

## **Essays in Systematic Theology 26: Addressing the Four-Point Hypothesis<sup>1</sup>**

Robert M. Doran, S.J.

I welcome the discussion that my article ‘The Starting Point of Systematic Theology’ has occasioned, and especially the attention that is drawn by this discussion to the relative merits and difficulties of Bernard Lonergan’s hypothesis relating the four divine relations to four created supernatural realities. In the course of my efforts to envision how a systematic theology based in Lonergan’s theological method might unfold, I have become increasingly convinced that the first answer to such a question must be, ‘Collaboratively.’ No one person can write such a systematics in our time, but a group sharing the same assumptions regarding the fundamental issues that Lonergan discussed under the rubric of religious, moral, and intellectual conversion can go a long way. One hope of mine in recent years has been to assemble such a group and start working with them, and that hope now seems to be taking the form of an online research enterprise that could soon be up and running.<sup>2</sup> Before my hope takes that cyberspace form, though, it seems to have found a more traditional organ of communication. And for this I can only be grateful.

When someone who in my estimation has already made at least two contributions of his own to the kind of systematics that I envision takes issue with a central thrust of my own suggestions, I must take notice, reflect seriously on what that person has said, and respond as best I can. Charles Hefling has recently written two masterful essays whose basic points, I believe, must be integrated into a fuller systematic effort, one on the

---

<sup>1</sup> Updated from a publication in *Theological Studies* 68 (2007) 674-82.

<sup>2</sup> 2010: The reference, of course, is to the present website!

human knowledge of Christ<sup>3</sup> and one on revelation.<sup>4</sup> These two papers, at least at this writing, have not yet been published, but they are both scheduled for publication soon. As Hefling knows, I have already recommended them to several of my students as definitive contributions to the issues they address.

And when another leading theologian whose many contributions to date have all been right on the mark, namely, Neil Ormerod, finds positive currency in a text from Lonergan that I have suggested could be central to systematic theology, it only bolsters my confidence that I cannot be entirely *off* the mark. Ormerod's contributions both to original systematic theology and to clear and forthright discussion of theological issues (several of them in this journal) are quickly earning him a reputation as a very reliable and solid systematic theologian, someone to be taken very seriously.

Let me be clear, then, that I accept two corrections proposed in Hefling's article. He had already called both of these to my attention in his capacity as one of the editors of *Method: Journal of Lonergan Studies*, and, as he no doubt is aware, on these two points I have already corrected an article that will appear in that journal.<sup>5</sup> The *Theological Studies* article that gives him some of the grist for his mill had already reached proof stage by the time I was aware of these difficulties, and so I did not have the chance to clarify my

---

3 Charles Hefling, 'Another Perhaps Permanently Valid Contribution: Lonergan on Christ's (Self-) Knowledge,' *Lonergan Workshop 20* (2008) 127-64. Now available on this website, under 'Scholarly Works/Journals.'

4 Charles Hefling, 'Revelation and/as Insight,' in *The Importance of Insight*, ed. David Liptay and John Liptay (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007).

5 Robert M. Doran, 'Imitating the Divine Relations: A Theological Contribution to Mimetic Theory,' *Method: Journal of Lonergan Studies 23* (2005, published in 2009) 149-86. This paper is now available on this site in two spots: under 'Journals' in the relevant issue of *Method* and in this e-book as chapter 20.

intentions and my meaning in line with his suggestions. I more or less anticipated that he would point out that I had continued in my errant ways, and he has. I refer to the loose way in which I spoke of the ‘secondary act of existence of the Incarnation,’ one of the central points in the ‘four-point hypothesis’ that I am adopting from Bernard Lonergan, and to the facile assumption on my part that in his later articulation of the starting point of the psychological analogy in the dynamic state of being in love, Lonergan was obviously referring to religious love.

On the *esse secundarium* Hefling is right: my language was sloppy, and his is not; I have since adopted his. On the second point, however, I have responded, in pieces composed after the *Theological Studies* article, by distinguishing with Lonergan three forms of love: the love of intimacy, love in the community, and God’s gift of love poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given to us, and I have conceded that a presentation of the psychological analogy proposed in Lonergan’s later work may properly begin from any one of these. I have chosen to begin it from the standpoint of religious love, even though I realize that this may not have been Lonergan’s intention (though I’m not as convinced as Hefling seems to be that it wasn’t). Part of my motivation has to do with my reading of the contemporary Catholic theological scene.<sup>6</sup> Quite specifically, I am convinced of the need for open dialogue and communication between Lonergan’s students and those of Hans Urs von Balthasar, and I believe that appealing to the category of religious love as a starting point in trinitarian theology, displaying the emanation of act from act in this realm of grace itself, might persuade Balthasar’s students that the so-called ‘psychological analogy’ could be more worthy of consideration than their master seems to have thought. If I am correct in thinking that it is

