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LONERGAN AND PROTESTANT THOUGHT: INTRODUCING A SPECIAL ISSUE

R. J. Snell

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MY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL forbade the observance of Halloween. We were not entirely forlorn, however, since candy was supplied (in abundance) for the annual Reformation Day party, also held on October 31st to commemorate that autumn day in 1517 when Luther is thought to have nailed the Ninety-five Theses on the church door.

We sang "*Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott*" – in the vernacular – munched sweets, and (somewhat falsely, it turns out) imagined the dramatic moments as each hammer blow pounded home the theses. It was exciting.

For many, 2017 is as exciting, with the 500th anniversary of the Reformation a backdrop to celebrations, studies, conferences, publications, and journal issues sponsored by various organizations, Protestant or otherwise. Bernard Lonergan, who as a priest belonged to the same Society of Jesus famed for its energetic role in the Counter-Reformation, nonetheless makes a good conversation partner for those who read Protestant theology.

Of course, Lonergan was familiar with the thought of notable Protestant thinkers such as Kant, Rudolf Otto, Friedrich Schleiermacher, and Paul Tillich, among others, even as influential Protestants such as George Lindbeck and N. T. Wright gleaned much from his thought, sometimes critically. More than scholarly conversation, however, Lonergan's insights into conversion, faith, belief, hermeneutics, grace, sin, atonement, and the Trinity are not only of interest but resonate with ways that (at least some) Protestants frame questions and structure experience. Or at least it seemed to me when as a young Protestant scholar I first encountered Lonergan, and others articulate similar responses.

As a major thinker, Lonergan's reading of Protestant theology is worth consideration. Interesting, also, is his limited but nonetheless real influence within contemporary Protestant circles, particularly in scriptural studies. Further, whether by accident or something more, not a few Protestant scholars have taken to Lonergan, choosing his work as a focal point and source of their own. Thus, this special issue on the 500th anniversary of the Reformation.

Steven D. Cone begins with a survey of issues central to Protestant theology for which Lonergan may be an especially productive partner. These include biblical studies, faith and conversion, inter-religious dialogue, grace, salvation, the Trinity, theological anthropology, method, and objectivity.

Karen Petersen Finch next examines the rejection of natural theology prevalent in certain forms of Protestant thought, particularly within the Reformed tradition. Not only natural theology, but the thought of Aquinas in particular, is sometimes presented in dialectical opposition, but Petersen Finch explores the possibility of a natural theology stirring up wonder rather than pride.

The two following pieces, the first by Joseph K. Gordon and the second, a reprint of Ben F. Meyer's influential essay, "The Primacy of the Intended Sense of Texts," give evidence of the fruitful reception of Lonergan's critical realism, often mediated by Meyer, to notable biblical scholars such as N. T. Wright and James D. G. Dunn. Gordon further explores Lonergan's contribution of historical consciousness as relating to how Christians understand the truthfulness of Scripture.

Lonergan's turn to the subject has parallels in Protestant theology. Richard Sherlock argues that the subject is foundational in Kant, Ritschl, Harnack, Bultmann, and even Barth, although Lonergan, states Sherlock, provides a substantive critique of these versions and a more coherent understanding of knowing.

Finally, Carl Trueman, noting an interest within Reformed thought of the historical heritage of doctrine, turns to John Henry Newman's understanding of doctrine's development, one offering challenging questions for Protestants. According to Trueman, while Lonergan self-consciously builds upon Newman, his account of doctrinal development may be particularly helpful.

On behalf of the editors, I offer my gratitude to the authors for their contributions to this special issue on "Lonergan and Protestant Thought."

THE VIEW FROM OUTSIDE:
WHY A PROTESTANT WOULD
CARE ABOUT LONERGAN

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LONERGAN STUDIES is a largely Roman Catholic field that has a number of interested Protestants within it. Given the questions Protestant scholars tend to have and the discussions they generally pursue, why would the heirs of the Reformation study this Jesuit philosopher and theologian? This is a different question, of course, from why Protestants *should* read Lonergan; his thought is foundational and not easily absorbed within existing forms of Protestantism (nor, I would say, within existing forms of Catholicism).

This essay gives a bird's-eye survey of issues endemic to Protestant theology for which Lonergan's work may be especially helpful. I also indicate the basic direction of Lonergan's contribution. In honor of the 500th anniversary of Luther's Ninety-five Theses, I structure my comments roughly to follow the doctrinal slogans that typified the Protestant Reformation.

