

RGT 5572 HS
 Class 9 (Also used in Class 10)
 © Copyright 2006 by Robert M. Doran

Theology and Praxis

- 1 'Praxis' has already been given the meaning of a 'method that can deal with the unauthentic as well as the authentic, with the irrational as well as the rational.' In the light of praxis so understood, Lonergan attempted in 'The Ongoing Genesis of Methods' to 'relate religion, theology, and religious studies.' The entire fifth section of that paper was devoted to praxis.

- 2 Now 'praxis' is understood in terms of conduct, doing, rather than product, making. '... products pass beyond the maker's control, and the ends to which they are used depend on the free decisions of others. But one's doing, one's conduct, results from the end which one has oneself chosen and, normally, chosen freely. Our making or producing, for ends we do not control, is guided simply by the know-how of technique. But our doing, our conduct, our praxis result from our own deliberation and choice under the guidance of ... practical wisdom ...' The theme informs popular reactions against alienation, but it is also manifest in a philosophic tendency apparent from Kant's second critique to Habermas's juxtaposition of knowledge and human interests. So we see how 'praxis' ties back to the notion of a method that can deal with the unauthentic as well as the authentic, with the irrational as well as the rational: with the existential dimensions of human living.

- 3 Is theology a praxis in this sense? Well, are there basic theological questions whose solution depends on the personal development of theologians? Are there issues that call for the employment of both a hermeneutic of suspicion and a hermeneutic of recovery, a hermeneutic of suspicion that diagnoses failures in personal development and a hermeneutic of recovery that generously recognizes the genuine personal development that did occur? That is the question of this paper.

- 4 The **first section** deals with one of these issues: Bernhard Welte's question whether the Nicene decree marks the invasion of theology by a Heideggerian forgetfulness of being. The issue 'can be genuinely solved only inasmuch as individual theologians undergo an intellectual conversion' (185). For Lonergan, as for Welte and others, it is certainly true that at different times, or at the same time among different individuals or groups, there exist different approaches to reality and different apprehensions of it. In the Greek councils there comes into play a differentiation of consciousness that is not found in biblical authors.

- 5 Is it true that this approach is static? Well, what is static? There is the static as actuality, the static as ideal, and the static as mere possibility. **The static as actuality:** A doctrine would be static if it proceeds from first principles to conclusions in such a manner that every predicate pertains to its subject universally, necessarily, eternally.

But Aristotle acknowledged only one such doctrine: mathematics, and even contemporary mathematics does not consider itself in this way. **The static as ideal:** an ideal is static if it pertains to a logic that aims at clarity in all its terms, coherence in all its propositions, rigor in all its arguments. But any belief that such clarity, coherence, and rigor have been attained is canceled when the logical ideal is regarded as only part of a larger methodical whole, where new discoveries occur and previous formulations are corrected. Logic has a place also in theology but does not lead to fixity, even in medieval theology, where 'it acted as a solvent, revealed the flaws in previously entertained views and, along with an ever fuller grasp of the sources, kept the questions on the move' (187). It was only when logic became dominant, in the fourteenth century, that theology headed into what really is static, namely, skepticism and decadence. **The static as mere possibility:** once a meaning is defined, and as long as that definition is retained, the meaning remains the same, and so is static and will yield a static apprehension of reality. But when is that the case? Definitions are most often negative, telling us what something is not; or heuristic, stating what we are attempting to discover; or provisional, as proposed in a hypothesis; or merely partial, claiming to be true as far as it goes but acknowledging that there is more to be said.

- 6 How static was the approach to reality and the apprehension of it set forth in the Nicene decree? *Homoousios* means that 'statements true of the Father also are true of the Son except that the Son is not the Father. But the statements in question Athanasius finds not in Greek metaphysics but in the scriptures. So 'the Nicene decree was just as static and just as dynamic as what Athanasius found in the Bible' (188).
- 7 **Section 2** turns to 'Eric Voegelin's Alternative,' by which Lonergan means replacing doctrine, whether right or wrong, with the search for the meaning of life. Voegelin would go back to the engendering experience rather than forward to the doctrines that come from the symbols that express the experience. The engendering experience involves discernment of the pulls and counterpulls in the tension of existence in order to discover the prior drawing to what is best or, in the Christian context, to Christ by the Father. Thus Voegelin will distinguish revelation and information. But his position is an alternative because it Greek philosophy is far more relevant to Christian truth than Welte would admit.
- 9 **Section 3** addresses 'Theology as Praxis.' The two instances of Welte and Voegelin 'between them ... raise a series of issues that continuously crop up in doing theology yet are resolved far less by objective rules than by existential decisions' (193). To address Welte first, two issues are raised by his charge that the dogmas are forgetful of being. They both have to do with the concern of the dogmas with *ousia*. One has to do with the presence of what lies before one, a perceptual element. The other has to do with a static logical element. The problems are distinct and are dealt with distinctly. Whether perceptualism is the same as Heidegger's forgetfulness of being or not, it is certainly forgetfulness of the inner light, the light that raises questions and, when answers are insufficient, keeps raising further questions, moving from the world of immediacy to the world mediated by meaning. Are the dogmas caught in the

