

## **Essays in Systematic Theology 11: Implementation in Systematics: The Structure<sup>1</sup>**

Many of the elements of the problem of implementation have been assembled in Philip McShane's paper and addressed in his life's work to date. The dimension to which I wish to contribute is the need to lift the chapter on Systematics in *Method in Theology* out of its tired and minimalist context into the context that Lonergan seems to have had in mind when, at the time of the breakthrough to functional specialization, what eventually was called Systematics was named 'Explanation' and its mediated object was said to be *Geschichte*. At that point Lonergan had in mind, I submit, not simply summing up and integrating the dogmatic-theological context – and even that task does not emerge clearly in *Method*'s chapter – but also advancing that context, in fact catapulting it into the third stage of meaning and onto the plateau where a normative source of meaning has been articulated that, while remaining normative, pays full recognition to historical mindedness.

I have written on this topic before. My thinking on the topic continues to evolve, however slowly, and the best I can do in the present context is to express the latest step in that thinking. I presented a longer paper on this step at the 2002 Boston College Lonergan Workshop,<sup>2</sup> and as I don't expect that I will have moved any further in the two months between the writing of this note and the deadline posed by the editor, I hope that it will be enough for the present occasion if I state briefly and concisely the principal point of that longer paper.

That point is that there is at hand an adequate unified field structure for the functional specialty Systematics. That unified field structure lies in a combination of a four-point theological hypothesis found in *Divinarum personarum* and *De Deo trino* with

---

1 First published in the online *Journal of Macrodynamical Analysis* 3 (2003) 264-72.

2 2009: See the tenth of these Essays in Systematic Theology.

what Lonergan says about the general categories in *Method in Theology*, especially as the account of the general categories opens out onto a theory of history. Moreover, Lonergan's theory of history is further enriched by some of the considerations that I attempted to put forward in *Theology and the Dialectics of History*.

My contention can be spelled out by answering three questions. What is meant by speaking of a unified field structure for systematics? What is the four-point theological hypothesis, and why is it so important? What function do the general categories play in the unified field structure, especially as these categories yield a theory of history?

### **1 What Is Meant by 'A Unified Field Structure for Systematics'?**

A unified field structure would provide the basic organizing conception for the entire functional specialty 'systematics.' My colleague Daniel Monsour has used the expression 'the systematic conception of systematic conceptions' to express this function.<sup>3</sup> As each area of systematic exploration – Trinity, Christology, grace, sacraments, and so on – may be expected to have its own organizing systematic conception, so systematics as a whole may be expected to reach toward the articulation of an overarching systematic conception that unites all of the more particular conceptions into a synthetic unity. It would do this, not by presenting a major premise for a series of deductions (something that we may presume is neither possible nor desirable) but by guiding the ongoing genetic development of systematics in much the same way that the appropriated invariant upper context of Lonergan's *Insight* will (at least in the best of all possible worlds) guide the future of philosophy. Thus we might say that it would stand to systematics much as the

---

<sup>3</sup> The expression appears in a paper that Monsour wrote for a seminar conducted under the auspices of the Lonergan Research Institute, Toronto. The paper was entitled 'The Categories "Gratia Increata et Creata" and the Functional Specialty Systematics.'

periodic table stands to chemistry. Again, it would provide an invariant upper blade for all work in systematics.

The unified field structure (again, Monsour's expression) would be in fundamental continuity with the implicit unified field structure of the *Summa theologiae* of Thomas Aquinas, which marks what we might call the first great plateau in the unfolding of systematic theology, and it leaves itself open to further enrichments and differentiations analogous to those that it adds to the Thomist conception. Thus it would stand to contemporary systematics as the theorem of the supernatural joined to Aristotle's metaphysics stood to Aquinas. But it would also be a genetic development upon that structure, since it would make systematics historically conscious and place it into the broader cultural context established by modern scientific methods and achievements.

Like the medieval organizing conception, this unified field structure combines a specifically theological element with a more general set of categories. The theorem of the supernatural was the specifically theological component of the medieval conception, and Aristotle's metaphysics provided its general categories. The principal specifically theological element in the unified field structure now at hand is a four-point hypothesis proposed in Bernard Lonergan's systematics of the Trinity. The hypothesis sublates the theorem of the supernatural into a more differentiated set of connections between the four Trinitarian relations — paternity, filiation, active spiration, and passive spiration — and the created supernatural participations in those relations: the secondary act of existence of the Incarnation is a created participation in paternity,<sup>4</sup> sanctifying grace a created

---

4 This is probably the most difficult of the connections expressed in the hypothesis, since it has to do with the interiority, not of us but of Christ, who, while fully human, has a different ontological and psychological constitution from us. I find the following helpful: the eternal Word immanent in the Godhead does not speak but is spoken; the incarnate Word speaks; but he speaks only what he hears from the Father.

participation in active spiration, the habit of charity a created participation in passive spiration, and the light of glory a created participation in filiation. And so it enables a synthetic understanding of the four mysteries of the Trinity, the Incarnation, grace, and the last things.

