

Essays in Systematic Theology 16: System Seeking Method: Reconciling System and History¹

1 Systematics and ‘Our Unfinished Aggiornamento’

The importance of the themes that I wish to raise can be highlighted, I believe, if I refer to a short document that Bernard Lonergan composed for the Vatican Secretariat for Nonbelievers. (In addition to his service as an original member of the International Theological Commission, Lonergan was a consultant to this Secretariat.) In October of 1976 Lonergan had received a letter from Rev. M.D. Vincenzo of the Secretariat, informing him that the Secretariat was planning an assembly in the autumn of 1977 on the theme ‘Youth and the Future of the Faith.’ Lonergan was asked to submit his comments on the ‘priority issues’ that would be most deserving of consideration, on how to present these issues to the Secretariat, and on the best approach to the overall problematic of the theme. Lonergan began his response with a humble acknowledgment that he did not consider himself an expert on the culture of contemporary youth. He then indicated that he had consulted a professor at Boston College who taught an introductory course in theology to undergraduates, and he reported on the advice that this professor

¹ I presented two papers in 2004 entitled ‘System Seeking Method, but they had different subtitles. At the International Lonergan Workshop, Toronto, August 2004, the paper’s subtitle was ‘Anticipating the Future of the Functional Specialty “Systematics.”’ The essay offered here was presented at the Gregorian University, Rome, in November of the same year, and represents a slight development on the Toronto lecture. It was published in *Il Teologo e la Storia: Lonergan’s Centenary (1904-2004)*, ed. Paul Gilbert and Natalino Spaccapelo (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 2006) 275-99.

had given. He added a few remarks of his own on the importance of images and on insight into phantasm. But he concluded his remarks with the following paragraph of personal reflections, which was marked off from the rest by a set of asterisks.

There does remain however a larger problem. It is our unfinished *aggiornamento*. The scientific revolution of the seventeenth century and the historical revolution of the nineteenth constitute exigences for a remodeling of philosophy and for new methods in theology. What we have got so far is a renewal of the liturgy, an intensification of interest in sacred scripture, a liquidation of scholasticism, and an inability to proceed efficaciously from scriptural statements to the dogmas of the church. At the present time the disarray of catholic writing on dogmatic issues is lamentable. It is, regrettably, an evil that will not be remedied by the ordinary measures of watchfulness, exhortation, repression. What is needed is something far more strenuous and more resourceful: a new epoch in Catholic theology and philosophy that will meet the exigences of our day as thirteenth-century scholasticism met the challenge of Aristotelian and Arabic thought.

The significance of these remarks for the present topic lies not so much in themes already familiar to Lonergan readers, themes that reflect his own efforts to launch that new epoch in Catholic theology and philosophy in the context of modern science and modern historical consciousness, but in the pinpointing of problems peculiar to what by this time he had differentiated as the two functional specialties of Doctrines and Systematics. Contemporary Catholic theology, he said, is marked by ‘an inability to proceed efficaciously from scriptural statements to the dogmas of the church’ and by a lamentable disarray on dogmatic issues that cannot be remedied by the magisterium’s usual measures of ‘watchfulness, exhortation, repression.’ We hear echoes of *Insight*’s statement that

recourse to force is a counsel of despair.² And we must wonder, nearly thirty years later, whether much has changed in this particular area of our unfinished aggiornamento, the area that regards doctrinal and systematic theology. On the one hand, there is disarray, and on the other the recourse to force: on the one hand, the scattered left, and on the other the solid right. Perhaps nowhere more than in doctrinal and systematic theology is there required the quiet, consistent work of what, in a frequently quoted passage, Lonergan once referred to as the ‘perhaps not numerous center, big enough to be at home in both the old and the new, painstaking enough to work out one by one the transitions to be made, strong enough to refuse half measures and insist on complete solutions even though it has to wait.’³

Doctrinal and systematic theologians who would find themselves in that perhaps not numerous center will find a great deal of help, I believe, in a set of papers that Lonergan composed in the form of notes at the time of his methodological breakthrough to functional specialization in theology. These notes, which are found in what we have come to call Batch V in the Lonergan Archives, may eventually prove to be at least as helpful as the book *Method in Theology* itself.⁴ In these notes Lonergan commented on the respective similarities and differences between, on the one hand, the functional specialties of the second phase – foundations, doctrines, systematics, and communications – and, on the other hand, the subject specializations traditionally known as fundamental theology, dogmatic theology, systematic theology, and pastoral or

2 Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, vol. 3 of Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992) 654-55.

3 Bernard Lonergan, ‘Dimensions of Meaning,’ in *Collection*, vol. 4 of Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988) 245.

4 2009: The notes are now available on www.bernardlonergan.com beginning at 47200DTE060/A472.

practical theology. These comments are remarkably germane to the problems that Lonergan highlighted in his report to the Secretariat.

Why do I say this? Because in these notes it is perhaps more clear precisely what is new in the areas of doctrinal and systematic theology when these are conceived as two among eight functional specialties with quite determinate relations to the other six. Clearly Lonergan intended a continuity in difference between the old subject specializations and the new functional specialties. But perhaps it may be said that in the book *Method in Theology* the continuity is more to the fore in the chapters on Doctrines and Systematics, and the differences are more prominent in the chapters on Foundations and Communications. The new 'foundations' are very different from the old 'fundamental theology,' and the treatment of communications, while it is presented only heuristically in *Method in Theology*, opens upon new and vast tasks of interdisciplinary collaboration and interreligious dialogue, as well as upon new uses of communications media, all of which are hardly imagined in most traditional presentations of pastoral theology; even the most directly pastoral applications call for a quite specialized ability to transpose what has been grasped in an explanatory fashion in systematics into symbols that will convey the meaning of Christian truth in contemporary terms. But the new 'doctrines' would seem, at least on a superficial reading, to be the same doctrines that the old 'dogmatic theology' affirmed, along with the doctrines that used to be treated in fundamental theology, and the new 'systematics' at first blush, that is, again on a superficial reading of chapter 13 of *Method in Theology*, seems to be no different from the 'systematic theology' whose method Lonergan articulated in the first chapter of *Divinarum personarum* and in a revised form in the first chapter of *De Deo trino: Pars systematica*, that is, in works that were written before his breakthrough to functional specialization and his definitive abandonment of the Scholastic framework. It is the notes to which I have called attention that highlight the differences.

