

## **Essays in Systematic Theology 17: Shorter Version of System Seeking Method: Reconciling System and History**

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(shorter version for delivery at 2004 Centenary Celebration, Gregorian University)

The significance of the topic that I wish to address can be indicated if I quote something that Bernard Lonergan wrote in 1976 in response to a request for advice from the Vatican Secretariat for Nonbelievers. He spoke of ‘our unfinished *aggiornamento*. The scientific revolution of the seventeenth century and the historical revolution of the nineteenth constitute exigencies 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 exigencies of our day as thirteenth-century scholasticism met the challenge of Aristotelian and Arabic thought.’

The lamentable disarray of catholic writing on dogmatic issues continues nearly thirty years later, and the principal reason is that theology has not yet adopted the new methods that will integrate the truth of Catholic dogma with both scientific advances and historical mindedness. I venture to say that nobody has contributed more to the articulation of those methods than Bernard Lonergan, and in the present paper I wish to suggest very briefly the implications of his work for the reconciliation of systematic objectives in theology with the adoption of historical mindedness.

In my longer paper, I refer to evidence in the Lonergan archives that indicates better than does the book *Method in Theology* just what the differences are between the

old subject specialization called dogmatic theology and the new functional specialty 'Doctrines' and between the old subject specialization called systematic theology and the new functional specialty 'Systematics.' In the book the continuity between the subject specializations and the functional specializations is more obvious than their differences. This is particularly the case with Systematics, which on a first or superficial reading seems to be no different from the subject specialization whose method Lonergan articulated in the first chapter of *Divinarum personarum* and again in the first chapter of *De Deo trino: Pars systematica*. But in the papers written at the time of his breakthrough to functional specialization the differences leap off the page. And they all have to do with the centrality of history in the conception of the functional specialties – of all the functional specialties, in fact, but of Doctrines and Systematics in particular. To put the issue as briefly and succinctly as I can, 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*.

In my own work in line with these emphases I have tried to develop Lonergan's heuristic of history in terms of progress, decline, and redemption, first by following up on the insistence in the paper '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.<sup>1</sup> 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 Voegelin calls cosmological and anthropological, a set that in its dialectical integrity does not yet function in a schematic fashion on any notable scale anywhere 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.’

Next, I have 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 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

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

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.

And I am now arguing that, if this is correct, 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, namely, the basic terms and relations of a theory of history.

Two further requirements exist, however. 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.<sup>2</sup> It was to meet these two requirements that I have

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<sup>2</sup> 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 the journal *METHOD: Journal of Lonergan Studies* (here, ‘Essays in

prepared another, and fortunately much shorter, manuscript entitled *What Is Systematic Theology?*<sup>3</sup> My efforts in the longer paper consist 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.

I can state only briefly what the issues are that are addressed under these headings.

Under 'Methodological Issues in Systematics,' I treat first the relationship between dogma and mystery, emphasizing that 'mystery' is a far more extensive category than 'dogma' and that, while systematics should begin by attempting to understand what has been expressed in the dogmas, its principal function extends beyond that to the broader category of the mysteries of faith. This requirement pushes us back to the permanently elemental meaning of some of the mysteries of faith, a meaning that requires a narrative or dramatic or aesthetic form of expression that, while it must be harmonious with the dogmatic affirmations of the Church, will probably never itself be able to be transposed into that type of expression. The key here is to articulate the method that will enable us to discern when the story is being told appropriately, *convenienter*, and when it is not, and I suggest that what I have called psychic conversion can help with that articulation.

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Systematic Theology' 6, 7, and 8) 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?

<sup>3</sup> 2009: The book was published in 2005 by University of Toronto Press.

Next, I treat theological doctrines, that is to say, the doctrines of other theologians whom one regards as having provided closure on certain issues, as providing a portion of what systematics understands. This issue is complex, and takes us into the discussion of an explanatory account of theological history itself, so it is probably best left to your reading of the longer paper.

Already in these two topics we see the issue of reconciling system and history lurking 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 of development and reconciliation 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 alone that I have time to develop here, as a special case of the reconciliation of system and history. But the other issues are also important. The issue of the relation of general and special categories heads directly into the center of the reconciliation of system and history, precisely in the area of theological content.

I found the answer to a long-vexing question about the relation of the general categories to the special categories in a paper by my colleague at the Lonergan Research Institute, Daniel Monsour. 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 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 fulfillment of our natural capacity for self-transcendence. The fulfillment 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.<sup>4</sup>

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4 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. 2009: I suspect the issues treated under the rubric of 'social obediential potency' are related to John Dadosky's vision of

Thus there arises the issue of what, again relying on Daniel Monsour, I have called a unified field structure for systematics. Briefly, what will correspond in today's systematics to the implicit unified field structure of the *Summa theologiae*, which I believe is a synthesis of Philip the Chancellor's theorem of the supernatural with Aquinas's appropriation of Aristotle? My suggestion is that the theorem of the supernatural has been sublated into a four-point hypothesis that appears in the final chapter of *De Deo trino: Pars systematica*, that the Aristotelian philosophical component of Aquinas's theology can be sublated into the theory of history that flows from Lonergan's *Grund- und Gesamtwissenschaft* of cognitional theory, epistemology, metaphysics, and existential ethics, and that the history thus articulated stands in relation to the *entia supernaturalia* of Lonergan's four-point hypothesis in the same relation of obediencial potency that marks the relation of Aristotle's 'nature' to the supernatural. In the theory of history itself, then, that is based on the integral scale of values (from above, religious, personal, cultural, social, vital), the four-point hypothesis is the central core of the realm of 'religious values,' and the dimensions of personal, cultural, social, and vital values in their interrelation with one another stand in a relationship of obediencial potency to the Trinitarian relations and the created participations in those relations that are articulated in the four-point hypothesis.<sup>5</sup>

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a fourth stage of meaning, a vision he put forth at the 2008 Lonergan Workshop at Boston College in an essay to be published in *Heythrop Journal*.

<sup>5</sup> The four-point 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, the assumed humanity of the Incarnate Word, is a created participation in paternity. 'Whoever has seen me has seen the Father' (John 14.9). In the immanent



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

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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, being on the receiving end of divine unqualified love (2009: this is a new formulation, replacing Lonergan's expression 'the dynamic state of being in love in an unqualified fashion, which amalgamates sanctifying grace and charity in too compact a fashion), 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 and as one principle breathe the Holy Spirit as uncreated term, so sanctifying grace, precisely as created participation in the active spiration of Father and Son, 'breathes' some created participation in the same Holy Spirit. (3) The habit of charity (2009: *charity*, not sanctifying grace, is the dynamic state of being in love in an unqualified fashion) 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. And so the hypothesis enables a synthetic understanding of the four mysteries of the Trinity, the Incarnation, grace, and eternal life.

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. For they are calling 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, will 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.