---

<sup>6</sup> For details, see Robert M. Doran, S.J., ‘Lonergan and Balthasar: Methodological Considerations,’ *Theological Studies* 38 (1997) 61-84 (updated on this site, in this e-book, as selection 4).

reasonable to envision Lonergan and von Balthasar standing in relation to each other in a future theological tradition much as we understand the relation of Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventure, then I also believe that the students of both of these twentieth-century giants have an obligation to make every effort to avoid a conflict in Catholic theology similar to the Aristotelian-Augustinian debacle that precipitated the decline of medieval theology and the effective loss for several centuries of the achievements of these two medieval saints. My hope is that Balthasar and Lonergan will both one day be named Doctors of the Church. I would hope as well that the followers of each of them might recognize gladly and freely that they both deserve that recognition, and might attempt to accommodate as much of the work of both theologians as is possible.

While I'm at the task of accepting these corrections from Hefling, though, let me correct him on one point in his interpretation of my own position. It is not the case that I regard the so-called 'four-point hypothesis' on its own as what I am calling the 'unified field structure' of a systematic theology. I regard it as *part* of that structure, not as the whole of it. In fact, I have argued that it cannot and must not be regarded as the whole of the unified field structure, which, in response to Lonergan's own insistence in notes that he wrote at the time of his breakthrough to functional specialization, must be suited to a systematic theology whose mediated object is *Geschichte*. The four-point hypothesis must be integrated with the theory of history contained in Lonergan's own work and in my *Theology and the Dialectics of History* as well. It is that integrated vision that will provide the unified field structure. On this point, then, Ormerod is correct in indicating that the developments contained in the four-point hypothesis 'move in the direction of ... a unified field structure for systematic theology.'

At any rate, the central point at issue between Hefling and myself seems to be over my efforts to redeem what Hefling calls a *hapax legomenon* in Lonergan, namely, the so-called four-point hypothesis proposed in the chapter 6 of *The Triune God*:

*Systematics*.<sup>7</sup> Strictly speaking this is not a *hapax legomenon*, since it appeared as well in the earlier *Divinarum personarum*, which saw its first light of day in 1957.<sup>8</sup> Even if this text was the forerunner to the *De Deo trino: Pars systematica* of 1964, Lonergan changed a good deal from the earlier text, as appendix 4 in *The Triune God: Systematics* manifests, but he did not see fit to change or abandon this hypothesis.

I was somewhat surprised that Hefling did not address the major contribution to the discussion of many of these issues that appears in Christiaan Jacobs-Vandegeer's article in the March 2007 issue of *Theological Studies*. I was happy to see that Ormerod finds the same merit in Jacobs-Vandegeer's contribution to the conversation that I find there. There is something of an interesting history here, since after I had submitted the 'Starting Point' article that is part of the object of Hefling's remarks, I read Jacobs-Vandegeer's article in manuscript form and felt that its central thesis regarding the meaning of the metaphysical distinction between sanctifying grace and charity was the clearest exposition of this that I had yet seen and that the challenge that Jacobs-Vandegeer proposed regarding the transposition of that distinction into categories derived from interiorly and religiously differentiated consciousness was now as clear as could be

---

7 Bernard Lonergan, *The Triune God: Systematics*, trans. Michael G. Shields, ed. Robert M. Doran and H. Daniel Monsour (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007) 471, 473. The text is translated from Bernard Lonergan, *De Deo trino: Pars Systematica* (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1964).

8 Bernard Lonergan, *Divinarum personarum conceptionem analogicam evolvit B. Lonergan* (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1959, 1964). 2010: It appeared as well in notes on sanctifying grace that Lonergan wrote for a course in 1951-1952. These will appear in vol. 19 of Lonergan's *Collected Works, Early Latin Theology*, trans. Michael G. Shields, ed. Robert M. Doran and H. Daniel Monsour (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011 or 2012).

desired. Jacobs-Vandegeer's article supports my conviction that the medieval distinction, made in metaphysical terms, is worth preserving in a theology that takes its basic terms and relations from interiority, and that we are thus challenged to find the appropriate way of transposing this distinction into the language of interiority analysis. A general caution might be helpful here: a theology based in Lonergan should be very slow to abandon metaphysical terms and relations found in Aquinas and in Lonergan's early theology, no matter how difficult it may be to transpose them into the terms and relations of conscious intentionality or to derive them from the latter.<sup>9</sup>

I used Jacobs-Vandegeer's article in composing a lecture that I delivered at Marquette University in October 2006 and again, in abbreviated form, at the Third International Lonergan Workshop in Mainz in January 2007.<sup>10</sup> Some material in this lecture addresses Hefling's central concern (though, of course, at the time I did not know of his concern). The material deals precisely with how the transposition might be effected. Whether Hefling would have accepted my way of treating the issue is another question, but at least the lecture manifests my awareness of some of the issues he raises, independently of finding these issues in his article.