forgetfulness of being in this sense? It depends on who is interpreting them. ‘When the dogmas are interpreted by one who habitually dwells in the world of the perceptualist there would be forgetfulness of the inner light and, as well, forgetfulness of being if by being is meant the world mediated by meaning and motivated by values. But if the dogmas are interpreted by one who habitually dwells in the world mediated by meaning and motivated by values, there is forgetfulness of the world of perceptualists but not of the world of those who have not seen but have believed (John 20:20)’ (194).

- 10 Next, there is the charge that the dogmas are static. But for Lonergan ‘static thinking has its source, not in Greek or other metaphysics, but in any thought or doctrine that gives onesided attention to logic. ‘... a metaphysics may be modeled on the dictates of the *Posterior Analytics* and then its doctrine will be static. But it may be conceived as the integration of the heuristic structures of such ongoing investigations as natural science, human studies, theology, and then it will be no more static than such ongoing investigations. Instead of being a dam that blocks the river’s flow, it will be the bed within which the river does its flowing’ (194). A doctrinal mode of thought, in a mind more inclined to logic than to understanding, is certainly a real source of static thinking. Thus Welte has a real point. And Voegelin is right in what he affirms, even if his criticism of doctrines and doctrinization is exaggerated. In fact, what he does say is foundational, the kind of knowledge by which people live their lives, a knowledge deeply related to spirituality and discernment. Voegelin regrets the separation of the experiential, ascetical, mystical theology to which such thematization pertains from ‘school theology,’ and while Lonergan agrees with Voegelin on the opposition to ‘separation,’ he also insists on a distinction. It is the separation, not the distinction, that is based on an absence of authenticity.
- 11 So he has sorted out some issues in which theology is basically a praxis, in the aforesaid sense. He concludes with three related points: ‘(1) the structure of individual development, (2) the occurrence of identity crises in the Christian community, and (3) the necessity of a certain doctrinal pluralism’ (196). On the structure of individual development, he distinguishes the movement from above downwards and the movement from below. And both of these are distinguished from the self-appropriation that would map interiority. As for identity crises in the Christian community, they can be met by common confessions of faith. Still, the multiple differentiations of consciousness will result in a type of doctrinal pluralism. The development that may be expected of a theologian is not to be required generally, nor is the mere repetition of formulas that are not understood to be defended. What Lonergan urges is going to the real import of the old issue, and if it is still important then finding a suitable expression for it. At Nicea the real import was whether Christ, the mediator of our salvation, was a creature. If that issue doesn’t arouse interest, perhaps it can be phrased in another way: whether God revealed God’s love for us by having a man die the death of scourging and crucifixion, or by sending his own Son, a divine person, who became flesh to suffer and die and thereby touch our hard hearts and lead us to eternal life.

