

Preliminary Notions

- 1 We can identify two meanings of the word 'system' as this word is used of theology. There is the methodological meaning that is applied to the 'system' of the whole of theology, and there is a strictly theological meaning that refers to the strictly systematic component within that whole.
- 2 The methodological sense refers to a generalized theory of theological operations and of the meanings intended in those operations:
 - 4 Dialectic
 - 3 History
 - 2 Interpretation
 - 1 Research
 - 5 Foundations
 - 6 Doctrines
 - 7 Systematics
 - 8 Communications

See the statement in the Introduction to *Method in Theology* xi: 'In such a contemporary theology we envisage eight distinct tasks: research, interpretation, history, dialectic, foundations, doctrines, systematics, and communications.'

- 3 The first column names the operations involved in the mediating phase of theology, the phase that mediates from the past into the present by interpreting, narrating, and evaluating what others have said and done. The second phase names the operations entailed when the theologian takes his or her own stand on the issues raised in the mediating phase and in the cultural matrix within which the theologian is operating. The first set, again mediates a meaning from the past into the present. The second expresses a meaning largely continuous with that mediated meaning in the contemporary situation and with an eye to the future.
- 4 In the first phase, theology is hermeneutical in the broad sense of understanding what others have said and done. This phase comprises (1) the history of the discipline of theology itself (e.g., Congar's *A History of Theology*), and (2) the history of what the discipline is about. The latter includes (1) the community's struggles to articulate its constitutive meaning in doctrines and dogma (e.g., Pelikan's *The Christian Tradition*, a history of the emergence of Christian doctrine) and (2) the very action of God in history which doctrines and dogmas articulate (e.g., Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*).
- 5 In the second phase, theologians state not what others have said and done but what they hold to be the case. (In Lonergan's words, the second phase is 'direct discourse,' while the first is 'indirect discourse.')
- 6 But the second phase is also constitutive. It not only articulates and affirms meanings mediated from the past. It also articulates meanings and values that one would have be constitutive of the Christian community and perhaps of a cultural matrix with an

eye to the future. John Courtney's work on religious liberty would be a clear example of this. It is true that Murray backed up his position by taking his stand on certain strands in the Catholic tradition, but his own position was a transformation of the official position, and in that sense it is more than a matter of stating meanings and values mediated from the past. It is creating a new line of thought and praxis in the Church.

- 7 The two phases can be understood in terms of the mediating (first phase) and mediated (second phase) objects of each of the specialties. In the first phase the mediating objects are: data (research), meaning (interpretation), truth (history), encounter (dialectic). In the second phase the mediated objects are conversion (foundations), redemption in history (doctrines), history itself (systematics), and the reign of God in the world (communications). (A good deal more discussion will be given in the course to these points, especially the last three.)
- 8 A theology mediates between a cultural matrix and the significance and role of a religion in that matrix. The mediation in question is a mutual self-mediation, and this is the reason that second phase on theology not only states the assimilated or mediated tradition but also is at least potentially constitutive of the ongoing tradition: 'Questions for systematics can arise from communications.' And perhaps not only questions but also elements of an answer can arise from communications.
- 9 H. Richard Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture* manifests different models of this mutual self-mediation: antagonism, accommodation, synthesis, paradox, and transformation. But many efforts at such mediation adopt a method of correlation, because their question is, What is the general form of the relation between the categories drawn from the tradition and the categories drawn from the situation? The two sets of categories that theology employs are better conceived as general and special. General categories are shared with other disciplines. Special categories are peculiar to theology. Against the method of correlation, both general and special categories are employed to express an understanding of both the cultural situation and the religious tradition.
- 10 For the method of correlation, cultural and religious categories tend to assume a foundational role. In the alternative approach to categories, foundations are located elsewhere: in the religious, moral, and intellectual conversion of the theologian employing the categories.
- 11 The final introductory notion is that of the dogmatic-theological context: ultimately, the set of Trinitarian, Christological, and Pneumatological presuppositions within which further theological developments take place. The other areas – ecclesiology, sacramental theology, soteriology, revelation, creation, eschatology – depend on the theological elaboration of the doctrines of the Trinity, the Incarnation, and the mission of the Holy Spirit in grace.

Concluding reflection on the introduction to the course: These other areas all have to do, in one way or another, with history. This, it seems to me, is why Lonergan assigned as the mediated object of the functional specialty 'Doctrines' what he called 'redemption in history,' and as the mediated object of the functional specialty 'Systematics' *Geschichte*, history, the history that is lived. The dogmatic-theological context required for future development both of Christian doctrine and of systematic appropriation of Christian doctrine will be constituted by a systematically organized articulation that integrates Trinitarian, Christological, and Pneumatological commitments with a developing philosophical and theological theory of history.