---

9 2010: This sentence was omitted from the *Theological Studies* article in 2007. I'm not sure why, but I have argued the point at greater length in 'Preserving Lonergan's Understanding of Thomist Metaphysics: A Proposal and an Example, in *Lonergan Workshop* 21 (2009) 85-101. This paper is available on the present site under 'Journals' in the relevant issue, and will be uploaded with some revisions in this e-book.

10 Robert M. Doran, 'Being in Love with God: A Source of Analogies for Theological Understanding,' Emmett Doerr Lecture, Marquette University, 2006, subsequently published in *Irish Theological Quarterly* 73 (2008) 227-42. See the present e-book, item 23.

I have also been aware all along that Lonergan's later formulations in terms of his intentionality analysis are 'three-point' rather than 'four-point' formulations. But, unlike Hefling, I have never been satisfied with this, partly because I have been convinced that there is real value to the metaphysical distinction between sanctifying grace and charity, and partly because I have been taken with the extraordinary explanatory systematic potential of the so-called four-point hypothesis. I want to try to develop that potential in my own systematic efforts. The difficulty, of course, lies in the transposition of that distinction into conscious relations, or into what, adding to Lonergan's own terminology, we might call 'special basic relations.' As I indicated in 'The Starting Point,' Lonergan, in a pithy summary of his methodological position in the chapter of *Method in Theology* devoted to systematics, speaks of general basic terms, general basic relations, special basic terms, and derived terms and relations both general and special, but there is no mention of special basic relations.<sup>11</sup> If we could find the appropriate manner of transposing the distinction of sanctifying grace and charity into the terms of interiority – a distinction that Lonergan says imitates and participates in the trinitarian relations of active and passive spiration, and so in trinitarian life in its entirety, since active spiration is not really distinct from paternity and filiation considered together – we would have a clue to what might constitute special basic relations.

For Jacobs-Vandeguer, if what Lonergan calls the dynamic state of being in love corresponds to what a medieval theology calls sanctifying grace, then that state has to do with the *unity* of consciousness as that unity reflects an entitative habit radicated in the essence of the soul, in central form, and manifested in diverse acts of faith, hope, and love, as well as in other operations and states. The dynamic state that corresponds in a 'methodical theology' to what in a metaphysical theology is called sanctifying grace is a

---

11 See Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003) 343.

radical enrichment of the unity of consciousness that accompanies the acts of the theological virtues and other acts while remaining distinct from them. I now quote from my Marquette lecture (which relies on Jacobs-Vandegeer's clarification): 'What, though, is this radical enrichment of the unity of consciousness? In what does it consist? How does the elevation of central form manifest itself in consciousness? I wish to suggest a movement from the gift of God's love to a knowledge and orientation (let us call it a horizon) born of that love, and a movement from the gift and the horizon together to acts of loving that coalesce into a habit of charity. In traditional terms, the gift of God's love is sanctifying grace, the horizon born of that love consists of faith and hope, and the disposition that proceeds from the gift and the horizon together constitutes charity. The gift of God's love and the horizon born of it are the created graced analogue of active spiration, and so of Father and Son together, and the habit of charity that proceeds from them is the created graced analogue of passive spiration, and so of the Holy Spirit. From the gift of God's love to faith and hope, and from these together to love; from the Father to the Word, and from Father and Word together to the proceeding Love that is the Holy Spirit.'

