

DOING CATHOLIC SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY IN A MULTI-RELIGIOUS WORLD

“Response To Fr. Robert Doran, “The Divine Missions And Globalization””

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I.

I am grateful for the invitation to speak in dialogue with Fr. Robert Doran’s richly insightful Systematics on the Trinity in history, specifically in regard to cooperating with God toward future realization of world-cultural humanity. There are many points to discuss in parts 2 and 3 about globalization and modernity/postmodernity. But I will focus first on potential in parts 2, 3, and 4 for collaboration between theology and sociology in Communications as a way toward effecting world-cultural humanity.

An analogy suggests an overall perspective on the excellence of Doran’s long-term contribution and a potential direction for further response to today’s paper. It may be helpful to imagine the methodological work of Doran on Bernard Lonergan’s Systematics as like an architect’s plan for a building or series of buildings. By itself, as with some blueprints designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, the envisioned building or complex of buildings may be a thing of beauty to contemplate. But insofar as the blueprint is a design to be actualized not only a work of art on its own, its finality lies toward an actual building project and result. Without the plan detailed in the blueprint nothing gets built. But even with the design, a great deal is still needed. Only with engineering and construction does the plan come to fulfillment of its purpose and enter the world of observable history as a place of human concourse. Architects have to rely on engineers and construction workers who take up available materials to build on a particular site perhaps with singular characteristics.

Doran’s development of Systematics is like the blueprint but the kind of work outlined in Communications supplies the engineering and construction needed to realize the larger plan in a given cultural context. So I propose that strengthening ties between Doran’s paper and the tasks outlined in Communications provides a path toward realization of Doran’s methodological and substantive ideas on Trinity, divine missions, and globalization. My further remarks tend in that direction.

On potential for collaboration between theology and sociology opened by parts 2 and 3: summarily, Doran’s project is not utopian in the sense of proposing an ideal goal without attention to means for achieving it; rather he outlines how to advance the cause of

world-cultural humanity by taking account of Lonergan's stages of meaning and applying Lonergan's scale of values. According to the scale of values, the realization of vital values of food, shelter, clothing, accessible to all members of a society comes about in regular fashion if some degree of the good of social order has been achieved. Analysis of and contributions of meaning, truth, and values essential to bringing about that good of social order has been the main preoccupation of for well over a century in Catholic social teaching. Many committed to postconciliar faith and justice projects have directed their attention and labors toward a just social order at national and international levels.

Now, one of Doran's signal contributions to the cause of faith and justice consists in applying the scale of values to illuminate the fact that renewal of the social order flows from a more comprehensive self-transcendence by members of a society in their cultural appreciation of the good, search for the truth, and cultivation of beauty. The higher realm of culture animates renewal in social values and so promotes movement toward a just social order. That I think is a valid, salient, and essential analysis. But how are cultural values to be mediated to the social realm of the good of order at national and international life? Here is where sociology comes into the picture. Sociology offers insight into how ideas gain leverage in history. They become influential especially by means of structured cooperation in associations, organizations, and institutions. At the same time sociology can learn from Lonergan and Doran the causal priority of religious, personal, and cultural self-transcendence that cannot be reduced to individualism.

Doran proposes a path toward historical realization of world-cultural humanity by way of fourfold conversions and the knowledge gained, communicated, and advanced by way of the 8 or 9 functional specialties. That proposal has potential for engaging the sociological imagination in devising associational, organized, institutional mediation of the outcomes of conversion and the specialties to effective impact of a larger scope than academic organizations ordinarily are capable of.

How can this occur methodologically? I think a key step is putting systematic theology into collegial relationship with the last of Lonergan's functional specialties, Communications. Communications relates the attainments of Systematics to a cultural context in a spirit of dialogue and cooperation with disciplines other than theology, with other church traditions, with other religions, and with associations promoting social and ecclesial renewal. One task for Communications is dialogue between systematic themes and

knowledge in a cultural context. Probably Communications not Systematics is where Doran's proposal on world-cultural humanity can find wind for its sails.

Without organized, associational mediation of cultural values to social values, Doran's proposal in Systematics could share the plight of Catholic social teaching after Vatican II, a body of valid, developing principles still seeking organizations to give it leverage in historical activity of a national and international scope. Again summarily, I suggest that Doran's systematic theology of the Trinity in history will bear its most influential fruit in collaboration with the functional specialty of Communications in consultation with sociology. There are two already active institutions that are obvious candidates for the role of mediating cultural values to social values. One is the church. The other is the network of institutions of higher learning, particularly those under Catholic auspices. Further discussion could wonder whether the church or the Catholic academy is better suited for the task of leading people into their world-cultural humanity or, on the other hand whether both might make distinct but harmonious contributions.