First, though, let me insist that there is a justification for highlighting the continuity between the old dogmatic theology and the new functional specialty ‘Doctrines,’ and between the old systematic theology and the new functional specialty ‘Systematics.’ After all, Lonergan held firmly to the dogmas of the Catholic Church, which articulate mysteries that are so hidden in God that we could not know them at all had they not been revealed. And he has done some of the most profound and original systematic work in the entire history of theology, attempting to understand the mysteries that these dogmas affirm, work in fact that I believe will one day be recognized as qualifying him for the title ‘Doctor of the Church.’ And if both dogmatic theology and the functional specialty ‘Doctrines’ affirm these mysteries, while the principal task of both systematic theology and the functional specialty ‘Systematics’ is to understand these mysteries, then there is a firm ground in the content of the respective disciplines for a quite thoroughgoing continuity from the old context to the new. But if the book *Method in Theology* in its chapters 12 and 13 does not convey enough of the differences that would accrue to these two specialties because of the transition from subject specialization to functional specialization and because of the transition from the old, classicist context to the new, historically minded context – and this lack of evident difference is more clear in the chapter on Systematics than in the chapter on Doctrines – it is because, for some reason that we may never fully comprehend, an emphasis that appears in the papers and notes from the period in which Lonergan was working out functional specialization does not find its way clearly and explicitly into the chapters of the book on Doctrines and Systematics.

That emphasis has to do with history: not with the history that is written but with the history that is written about. The functional specialty Doctrines is not simply a set of affirmations that correspond with, and transpose into contemporary categories, the dogmatic and doctrinal affirmations of the church. It is an *organized* set of affirmations, where the organization is a function of a theological assembling of truth, and where the

central theological emphasis around which the affirmations are constellated is the theme of redemption in history. And the functional specialty Systematics is not simply an attempt to understand in a synthetic fashion the doctrines that the church teaches, and to do so on the level of our own time. Rather, precisely because Doctrines organizes doctrinal and theological affirmations around the theme of redemption in history, Systematics understands these same affirmations in the form of a theological theory of history. The mediated object of Doctrines is redemption in history. The mediated object of Systematics is *Geschichte*.⁵

Even prior to my discovery of these emphases in Lonergan's notes and papers from 1965, I had wagered (1) that much more had to be said about the method of the functional specialty 'Systematics' than Lonergan had conveyed in *Method in Theology*, (2) that this had to be done in the very interest of promoting Lonergan's own intentions, and (3) that the key to the needed developments was to be found in conceiving Systematics as a theological theory of history. It was with this in mind that in the early 1980s I began working on the book that eventually became *Theology and the Dialectics of History*, where I attempted to build on Lonergan's already extremely fertile theory of history in terms of progress, decline, and redemption, and to fill out that theory by highlighting points that become clear in his work only after the publication of *Method in*

⁵ These statements can all be supported by referring to papers in Batch V in the Lonergan Research Institute's archives. Let me simply quote one important item in support of what I have written.

'doctrines: ... synthesis in a doctrine about history, d [doctrine, or doctrinal] role of Church as continuing redemption'

'theories [systematics]: ... synthesis in a theory of history' (47400DTE060, p. 12).

More evidence along the same lines can be found in these papers.

Theology (and perhaps only after I had shared with him a suggestion regarding what, for better or for worse, I called psychic conversion). It was only in papers from 1975 ('Mission and the Spirit') and 1977 ('Natural Right and Historical Mindedness') that the normative source of meaning in history, the source that makes for progress, is not simply the four levels of intentional consciousness with their transcendental precepts, 'Be attentive, Be intelligent, Be reasonable, Be responsible,' but rather a tidal movement of self-transcendence that begins before consciousness, unfolds on and through the four levels of intentional consciousness with their transcendental precepts, only to find its rest beyond all of these, namely, in being in love.⁶ The normative source, then, is dialectical both in Lonergan's sense of the dialectic of contradictories represented in the expression 'progress and decline,' and in the sense in which I have spoken of a dialectic, not of contradictories but of contraries. A complex form or heuristic structure of dialectic plays out in three dimensions: in the subject, in the community, and in culture. The dialectics of the subject and of community are given initial heuristic expression in chapters 6 and 7, respectively, of *Insight*, while the dialectic of culture is my own contribution, drawing on categories suggested by Eric Voegelin and anticipating heuristically a set of constitutive meanings that does not yet function in a schematic fashion on any notable scale but that could be brought into being and that, if it were brought into being, might help guarantee that collective responsibility for the future of humanity might become, not just a possibility but a reality: precisely the collective responsibility that is Lonergan's concern in 'Natural Right and Historical Mindedness.'

In the same book, I located these three dialectical processes at three distinct 'levels' in Lonergan's scale of values: the dialectic of the subject at the level of personal

⁶ This is the way the point is expressed in 'Natural Right and Historical Mindedness.'

See Bernard Lonergan, *A Third Collection*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1985) 175.

value, the dialectic of culture at the level of cultural values, and the dialectic of community at the level of social values. The interrelations of these three dialectical processes, not only with one another but also in assuring the equitable distribution of vital goods to the whole community and with the 'religious values' that are the fruit of the gift of God's love, constitute, I propose, an advancing heuristic structure for understanding the dynamics of historical process.

If this is correct, then the initial general categories are in place for work in the functional specialty 'Systematics,' where the task is one of providing a theological 'synthesis in a theory of history.' That synthesis could offset the present lamentable disarray in theological writing about doctrinal issues by articulating the meaning of the mysteries of faith precisely within the context of historical consciousness, and without resorting to the usual magisterial tactics of 'watchfulness, exhortation, repression.' Those initial general categories are constituted by an analogy of dialectic (subject, culture, and community) set in motion by the interrelations among the levels of value. Systematics, of course, is an ongoing process. We can and should expect no more than a genetic sequence of systematic syntheses; and part of the development will come from developments in the theory of history itself. But at least one piece is sufficiently in place to enable us to begin.

