doctrines thus understood obviously include the mysteries of faith, but they include far more. And their immediate context is the academic discipline called theology, not the ongoing devotional and doctrinal life of the church. While the academic context is distinct from the doctrinal context of the church confessions, it interacts with the latter context, so that in the process of church history we may trace moments in which theological doctrines influenced later church doctrines even while church doctrines

38 Lonergan, *Method in Theology* 298.

provided basic elements to be formulated and reformulated theologically in ever new contexts.

What, though, are the tests that, if passed, would endow systematic theological achievements with a certain doctrinal status? What sorts of things transpire in theological study itself to confer on some of its achievements something of a doctrinal status, if not for the church at least for subsequent theologians? In the article ‘Bernard Lonergan and the Functions of Systematic Theology,’ I mentioned three theological positions to which I would grant this kind of doctrinal status, and subsequently I have realized that each of these manifests and fulfills a different criterion. So I will speak briefly here of three distinct criteria, without attempting to be exhaustive.

First, a theological achievement may be granted a certain doctrinal status because one judges that *it has brought definitive closure to a particular theological debate*. A theological achievement that has assumed doctrinal status for me on these grounds is the position of Aquinas on operative and cooperative grace expressed in the *Prima secundae* of the *Summa theologiae*, q. 111, a. 2, precisely as that position has been interpreted by Lonergan.³⁹ For that interpretation brings definitive closure, in my view, to the *de auxiliis* controversy, pronouncing a plague on both houses.

Second, one may grant to a given analogy a certain doctrinal status because one judges that *it is the only analogy of nature yet discovered and developed that is useful for understanding a particular divine mystery*. I continue to maintain that this is the case for the Thomist psychological analogy for the trinitarian processions. If one grants that these are processions of Word and Love (and there is certainly scriptural warrant for doing so), then I do not see how one can refuse to turn to the psychological analogy for systematic understanding of these processions.

39 Lonergan, *Grace and Freedom*.

The analogy can continue to be better understood and more profoundly applied. This Lonergan has done in the *pars systematica* of his *De Deo trino*; and he has suggested a further and more radical development in a later suggestion that would find the analogy in a movement of consciousness ‘from above’ rather than ‘from below.’⁴⁰

40 ‘The psychological analogy ... has its starting point in that higher synthesis of intellectual, rational, and moral consciousness that is the dynamic state of being in love. Such love manifests itself in its judgments of value. And the judgments are carried out in decisions that are acts of loving. Such is the analogy found in the creature.

‘Now in God the origin is the Father, in the New Testament named *ho Theos*, who is identified with *agapē* ... Such love expresses itself in its Word, its Logos, its *verbum spirans amorem*, which is a judgment of value. The judgment of value is sincere, and so it grounds the Proceeding Love that is identified with the Holy Spirit.

‘There are then two processions that may be conceived in God; they are not unconscious processes but intellectually, rationally, morally conscious, as are judgments of value based on the evidence perceived by a lover, and the acts of loving grounded on judgments of value. The two processions ground four real relations of which three are really distinct from one another; and these three are not just relations as relations, and so modes of being, but also subsistent, and so not just paternity and filiation [and passive spiration] but also Father and Son [and Holy Spirit]. Finally, Father and Son and Spirit are eternal; their consciousness is not in time but timeless; their subjectivity is not becoming but ever itself; and each in his own distinct manner is subject of the infinite act that God is, the Father as originating love, the Son as judgment of value expressing that love, and the Spirit as originated loving.’ Bernard Lonergan, ‘Christology Today: Methodological Reflections,’ in *A Third Collection* 93-94.

But I do not believe that any other analogy ‘works’ to provide the sort of understanding of this particular mystery that qualifies genuinely as systematic-theological understanding. If indeed it is the proper analogy, then it may be assumed that it will provide the resources as well to integrate important issues being raised in contemporary Trinitarian systematics, and especially the relation of the ‘immanent Trinity’ to history and to the Paschal mystery. In fact, if one judges as I do that it is the only satisfactory analogy, then one must wager that it will successfully illuminate these issues, and one must set oneself the task of showing that this indeed is the case. In the process, the analogy itself is likely to undergo further development.