I then admitted that in terms of consciousness it is much easier to speak of the horizon born of the gift of God's love than it is of that gift itself. That horizon would manifest itself in a disposition that favors evidence for affirming the goodness of being in the face of all contrary evidence rather than acquiescing to the contrary evidence itself. Such an orientation issues in an affirmation of value, a yes that, as cognitive, is faith and, as oriented into ever greater mystery and awaiting yet further discovery of that mystery, is hope. From the gift of God's love and the faith and hope born of it there proceed acts

of loving that cumulatively coalesce into an ever firmer habit or 'form' of charity or, in the terms of *Insight*, of universal willingness.<sup>12</sup>

What of the gift itself? This has been my question in all of my attempts, however inadequate they may be to this date, to open up this discussion. I remain as convinced today as I was when I wrote 'Consciousness and Grace,' the article referred to in Hefling's note 25, that the four-level structure of intentional consciousness presented by Lonergan is not able to provide room for the conscious reception of this gift. I did not express that conviction very well in that article. The responses to the article, however, one of which Hefling mentions, seem to have questioned not only the expression but also the conviction, and on this I will not yield. This conviction on my part is an extension of a very early persuasion of mine that there is more to be accounted for in the realm of interiority than can be fitted into the four levels of Lonergan's intentionality analysis. Every attempt to articulate that conviction has brought some tension with at least a few of Lonergan's students. But it was from that conviction that I developed a notion of psychic conversion, in order to incorporate what Lonergan himself, explicitly following me on this, called the symbolic operator,<sup>13</sup> and it is from this conviction that I am trying to find the proper way to talk about the gift, precisely as gift, of God's love.

I now want to suggest that perhaps Lonergan's students have to abandon the use of 'level' language with regard to this issue: In fact I am getting close to the point of suggesting that we abandon that language altogether. The spatial metaphor is causing at

---

12 See Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran, vol. 3 in *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993) 646-47, and the extension of that discussion into the consideration of charity, *ibid.* 720-22.

13 See note 15 below. Lonergan's footnote at 'symbolic operator' refers to my work on psychic conversion.

least as many problems as it is solving, and it may be that we have to find another way of speaking about these interior realities. They are sublating and sublated operations and states, and as Lonergan indicates in one place, 'level' language presents no more than initial signposts.<sup>14</sup> At any rate, I believe that Lonergan recognized that even his movement to four rather than three levels of intentional consciousness was not adequate to explain some dimensions of religious experience, and that it is for this reason that he experimented with the suggestion of a fifth, and in one place a sixth,<sup>15</sup> level of

---

14 See Bernard Lonergan, 'Philosophy and the Religious Phenomenon,' in *Philosophical and Theological Papers 1965-1980*, vol. 17 in *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, ed. Robert C. Croken and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005) 397.

15 Ibid. 400: 'Our intentionality analysis distinguished the four levels of experience, understanding, factual judgment, and existential decision. We must now advert to the fact that this structure may prove open at both ends. The intellectual operator that promotes our operations from the level of experience to the level of understanding may well be preceded by a symbolic operator that coordinates neural potentialities and needs with higher goals through its control over the emergence of images and affects. Again, beyond the moral operator that promotes us from judgments of fact to judgments of value with their retinue of decisions and actions, there is a further realm of interpersonal relations and total commitment in which human beings tend to find the immanent goal of their being and, with it, their fullest joy and deepest peace.

'So from an intentionality analysis distinguishing four levels one moves to an analysis that distinguishes six levels. Moreover, the two added levels are particularly relevant to religious studies.'

Hefling and others might object to my appeal to this text that mention of six levels is another *hapax legomenon*. And so it is. But before this objection deflects attention

consciousness. Lonergan was a Jesuit, and Jesuits make the full *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius Loyola at least twice in their lives. While Lonergan was extremely critical of the conceptualist framework that governed the manner in which the *Exercises* were given to him on both occasions,<sup>16</sup> he remained extremely interested in the genuine Ignatian teaching regarding discernment and consolation without a preceding cause. In the Ignatian text there are expressed insights into religious experience that, I am convinced, cannot be accommodated by Lonergan's structure unless that structure is expanded. I have argued elsewhere that Ignatius's so-called third time of election is adequately accounted for in Lonergan's terms, since the delineation of decision in *Insight* presents the general form of that third time.<sup>17</sup> But Ignatius provides clues that would help students

---

from the issue itself, let me insist that the concern that led Lonergan to speculate along these lines was not a fleeting concern, but one that stayed with him for quite some time. There is further evidence of this concern in unpublished responses to questions at various Boston College Lonergan Workshops and in institutes on *Method in Theology*. These are all available on audio recordings that have been transferred to digital media by Greg Lauzon. 2010: The recordings are now available on [www.bernardlonergan.com](http://www.bernardlonergan.com). Jeremy Blackwood has begun the important task of interpreting these recordings and evaluating their importance for determining the status of a very important question.

