

Introduction to Systematic Theology
Continuation of Class 5, October 5, 2009

1 Introduction to chapter 5

I would propose the following affirmations as stating where we should be as we move into chapter 5. Some of these points require further explication beyond what I've been able to do thus far.

(1) Theology is a mutual self-mediation and mutual self-constitution of religion and culture.

(2) The two constituents of culture and of religion are meaning and value, studied respectively in chapters 2 and 3.

(3) The human good is also the goal of the mediation, and the mediation occurs in the dimension of meaning.

(4) The constitution of the authentic religion that theology would mediate with culture is a being-in-love that fulfils the self-transcendent thrust of human intentionality.

(5) The foundations of the mediation lie in interiorly and religiously differentiated consciousness, which provide the 'rock' on which we can build in an age of historical consciousness that relativizes every other supposed foundation. Interiorly differentiated consciousness is the anthropological component of foundations, and religiously differentiated consciousness is the specifically theological component. They replace, respectively, the notions of metaphysics and the supernatural, but without denying the validity of either of these.

Chapter 5 has to do with the structure of the mediation: the 'set of related and recurrent operations cumulatively advancing' toward a goal.

For Lonergan, theology is **a process from data to results**, and so its method and structure distinguish **successive stages in that process**. The **result** is communication to a contemporary cultural matrix in the interests of the human good.

Other conceptions of theology either divide and subdivide data (positive theology, field specialization) or divide and subdivide results (dogmatic theology, subject specialization), and show no connection between positive and dogmatic theology.

Lonergan, by contrast, distinguishes stages in a process from data to results, where 'results' always entail **contemporary mediation** in 'the larger context of Christian living and ... the still larger process of world history' (144).

2 An eightfold division of tasks

The process from data to results is a set of interrelated sets of operations. Part 2 of the chapter sets forth the division of the steps, but without articulating the grounds of the division – that is left for section 3, and is basically something that we covered in this course at the very beginning.

2.1 *Research*

The process begins with making the data available, whether on a particular question (special research) or in principle on everything (general research). The ideal goal of research is a complete information retrieval system.

2.2 *Interpretation*

Next, the data have to be understood (interpretation). The relevant data for theology are carriers of meaning, and so understanding the data is understanding what was meant. But that has to be done (127) ‘in its proper historical context, in accord with its proper mode and level of thought and expression, in the light of the circumstances and intention’ of the writer or speaker or artist or symbol producer or group or agent. Questioning that context is left to dialectic.

2.3 *History*

Next, meaning is subject to cumulative development and decline. It is ‘going forward,’ in process, in some ongoing context. So history is concerned with these movements that at their core are movements of meaning informing ways of living. Special history studies specific cultural, institutional, or doctrinal movements. General history studies, in the limit, all movements in history. The ‘substantial concern’ (128) of history as theological is ‘the doctrinal history of Christian theology with its antecedents and consequents in the cultural and institutional histories of the Christian religion and the Christian churches and sects.’ But not in abstraction from general history. 128: ‘... it is only within the full view that can be grasped the differences between the Christian churches and sects, the relations between different religions, and the role of Christianity in world history.

2.4 *Dialectic*

Next, the movements of Christian history have been involved in conflict, and so too have the historical accounts of these movements and theological interpretations of them. So there must be an attempt at mediating and resolving such conflicts: dialectic. Dialectic aims at the ‘high and distant’ goal of ‘a comprehensive viewpoint,’ a ‘single set of related bases’ for understanding the character of the many viewpoints, their oppositions, and their relations. From that viewpoint one would be able to ascertain (129) ‘just where differences are irreducible, where they are complementary and could be brought together within a larger whole, where finally they can be regarded as successive stages in a single process of development.’ Thus dialectic is (130) ‘a generalized apologetic conducted in