

## Introduction to Systematic Theology

### Class 4, 28 September 2007

Theology mediates between a cultural matrix and the significance and role of a religion within that matrix. A cultural matrix is the operative set of meanings and values informing a given way of life. The mediation is in the realm of meaning, and for the sake of the human good. We have discussed meaning and value, and now we turn to religion. What precisely is it that theology mediates with the other meanings and values that determine given ways of life?

## 1 The Question of God

### *1.1 The Transcendent Exigence*

Among the exigences promoting us to realms of meaning beyond that of common sense, there is a transcendent exigence. It is discussed in chapter 3 on pp. 83-84: 'There is to human inquiry an unrestricted demand for intelligibility. There is to human judgment a demand for the unconditioned. There is to human deliberation a criterion that criticizes every finite good. So it is ... that [we] can reach basic fulfilment, peace, joy, only by moving beyond the realms of common sense, theory, and interiority into the realm in which God is known and loved.' There we reach what in *Insight* is called the absolute limit in the process of going beyond.

### *1.2 Three Philosophic Forms of the Question of God*

That statement from 83-84 states three ways in which the very unfolding of our conscious intentionality is a question of God, prior to any formulated question, three ways, if you will, in which it provides the basic and fundamental meaning of the name 'God' (see 341: '... an orientation to transcendent mystery is basic to systematic theology. It provides the primary and fundamental meaning of the name, God'). We can make this orientation a formulated question of God by reflecting on our own questioning in the three dimensions mentioned in the quotation. Then there emerge *three explicit forms* of the question of God: Is there a ground of intelligibility, Is there a ground of existence, Is there a ground of value? These are *philosophic forms* of the question of God. We will see also a religious form of the question of God in the course of the chapter.

#### 1.2.1 The ground of intelligibility

The first form of the question of God arises when we inquire about our inquiring. In raising questions for intelligence we are assuming that the universe is intelligible. This assumption is confirmed every time we reach intellectually satisfying answers. But could the universe be ultimately intelligible if it did not have an intelligent ground? That is one form of the question of God. More fully, p. 101: '... why should the answers that satisfy the intelligence of the subject yield anything more than a subjective satisfaction? Why should they be supposed to possess any relevance to knowledge of the universe? Of

course, we assume that they do. We can point to the fact that our assumption is confirmed by its fruits. So implicitly we grant that the universe is intelligible and, once that is granted, there arises the question whether the universe could be intelligible without having an intelligent ground. But that is the question about God.

### 1.2.2 The ground of existence

A second philosophic form of the question of God arises when we reflect on our reflecting. Just what happens when we marshal the evidence for pronouncing that this probably is so and that probably is not so? Our questions for reflection at times give rise to a grasp of the fulfilment of conditions required to pronounce a rational Yes. This grasp gives rise to what Lonergan calls the virtually unconditioned. The prospective judgment has conditions, but one grasps that the conditions are fulfilled. But is the fulfilment of conditions possible without an unconditioned reality that has no conditions whatever? Does a necessary being exist? Can there be mere matters of contingent fact without explanation, if in fact the universe of being is completely intelligible? That is another form of the question of God.

### 1.2.3 The ground of value

A third form of the question of God arises when we deliberate about our deliberating. Our questions for moral deliberation ask is X is worth while. But is it worth while to deliberate at all? Has 'worthwhile' any ultimate meaning? If so are we the only instance of moral agency in the universe? 102-103: '... is the universe on our side, or are we just gamblers and, if we are gamblers, are we not perhaps fools, individually struggling for authenticity and collectively endeavoring to snatch progress from the ever mounting welter of decline? ... Are cosmogenesis, biological evolution, historical process basically cognate to us as moral beings or are they indifferent and so alien to us?'

There is, then, a question of God implicit in all our questioning, and reflecting on our questioning makes it explicit. So the question of God lies within our horizon. 23: '... the objects of theology do not lie outside the transcendental field. For that field is unrestricted, and so outside it there is nothing at all.' 103: 'There lies within [our] horizon a region for the divine, a shrine for ultimate holiness. It cannot be ignored. The atheist may pronounce it empty. The agnostic may urge that he finds his investigation has been inconclusive. The contemporary humanist will refuse to allow the question to arise. But their negations presuppose the spark in our clod, our native orientation to the divine.'

## 2 Self-transcendence

### 2.1 *At each level*

These questions for intelligence, reflection, and deliberation manifest our capacity for self-transcendence. It is in self-transcendence that we achieve authenticity 104: 'One can live in a world, have a horizon, just in the measure that one is not locked up in oneself. A first step towards this liberation is the sensitivity we share with the higher animals. But