Third, there are doctrines that one may judge express *inescapable practical conclusions of the gospel*. The doctrine of liberation theology regarding the preferential option for the poor (a theological doctrine that has become church doctrine, by the way) is a clear instance of the fulfillment of this criterion.

These, then, would be some of the reasons why a particular theological achievement may assume something of a doctrinal status for a given theologian or tradition in theology.⁴¹

41 These criteria can be complemented by some suggestions that Lonergan presents in *Divinarum personarum* (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1957, 1959) 16 (‘*Sexto ...*’) regarding the sources from which theological hypotheses can acquire a certain measure of truth. Briefly, (1) such hypotheses can be supported by natural knowledge of God and of creatures, (2) they can be bolstered by being in harmony with what we know from revelation, and (3) the deductions that can be made from such a hypothesis can be so strongly in agreement with what we know from these other sources that they lend strong support to the hypothesis itself. 2009: This material may now be found in *The Triune God: Systematics* 746-49.

4 The Transposition of Categories

A third area where Lonergan's reflections on systematics can be filled out has to do with the transposition of categories. Again, the point is present already in Lonergan's own statements, and I am doing little more than heightening its importance and drawing attention to the difficulty of the task involved. In the second of the *Theological Studies* articles, I stay with the same three examples – grace, Trinity, and praxis – and argue for the necessity of rooting all one's categories in what Lonergan calls interiorly and religiously differentiated consciousness. '... for every term and relation there will exist a corresponding element in intentional consciousness.'⁴² Here I will limit myself to the question of the systematic theology of grace, since it is the area in which I have tried to call attention to a particular problem that I find in Lonergan's own work.

Lonergan's systematic understanding of the doctrine of grace is probably most fully expressed in a schematic supplement 'De ente supernaturali' that he wrote for a seminary course in 1946. The first thesis affirms that there exists a created communication of the divine nature through which operations are elicited in us by which we reach the very being of God. And the second thesis affirms that this created communication of the divine nature is absolutely supernatural. We can agree with both of these affirmations, and in a systematics we can attempt to explain what they mean. But there must be a difference between the way in which we would try to explain their meaning and the way that Lonergan adopted in 'De ente supernaturali'; and this difference is found in Lonergan's own insistence on what is required for a theology to be methodical. We now have to answer a question that, in that supplement, Lonergan did not face. The question is, What, *in terms of interiorly and religiously differentiated consciousness*, is an absolutely supernatural 'created communication of the divine

42 Lonergan, *Method in Theology* 343. For further and more detailed statements on the bases of the categories employed in theology, see *ibid.* 282-83.

nature'? What are the referents, in interiorly and religiously differentiated consciousness, of the metaphysical terms and relations that Lonergan employs to speak about sanctifying grace? In Scholastic metaphysical terms we are talking about an entitative habit rooted in the essence of the soul. But one can accept that Scholastic metaphysical analysis in its entirety and still not have fulfilled the contemporary exigence, for that exigence calls not only for theory but also for some foundation of theory in corresponding elements in intentional consciousness and/or religious experience. Only then will the contemporary reader have some idea of precisely what is being affirmed. It is the task of systematic theology to answer that question on the level of one's own time: What in the world do these doctrines mean?

I have made three successive attempts at an approximation to an adequate formulation of these theological doctrines in categories derived from interiorly and religiously differentiated consciousness.⁴³ I am mindful that further development is required. The three attempts are evidence of the difficulty of transposing from the metaphysical context of medieval theology to the interiority context of contemporary thought. The systematic issue is one of finding terms and relations in religious experience itself that correspond to the distinction of sanctifying grace and charity that Lonergan in 'De ente supernaturali' takes from Aquinas and that he systematizes in his own way in the four-point systematic hypothesis or theorem that I have already presented. Lonergan's own expressions in terms of an exegesis of Romans 5.5 do not quite do the job, at least in that they do not always emphasize clearly enough that the phrase 'of God' in the verse, 'The love of God is poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who is given us' is a subjective genitive. The verse is speaking of God's own love, given to us in the gift of the Holy Spirit. Lonergan's texts are ambiguous on the issue, as is evidenced by the interpretation that has been given them even by some of the best Lonergan scholars. It is