What else is required? Two things. We need further definition regarding methodological questions in Systematics. And we need a way of specifying the relation between the general categories of a theory of history and the special categories peculiar to theology. The first requirement addresses the principal part of my title, System Seeking Method, while introducing as well some elements covered by the subtitle, Reconciling System and History. The second requirement focuses on one crucial element of the

reconciliation of system and history.⁷ It was to meet these two requirements that I have prepared another, and fortunately much shorter, manuscript entitled *What Is Systematic Theology?* The rest of my efforts here will consist very simply of a summary statement of some of the more salient points of that manuscript. The conclusion of this lecture will emphasize that the reconciliation of system and history is the key to system's finding method in this new age of theology.

2 Methodological Issues in Systematics

My principal contention in the book *What Is Systematic Theology?* is that the notions of functional specialization, of the mutual self-mediation of religion and culture, and of foundations rooted in conversion call for an accumulation of insights, adjustments, and reinterpretations around the notion of systematics that do not find their way explicitly into the chapter on that functional specialty in *Method in Theology*.

2.1 Four Emphases and Four Questions

I begin the book by indicating my firm agreement with four emphases regarding systematics expressed in Lonergan's writings both before and after his breakthrough to

⁷ The task of reconciling system and history is extensive. To trace Lonergan's efforts at reconciling system and history is a vast undertaking, one that I have begun in several recent articles in *Method: Journal of Lonergan Studies* and that I am continuing to pursue. I focus here on the one issue of the relation of the general categories regarding history to the special categories regarding the God of revelation, because I believe it is the most crucial concern of theology at the present time. Beyond reconciling history and system, it envisions reconciling history and God. But is that not what theology speaks about?

functional specialization. These emphases are what guarantee continuity between the older subject specialization of systematic theology, at its best, and the new functional specialty 'Systematics.'

First, the principal function of systematics, around which the other functions are assembled, is precisely what Lonergan says it is, namely, the hypothetical, imperfect, analogical, obscure, and gradually developing understanding of the mysteries of faith.

Second, the systematic theologian does best to take as his or her core or central problems those mysteries of faith that have been defined in the church's dogmatic pronouncements, the core meanings that were explicitly affirmed by the Christian church in the kairos moments of its self-constitution, and especially those affirmations that have to do with the triune God, the incarnation of the Word of God, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in grace.

Third, systematic understanding should proceed as much as possible according to what Lonergan, following Aquinas, calls the *ordo disciplinae* or *ordo doctrinae*, the order of learning and teaching, as contrasted with the *ordo inventionis*, the order of discovery. To use what is perhaps Lonergan's most frequent analogy on this point, the history of chemistry shows that the science established its basic principles, as it were, by moving step by step toward the understanding of sensible data; but a contemporary textbook begins, not by repeating these experiments and so going through the whole history of discovery, but with the periodic table of chemical elements from which over 300,000 compounds can be derived. The way of analysis, the way of discovery, led to the formulation of the periodic table. The way of teaching begins from the periodic table and proceeds to compose from it the various compounds that it allows us to understand. Scientific investigations begin from the sensibly manifest, but a teacher starts with those notions the understanding of which does not presuppose the understanding of anything else but rather makes possible the understanding, in the limit, of everything else in the

science.⁸ And on this basis, we may formulate one of our key questions in the following form: *Is there anything that stands to systematics as the periodic table stands to chemistry?* Answering that question will enable us to proceed in the *ordo doctrinae* that is appropriate to systematics.

It is true, of course, that when it becomes clear that a particular systematic framework is too narrow to handle the further questions that arise within it – and this will inevitably happen to any systematic synthesis, no matter how complete it may be at a given point in the history of theology – then holding fast to the *ordo doctrinae* of that systematic framework would be, at best, a logical-deductivist mistake and, at worst, an obscurantist rejection of those further questions. The move then has to be made to a systematics *in fieri* that employs the *ordo inventionis*, until there is reached the new vantage point that will account for and respond to the new questions. The irreversible ‘upper blade,’ the source of all permanent achievements, lies not in any explicit system but in the dynamism of the minds that raise the further questions. Permanent achievements, both doctrinal and theological, have been reached along the way, but the only arbiter of such achievements lies in the authenticity that acknowledges them.

Fourth, systematics is not description but explanation, and explanation not on the level of another time but on the level of our own time, where every term and relation must be grounded either in the operations and states of conscious intentionality or in the experience of the gift of God’s love. The base of the general categories that theology shares with other disciplines is the interiorly differentiated consciousness promoted by Lonergan’s intentionality analysis; Lonergan indicates that his earlier work *Insight* shows how the general categories are derived. The base of the special categories that are

⁸ See Lonergan, *The Triune God Systematics* 60-63. The first chapter of this work, sections 5 and 6, contains Lonergan’s most complete presentation of the contrast between the two ways.

peculiar to theology is the religiously differentiated consciousness that would be promoted by an exploration of religious love and a differentiation of the dynamics of the spiritual life.

Each of these emphases gives rise to a question, and from these questions my own explorations take off.

First, if there is a principal function, there must be other functions. What are they? How are they related to the principal function? How are they related to the other functional specialties? Lonergan does not answer these questions.

Second, while the core problems are set by the dogmas that express some of the revealed mysteries, still there are also aspects of revealed mystery that have not received, perhaps never will receive, and even cannot receive dogmatic status in the church. How are these to be related in systematics to the dogmatic elements?

Third, what are the dynamics that are operative when one is doing, for example, interpretation or history or dialectic or even doctrines, not for their own sake but in order to prepare the way for systematics? And how does one guarantee that one's integrity in these other functional specialties is not compromised by one's ulterior systematic objective?