Presenting Lonergan's contribution according to Protestant commonplaces risks, at the least, making it more about Protestants than about Lonergan. On the other hand, Lonergan emphasized that questions arise spontaneously and that one must be authentic to the process of inquiry one actually has. What we will see below, then, is an interplay between the logic of the Protestant mottos and the trajectory of Lonergan's thought. At the least, it should show a significant intersection between these *topoi*, and many fruitful avenues that can be or have been pursued.

SOLA SCRIPTURA

Ironically, no academic field shows more widespread discussion of an aspect of Lonergan's thought than biblical studies.¹ Lonergan was not a biblical scholar; his use of scripture is sporadic and follows the norms of Catholic systematic theology, not biblical studies. However, Lonergan's life-long interest in history bore fruit in the critical realism championed by New Testament scholar Ben Meyer and his students, most notably N. T. Wright and James Dunn.² Because of Meyer, Dunn, and Wright's prominence, biblical scholars have both embraced and excoriated critical realism as an intellectual stance and as an approach to reading scripture.

In Lonergan, "critical realism" sums up the cognitional, epistemological, and metaphysical burden of *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*.³ Its application to historical study centers on the character of the world we are trying to discover through historical research and the role we have as inquiring subjects who perform this research. Many forms of modern historical scholarship view interpretation as something alien to the reality we are trying to know; witness the interest in peeling back the redactions of the synoptic gospels, applying "criteria of authenticity" to reach an unvarnished and unelaborated reality, or conversely, the rejection that the gospels contain interpretation at all.⁴ Critical realism, by contrast, emphasizes that we know reality precisely through its interpretation. The real world is the world

¹Joseph Gordon's article in this volume will give a much more expansive examination than is possible here of Lonergan and biblical scholarship.

²See Ben Meyer, *Critical Realism and the New Testament* (Princeton Theological Monograph [Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 1989]); *Reality and Illusion in New Testament Scholarship: A Primer in Critical Realist Hermeneutics* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1994); and *The Aims of Jesus* (Princeton Theological Monograph [Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 1989]). See also N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 1 (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1992). See also James Dunn, *Jesus Remembered: Christianity in the Making*, 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 110-11. N.B., the "critical realism" of Roy Bhaskar and the Routledge series on critical realism are not connected with Lonergan's thought.

³In *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, vol. 3 of the *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), Lonergan tends to refer to critical realism as generalized empirical method. For Lonergan's post-*Insight* elaboration of critical realism, see "The World Mediated by Meaning," "Is It Real?" and "What Are Judgments of Value." For a discussion of critical realism and trends of knowledge in analytic philosophy, see Joseph Fitzpatrick, *Philosophical Encounters: Lonergan and the Analytic Tradition* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 13-36.

⁴See Chris Keith and Anthony Le Donne, *Jesus, Criteria, and the Demise of Authenticity* (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2012).

mediated by meanings, and we know reality, not when we have some kind of unimpeded contact with it, but when we rightly understand it.

In *The Aims of Jesus*, Meyer lays out a programmatic account of how critical realism provides a coherent basis for the historical study of the gospels.⁵ He there explains a rich interplay between questions, hypotheses, and attempts at verification. This process includes, (1) basic exegesis that seeks authorial intention by interpreting the semantic significance of the text, (2) a further level of interpretation that asks about the aims the author intended to achieve through the text, (3) an even more expansive level of historical explanation that seeks to grasp what was going forward in the author's time, and (4) beyond all these, the question of our aims and our horizons as readers of history. The process works as a spiraling whole in which we move back and forth from one issue to another, seeking to follow the questions we have and the data we possess.

The reason that Meyer finds critical realism so important for historical research is that some but not all interpretations of an event are valid; and, the process of verification we go through in trying to assess which interpretations may be valid is different from the process we go through to find out whether there are interpretations present at all. The methodical skepticism of much modern history starts out with a mistrust of interpretations, for what it is seeking is direct access to the unmediated world of the past. Or, if it cannot achieve this, it wants to calculate the ways that the layers of interpretation have distorted the original event. For this reason, it wants to isolate any aspect of a text that shows the authors hand in interpreting the realities of which he or she writes. Meyer, conversely, argues that genuine interpretations are exactly the access we have to reality. We are therefore most authentic to "what happened" by working through the different interpretations, testing them methodically and trying to gain a coherent picture of the whole.