What, then, about the general categories? Is there something that sublates the Aristotelian framework that gave Aquinas his general categories, in a manner analogous to the way in which the four-point hypothesis sublates the theorem of the supernatural? Obviously, for any student of Lonergan, there is: namely, the basic and total science, the *Grund- und Gesamtwissenschaft*, that can be found in the cognitional theory, epistemology, and metaphysics of *Insight*, the existential ethics of both *Insight* and *Method in Theology*, and the unfolding of these into the theory of history that, for Lonergan, probably reaches its most nuanced articulation in ‘Natural Right and Historical Mindedness’ and that, I believe, is given a few further refinements in the treatment of the scale of values in my book *Theology and the Dialectics of History*.

## 2 The Four-point Hypothesis

The four-point theological hypothesis to which we have referred reads as follows.

... 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 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 [created] participation of active spiration, and so has a special relation to the Holy Spirit; that the habit of charity is a [created] participation of

passive spiration, and so has a special relation to the Father and the Son; and that the light of glory is a [created] participation of sonship, and so in a most perfect way brings the children of adoption back to the Father.<sup>5</sup>

The importance of this passage is both theological and methodological. It is theological in that the passage so sublates the medieval theorem of the supernatural as explicitly to embrace the doctrines on which, it may be maintained, the clearest differentiations have been reached: the doctrines of the triune God, of the Incarnate Word, of the inhabitation of the Holy Spirit, and of the last things; and it so embraces these doctrines that the mysteries affirmed in them are related systematically or synthetically to one another, something rarely achieved in the history of theology.<sup>6</sup> Not only, however, does the hypothesis present in a systematic order some of the principal realities named by the special categories, the categories peculiar to theology, but also, if my position on the unified field structure is correct, it has the methodological significance of lifting this systematic order into the heuristic upper blade of further work in systematics.

### **3 The General Categories and the Theory of History**

The significance of general categories and their issuing into a theory of history can be appreciated, I believe, if we follow through on a test that Daniel Monsour has proposed for evaluating the adequacy of the four-point hypothesis to function on its own as a unified field structure for systematics. I suspect that my judgment on the results of this

---

<sup>5</sup> Lonergan, *The Triune God: Systematics* 471, 473.

<sup>6</sup> Monsour refers to Henri Rondet's book *The Grace of Christ* for evidence that the doctrine of grace has rarely been unified synthetically with the theology of the divine missions. The connection is explicit in the four-point hypothesis.

test may be different from Monsour's, and I present them for discussion and as subject to correction.

Monsour frames the test in the following terms: 'Take some or all of the five sets of special theological categories enumerated by Lonergan in *Foundations* and actually attempt to work out tentatively the categories belonging to each set. Then transfer whatever categories one has derived in *Foundations* into *Systematics* and try to map them onto the proposed unified field structure ... If it is truly a unified field structure for *Systematics*, it would ... provide the organizing principle integrating all the categories of all the five sets. To the extent that one continued to succeed in mapping the categories onto the hypothesis, to that extent one continues to confirm the hypothesis as indeed a unified field structure for *Systematics*.'<sup>7</sup> My judgment is that the four-point hypothesis will not be able to integrate the second, fourth, and fifth of these sets into an overall systematic exposition unless there is added to it the theory of history that issues from the *Grund- und Gesamtwissenschaft*, the basic and total science, of *Insight and Method in Theology*.

The first set of special categories, then, is derived from religious experience. These categories, Lonergan says, will emerge from 'studies of religious interiority: historical, phenomenological, psychological, sociological. There is needed in the theologian the spiritual development that will enable [one] both to enter into the experience of others and to frame the terms and relations that will express that experience.'<sup>8</sup>

---

7 Monsour, "The Categories "Gratia Increata et Creata" and the Functional Specialty Systematics' 16.

8 Lonergan, *Method in Theology* 290.

A second set has to do, not with the subject but with ‘subjects, their togetherness in community, service, and witness, *the history of the salvation that is rooted in a being-in-love*, and the *function of this history* in promoting’ the reign of God in the world.<sup>9</sup>

A third set ‘moves from our loving to the loving source of our love. The Christian tradition makes explicit our implicit intending of God in all our intending by speaking of the Spirit that is given to us, of the Son who redeemed us, of the Father who sent the Son and with the Son sends the Spirit, and of our future destiny when we shall know, not as in a glass darkly, but face to face.’<sup>10</sup>

A fourth set differentiates authentic and inauthentic humanity and authentic and inauthentic Christianity. ‘... to the unauthentic [person] or Christian, what appears authentic is the unauthentic. Here, then, is the root of division, opposition, controversy, denunciation, bitterness, hatred, violence.’<sup>11</sup>