43 See above, note 6.

divine love that has been poured into our hearts, and the first manifestation or indication of that gift is the experience of being on the receiving end of such a gift. Romans 5.5 is not talking about our love for God except insofar as our love for God is God's own love operative within us; it is talking about God's own love, the love that is God, given to us in grace through the mission of the Holy Spirit. That love may become our love, so that we love with the very love of God; but the issue is that we are on the receiving end of the gift of divine love, and that that 'being on the receiving end' is equivalent to what a metaphysical theology called 'sanctifying grace.' Some way must be found, in categories derived from interiorly and religiously differentiated consciousness, to express the reception of the gift. The experience of that gift, however elusive it may be, must be given more emphasis than is common in accounts of religious living.

Ultimately, only an explicit connection with the procession of the Holy Spirit, such as appears in Lonergan's four-point hypothesis, will provide the satisfactory conceptualization. That systematic hypothesis allows us to speak of sanctifying grace, however haltingly but also *sine inconvenientia*, as a created external term of the actively spirating love of Father and Son, just as the Holy Spirit is the uncreated internal term of the same love.⁴⁴ This is fundamentally what it means to be *recipients* of the mission of the Holy Spirit. That mission *is* the eternal procession of the Spirit within the divinity joined to a created external term, namely, the created participation or communication of divine life that we call sanctifying grace. Something of this gift enters into religious experience, but it has seldom been subsequently articulated with any sufficient clarity. Upon reflection we should be able to understand some of the elements of our own religious experience in this way, and so locate something in *consciousness* (precisely as

44 2009: Some developments on this articulation have appeared later in my work. They will be clear in later essays in this website series.

experience on the side of the subject, not as perception on the side of the object⁴⁵) that corresponds to that mystery that subsequent reflection enables us to *know* (on the side of the object) to be our election as recipients of the actively spirating love of Father and Son in the outpouring of their Spirit upon us. Clearly, of course, if the mystery of sanctifying grace has to do with an entitative habit, it extends beyond consciousness. But, as Karl Rahner emphasized as strongly as did the later Lonergan, it also must have some implications that can be specified in terms of religious *experience*. Such specifications provide the grounding categories for a theology of grace, the terms and relations that express an understanding of the doctrine of grace. What a theoretical theology articulated in metaphysical terms as sanctifying grace and the habit of charity can be spoken of in a methodical theology in terms of the religious experience of being on the receiving end of the gift of God's own love and of loving with that love, of being-in-love with a love that is a created participation of the Proceeding Love within the Godhead whom we call the Holy Spirit. There are two real relations within the Trinity that have to be reflected in the founding categories of a theology of grace: active spiration and passive spiration. Lonergan's four-point hypothesis states that sanctifying grace is the created external term of active spiration, and the habit of charity is the created external term of passive spiration. I am asking that some distinction be named *within religious experience itself* that will correspond to these metaphysical, theoretical affirmations. And I am suggesting that that distinction will differentiate in experience (1) being on the receiving end of the gift of God's actively spirating love and (2) loving with a love that is not our own but that is the very love of God that has been given to us.

45 The most complete discussion of the difference is in *The Ontological and Psychological Constitution of Christ*, parts 5 and 6.

5 *Vetera et Nova*

My fourth point can be stated quite briefly. It is important especially because it begins to point more directly to the need to incorporate the four-point hypothesis in a higher synthesis that formulates a systematics in the terms of history.

Categories that are transposed from the theological tradition in which one stands must be integrated with contemporary developments, whether those developments are one's own work or reflect the work of others. This integration will entail influence going both ways: the transposed traditional emphases will affect the appropriation of the contemporary developments, and these developments will affect the expressions adopted in the transpositions.