And fourth, is an explanatory employment of symbolic categories possible *in systematics*, as a way of talking about the mysteries of faith? If it is, what are its grounds? Is it not true that some mysteries of faith are best expressed, not in technical terms but in symbols, and this as a permanent requirement, what we might call permanently elemental meaning? But can such expression also be explanatory, and if so, how and on what basis?

2.2 Dogma and Mystery

In response to the first question, chapter 3 of the book asserts that systematics is more than an understanding of dogmas. It is the ordered, coherent, hypothetical, gradually

developing, structured, synthetic, and in places analogical and obscure understanding, in the limit, of all the realities intended in the meanings actually or ideally constitutive of the community that is the church. In the first place, moving beyond the principal function, we must acknowledge mysteries of faith that have not received, and in some cases perhaps will not, even cannot, receive dogmatic formulation. Consider, for instance, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. There is no dogma about the resurrection. Yet surely the affirmation of the resurrection is constitutive of the community that calls itself the church. While dogma defines mysteries of faith, the mysteries of faith extend beyond what has been or, perhaps, 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 statement on method in systematics must account for such understanding. And so we ask, What grounds the synthetic inclusion in systematics of elements of the Christian mystery that have not been and perhaps never will be formulated in dogmatic pronouncements?

Now a partial answer to that question is that the affirmed truth of some of these mysteries – to take another example, the doctrine of redemption – lies in the domain of *permanently elemental meaning*. That is to say, its meaning will always be better expressed in the symbolic, aesthetic, and/or dramatic terms of scripture, literature, drama, and lived forward from the narrative, than it will be formulated in the quasi-technical or post-systematic type of formulation that most dogmas provide. And so there is an exigence in systematics for the capacity to employ such aesthetic and dramatic terms in a manner that is explanatory and not purely descriptive. There must be some kind of explanatory employment of symbols through a further immersion into the symbols that enables one *to grasp in their relations to one another first the symbolic meanings, and through those meanings the elements of the drama that are affirmed precisely by employing these symbols*.

Such demands push us back to the grounds of systematic understanding. If those grounds at times have to do with the refinement of human feelings, with the emergence of a Christian religious *sensibility*, with the aesthetic and dramatic constitution of Christian living, then there is perhaps a dimension to theological foundations that Lonergan did not expressly articulate. It is the dimension that I have attempted to indicate in my various attempts to speak of a ‘psychic conversion.’ And if this is the case, then we have moved from a partial answer to the first question – what are the other functions? – to an answer to the fourth – what are the grounds of an explanatory use of symbolic, aesthetic, and dramatic categories in systematics? What is at stake here is what we must regard as an expansion of the normative source of meaning beyond what is generally regarded as Lonergan’s view on the issue. In fact, as I already indicated, something of an expansion of his own usual view can be found in Lonergan’s own later writings, and especially in the wonderful paper, ‘Natural Right and Historical-Mindedness.’ Here Lonergan states that the normative source is twofold. It consists, first, of the operators of conscious intentionality: questions for intelligence, questions for reflection, questions for deliberation. These operators are what most would probably consider Lonergan’s normative source of meaning to be. 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 now affirmed as the 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.’⁹ This tidal movement is an ongoing process of self-transcendence that in another paper from roughly the same post-*Method* period, ‘Mission and the Spirit,’ is called ‘the passionateness of being.’¹⁰

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

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

The tidal movement or, again, 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 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 interpersonal relations and community.

My own addition, perhaps, to what Lonergan says consists in the affirmation that in its totality this tidal movement contains a series of operators that I will call aesthetic-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. Furthermore, what I call psychic conversion establishes the link, through a turning of intentional consciousness to its aesthetic-dramatic counterpart. It is from the ongoing clarification and appropriation of the aesthetic-dramatic operators that the explanatory use of aesthetic and dramatic categories will be possible in systematics. It is this psychic conversion, which really is something like a perpetual ‘*conversio ad phantasmata*,’ that will keep systematics in touch with the mystery that it is attempting to understand.

2.3 Theological Doctrines

Next, returning to the first question – what are the other functions? – we must speak of theological doctrines and of the systematic appropriation of theological history.

We have already seen that, while systematics is centered in an understanding of the mysteries of faith, it is not limited to such mysteries, even when ‘mysteries of faith’ is

taken to include more than dogmas, even when it includes the elemental meanings that are closest to the form of divine revelation itself. Systematics is principally an understanding of mysteries, yes, but there are also doctrines, both theological and ecclesial, that do not directly express mysteries of faith but that systematic theologians attempt to work into a synthetic construction. I am especially concerned now, not so much with ecclesial doctrines that are not dogmas as with the *theological* doctrines that one receives from the tradition or from one's contemporaries, or in some cases that one has developed on one's own. These often emerge from attempting to understand scriptural doctrines or church doctrines or dogmas or mysteries of faith, but even if they do not directly transpose any of these, they are among the doctrines that the systematic theologian will attempt to understand, for they have been received as either entering into or explicating the meaning constitutive of the community. They influence the very patterns in which we receive that meaning. Moreover, these appropriated theological doctrines themselves often have systematic implications, and when that happens elements of other *systematic* syntheses are part of the *doctrinal* inventory of a contemporary systematic theologian. I cannot go into this point in detail, but in the book I emphasize, first, that this notion of theological doctrines is also what Lonergan intends when he speaks of a functional specialty named Doctrines, and second, that there are clear instances of such appropriation of doctrines that are theological, as contrasted with ecclesial, in Lonergan's own work and in the systematics that I envision. Examples are the psychological analogy for understanding the Trinitarian processions and the synthesis that Aquinas reached in the *Prima secundae* on operative and cooperative grace. Lonergan simply takes these over as doctrines: not of course as church doctrines, but as theological positions that he affirms first and then attempts to understand in more contemporary terms. Moreover, these appropriated theological doctrines themselves often have systematic implications, and when that happens elements of other *systematic* syntheses are part of the *doctrinal* inventory of a contemporary systematic theologian.