SOLA FIDE

Lonergan held a noteworthy conversation about the nature of faith with comparative religion scholar Wilfred Cantwell Smith.⁶ In this conversation, as well as in later works, Lonergan articulated an understanding of faith that

⁵See especially Meyer, *Aims of Jesus*, 76-110.

⁶Bernard Lonergan, "Faith and Beliefs," in *Philosophical and Theological Papers, 1965-1980*, vol. 17 of the *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, ed. Robert C. Croken and Rober M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004). "Faith and Beliefs," 30-48.

has a significant intersection with Protestant understandings of faith that have a central role for trust.⁷ Rather than seeing faith as an intellectual assent that could possibly be divorced from personal commitment, Lonergan understood faith to be “the knowledge born of religious love.”⁸ This knowledge is existential, for it flows from the way we relate to and are changed by God in the entirety of who we are.⁹

Faith and Conversion

The specific truths affirmed by religious belief live within the horizon provided by faith. They are authentic to the extent that they cohere with the work of God in the believer’s heart. Rather than seeing the religious beliefs as the “husk” wrapped around faith’s “kernel,” though, Lonergan saw both the outer word of religious belief and the inner word of faith as constitutive of our persons. Just as much as Gadamer, Lonergan saw our identities as enmeshed within our traditions.¹⁰ The rationality given to us by our communities is just as real for us as the *Logos’s* work inside of us. It is possible, though, for these factors of our identity either to support each other or to conflict. And, it is further possible for us to be falsely or inconsistently related to either – or both – of them.¹¹

Lonergan understands religion, then, and human personhood, to have a key role for conversion. For Lonergan, “conversion” means a radical setting right of the principal ways that our identities have gone wrong. He identified three conversions of greatest importance: religious, moral, and intellectual.¹² Some Lonergan scholars have proposed including a fourth conversion: psychic.¹³

⁷Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 115-24. See Steven D. Cone, “Aquinas’ Sanctifying Grace and Lonergan’s Religious Conversion: Exceptions that Prove the Rule,” in *Grace and Friendship: Theological Essays in Honor of Fred Lawrence, from His Grateful Students*, ed. M. S. Copeland and J. Wilkins (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2016), 23-48.

⁸*Method in Theology*, 115.

⁹“Horizons,” in *Philosophical and Theological Papers, 1965-1980*, 19-23.

¹⁰*Method in Theology*, 57-100.

¹¹*Method in Theology*, 79-80.

¹²*Method in Theology*, 237-45; “Self-Transcendence: Intellectual, Moral, Religious,” in *Philosophical and Theological Papers, 1965-1980*, 313-31.

¹³Doran, *Theology and the Dialectics of History*, 42-63. See also Bernard Lonergan, “Reality, Myth, Symbol,” in *Myth, Symbol, and Reality*, ed. A. Olsen (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980), 390.

Religious conversion is the operative grace by which we come to be in love with God. It provides our basic horizon of faith. Moral conversion means accepting an ultimate source of value outside of ourselves. Instead of pursuing the proximate goods that satisfy our own interests and the interests of our groups, we become committed to what is really worthwhile from an overall point of view. Intellectual conversion is the process by which we realize that objective knowledge results from a grasp of sufficient reason for believing something, not from some kind of unimpeded or detached view of the thing. It is the ground for the critical realism discussed above.¹⁴ Psychic conversion means setting right the processes operative in our subconscious motivations so that they support our religious, intellectual, and moral lives instead of subverting them.¹⁵ Whereas moral and intellectual conversions tend to operate within our focal awareness (and religious conversion partially does), psychic conversion works from the bottom up, setting right the bases within our consciousness for conversion.

Interreligious Dialogue and Comparative Theology

The lines of thought that can be connected to Lonergan's notion of conversion are nearly endless. However, if we focus on religious conversion and faith, there are potential resources for advance in interreligious dialogue and comparative theology. While some Protestants involved in interreligious dialogue have embraced Smith's prominent notion of faith, others have been concerned that it relativizes the importance of truth commitments and of specific faith traditions in favor of a pan-religious homogenization.¹⁶ On the other hand, interreligious dialogue does not get very far without willingness to acknowledge God's work in the other person.