The point is best conveyed through an example. Liberation theology is an instance of contemporary theologians proposing new theological doctrines, and some of these new theological doctrines are among the doctrines that one attempts in systematics to understand. The same example shows that some of these new theological doctrines become part of the teaching of the church, while others remain affirmations that one may or may not hold without being in conflict with the church's official teaching. The systematic theologian will accept some of these doctrines among those that he or she tries to understand; and in fact, in some cases the systematic theologian will even propose some such doctrines for the first time. But my present question is, How are they to be integrated with the doctrines that one accepts from the tradition? To stay with and expand on the examples we have employed, we can ask, How are liberation emphases to be integrated with dogmas, church doctrines, and past theological doctrines regarding grace and the Trinity? Operative and cooperative grace, both habitual and actual, obviously can be integrated with the psychological analogy for understanding trinitarian processions. The basis of the integration is given in Lonergan's four-point systematic hypothesis. But

what do operative and cooperative grace, both habitual and actual, and the psychological analogy have to do with the preferential option for the poor?

The question reveals that the four-point hypothesis is only part of the framework of a contemporary systematics. To it must be added categories derived from the philosophical and theological analysis of history. In particular, theology is in effect today developing a social doctrine and systematics of grace, a theology of grace that would correspond to earlier developments regarding the social constitution of sin. Theology today is also highlighting the social and historical dimensions of the Trinitarian doctrines. Theology will integrate the affirmations it accepts from the tradition with developments going forward in our own time by placing *within a theory of history* the elaboration of the four-point hypothesis on the connections between the Trinitarian relations and created grace.

6 Mediation

Before I turn to that issue, let me address the question of mediation, since it makes even more obvious the need to make an analysis of history part of the basic framework of a contemporary systematics.

We begin with the often-quoted sentence with which Lonergan begins *Method in Theology*: ‘A theology mediates between a cultural matrix and the significance and role of a religion within that matrix.’⁴⁶ Seldom has the question been faced, What kind of mediation is performed by theology, and especially by systematic theology? In a posthumously published paper that he delivered in 1963, ‘The Mediation of Christ in Prayer,’ Lonergan distinguishes four kinds of mediation: simple mediation, self-

46 Lonergan, *Method in Theology* xi.

mediation, mutual mediation, and mutual self-mediation.⁴⁷ Which of these best fits the sort of mediation performed by the functional specialty ‘systematics’?

A full treatment of this question would entail presenting Lonergan’s understanding of each of the four types of mediation, and in fact not only creating one’s own examples of each of these types but also expressing the vision of theology that emerges if one regards the mediation between religion and a cultural matrix to be simple mediation or mutual mediation or self-mediation or mutual self-mediation. I cannot go into such intricate analysis in a paper that I am striving to contain within manageable limits, and so I will simply state the point that I am trying to make. It is that the mediation that Lonergan refers to in the opening sentence of *Method in Theology* should be regarded as a mutual self-mediation.

Mutual self-mediation occurs between two human beings when one reveals one’s own self-discovery and commitment to another and receives the self-revelation of the other; one opens oneself to be influenced at the depth of one’s being, and others open themselves to be influenced by us. But what is to be said about the mutual self-mediation of communities or of different common mentalities, different sets of constitutive meanings? At the end of his discussion of self-mediation Lonergan says that communities perform self-mediation in history, and a similar comment could well have been appended to the discussion of mutual self-mediation. The mediation of religion and culture that

47 Bernard Lonergan, ‘The Mediation of Christ in Prayer,’ in *Philosophical and Theological Papers 1958-1964*, vol. 6 in *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, ed. Robert C. Croken, Frederick E. Crowe, and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996) 160-82. Lonergan’s re-reading of the work of Jean Piaget in the spring and early summer of 1959 was a factor in directing his attention to the notion of mediation. Also influential was Henri Niel, *De la Médiation dans la philosophie de Hegel* (Paris: Aubier, 1945).