I speak in the book of three distinct criteria for affirming certain theological achievements as having something of a doctrinal status in theology. The first is that a given theological achievement is judged to have brought definitive closure to a particular theological debate. This holds, I believe, for Aquinas's position on operative grace as Lonergan has retrieved that position in *Grace and Freedom*. The second is that a given theological achievement presents the best or perhaps even the only analogy of nature yet discovered and developed that is useful for understanding a particular divine mystery. This, I would continue to hold even in a contemporary situation that tends in a contrary direction, is the case with the psychological analogy for the Trinity. The third criterion is that a given position has doctrinal status because it is an inescapable practical conclusion of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The church itself has found this to be true regarding the theological affirmation of the preferential option for the poor.

2.4 Categories

We have seen two areas where Lonergan's reflections on systematics can be developed or at least filled out, and the manner in which the development meets the exigencies of systematic seeking method. These are the relation of dogma and mystery, and the explicit acknowledgment of theological doctrines as providing material for systematic understanding. Already the issue of reconciling system and history lurks in the background. A number of the mysteries of faith that have not been given dogmatic status have to do with God's action in history. The two examples of resurrection and redemption are clear cases in point. And a different problem in the reconciliation of system and history is clear from the fact that the appropriation of theological doctrines calls for the kind of systematic or methodical hermeneutics that enables one to read the historical tradition in a manner that brings forward what is to be advanced and simply leaves behind what cannot be advanced.

A third area has to do with the categories: with their generation in the contemporary context, with their transposition from other contexts, with the integration of categories transposed from past contexts with categories developed today, and with the relation of the general categories to the special categories. It is the latter issue that will be given special treatment here as a special case of the reconciliation of system and history. But the other issues are also important.

First, then, the generation and transposition of categories. The fundamental rule here is that systematic categories that are preserved from past syntheses and categories that are developed in the contemporary context must be grounded in interiorly and religiously differentiated consciousness. ‘... for every term and relation there will exist a corresponding element in intentional consciousness.’¹¹ If a given category or set of categories accepted from the tradition is metaphysical, for instance, its grounds must be demonstrated in intentional consciousness. In the doctrine of *Insight*, the metaphysical elements are isomorphic with the levels of consciousness, and a critical metaphysics will be based on this isomorphism. Thus, for instance, metaphysical categories are employed when Lonergan tells us what he means by the intelligent or intellectual emanation that serves to provide us with the basic analogy for understanding the Trinitarian processions. The appropriate intellectual emanation is the procession of act from act, not of act from potency. That is all fine and good, but what does it mean? Only the explorations of a book like *Insight* – and I’m afraid there is only one book like *Insight!* – will answer that question. One has to appropriate the difference between the emergence of an insight from

11 Lonergan, *Method in Theology* 343. This statement expresses the very core of what Lonergan means by intellectual conversion. One who has problems with it has not yet known the ‘startling strangeness’ associated with this conversion. For further and more detailed statements on the bases of the categories employed in theology, see *ibid.* 282-83.

questions, which is the emanation of act from potency, and the emergence of concepts from insights or the emergence of judgments from the grasp of the sufficiency of evidence, which is the emanation of act from act. Again, the theology of history that provides the systematics that I am envisioning with its principal general categories is based on notions of dialectic and of the scale of values that are themselves derived quite directly from the intentionality analysis that gives rise to interiorly differentiated consciousness.¹² Finally, let us consider the first and second theses of Lonergan's *De ente supernaturali*. Here we are in the realm of the special categories. 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, but still ask the question, 'What in the world is an absolutely supernatural created communication of the divine nature? Show me one. What are the referents, in interiorly and religiously differentiated consciousness, of the metaphysical terms and relations that Lonergan employs to speak about sanctifying grace?' The issue is one of finding terms and relations in religious experience that correspond to the metaphysical distinction of sanctifying grace and charity that Lonergan in *De ente supernaturali* takes from Aquinas and that in *De Deo trino* he employs in a basic four-point hypothesis regarding created participations in the four divine relations.

Lonergan's own expression is in terms of an exegesis of Romans 5.5, 'The love of God is poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who is given us.' The words 'of God' here constitute a subjective genitive. It is *divine* love that has been poured into our

12 See my paper for the 2004 Boston College Lonergan Workshop, 'Complicate the Structure: Notes on a Forgotten Precept,' for an argument that the scale of values is grounded in the levels of consciousness. 2009: Here 'Essays in Systematic Theology 15.'

hearts. It is by participating in divine love that we love God with all our hearts and all our minds and all our strength. It is by the same participation in divine love that we love our neighbors as ourselves. Romans 5.5 is not talking about our love for God, except insofar as God's own love is given to us to be our love as well. Ultimately, only an explicit connection with the Trinitarian processions, such as appears in Lonergan's four-point hypothesis that I will speak of later in more detail, will provide the satisfactory conceptualization. That hypothesis gives us an articulation that allows us to speak of sanctifying grace, however haltingly but also, as Lonergan writes, *sine inconvenientia*, as the created external participation in the actively spirating love of Father and Son. There is something given to us at the core of our being that empowers us to love with a created participation in that love. That created participation in God's own unrestricted, unqualified, unconditional agape and judgment of value, in Father and Son as they breathe the Holy Spirit, is what medieval systematic theology conceived as the entitative habit, rooted in the essence of the soul, known as sanctifying grace. Furthermore, the four-point hypothesis goes on to conceive the habit of charity as what is breathed forth in us from sanctifying grace, and so as a created participation in the passive spiration that is the Holy Spirit. As the Holy Spirit is the uncreated internal term of the uncreated actively spirating love of Father and Son, so the habit of charity is the created external term of the created actively spirating *being-in-love* that is sanctifying grace, which itself is a created participation in divine active spiration. This is fundamentally what it means to be *recipients* of the mission of the Holy Spirit. But this is also what it means to say that, when the Holy Spirit is given to us, the Father and the Son come with the Spirit to dwell in us. The mission of the Holy Spirit *is* the eternal procession of the Spirit within the divinity, joined to a created external term, the habit of charity. But the habit of charity flows from the new *being* that is a being in love, and that being in love is a created participation in the eternal active spiration that is Father and Son operating as one principle breathing the Spirit of love. The dynamic state of being in love gives rise in a