Very briefly and finally, in part 4 on the divine missions and world-cultural consciousness a clarification of the following sort would help. The divine missions depend on the causally but not necessarily chronological priority of the divine act of creating. The divine missions are the divine processions with the addition of a temporal effect. The temporal effect added to the procession of the Son from the Father is the assuming of an individual human nature, the Word becoming flesh. The temporal effect added to the spiration of the Holy Spirit is not hypostatic union with a creature but a diffuse, universal mode of presence in human interiority and history. In the missions of Son and Spirit the temporal effect is and has to be creaturely. In the case of the Holy Spirit the procession of the Holy Spirit is part or all of what has been created but in a union other than hypostatic. So both divine missions depend on the prior act of creating and the prior existence of what has come to be.

A statement in part 4 says, "It is first and foremost the mission of the Holy Spirit that constitutes the universal realm of religious values in the integral scale of values." What is left unstated is that the mission of the Spirit depends on creaturely existence due to the Son/Word/Logos acting with the Father as John 1: 1-14 (and parallel passages in Hebrews, Colossians, etc.) declares. What's at stake is not the logic of discourse about mission but the prior creature/Creator relationship touched by the Spirit. And a number of New Testament

passages, as if ignoring the traditional axiom that divine act affecting what is not divine is one and not distinguished by divine person, not a proper act, attributes the immediate divine act of creating to the Son/Word/Logos not to the Holy Spirit. That means the universal grace and love of God from the Spirit to humanity is given to what exists in dependence on the Son/Logos. Prior to the visible and invisible missions of Logos and Spirit is creaturely dependence for existence on the creating Logos.

Consequently I'd propose a modification that clarifies the relation between divine creating and the mission of the Holy Spirit. For example, Doran states that, "The first task of theology in this twenty-first century is to work out the discernment of the gift of the Holy Spirit in terms that can locate that gift." In responding dialogue I'd look for a clarification that brings to light the prior creature/Creator relationship that is a creature/creating Logos relationship. Lastly since the creating Logos exists in hypostatic union with the humanity of Jesus, the mission of the Spirit likewise has a relation to Jesus not adequately summed up in the Western, *filioque* idea of Jesus co-sending the Spirit. That more difficult relationship to pronounce is the Spirit somehow active in divine creating with the Logos prior to the mission of the Spirit.

One difference this makes is to emphasize creature/Creator dependence as a primary locus for interreligious discovery.

II.

I'd like to raise some further questions of a more specific, technical sort not explicitly encompassed by reflection responding to Doran's main theme on divine missions and globalization.

First, a question about models: the paper quotes Lonergan on models, "For models purport to be, not descriptions of reality, not hypotheses about reality, but simply interlocking sets of terms and relations" (3). Does this formulation empty models of all referential meaning? Do not models like all knowledge originate in experience yielding to understanding and so retain some relation to reality? Even mathematical models derive from experience of quantity. Consequently might not Doran's models—world-cultural humanity, the scale of values, and stages of meaning—be restoring something missing or not made explicit in Lonergan's idea of models and in that sense does not Doran's paper today develop rather than only apply Lonergan's idea of a model?

Second, the paper explains the model of “world-cultural humanity,” “world-cultural consciousness” and a “world-cultural mentality.” The model is heuristic and projects a future condition whose concrete modes cannot be known in advance. The paper outlines the path toward that future. Presuming fourfold conversion, functional specializations somehow enable movement toward world-cultural common meaning that in turn makes renewal of societies possible. More detail on that movement is essential for its practical feasibility and plausibility in academic, ecclesial, and societal publics, and in the public sphere of debates on common matters on any nation’s agenda.

That is, movement toward world-cultural consciousness necessarily starts within and from a multiplicity of more limited cultural self-understandings. Danger attends leaving too indeterminate the passage from local to world-cultural humanity through attaining a new common meaning. The new common meaning cannot be a cultural Esperanto that leaves behind all the particulars, gifts, and limits of being European, Asian, African, Latin American, North American, etc. That cannot be the outcome not only because four-fold conversion subsumes without destroying a condition prior to each kind of self-transcendence but also because each functional specialization builds on the one it follows. Systematics and Communications build on the prior specializations that acquire, organize, interpret, resolve, and bring into the light of faith and belief knowledge of many cultural contexts.

So I recommend saying more about how the functional specialties, always at work in specific cultures, operate in them toward world-cultural consciousness. The specialty of Dialectic would seem to have an essential role, for example, in approaching inter-cultural and international conflicts.

Third, to avoid an impression that movement toward world-cultural humanity consists entirely in an accumulating number of properly converted, educated, and inquiring individuals, some account of intermediate institutions and structures that foster the functional specialties in advancing toward new common meaning and renewed societies would help greatly. It is a sociological insight that institutions, organizations and groups give ideas leverage in history. Some in the specialty of Communications need to take up this topic to supplement Doran’s contribution and as it were put wheels under it.