theology performs is not simply a self-mediation of Christian constitutive meaning, a mediation that moves *from* the data on revelation *through* their ongoing consequences in history *to* the contemporary faith of the church. That is the kind of mediation that is found in Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics*. It has a place in theology, no doubt. But, *pace* Barth and his disciples, the ongoing consequences of the data on revelation are a function of the *exchange* that takes place between the community grounded in those data and various cultural matrices. The very constitutive meaning of the church in its historical development is a function of that exchange. Theology *does* perform a self-mediating function, but this function does not adequately exhaust the role of theology as mediating *faith and culture*. In fact, it can be argued that self-mediation is what Lonergan is speaking about most of the time in *Method in Theology*, despite the emphasis on mutual self-mediation that is contained in the first sentence of the book. But as theology mediates faith and culture, its self-mediating function is sublated into the mutual self-mediation of the church's constitutive meaning with the meanings and values constitutive of a given way of life. Theology contributes to the mutual self-mediation of the constitutive meaning of the church with the meanings and values constitutive of contemporary cultural matrices.

What is perhaps Lonergan's most complete definition of 'a culture' can be found in notes that he distributed at Boston College for his 1957 lectures on existentialism: '... the current effective totality of: immanently produced and symbolically communicated contents of imagination, emotion, sentiment; of inquiry, insight, conception; of reflection, judgment, valuation; of decision, implementation.'⁴⁸ Theology in its entirety exercises a

48 The statement is taken from Lonergan's Notes on Existentialism distributed in connection with the 1957 lectures. See Lonergan, *Phenomenology and Logic*, vol. 18 in *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, ed. Philip J. McShane (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001) 209-210.

mutual self-mediation between that 'current effective totality' and the meanings constitutive of the Christian church. It is not simply a self-mediation of the ecclesial imagination, understanding, judgment, and evaluation found in the tradition. That self-mediation is but the beginning of theology's work. In its totality it constitutes the first phase of the entire theological enterprise: research, interpretation, history, and dialectic. Nor is theology the simple mediation from Christian constitutive meaning to a cultural matrix. The church is, or should be, a learning church, a church whose own constitutive meaning is, within the limits imposed by truly dogmatic meanings and their implications, changed by interaction with various cultural matrices.

There is a doctrinal component to this insistence on mutual self-mediation. Systematic theology is not only *de facto* a mutual self-mediation between the accumulated wisdom of the community and the cultural matrix. It is this type of mediation *in principle, de iure*. Why? The reason has to do with the universal mission of the Holy Spirit. The universal mission of the Holy Spirit, and as well the invisible dimension of the mission of the Word in whom all things were created, prompt the believing community at its best to *expect* to find meanings and values that are operative in the cultural matrix in ways that have yet to be realized in the church itself. This position is not simple accommodation, which would not be mutual self-mediation at all but simply an abdication of responsibility. There are elements in prevailing cultural matrices with which no accommodation is possible. Here mutual self-mediation is explicit dialectic, where dialectic involves saying no because one's own position is and must be simply and irrevocably contradictory to the prevailing values. But the initial attitude of the genuine Christian individual or community is not one of suspicion but one of a readiness to learn. The Ignatian presupposition for the director of the *Spiritual*

Exercises says it well and can and should be generalized: ‘... every good Christian is to be more ready to save the neighbor’s proposition than to condemn it.’⁴⁹

7 Structure

The question of structure is the question, Is there one theorem or hypothesis that can serve as an organizing systematic conception for the entire discipline or functional specialty that we call systematics?