Questionnaire on Philosophy: A Response

- 12 We move to Lonergan's response to a questionnaire that Jesuit central headquarters sent to a number of people, on the question of the philosophical training of Jesuits. (Little did they expect this, however, in a response!) The breakdown in Jesuit philosophical training, with its pluses and minuses, is explained first in terms of underlying and longstanding causes, namely, the radical shift in the notion of science in the seventeenth century and the radical shift in the notion of history in the nineteenth century. In many ways there are two aspects of one great transition from the medieval to the modern. But a more proximate cause is the failure of the Society of Jesus to grasp the radical character of these developments, of this 'single momentous event demanding an equally momentous development in philosophy.' We have tended to regard it as 'a series of regrettable aberrations that unfortunately were widely accepted' (354).
- 13 Philosophy in this modern context, then, for Lonergan is the basic and total science, and as such it mediates between theology, other sciences, human cultures and societies. For Aristotle that basic and total science is metaphysics, the science that sets forth necessary principles and conclusions about being as being, that hold for every being. But the scientific and historical revolutions challenge the view of science on which this position rests. The basic sets of terms and relations yielded by modern natural science were far more fruitful than anything that could be derived from Aristotelian metaphysics, and the methods of such science differ vastly from the procedures of Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*. Furthermore, science is now acknowledged to lie not in the individual but in the community. As for history, Aristotle had no idea of the procedures of critical history that became commonplace in the nineteenth century.
- 14 So the basic and total science is not just metaphysics but the compound of (1) cognitional theory, (2) epistemology, (3) the metaphysics of proportionate being, and (4) existential ethics.
- 15 Cognitional theory: What am I doing when I am knowing? 'It includes the whole genesis of common sense, of the sciences, of exegetical and historical studies, scholarly, and philosophic developments. It insures our basic and total science against objections from the sciences of the past and leaves it open to the discoveries of the future' (357).
- 16 Epistemology. Why is performing the operations set forth in cognitional theory knowing? 'It takes the reader or student beyond the mistaken views on knowledge and reality which [people] of common sense, scientists, scholars, and philosophers so easily and frequently maintain' (357).
- 17 Metaphysics. A corollary that sets forth what in general we know when we perform cognitional operations.

- 18 Existential ethics. This is spoken of in the context of the discussion of theology. The Christian religion on the side of the subject is the transformation of existential ethics, ‘the ethic of a living that has not yet emerged inasmuch as one just drifts through life – that is, just does and says and thinks what everyone else is doing and saying and thinking, and everyone else is drifting too. Positively, I mean the ethical living that begins indeed when one finds out for oneself that one has to decide for oneself what one is to do with one’s life, but that becomes established when one lives in love with those nearest one and in loyalty with one’s fellow [human beings] about one. Now such existential ethics undergoes a transformation when God’s love floods our hearts through the Holy Spirit he has given us: for such love is unrestricted; it is with all one’s heart and all one’s mind and all one’s strength; further, it is comprehensive, loving God above all, and one’s neighbor as oneself, and the world in which we live, with all it contains, as God’s own world. It is the love described by St Paul in the thirteenth chapter of his first letter to the Corinthians; it is the love to which Ignatius of Loyola directs those that follow his *Spiritual Exercises*’ (358).’ ... the Christian religion sublates the whole of human living. For what sublates goes beyond what is sublated; it adds an entirely new principle sets a new goal, a new task, a new criterion, liberates what is sublated from its limitations and directs it to higher ends, yet in no way stunts it, interferes with it, robs it of its integrity ... within the individual [the Christian religion] is God’s love flooding [one’s] heart and thereby transforming [one’s] existential subjectivity; within the ongoing human community it is the objective revelation of God’s love in Christ Jesus, the mediation of that revelation through the Christian community, and the mission to preach the gospel to all nations until the consummation of all in all’ (358-59).
- 19 Theology thematizes the Christian religion as lived: ‘We have seen that the Christian religion as lived is the sublation of the whole of human living. It follows at once that to thematize the sublation of the whole of human living is a task beyond the competence of theology as a particular science or particular discipline, that theology can perform that task only by broadening its horizon in uniting itself with philosophy as the basic and total science’ (359). Thus, special and general categories, with the special grounded in ‘the Christian religion as lived’ and the general in ‘the basic and total science.’ The basic and general science ‘results from understanding both in their similarities and in their differences the several methods of the particular sciences and, as well, the procedures of common sense. Only in virtue of such understanding is the theologian capable of thematizing adequately the Christian religion both in itself as a principle of sublation and in its effects upon the whole of human living’ (359).
- 20 In this new context theology is the sublation of philosophy. ‘For philosophy is the basic and total science of human living. The Christian religion as lived is the sublation of the whole of human living. Hence the Christian religion as thematized is the sublation of the basic and total science of human living’ (359-60). There follows a wonderful expression of ‘an opinion on the relevance of philosophical study in the preparation of candidates for the priesthood and in the training of Jesuits’ (360). And the opinion is expressed that in such a context philosophy and theology should be

taught together (a practice that even today only some Jesuit Provinces have implemented).