But, for Lonergan, the commitments of religious belief, including the voice of our religious tradition, are a *locus* of grace, and they constitute our persons alongside the interior horizon of faith.¹⁷ While Lonergan did intend his notion of faith to be something that could apply across religions,

¹⁴See R. J. Snell and Steven D. Cone, *Authentic Cosmopolitanism: Love, Sin, and Grace in the Christian Community* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2013).

¹⁵See Robert Doran, *Psychic Conversion and Theological Foundations* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2006).

¹⁶For this, one need only make a short perusal of the varying reviews for Wilfred Cantwell Smith's *Faith and Belief* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979).

¹⁷*Method in Theology*, 118-20.

one cannot therefore disregard the various religious beliefs, traditions, and practices. Adverting to the particularities of each religious tradition is of vital importance for interreligious dialogue and comparative theology, just as much as analyzing the character of God's inner work of grace.¹⁸ And, such discussions can proceed on the basis of the commitment to faith, and to one's own particular faith tradition, even as it expects God's grace to be operative in the wider world.¹⁹

SOLA GRATIA

The relation of human freedom and divine grace has preoccupied Protestantism since its inception. While some streams of Protestant thought flatly deny the importance of human freedom in conversion to Christ, others make human freedom integral to the salvific economy. Concern with the doctrine of grace is a legacy the Western Church has from Augustine's battles against the Pelagians.

Grace and Freedom

Lonergan was no stranger to this struggle. His doctoral dissertation dealt with Thomas Aquinas's doctrine of operative grace relative to human freedom, and Lonergan's first theological publications were articles based on his dissertation.²⁰ He also wrote a textbook on grace, now translated into English as, "The Supernatural Order."

In many ways, the Bañezian conflict with the Molinists during the late 1500s mirrored the Calvinist versus Arminian dispute, though transposed within a Thomist theological setting.²¹ Lonergan started out his research a Molinist partisan but soon came to the conviction that both sides distorted

¹⁸See Francis Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning across Religious Borders* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).

¹⁹See Francis Clooney, *Theology after Vedanta: An Experiment in Comparative Theology* SUNY Series, Toward a Comparative Philosophy of Religions (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993).

²⁰These works are now published as vol. 1 of the Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan as *Grace and Freedom: Operative Grace in the Thought of St. Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992).

²¹See Michael J. Stebbins, *The Divine Initiative: Grace, World-Order, and Human Freedom in the Early Writings of Bernard Lonergan* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 183-211.

Thomas's thought. Lonergan's careful historical study of Aquinas, looking beyond the standard Thomist positions, participated in the twentieth-century *ressourcement* of Aquinas.²²

Lonergan's conclusion, and his analysis of Thomas, depends on distinguishing the varying natures of divine and created causality. Our salvation must be caused by God, and this must be by operative grace: in us but not of us. But, because divine causality establishes the created order instead of being an element within it, God's causation does not compete with human freedom or rule it out.²³ Rather, God works through human freedom – which remains real and contingent – healing and elevating us and establishing us as part of an order of supernatural relations.

Salvation

The first two generations of Protestant theology continued the ancient and medieval legacy of understanding salvation in terms of divinization.²⁴ In many ways, Reformed theology still sustains this emphasis by stressing union with Christ. Some parts of current Protestant tradition would also seek to recover this soteriology.²⁵ While Thomas is sometimes overlooked as a resource for understanding divinization, Lonergan's constructive work drawing on Thomas provides a significant source for this retrieval.

In the "The Supernatural Order," Lonergan provides a careful analysis of divinization in terms of our receiving a relationship with God in which the way we know and the way we love come to be like God's own knowing

²²For other voices in this twentieth-century renewal of Catholicism, see Gabriel Flynn and Paul Murray, eds., *Ressourcement: A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth-Century Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

²³For a reading of Thomas strongly consonant with Lonergan's on this point, see Harm Goris, *Free Creatures of an Eternal God: Thomas Aquinas on God's Infallible Foreknowledge and Irresistible Will*. Thomas Instituut Utrecht 4 (Leuven/Louvain: Peeters Publishing, 1996).

²⁴See Jonathan Linman, "Martin Luther: 'Little Christs for the World': Faith and Sacraments as Means to Theosis," in *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions*, ed. M. Christensen and J. Wittung (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 175-88; J. Todd Billings, "John Calvin: United to God through Christ," in *Partakers of the Divine Nature*, 189-99; and Michael Christensen, "John Wesley: Christian Perfection as Faith Filled with the Energy of Love," in *Partakers of the Divine Nature*, 219-32.