As we have seen, Lonergan proposed that the systematic theologian does best to look to the dogmas themselves for the central problems to be addressed in a systematic theology. We have also seen that, in attempting to understand what the dogmas mean, the systematic theologian should proceed, as much as possible, according to the *ordo doctrinae*, ‘from above’ as it were. One should begin with that element or those elements the understanding of which does not entail understanding anything else but is rather the basis of understanding everything else. As chemistry texts begin with the periodic table, which itself is the product of a long history of work in the way of discovery, so systematic treatises should begin with achievements that themselves may have taken centuries to develop, but which, once understood, provide the key to understanding other elements. The question of structure, then, is (mutatis mutandis) the question, *What stands to systematic theology as the periodic table stands to chemistry?*

I have already indicated that there is a particular set of systematic theological meanings that Lonergan proposes in *De Deo trino* that *begins* to fulfill these methodological prescriptions and so provides part of the overall conceptual framework of

49 David L. Fleming, S.J., *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius: A Literal Translation and A Contemporary Reading* (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1978) 20, §22.

the discipline or functional specialty of systematics; namely, the four-point hypothesis that I quoted above in the treatment of dogma and mystery.

The statement expresses a synthetic understanding of the major dogmatic affirmations of the Christian church: of the Trinity, of the incarnation, of grace, and of the last things. The understanding is synthetic in that it proposes a conceptual framework in which these mysteries are related to one another, a framework that enables us to achieve more than an understanding of each mystery in isolation from the others. Thus this four-point hypothesis provides a core set of meanings for systematic theology. Moreover, the hypothesis has the advantage that it is immune from the doctrinal misunderstandings that have sometimes been attached to Karl Rahner's famous trinitarian axiom that the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity, and vice versa (misunderstandings, I hasten to add, that are not at all in keeping with Rahner's intentions).

However, the four-point hypothesis, while essential to the systematic project that I envision, is not enough. It would serve equally well to organize a systematic theology within a classicist framework. As we saw in the section on *vetera* and *nova*, something more is needed for a systematics in the context of historical mindedness, and that 'something more' consists precisely in the general categories through which a theory of history can be expressed.

Let me expand on this claim, however briefly. In a paper that he presented at a seminar conducted by the Lonergan Research Institute, Toronto, in the spring semester 2000, my colleague Daniel Monsour proposed a test of the claim that Lonergan's four-point hypothesis can be taken as the organizing systematic conception. The test lies in the question, Can the five sets of special categories that Lonergan suggests in *Method in Theology* be mapped onto this four-point hypothesis? If so, then the hypothesis is a 'good bet' as an organizing systematic conception for the discipline. If not, then something else is needed as an addition to the hypothesis.

Lonerger's five sets of special categories regard (1) the religious experience of the subject, (2) subjects in communion and solidarity with one another in a historical community, (3) the loving source of our love, that is, the triune God, and the historical missions of Son and Spirit, (4) the dialectic of authentic and inauthentic Christianity, and (5) the dialectic of history understood in terms familiar to every student of Lonergan's work, that is, in the categories of progress, decline, and redemption.⁵⁰

Now, my own answer to Monsour's question is that the first and third sets of special categories can be mapped onto the four-point hypothesis, without remainder, but that the other three cannot. In fact, as I have already argued, the hypothesis provides a key element for the clarification of some ambiguities in Lonergan's articulation of the first set of categories, those having to do with the religious experience of the subject. Clearly the Trinitarian and Christological core of the hypothesis allow it to fulfill the same requirement with regard to the third set of special categories. But mapping the other three sets onto the hypothesis is more difficult, and in fact any attempt to do so shows that something needs to be added to this hypothesis if we are to have a core statement around which a systematic theology can be organized. To be precise, it is necessary to choose a framework that locates within, or in relation to, the dialectical dynamics of history the four created supernatural realities that are the consequent conditions of the divine missions and of the doctrine regarding our last end. The four-point hypothesis needs to be placed in history. It has to be made to function within a conception of history that will enable the integration of the second, fourth, and fifth sets of special categories into the overall systematic statement. There are indications in some notes that Lonergan wrote at the time of his breakthrough to the notion of functional specialization that in his view a contemporary systematic theology in its entirety would be *a theological theory of history*. Clearly, in these papers Lonergan means that the doctrines that express the

⁵⁰ Lonergan, *Method in Theology* 290-91.

constitutive meaning of the church are to be understood in the categories of a theory of history. The ‘mediated object’ of systematics, Lonergan says in these notes, is *Geschichte*.

