

## Class 8

October 26, 2009

The material for dialectic was prepared for at the end of chapter 9, in the section on horizons. **Horizons**: Within the same or compatible horizons, then, there may be different perspectives, and these cause no major difficulties. But the historian's development is also a function of basic options, options that can be involved in historical investigations, and that may result in different and irreconcilable histories. The same issue arose in the treatment of interpretation, when Lonergan came to the part about 'understanding oneself.' An example of how it arises in history is given on p. 221: 'When the historian is convinced that an event is impossible, he will always say that the witnesses were self-deceived, whether there were just two or as many as two hundred. In other words, historians have their preconceptions, if not about what must have happened, at least about what could not have happened. Such preconceptions are derived, not from the study of history, but from the climate of opinion in which the historian lives and from which he inadvertently acquires certain fixed convictions about the nature of man and of the world. Once such convictions are established, it is easier for him to believe that any number of witnesses are self-deceived than for him to admit that the impossible has actually occurred.'

Again on 221: 'Each of us lives in a world mediated by meaning, a world constructed over the years by the sum total of our conscious, intentional activities. Such a world is a matter not merely of details but also of basic options. Once such options are taken and built upon, they have to be maintained, or else one must go back, tear down, reconstruct. So radical a procedure is not easily undertaken; it is not comfortably performed; it is not quickly completed. It can be comparable to major surgery, and most of us grasp the knife gingerly and wield it clumsily.' See the discussion of **miracles** on 222 and again 226.

Historical method as such cannot treat these problems. A new set of methods, those of dialectic and foundations, is involved.

### Question 1: What is the aim or function of Dialectic?

235: Dialectic deals with conflicts. They may be overt or latent. They may lie in religious sources, in the religious tradition, in the pronouncements of authorities, or in the writings of theologians. They may regard contrary orientations of research, contrary interpretations, contrary histories, contrary styles of evaluation, contrary horizons, contrary doctrines, contrary systems, contrary policies.

Differences in theology are multiform. Not all are dialectical. Some differences can be eliminated by uncovering fresh data. Some are traced to different perspectives, and are due to the complexity of historical reality or of individual development and questions. But some are **fundamental**, and for Lonergan these stem from an explicit or implicit cognitional theory, ethical stance, and religious outlook. These will profoundly modify one's mentality, and are to be overcome only through an intellectual, moral, religious

conversion. The **function of dialectic** is to bring such conflicts to light and to provide a technique that **objectifies subjective differences** and promotes conversion. The key result of Dialectic lies in the objectification of subjectivity.

A **distinct set of methods** is required to confront these, a set of methods that witnesses to and promotes conversion in these areas of living: distinct from the methods of research, interpretation, and history that we have seen thus far and also from the methods of the other functional specialties. **Only changes in horizon**, and such changes as constitute conversion, can overcome such conflicts. **Dialectic as a functional specialty would uncover such conflicts, eliminate more superficial ones, and promote the articulation of basic stances.**

To posit dialectic as a **distinct set of theological operations** calling for a distinct method is **one of Lonergan's unique contributions**: a method for meeting head-on issues that arise, are crucial, and cannot be dealt with by the methods of interpretation, history, doctrines, or systematics.

There arise, then, issues in the doing of theology that are **existential, intensely personal, and of crucial significance for work in the functional specialties that we have seen as well as in those we are yet to see.** Lonergan's method takes explicit concern for these issues and introduces a distinct set of methods for confronting them. In fact these methods, of dialectic and of foundations, are the **hinge point of the overall method** that Lonergan proposes. 254: 'The **basic idea** of the method we are trying to develop takes its stand on discovering what human authenticity is and showing how to appeal to it. It is not an infallible method, for [we] are easily unauthentic, but it is a powerful method, for [our] deepest need and most prized achievement is authenticity.'

This aim is conceived in a positive, **not a polemical** fashion. Engaging in dialectic aims at (129) 'a comprehensive viewpoint,' 'some single base or some single set of related bases' that enable us to understand how the many viewpoints exhibited in Christian history and in the Christian present are to be understood. Later, he switches the emphasis to dialogue.

### **Question 2: What is a horizon?**

A horizon is the limit of what one can see or ask about from a particular standpoint. 237 (not a definition, but a statement): 'Horizons ... are the structured resultant of past achievement and, as well, both the condition and the limitation of further development.' In this sense horizons may be regarded as the ultimate context of all our other contexts, the boundaries that limit our capacities for assimilating more than we already have attained.

### **Question 3: Explain the following statement on p. 236: 'Differences in horizon may be complementary, or genetic, or dialectical.'**

Lonergan finds three types of relations and of differences among horizons.