²⁵For example, Roger Olson, "Deification in Contemporary Theology," *Theology Today* 64, no. 2 (July 2007): 186-200." See also Steven D. Cone, *An Ocean Vast of Blessing: A Theology of Grace* (Kalos, 1.) (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014), 163-214.

and loving (as far as is possible for a created being).²⁶ In other words, being made like God means a change in our operations, not our substance. God saves us by making us able to live in a different way – a way that is like him, because we know him – not by changing us into a different kind of being. God does this through the grace brought about by Jesus Christ and communicated to us through his Spirit. He thereby brings about in us the kind of friendship with God that initiates eternal life in us.

SOLUS CHRISTUS

Karl Rahner famously intimated that Lonergan was ever “sharpening the knife” of theology, by concentrating on theological method, without trying to “cut,” by contributing to theology’s substance.²⁷ Lonergan did return to his early interest on economics after the publication of *Method in Theology*, not to extensive writing of theology.²⁸ However, as we have already seen with grace, Lonergan wrote several works on core theological topics, such as the Trinity and Christology, for use in teaching his classes. These works were until recently available only in Latin, and sometimes they existed only in unpublished archival material. With the most recent editions of the Complete Works of Bernard Lonergan (University of Toronto Press), however, Lonergan’s Latin theology is now available in English translation, with facing Latin original and copious explanatory notes.²⁹

Lonergan’s contributions to Christology include doctrinal and systematic thought both on Christ’s person and his work. In terms of Christ’s person, Lonergan extends the logic of the Council of Chalcedon and the Third Council of Constantinople to include contemporary reflection on the consciousness(es) of Christ.³⁰ In terms of Christ’s work, Lonergan produced a multifaceted understanding of the cross; he examined satisfaction, moral communication, and sacrifice, among other analogies for Christ’s accom-

²⁶Bernard Lonergan, “The Supernatural Order,” in *Early Latin Theology*, ed. Robert M. Doran and H. Daniel Monsour (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 65-78.

²⁷David Tracy, “God, Dialogue, and Solidarity: A Theologian’s Refrain,” *The Christian Century* 107, no. 2 (October 1990): 900-904.

²⁸Bernard Lonergan, *For a New Political Economy*, vol. 21 of the Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan, ed. Philip McShane (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998).

²⁹Bernard Lonergan, *Early Latin Theology; The Incarnate Word; The Triune God: Doctrines; The Triune God: Systematics; The Ontological and Psychological Constitution of Christ*.

³⁰*The Ontological and Psychological Constitution of Christ*.

plishment of our salvation, and steadfastly refused to reduce any of them to equivalence with or subservience of the others.³¹

Episcopal theologian Charles Hefling has produced a substantial volume of work analyzing and drawing upon Lonergan's contributions to systematic theology. Hefling's work spans a number of topics. He has, though, concentrated many of his efforts on Christology.³² In that vein, he has carried out a long and fruitful consideration of the non-penal, substitutionary thought and legacy of Anselm of Canterbury. Hefling has also produced significant articles conversing with the Christological thought of Friedrich Schleiermacher, René Girard, Marilyn McCord Adams, John Macquarrie, James Alison, and Austin Farrer. Moving beyond *personae* to issues, Hefling works to flesh out the meaning of Chalcedon, exploring Christ's self-knowledge, the relation of his person and work, the nature(s) of Christ's work, the relation of Christology and Pneumatology, and the implications of different approaches to Christology for Christian doctrine.

³¹See "The Notion of Sacrifice," in *Early Latin Theology*," and Bernard Lonergan, *The Divine Redeemer: A Supplement to De Verbo Incarnato*, trans. Michael Shields from *De bono et malo* (Toronto: Lonergan Research Institute, 2000); see also Doran, "The Nonviolent Cross;" John Volk, *Lonergan on the Historical Causality of Christ: An Interpretation of "The Redemption: A Supplement to De Verbo Incarnato."* PhD diss., Marquette University, 2012; and Mark Miller, "Why the Passion?" *Why the Passion?: Bernard Lonergan on the Cross as Communication.* PhD diss., Boston College, 2008.