- 21 Lonergan would want religious, moral, and intellectual conversion to be the minimum required of Jesuit students. This core requirement may be expressed and communicated in several quite different styles: symbolically, analytically, through definitions, systematically, methodically. But ‘thinking in terms of the minimum leads to minimal results. The minimum is dull and uninspiring. It offers no challenge. It brings no real benefit. It is regarded as drudgery, and it is endured only because it is authoritatively stated to be a *conditio sine qua non* of ordination. Once the condition is fulfilled, it is forgotten, and the only regret people have is that they had to put up with it’ (365). Rather, plan a maximum, provide brilliant teachers, encourage all to make the most of their opportunity, keep students at the books only as long as they are making progress (or perhaps long enough for them to discover their limitations).
- 22 What about Marxism? We need to know about theories of history, including Marxism, but also to work out our own. Lonergan presents his own heuristic in terms of progress, decline, and redemption. He then relates this heuristic to liberal and Marxist doctrines. ‘In brief, what priests need today is, not an understanding of Marx, but an understanding of the dynamics of history and of the vital role that Christians are called upon to play’ (370).
- 23 What about the human sciences? Lonergan distinguishes human sciences and human studies. Human sciences are concerned with discovering universal laws, while human studies, such as interpretation and history, are engaged in understanding particular texts and particular processes. Both are cognitional activities that the philosopher has to thematize, but there must be two separate thematizations. The human sciences bear some analogy to the natural sciences, whereas human studies are analogous to the development of common sense. He unfolds the analogy of human and natural sciences a bit and relates the human sciences to human studies. He also discusses the place of philosophic, moral, and religious issues in these areas by appealing to *Method in Theology*, where interpretation and history yield to dialectic and foundations to settle these ultimate issues.
- 24 The question moves to method, and Lonergan presents his own, as a thematization of what happens all the time. Knowledge of such method becomes a necessity when false notions of method are current and more or less disastrous. The basic and total science is also basic and total method. It ‘is reached only through performing the operations of such particular disciplines as mathematics, natural science, common sense, human studies, adverting to the operations so performed and thematizing them, adverting further to the dynamism linking related operations and thematizing that dynamism, thereby arriving at a normative pattern for each of the particular methods and, through them, to the common core of all methods, namely, the dynamic structure of human coming to know and coming to decide’ (376).

- 25 What about systematic thinking? A few paragraphs put forward succinctly what is meant by ‘system,’ only to conclude that empirical science is systematic, not in the sense that it offers a system valid for all time but in the sense that it offers a succession of provisional systems, where each later system satisfies the known data better than its predecessors. But in generalized empirical method the basic terms and relations are verified in a singular fashion. ‘In the ordinary case, the hypothesis is the antecedent, its implications are the consequent, and the confirming data correspond directly only to the consequent. But in generalized empirical method both antecedent and consequent are given in experience: the antecedent in the thematized operations and processes; the consequent in the publicly performed methods of particular disciplines. Again, in the ordinary case, revision involves change in a theory but not a change in the object to which the theory refers. But the revision of the central core of generalized method involves a change not only a theory about human knowledge but also in the occurrence, or in the consciousness, or in the thematization, of conscious and thematized operations and processes’ (377). This means that the basic and total science is empirical yet in some sense not strictly hypothetical; that in some sense its central core of experiencing, understanding, and judging is not open to revision. The isomorphism of knowing and known follows on the analysis, as does the structure of authenticity and four basic precepts that are independent of cultural differences. And to the four Lonergan here adds a fifth, Acknowledge your historicity.
- 26 What about pluralism? There is the pluralism of common sense, which is not an issue in the present discussion. There is the pluralism of perspectivism in exegesis and history, but the differences here are minor and not a concern. The graver difficulties in exegesis and history arise from philosophic, moral, and religious differences. Such pluralism can be mitigated by conceiving exegesis and history as functional specialties and by adding further functional specialties to objective these graver differences. There is the pluralism of systems, and it is a problem only if a particular system is a priorist and claims to be the only system and comes up against another system that makes the same claims. But such problems tend to vanish as logic is displaced from its central position. Finally, there is a pluralism of philosophies that are methodical in an empirical sense. The key issues are horizon and conversion. The specification of the horizon may fall short of the objective at which we aim. We have to be converted from assumptions about the real and the good. Teachers of the cognitional theory, epistemology, metaphysics, and existential ethics that constitute the basic and total science should themselves be converted and should be able to organize their courses so as to communicate their own conversion to others. Freedom in philosophy entails following the method, whereas departure from the method means people are no longer really philosophers in the sense intended here. But following the method is a matter of creativity, either enriching the elements already provided or adding quite new dimensions.
- 27 The paper concludes with a response to the question, How should future professors of philosophy be prepared?