I took a similar and related option in *Theology and the Dialectics of History*, where some of the general categories of such a systematics of history are worked out. I cannot go into detail here on those categories.⁵¹ The affirmation that I wish to make here consists of three points. First, there is at hand an organizing systematic conception for the functional specialty ‘systematics.’ Second, we may say with a qualification that that organizing conception is provided in the four-point hypothesis that we have adopted from Lonergan. And third, the qualification is that the hypothesis must be placed within the context of the dialectic of history. And for that I would suggest Lonergan’s own theory of history, supplemented by the additions to this general-categorical framework that I have already proposed in *Theology and the Dialectics of History*. In the complex structure of general and special categories that emerges from integrating the four-point hypothesis with Lonergan’s theory of history as developed and supplemented in *Theology and the Dialectics of History*, there can be discerned the overall contours of the synthesis that a contemporary systematics would attempt to construct.⁵²

8 A Question about Theological Predication

A final question, one that does not appear in the articles on which the bulk of this paper is based, has to do with the intricacies of theological predication, and in particular of

51 A summary of the principal categories derived in that book is presented in ‘System and History: The Challenge to Catholic Systematic Theology.’

52 It should perhaps be noted that what we are doing in this section is an exercise in the functional specialty ‘foundations,’ one of whose tasks is the derivation of the categories.

contingent and necessary predication about God. As I stated earlier, all that I wish to do at present in this final section is raise a question, with the hope that it might catalyze a collaborative discussion.

A story that might or might not be apocryphal can serve as an introduction to the question. We might call the story ‘Postcards from the Center.’ A student of Lonergan’s work and professor of theology is said to have written Lonergan a short letter, in which he asked one question. Included in the envelope was a self-addressed postcard. Lonergan was asked only to write on the postcard either ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ in response to the question. The question was, Do we make a difference to God? About a week later, the postcard from Lonergan arrived: ‘No.’

But the story does not end there. Several days later, another postcard arrived from Lonergan. ‘We make an eternal difference to God.’

Now the doctrine that we make an eternal difference to God, framed precisely in this way, matches in some respects the celebrated doctrine of election in which Karl Barth, working in his own context, definitively overcomes Calvin on predestination. (For what it is worth, I believe that Barth has made a permanent contribution to all Christian theology in his doctrine of election.) The heart of Barth’s doctrine of election (as contrasted with, for example, his doctrines of creation and providence) is that the doctrine of election names eternal elements constitutive of the Godhead, while the doctrines of creation and providence make what Lonergan would name contingent predications about God. The doctrine of election is for Barth part of the doctrine of God, while the doctrine of providence belongs in the treatment of the doctrine of creation. I do not intend here to go into the intricacies of Barth Studies. I want only to indicate that there is a major confluence of theological affirmations that Lonergan is tapping into if indeed he holds the view that is suggested on the second postcard in our story. The theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar also is part of that confluence. And the upshot of the confluence is that it just might be the case that some affirmations that Thomist-inspired theologians have for

centuries regarded as contingent predications about God may in fact need to be conceived in terms of some further category that we may not yet have developed. If God is from eternity what God is because of the eternal decree of election and salvation, then we are confronted with a new set of methodological and theological requirements, one that, I might add, I am not at all prepared even to enumerate at the present time. I am not convinced that the doctrine is sufficient that election and redemption entail only notional relations attributed to God while real relations are found in the created external terms that are the consequent conditions of the truth of those doctrines. I do not want to speak of changes in God, mind you, but I want some further category to enable us to speak properly about the kind of predication that is involved here.

I raise this issue here only because what I wanted to do in this paper is to present the major developments that have occurred in my own thinking about methodological issues in systematics since the publication of the three articles on which I based the bulk of the paper. The articles do not touch on the issue of theological predication, and it is a crucial methodological question. But here we can perhaps see that it is also a crucial theological issue. This final section presents nothing but a question. But I hope that the question can bring the movement that stems from Lonergan into closer dialogue and collaboration with several other contemporary theological emphases.