³²Charles Hefling, "About What Might a 'Girard-Lonergan 'Conversation' Be?," *Lonergan Workshop Journal*, vol. 17, ed. Fred Lawrence (Chestnut Hill, MA: Boston College, 2002): 95-123; Charles Hefling, "Another Perhaps Permanently Valid Achievement: Lonergan on Christ's (Self-) Knowledge," *Lonergan Workshop Journal*, vol. 20, ed. Fred Lawrence (Chestnut Hill, MA: Boston College, 2008): 127-64; Charles Hefling, "Gratia: Grace and Gratitude: Fifty Unmodern Theses as Prolegomena to Pneumatology," *Anglican Theological Review* 83, no. 3 (2001): 473-91; Charles Hefling, "How Wide Is God's Mercy?: The Holy Spirit in Other Religions," *The Christian Century* 132, no. 23 (2015): 22-27; Charles Hefling, "The Meaning of God Incarnate According to Friedrich Schleiermacher: Or, Whether Lonergan Is Appropriately Regarded as 'A Schleiermacher for Our Time,' and Why Not," *Lonergan Workshop Journal*, vol. 7, ed. Fred Lawrence (Chestnut Hill, MA: 1987): 105-77; Charles Hefling, "Redemption and Intellectual Conversion: Notes on Lonergan's 'Christology Today'," *Lonergan Workshop Journal*, vol. 5, ed. Fred Lawrence (Chestnut Hill, MA: Boston College, 1985): 219-61; Charles Hefling, "Reviving Adamic Adoptionism: The Example of John Macquarrie." *Theological Studies* 52, no. 3 (September 1991): 476-94; "Solved by Sacrifice: Austin Farrer, Fideism, and the Evidence of Faith; Charles Hefling, "A View from the Stern: James Alison's Theology (So Far)," *Anglican Theological Review* 81, no. 4 (September 1999): 689-710; Charles Hefling, "Christ and Evils: Assessing an Aspect of Marilyn McCord Adams's Theodicy," *Anglican Theological Review* 83, no. 4 (September 2001): 869-82; Charles Hefling, "A Perhaps Permanently Valid Achievement: Lonergan on Christ's Satisfaction," *METHOD: Journal of Lonergan Studies* 10, no. 1 (1992): 51.

SOLI DEO GLORIA

“Glory to God Alone” was the byline of Johann Sebastian Bach, Protestantism’s greatest composer, and it is as good a spot as any to consider contributions Protestants might be interested in from Lonergan’s theology proper. Lonergan wrote two Latin textbooks on *The Triune God*, noted above. The first of them (*Doctrines*) traced the historical development of the doctrine of the Trinity; the second (*Systematics*) recast the psychological analogy for the Trinity. Lonergan also wrote a series of articles analyzing Thomas Aquinas’s cognitional theory and showing how Thomas saw the procession of understanding (*Verbum*) in the human intellect to shed light on the real relations of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The Trinity

Originally translated into English and published as *The Road to Nicaea*, Lonergan’s examination of how the church came to articulate the doctrine of the Trinity is not a mere historical survey. Rather, Lonergan is making an argument about how doctrines develop and what this means for the identity of the church. In the particular case of Nicaea – of great importance for all subsequent Christian theology – one might say that the doctrine itself is the development. In other words, in Nicaea and its aftermath, the church had to come to terms with its need to do something new in stating its teachings. Its ability to do so constituted Nicaea’s development of doctrine just as much as did the word “*homoousios*,” through the process of articulating a deeper understanding of God, the church came to a fuller and more comprehensive understanding of itself.³³

Composed for his classes on the Trinity at the Gregorian Institute in Rome, Lonergan’s systematic examination of the doctrine of the Trinity goes far beyond elaborating the classical formulations of the psychological analogy in Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. On the contrary, it examines all of the terms and relations of classical trinitarian teaching in light of the cognitional theory, epistemology, and metaphysics that Lonergan explained in *Insight*. While the psychological analogy has lagged behind the social

³³For an approach to Nicaea having resonances with Lonergan’s approach, see Anatolios, *Retrieving Nicaea: The Development and Meaning of Trinitarian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011).

analogy for the Trinity in recent Protestant (and Catholic) thought, Lonergan offers a seminal, extended, and careful explication of this classic model.

Protestant theologians commonly affirm the Trinity as the widest and most fundamental framework for theological reflection.³⁴ Yet, it is a good question as to *how* one is to construct a systematic theology based on the Trinity. In this vein, one of the most intriguing current conversations taking place in Lonergan Studies concerns Robert Doran's articulation of Lonergan's "Four Point Hypothesis."³⁵ Following the logic of the Trinitarian Missions and of the supernatural life they create in the redeemed, Doran constructs a persuasive framework for how the topics of systematic theology rightly proceed from and relate to each other.