16 See William A. Mathews, *Lonergan's Quest: A Study of Desire in the Authoring of Insight* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005) 30. Mathews suggests that it was Eric Voegelin's discussion of the golden cord in Plato's *Laws* that brought Lonergan to a better understanding of the Ignatian materials.

17 Robert M. Doran, 'Ignatian Themes in the Thought of Bernard Lonergan, *Toronto Journal of Theology* 22 (2006) 39-54; 'Ignatian Themes in the Thought of Bernard Lonergan: Revisiting a Topic that Deserves Further Reflection,' *Lonergan Workshop*

of Lonergan settle some of the disputes over how to unpack his later notion of value and decision. This is particularly the case in Ignatius's talk of a second time of election that involves pulls and counterpulls of affectivity. Further work needs to be done to relate Ignatius's first and second times of election to Lonergan's analysis, and I submit that it will involve something along the lines of the expansion of the structure that Lonergan speaks of in the several references to levels beyond the familiar four. I have also stated that, if Lonergan is correct in adopting and adapting from Karl Rahner the position that Ignatius's 'consolation without a preceding cause' is consolation that has a content but no apprehended object,<sup>18</sup> then that experience as well cannot be accounted for in terms of four levels of intentional consciousness. Something more is needed. It is that something more that I am in search of.

Now at least part of the something more lies in simply receiving unqualified love. If we are oriented to grasping evidence for saying yes to the rest of being, it is because we have had an elemental experience that may be objectified in some such fashion as 'being has said "yes" to us.' As Balthasar has said, it is not too much to suggest that a mother's smile welcoming her infant into this world is one way of mediating such a global awareness.<sup>19</sup> At any rate, I believe we must search not only for a way of articulating a conscious participation in the relationship in the triune God between the *notionaliter diligere* of Father and Son and the *amor procedens* that is the Holy Spirit, between active and passive spiration, but also for a way of clarifying how the gift that

---

19, ed. Fred Lawrence (Boston College, 2006) 83-106. These two articles are both available in the present e-book, numbers 18 and 19.

18 See Lonergan, *Method in Theology* 106 note 4.

19 See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Love Alone*, trans. Alexander Dru (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), p. 61; *Theo-Drama II: Dramatis Personae: Man in God*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), p. 389.

initiates the process is a communication precisely of a created participation in the *notionaliter diligere* that is Father and Son as they breathe proceeding Love.<sup>20</sup> That suggestion remains to be developed, but I think it is well worth the effort. It is precisely the ‘gift’ character of that communication that needs to be clarified. Moreover, the conscious participation in both active and passive spiration would then constitute for a ‘methodical’ theology ‘special basic relations’ as part of the ground of special categories in theology. It is partly for this reason that I plan to continue to try to unpack a four-point, not a three-point, hypothesis.

Additional reasons for this choice are theological in the strict sense of systematic theology. But these reasons have been addressed to my satisfaction in Neil Ormerod’s contribution to this discussion, and I need not repeat them here. Let me just indicate that I am particularly drawn to his response to the question whether the life of grace is sufficiently accounted for by the divine self-communication of the Holy Spirit. While Hefling uses other language, his suggestion that we leave a participation in active spiration out of the discussion of created grace would seem to head in the same direction. I think Ormerod has admirably argued that the four-point hypothesis better accounts for the divine indwelling of the three divine Persons than does any limitation of grace to the gift of the Spirit. To quote Ormerod, ‘The life of grace ... involves the whole Trinity, Father, Son and Spirit, in a proper Trinitarian mode of active and passive spiration.’ I

---

<sup>20</sup> That Lonergan regarded charity as ‘spirated’ appears in an interesting statement in *The Triune God: Systematics*, at 113: ‘Just as we are not justified by faith alone but by that faith that works through love, so we are not perfected by theology alone but only by that theology that breathes forth charity more deeply and enlightens it more effectively.’ The Latin word here translated as ‘breathes forth’ is ‘spirat.’ The theology that would breathe forth charity would itself be a collaboration through participation with the divine Word. Theology, after all, *is* a vocation within the church.

appreciate as well Ormerod's account of a possible 'logic of Lonergan's position' toward the end of his paper.

Hefling's challenge remains very real. The transposition of the medieval distinction of sanctifying grace and charity into the special basic terms and relations called for by Lonergan is not an easy task. I take comfort in the fact that Hefling has never been one to shun speculative tasks because they are not easy, so I trust that he will maintain interest in the attempts that I and others make to meet the challenge, and I hope that he – and others – will continue to express concerns over what we are about. Mutual and respectful consideration of concerns, after all, is surely one avenue to theology's fruitful development.