habitual fashion to acts of love of God and neighbor, as the agapē of the Father and the judgment of value that is the Son together breathe the proceeding Love that is the Holy Spirit. Something of this gift enters into religious experience, but it has seldom been articulated with any sufficient clarity precisely as gift, and so as received. Upon reflection we should be able to understand some of the elements of our own religious experience in this way, and so to locate something in consciousness (precisely as experience) that corresponds to that mystery. The mystery is that we are given the capacity to love as a created participation in the proceeding love in God. In us that created participation in God's own proceeding love is breathed forth from the created participation in God's actively spirating love, the entitative change in our being that is sanctifying grace. Clearly, of course, if the mystery of sanctifying grace has to do with an entitative habit, it extends beyond consciousness. But 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, and, I would hazard to submit, also the categories that are required to get a systematics started. But, if we can acknowledge the difficulties upon which all of this opens us, is it any wonder that Lonergan writes that the very first set of special theological categories yet to be worked out has to do with religious experience itself? There is a great amount of work to be done simply clarifying religious interiority.¹³

Here, however, I believe that we must introduce one qualification to what Lonergan says about the correspondence of theological terms and relations with elements

13 2009: Further clarifications in my own work can be found on this website in the drafts of chapters of *The Trinity in History*. In brief, I am picking up on emphases that I first expressed in 'Consciousness and Grace' ('Essays in Systematic Theology 1'), in order to articulate the distinction of sanctifying grace and charity in terms of being on the receiving end of God's love and loving in return.

of intentional consciousness. The correspondence at times may be with elements, not of intentional but of nonintentional consciousness. I know that not everybody will agree with me, but I believe we must say that if the gift of God's love is correlated with St Ignatius Loyola's 'consolation without a cause,' and if the latter is correctly understood by Karl Rahner and Lonergan as consolation that has a content but is not a response to an apprehended object, then we must speak of this gift, as experienced, as occurring in nonintentional consciousness. Only when it begins to be appropriated and directed toward various objects, projects, persons, tasks, does it enter into intentional consciousness. This fits nicely, I think, with what St Ignatius says about distinguishing the gift itself and what follows from it.

It belongs to God our Lord alone to grant consolation without any preceding cause for it, because it belongs to the Creator alone to go in and out of the soul, to excite motions in it, attracting it entirely to the love of His Divine Majesty. I say, without cause, that is, without any previous perception or knowledge of any object from which such consolation might come to the soul, by means of its own acts of the understanding and will.

... When there is consolation without any preceding cause, though there be no deceit in it, inasmuch as it proceeds only from God our Lord ..., nevertheless the spiritual person to whom God gives this consolation ought with great watchfulness and care to examine and to distinguish the exact period of the actual consolation from the period which follows it, in which the soul continues fervent and feels the remains of the Divine favor and consolation lately received; for in this second period it often happens that by its own thoughts, from its own habits, and in consequence of its conceptions and judgments ..., it makes various resolves and plans, which are not inspired immediately by God our Lord; and hence it is necessary that they be

thoroughly well examined before they receive entire credit and are carried out into effect.¹⁴

Next, categories that are transposed from the theological tradition in which one stands must be integrated with contemporary developments, whether the developments are the work of others or of oneself. The only way to assure such integration, of course, is through the grounding of both traditional and contemporary categories in interiorly and religiously differentiated consciousness. Moreover, the integration will itself entail a development, and in fact one that goes both ways: the transposed traditional emphases will deepen the appropriation of the contemporary developments, frequently making possible a discovery of their metaphysical equivalents, while contemporary developments will affect the expressions adopted in the transpositions. There will take place, not so much a correlation as a mutual self-mediation between tradition and contemporary situation.

The final point to be emphasized under this heading of categories is the relation of the general categories to the special categories. What precisely this relation is has been articulated in a paper Daniel Monsour. I cannot do justice here to the richness of Monsour's analysis. I can only state his central point on this particular issue, while acknowledging that when I first read it I knew that I had found the answer to a question that I have been asking almost from the time I first read *Method in Theology*. If the ground or base of the general categories is the attending, inquiring, understanding, conceptualizing, reflecting, judging, deliberating, evaluating, deciding subject, and if the ground or base of the special categories is God's gift of divine love in grace, then the relation of the general categories to the special categories must be precisely the relation

14 St Ignatius Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises* 330 and 336, trans. Henry Keane (London: Burns Oates and Washbourne, 1952).

of their respective bases or grounds to one another. The relation of the base for the general categories to the base for the special categories is a relation of that remote essential passive potency that is capable of being moved to receive a form by the omnipotent power of God alone, and so of obediential potency. The base of the general theological categories, the transcendental notions as the unrestricted core of our capacity for self-transcendence, stands to the base of special theological categories, the state of being-in-love in an unrestricted manner, in the relation of obediential potency. Because the potency is a real orientation or order, being-in-love in an unrestricted manner is a real, intrinsic, proper, supernatural fulfilment of our natural capacity for self-transcendence. The fulfilment occurs in accord with the actual order of this universe that mirrors forth the glory of God. The missions of the Son and the Spirit are in harmonious continuation with the actual order of this universe and were so from the beginning. In ways we hardly understand, this universe and everything in it were from the beginning oriented, ordered, configured to the missions of the Son and the Spirit. But if that is the case, there is an enormous theological task ahead of us, for now we must formulate not only the individual obediential potency of a relation of intentional consciousness to the gift of God's love but also the social obediential potency of the relation of history to God's redemptive love in the divine missions of Word and Spirit. In that formulation will be found the core or focal meanings of a contemporary systematics. And it is precisely the scale of values and the dialectics of subject, culture, and community in their relations to one another that will enable us to construct such a theology.¹⁵

15 See H. Daniel Monsour, 'Harmonious Continuation of the Actual Order of This Universe in God's Self-communication,' unpublished paper presented to the Lonergan Research Institute Seminar, 13 November 2003.