Theological Anthropology

Certain strains of Protestant thought, of course, take the glory of God as their dominant theme. Lonergan believed in the glory of God, of course, but his understanding of it resonates with Irenaeus's great affirmation, "For the glory of God is a living man; and the life of man consists in beholding God."³⁶ Human beings are made in the image of the Trinity, and their final perfection to be like the God they have received.

To say that God created the world for his glory is to say that he created it not for his sake but for ours. He made us in his image, for our authenticity consists in being like him, in self-transcending, in being origins of value, in true love.³⁷

God's glory, then, is his outward focused life in which the fullness of the divine sharing in wisdom and love does not lead God to rest in self-absorbed narcissism; freely and creatively he wills to give his life away. In a real sense,

³⁴See theologians as disparate as Thomas F. Torrance, *Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2016); Stanley Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000); Michael Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity: An Introduction to the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012); and Donald Fairbairn, *Life in the Trinity: An Introduction to Theology with the Help of the Church Fathers* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009)..

³⁵Robert M. Doran, *What Is Systematic Theology?* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 61-77; Charles Hefling, "On the (Economic) Trinity: An Argument in Conversation with Robert Doran," *Theological Studies* 68, no. 3 (September 2007): 642.

³⁶Irenaeus, *Adversus Haeresis*, IV. 20. 7.

³⁷*Method in Theology*, 116-17.

then, God's glory becomes the excellence of his creatures as those creatures come to mirror God's self-giving life.

Lonergan's theological anthropology has ample place for the reality of sin, as do many historic and current streams of Protestantism. He examines it in terms of the many biases that distort our rational being, our alienation from God and from our own true selves, the absurdity that we come to believe and accept as normal, and the inauthenticity we practice – and become – relative to who we are and who we are called to be. Sin, for Lonergan, is not mere moral failing; it is a moral impotence that has roots in our unconscious motivations, and it bears foul fruit in a “radical dimension of lovelessness” in which our whole beings come to be distorted.³⁸

Lonergan's understanding of how God works to save us includes the conversions mentioned above. The purpose of the conversions, though, is to heal our brokenness and establish us in a life that reaches the full potential of human personhood. Here, Lonergan is following Augustine's seminal insight of *Confessions*, Book X, that finding God and becoming reconciled to our own true selves are part and parcel of each other. Human life involves a destiny, and being authentic to ourselves means to receive eternal life in friendship with God.³⁹

ECCLESIA SEMPER REFORMANDA EST

Although Lonergan submitted to the dogmatically defined Catholic magisterium and Vatican I's teaching about the permanence of doctrine, he did not believe that the church would be a completed project until the life of the world to come.

Theological Method

Countless Protestant systematic theologies begin with comment on theological prolegomena or theological method. One can often guess the

³⁸*Method in Theology*, 242-43; see also Cone, *Transforming Desire*, 188-220.

³⁹For Lonergan's widest-ranging statement of this position, see “Finality, Love, Marriage,” in *Collection*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 17-52.

trajectory Protestant systematics pursues by which it places first: the section on God, or the section on the Bible. As Lonergan's theological anthropology shows above, though, he found the division between whether one begins with God's work or with the inquiring subject to be a false dichotomy.

What Lonergan sought in his theological method is a "framework for collaborative creativity."⁴⁰ As explained in *Method in Theology*, this framework has two complementary aspects. First, it helps us understand the enduring bases of the differences among theologians by clarifying the processes that we pursue in doing theology. Second, it helps us understand ourselves better as those called together by God to build meaningful theologies for the healing of the world.⁴¹

Method in Theology presupposes the philosophical base provided by *Insight* but moves beyond it. That is, in *Method in Theology*, Lonergan enlarges and extends *Insight's* critical realism to provide a better account of theologians and of the functions we perform in receiving and producing theology.⁴² What does it mean for us to be authentic? How does theology move from the past into the present, looking toward a future? How do we, and how does this process, get derailed? What does it take to set us right again? What does it mean that in faith, hope, and love we know both the real world and the call of God?⁴³

Relativism and Objectivity

One problem such an endeavor faces is that we have no way outside of the human process that we live in and are. Protestant theology faces this issue as much as any other. Sometimes Protestant theology has solved the issue by treating revelation as a brick that God throws, crashing from outside into our reality. Sometimes Protestants have simply accepted relativism as a consequence of human finitude; here, the revelation becomes "the word of God in the words of human beings," and who knows what happened to God's word once we got hold of it. Sometimes we have just ignored the problem.

