

Class 14  
 Chapter 10, *What Is Systematic Theology?*  
 System and History

1 We saw in the discussion of dogma toward the end of the chapter in *Method on Doctrines* that Lonergan felt he had to address the question of how to reconcile the permanence of meaning of the dogmas with the historicity of all human understanding and expression. A similar problem arises for systematics, namely, **Can the systematic ideal be reconciled with historical consciousness? What really is the systematic ideal? If the systematic ideal is conceived along the lines of a symbolic-logical type of system, the answer is No, the two cannot be reconciled. But if the systematic ideal is something else, then perhaps reconciliation is possible.** That issue takes up the first two sections of the chapter. The third section, which consumes most of the chapter, moves to complete the unified field structure by adding to it a theory of history, and a fourth section treats the historical responsibilities of systematics.

### Section 1: Developing Synthesis

- 2 The first way in which system and history can be reconciled is by anticipating the possibility of **an ongoing genetic sequence of systematic theologies**. 145: ‘There must be acknowledged an indefinite series of efforts to construct systematic theologies. And there must be rejected the possibility of some single definitive *Summa* of theological understanding.’ Even though permanent achievements have been attained, **higher viewpoints** remain possible, calling for a shift in the basic terms and relations of the entire discipline, for a rearrangement of everything else, including the permanent achievements.
- 3 What is the **source** of these theological higher viewpoints? Sometimes they are occasioned by **cultural developments** that are relatively independent of theology. At other times, especially if they are proposed by theologians who are also saints, they are the fruit of **deepened insight** into the mysteries of faith themselves, in their distinctive supernatural reality.
- 4 The culturally occasioned advances are particularly long-lasting if the higher viewpoints occur in the development of the **categories** that theology shares with other disciplines. To take what is perhaps an overly simple and obvious example, the cosmology of Aquinas has been vastly superseded by modern physics and astronomy, and so no systematic theology can be written today relying on the scientific worldview of the Middle Ages. These general categories are particularly important in theology’s task of mediating Christian faith and contemporary culture. A theology without general categories is at best a matter of self-mediation from the events of revelation to the contemporary faith of the church rather than a mutual self-mediation with culture.
- 5 The way in which the succession of higher viewpoints can still be linked to the systematic ideal, however, is not yet clear until it is acknowledged that the series of systematic theologies is grounded in the **invariant structures** of intentional consciousness and the gift of God’s love. This is what makes for invariance, not the set of terms and propositions with which one begins. This alone makes for genuine continuity and systematic unity. See Lonergan’s section

*Permanence  
Dogma*

in chapter 13 of *Method* regarding the sources of continuity: structures of consciousness, the gift of God's love, and permanent achievements reached along the way. And these structures themselves are subject to ever greater refinement of understanding and formulation. 146: 'We can envision today, I dare say for the first time in the history of Catholic theology, the possibility of an ongoing genetic sequence of systematic statements grounded in an ongoing clarification of the basic terms and relations' giving rise to 'a developing synthesis, a synthesis ... that in any of its stages will never be complete in any one person's mind, a synthesis that will reside rather in the collaborative community itself.' Theology can envision a future that is somewhat analogous to the ongoing history of the more successful empirical sciences.

## Section 2 System as Witness

6 Here we get into the difficult and new area of understanding religious and theological **history** in a manner that is not only narrative and descriptive but also synthetic, systematic, **explanatory**. What will issue from positive research, Lonergan anticipated, is a new kind of synthesis, **an explanatory history of theological meanings**, where theologians will be able to relate to one another in genetic and dialectical fashion the various **stages in the evolution of the meanings constitutive of the Christian church**. Interiority analysis yields an understanding of both **differentiation and conversion**, and these provide an always **potential totality of viewpoints** that can be employed to understand the relations among various sets of historical data, **an explanatory grasp of the relations among stages**, where the relations are both genetic and dialectical. I am envisaging here ultimately **an explanatory comprehension of the universal religious phenomenon of humankind, a theology of theologies, as a dimension of systematics itself as that functional speciality is emerging**.

## Section 3 History as Mediated Object of Systematic Theology

7 History is also reconciled with system by **becoming part of the unified field structure** of systematic theology, in the form of a theology of history. That is what is explored here. I begin in section 3.1 with data from the Lonergan archives in which it is clear that **Lonergan** intended systematics today to be a theory of history. *Geschichte* is to be the mediated object of systematics. And the history here is broader than the history of theological ideas discussed above.

8 The section includes a review of the notion of functional specialization that we need not go into again. But attention is drawn to Lonergan's specification of a **mediating object for each step in the first phase and of a mediated object in each step in the second phase**. Furthermore the **mediating subject** is introduced at the end of the first phase as catalyst of the transition from hearing to saying, from mediating objects to mediated objects.

9 The mediating object of **research** is the given; of **interpretation** meaning; of **history** truth, 'what really happened'; and of **dialectic** or 'conversion' encounter. The mediated objects of the second phase are mediated through the offices of the mediating objects of the first phase as these have been processed by the mediating subject, the converted theologian. The respective objects of the second phase are mediated into the present by the subject's