3 The Unified Field Structure

To speak of the core or focal meanings of a systematics is to speak of what some have called the unified field structure for the functional specialty or theological discipline ‘systematics.’ The expression ‘unified field structure’ is Daniel Monsour’s.¹⁶ In my appropriation of it, I take it to mean an open set of conceptions that embraces heuristically the field of issues presently to be accounted for and presently foreseeable in systematics. The unified field structure would be found in a statement, perhaps a quite lengthy one, perhaps even one taking up several large volumes, capable of guiding for the present and the foreseeable future the ongoing genetic development of the entire synthetic understanding of the mysteries of faith and of the other elements that enter into systematics. It would guide all work at bringing these elements into a synthetic unity. It would stand in 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 will leave itself open to further enrichments, differentiations, and transformations analogous to those that it itself adds to the Thomist conception.

The implicit unified field structure of Aquinas’s *Summa* is provided by an integration of Aristotelian metaphysics and the theorem of the supernatural. The metaphysics of Aristotle grounds Aquinas’s general categories, and the theorem of the

16 See H. Daniel Monsour, ‘The Categories “Gratia Increata et Creatata” and the Functional Specialty Systematics,’ unpublished paper presented to the Lonergan Research Institute Seminar, 18 November 1999, and ‘The Four-point Hypothesis and the Special Theological Categories,’ unpublished paper delivered at the Boston College Lonergan Workshop, 2001.

supernatural grounds his special categories. As nature is in a relation of obediential potency to the supernatural, so the same relation provides the key to the integration of the two elements of the unified field structure. We are looking for something that would stand to a contemporary systematics as the theorem of the supernatural integrated with Aristotle's metaphysics stood to the emergent systematic theology of the Middle Ages as this systematic theology came to its synthesis in Aquinas. Even more, we are looking for something that would be a genetic development upon that unified field structure. So the two principal components of the structure that I am proposing are sublations of the two components of Thomas's structure, that is, of the theorem of the supernatural and of Aristotle's metaphysics. Thus, like the medieval organizing conception, the unified field structure that I am suggesting combines a specifically theological element with a more general set of categories. Finally, and to answer a question raised earlier, this unified field structure would be what, at least at the present time, stands to systematics as the periodic table stands to chemistry.

The principal specifically theological element in the unified field structure now at hand is a four-point hypothesis proposed in Lonergan's systematics of the Trinity. The hypothesis differentiates the theorem of the supernatural into a set of connections between the four real divine relations – what the tradition calls paternity, filiation, active spiration, and passive spiration – and created supernatural participations in those relations. Thus, (1) the secondary act of existence of the Incarnation is a created participation in paternity. 'Whoever has seen me has seen the Father' (John 14.9). In the immanent Trinitarian relations, the Word does not speak; the Word is spoken by the Father. The Incarnate Word speaks. But he speaks only what he has heard from the Father. Again, (2) sanctifying grace as the dynamic state of being in love is a created participation in the active spiration *by* the Father and the Son *of* the Holy Spirit, so that as the Father and the Son together breathe the Holy Spirit as uncreated term, so sanctifying grace, *being-in-love* in an unqualified fashion, precisely as created participation in the

active spiration of Father and Son, ‘breathes’ some created participation in the same Holy Spirit.¹⁷ (3) The habit of charity is that created participation in the passive spiration that *is* the Holy Spirit, a created participation in the third person of the Blessed Trinity. And (4) the light of glory that is the consequent created contingent condition of the beatific vision is a created participation in the Sonship of the divine Word. Thus the hypothesis enables a synthetic understanding of the four mysteries of the Trinity, the Incarnation, grace, and eternal life.

What about the general categories? The set of general categories that would represent a sublation of the Aristotelian metaphysics that provided Aquinas with his own general categories will be provided by what Lonergan calls a ‘basic and total science.’ That basic and total science is to be found in the cognitional theory, epistemology, and metaphysics of Lonergan’s great book *Insight* and in the existential ethics of both *Insight* and *Method in Theology*, but principally as these are brought to bear on the development of a theory of history. The two sets, general and special, are required. The divine missions, which are at the heart of the four-point hypothesis, and which are identical with the divine processions joined to created contingent external terms as the consequent conditions of the processions being also missions, must be located in creation and especially in the history whose dynamics of progress, decline, and redemption are part of the reason for the missions in the first place. And to the extent that it is possible, the missions must be located in creation and in history not vaguely but precisely. I believe this can be done through the scale of values, which, as a key to the theory of history, will form an additional component in the unified field structure. But this means that these theological realities must be integrated not only with one another but also with the heuristic account of the order of the universe (what Lonergan calls emergent probability)

17 2009: This articulation has been improved in the drafts from *The Trinity in History* mentioned above.

and with other realities constitutive of human history, that is to say, with realities that are known by sciences and scholarly disciplines other than theology. An additional set of sets of categories beyond those rooted in the four-point hypothesis and beyond the other special categories is required for such a theological synthesis to take place. *General* theological categories are required even for the adequate theological understanding of specifically theological realities. As the medieval theorem of the supernatural needed a metaphysical system, in the theology of Thomas Aquinas, if it was to mediate religion and the cultural matrix influenced by Aristotle, so the four-point hypothesis requires general categories shared with other disciplines if the divine missions that are at the core of the hypothesis are to be located in relation to their historical occasions and effects. More precisely, a mission is for a purpose, and the divine missions are for the purpose of establishing and confirming interpersonal relations, first between God and us, and then among ourselves; and interpersonal relations are also the core element in the structure of the human good that is coincident with the immanent intelligibility of history. Thus understanding the divine missions entails understanding the history that the Word was sent to redeem from the alternating cycles of progress and decline and that the Holy Spirit is sent to renew with the outpouring of self-sacrificing love.