And a fifth set ‘regards progress, decline, and redemption. As human authenticity promotes progress, and human unauthenticity generates decline, so Christian authenticity – which is a love of others that does not shrink from self-sacrifice and suffering – is the sovereign means for overcoming evil. Christians bring about the kingdom of God in the world not only by doing good but also by overcoming evil with good ... Not only is there the progress of [humankind] but also there is development and progress within Christianity itself; and as there is development, so too there is decline; and as there is decline, there also is the problem of undoing it, of overcoming evil with good not only in the world but also in the church.’<sup>12</sup>

---

9 Ibid. 291, emphasis added.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

Now, obviously the third set matches the four-point hypothesis almost point by point, so that it can safely be said that this set can be mapped without remainder onto the hypothesis. Moreover, I believe the hypothesis provides a key to clarifying religious experience, and so is relevant to elements of the first set of special categories. But mapping the other three sets onto the hypothesis is not only more difficult; in the last analysis, it is, I believe, impossible. One can relate the other three sets to the third set, and so to the hypothesis, but any attempt to go further would be an attempt to reduce the other three sets to the third. The four created supernatural realities that are the created consequent conditions either of the divine missions (the *esse secundarium* of the Incarnation, sanctifying grace, and the habit of charity) or of the beatific vision (the light of glory) have to be located within, or in relation to, the dialectical dynamics of history. Only then can there be integrated into systematics the reality of revelation (which, as Lonergan says, introduces a new meaning into *history*), redemption, the church, sacraments, and Christian praxis. The created contingent external terms that make possible that there are divine missions are not enough to allow for the integration of the second, fourth, and fifth sets of special categories into the overall systematic conception. The four-point hypothesis does not in itself tell us anything about what the incarnation and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit have to do with historical progress and decline, whereas revelation, redemption, the church, the sacraments, and Christian praxis cannot be understood apart from historical progress and decline.<sup>13</sup> As Lonergan himself wrote at

---

<sup>13</sup> In a discussion period at the 1962 Institute at Regis College, Toronto, on ‘The Method of Theology,’ Lonergan expressed a conviction that the sacraments and the church are two areas in systematic theology in which an enormous amount of work needs to be done. In fact, he said, there is needed even doctrinal development in these areas. ‘The fundamental developments are: the trinitarian doctrine in which the key element is the consubstantial; christological doctrine: one person and two natures; the idea of the



the time of his breakthrough to the notion of functional specialization, a contemporary systematic theology in its entirety must be a theological theory of history; or again, the mediated object of systematics is *Geschichte*. And the relation of this comment to our concerns becomes clear when we note that he also said that the mediated object of the preceding functional specialty, doctrines, is redemption in history.

We may conclude, then, that the basic organizing systematic conception must contain, in addition to the four-point hypothesis, the fundamental elements of a theological theory of history. And I would propose that those fundamental elements are provided at least in an incipient fashion in Lonergan's analysis of the dialectic of history in terms of progress, decline, and redemption and in the complementary suggestions that I offer in *Theology and the Dialectics of History*. These elements of a theory of history are rooted in the *Grund- und Gesamtwissenschaft* that is the cognitional theory, epistemology, and metaphysics of *Insight* and the existential ethics of both *Insight* and *Method in Theology*.<sup>14</sup> While there is no doubt that further work (for example, in social

---

supernatural habit and act. There is then the field in which the categories are not yet fully developed. For example, categories as to the instrumental causality of the sacraments; they have to be developed more fully. There is also *everything regarding history and the mystical body, and the church*; all these need further development.' (Emphasis added)

14 A note on the relation of *Insight* and *Method* on ethics might contribute to another of the problems raised by McShane. With McShane I do not believe the two presentations contradict one another. But I do believe that they are two quite distinct accounts, and I would relate the distinction to the second and third moments of election or decision in St Ignatius Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*. The ethics of chapter 18 of *Insight* is an explanatory account of what Ignatius calls the third moment. The ethics of chapter 2 of *Method* is an explanatory account of the second moment. As the

theory and economics) will uncover other elements and so other categories, these give us enough to get started and provide the basic map or grid for locating the elements that further work will discover, just as the periodic table provides the basic grid for locating possible further atomic elements.

---

two moments are complementary and would yield the same results, so the two explanations account for two different ways of arriving at the same thing, namely, a morally responsible decision. Which ‘moment’ the existential subject relies upon and employs depends on the condition of the subject at the time. Is one drawn by affective pulls and counterpulls? Then Ignatius’s second moment and Lonergan’s account in *Method* are relevant. If one is not drawn by conflicting affects, then Ignatius’s third moment and Lonergan’s account in *Insight* put forth the set of operations involved in arriving at a good decision.