And so my thesis is that the set of sets of general categories will be based in the cognitional theory, epistemology, and metaphysics of *Insight*, in the existential ethics of *Insight* and *Method in Theology*, and in the theory of history proposed by Lonergan over the span of his writings and complemented by the contributions that I have tried to offer in *Theology and the Dialectics of History*. My thesis is that, taken together, these two elements – a four-point theological hypothesis and what Lonergan calls the basic and total science, the *Grund- und Gesamtwissenschaft*, especially as the latter issues in a theory of history – provide the basic framework, the set of terms and relations, of a unified field structure for systematics. With the four-point hypothesis and the philosophical positions that are for the most part already in place in *Insight* and that are

complemented where necessary by later developments, we have everything we need to begin constructing a systematics. And that ‘everything we need to begin constructing a systematics’ is precisely what I mean by a unified field structure. And let me be clear about what I do *not* mean. No systematics will be complete until we enjoy the systematics that is coincident with the beatific vision. There is no possibility of a closed system in theology any more than there is in mathematics or empirical science. Eventually, every system will give rise to questions that cannot be answered on the basis of the resources provided by that system. Every system is an open system, that is, one in which it is anticipated that questions will arise from within the system itself that the system is not able to answer, that will demand the move to a higher viewpoint, perhaps a paradigm shift, before satisfactory hypotheses can be provided. Any system that claims not to be open in this way is an idol. Still, we must begin somewhere, and we must begin with the anticipation that the further categories that emerge will be validated by their connection with the categories that frame this unified field structure.

I cannot repeat here the rather detailed argument that grounds my affirmation of this particular unified field structure. But perhaps we can already glimpse the enormous theological implications of the twofold methodological insistence on basing everything in interiority and on locating everything in relation to history. It is one thing to transpose, for example, Trinitarian theology into categories dictated by interiorly and religiously differentiated consciousness. We are already familiar with the historical antecedents of such a transposition in the psychological analogies first of Augustine and then of Aquinas. Lonergan in *Divinarum personarum* and then in *De Deo trino* transposes the psychological analogy into categories explicitly derived from interiorly differentiated consciousness. But to add to this requirement the additional demand that all of this material must be formulated in terms of a theory of history adds a new dimension. The direct impact, of course, is on that portion of Trinitarian theology that treats the divine missions, and particularly the mission of the Holy Spirit. But the implications are more

far-reaching. They call for the development of a social and historical theology of grace at the very starting point of a systematics. The theory of history based on the interrelations of the levels of value – from above, religious, personal, cultural, social, vital – proposes that the recurrent intelligent emanation of the word of authentic value judgments and of acts of love in human consciousness (personal value) is due to the grace of the mission of the Holy Spirit (religious value) and is also the source of the making of history, of historical progress, through schemes of recurrence in the realms of cultural, social, and vital values. But the mission of the Holy Spirit *is* the eternal procession of the Holy Spirit linked to a created, contingent external term that is the consequent condition of the procession being also a mission, or of the proceeding Holy Spirit also being sent. Thus the intelligent emanation in God of the Holy Spirit, the eternal procession in God of the Holy Spirit, joined to the created, contingent, consequent external terms that are sanctifying grace and the habit of charity (as well as to the operative movements that are known as *auxilium divinum* or actual grace), the eternal intelligent emanation of the Spirit in God as also Gift in history, is the ultimate condition of possibility of any consistent or recurrent intelligent emanation of authentic judgments of value and schemes of recurrence rooted in acts of love in human beings. This collaboration of intelligent processions, divine and human, is, then, the condition of the possibility of the consistent authentic performance of what Lonergan calls the normative source of meaning in history. And if such personal value conditions the possibility of functioning schemes of recurrence in the realms of cultural, and then social, and then vital values, if that normative source, functioning communally, is the origin of progress in history, then the mission of the Holy Spirit, which is identical with the eternal procession of the Spirit linked to the created, contingent, consequent term of charity, and so the Spirit as Gift, is the very source of progress in history. Conversely, wherever genuine progress (measured by fidelity to the scale of values) takes place, the Spirit is present and active. The combination of the four-point hypothesis with the theory of history thus enables us to

relate Trinitarian theology, and even the theology of the immanent Trinity, directly to the processes not only of individual sanctification but also of human historical unfolding. The discernment of the mission of the Holy Spirit in all its concrete details thus becomes the most important ingredient in humankind's taking responsibility for the guidance of history. Conversely, the appropriation of the integral scale of values, again as much as possible in all its concrete details, would represent the contribution of systematics to the church and to various local Christian communities in their communal discernment of the mission of the Holy Spirit. As the theology of a very recent generation disengaged in a new way the notion of social sin, so the theology of this generation, if it begins with the four-point hypothesis in the context of a theory of history, may elaborate the notion of social grace, or, to use Lonergan's own expression in the sixth chapter of the systematic part of *De Deo trino*, the notion of the state of grace, not as an individual habit but as a social situation, as an intercommunion of the three divine subjects, one of them being the incarnate Word of God, with all those who have said yes to the offer of a created participation in divine life and as the consequent intercommunion of these human subjects with one another in the incarnate Word.¹⁸

4 Conclusion

I have gone on long enough, too long in fact, even if I have presented summary statements of only six of the ten chapters in the book *What Is Systematic Theology?* What I have offered here is a compendious statement of the positions put forth in chapters 1 to 5 and chapter 7. What have I left out? Chapter 6 argues that the mediation of religion and

18 See Bernard Lonergan, *The Triune God: Systematics*, trans. Michael G. Shields, ed. Robert M. Doran and H. Daniel Monsour (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007) 512-21.

culture that occurs in systematics is a mutual self-mediation. Chapter 8 presents a series of further methodological, hermeneutical, and substantive anticipations, all of which are rooted remotely or proximately in what I have summarized here. Chapter 9 is by far the lengthiest chapter in the book. This chapter treats the complex area of foundations. And chapter 10 spells out in far greater detail the implications for systematics when work in that functional specialty is deliberately undertaken as the development of a theological theory of history. As the entire book is only an anticipation of a future systematics, so this paper, I fear, is nothing more than an anticipation of that anticipation, and so an all too rudimentary introduction to the questions explored in the book. But this is no less than what I was asked to do in this paper, and so I must leave it to you to explore further and to see whether my anticipations are legitimate and my aspirations worth while.