⁴⁰*Method in Theology*, 18.

⁴¹For somewhat dated but wide-ranging comment on Lonergan's method, see Patrick Corcoran, *Looking at Lonergan's Method* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007).

⁴²See Donna Teevan, *Lonergan, Hermeneutics, & Theological Method* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2005).

⁴³See Neil Ormerod, *Method, Meaning, and Revelation: The Meaning and Function of Revelation in Bernard Lonergan's Method in Theology* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2000).

Lonergan was no relativist. Yet, he also believed that we have no way outside of human history, no “God’s eye view” by which we could exorcise the specter of relativism.⁴⁴ Lonergan, further, did not believe there was any Golden Age of history that would provide a sure reference for us to base subsequent cultures on.⁴⁵ His conviction was that God works inside human history by healing and elevating us, not by invading us.⁴⁶ “Genuine objectivity, then, is the fruit of authentic subjectivity.”⁴⁷

Authentic subjectivity exists when our experience of the world is attentive, when we understand our experience intelligently, when we assess it reasonably, when we deliberate responsibly, and when, in all things, we love.⁴⁸ Attentiveness, intelligence, reasonableness, responsibility, and love characterize the way the processes of our conscious being operate when they are achieving their full potential, and the fruit of this well-regulated process is a life that knows, chooses, and loves what is good and true. There is, of course, ample opportunity for these processes to go wrong; Lonergan was a fallibilist.⁴⁹ But, it is in exactly these processes – that is, in terms of the beings that we are – that we receive the work of God; and, it should reassure Protestant theology that, throughout and in the end, Lonergan’s work depends on the reality of God’s grace.

ET IN SAECULA SAECULORUM

Lonergan’s works, then, contain fruitful intersections with the concerns typical of Protestant theology in the areas of the doctrines of scripture, faith, conversion, interreligious dialogue and comparative theology, grace, salvation, Christology, theology proper, theological anthropology, theological method, and theological objectivity. While there is much more

⁴⁴For an excellent statement of this problem, and of Lonergan’s response to it, see R. J. Snell, *Through a Glass Darkly: The Meaning and Function of Revelation in Bernard Lonergan’s Method in Theology* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2000).

⁴⁵“The Transition from a Classicist World-View to Historical-Mindedness,” in *A Second Collection*.

⁴⁶*Insight*, 718-25, 741; “Healing and Creating in History,” in *A Third Collection* (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), 100-109.

⁴⁷*Method in Theology*, 202.

⁴⁸See Patrick Byrne’s comprehensive analysis of Lonergan’s ethics in *The Ethics of Discernment: Lonergan’s Foundations for Ethics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016).

⁴⁹*Method in Theology*, 110-12.

both to Protestant theology and to Lonergan, I think that these discussions provide ample place – and reason – to start.

This examination has but scratched the surface of Lonergan's work. Lonergan was as much of a philosopher as he was a theologian, and his works have as many fruitful intersections with philosophy as they do with theology. In fact, Lonergan did not believe that there was a complete division between philosophy and theology; the ability to receive revelation is intrinsic to human reason, and although the reception of revelation is historically conditioned, so are all of our other thought processes.⁵⁰ Lonergan's work, from his viewpoint then, stretches across the fields as one great multifaceted exploration of who we are, the world we live in, the God who calls us, and who we are called to be.

⁵⁰"Lecture 1: Philosophy of God," in *Philosophical and Theological Papers, 1965-1980*, 162-78.

THE REFORMED REJECTION OF NATURAL THEOLOGY: DIALECTIC AND FOUNDATIONS

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FREDERICK LAWRENCE HAS written that in *Method in Theology*, Bernard Lonergan “consummated” his profound interest in meaning “by emphasizing the absolutely central role of the constitutive function of meaning.”¹ Lonergan argued that a constitutive act of meaning occurs when the process of asking and answering questions generates a new social reality.² This identification of constitutive meaning is partly why Lonergan’s theological method brings so much light to the complexities of ecumenical dialogue. When Christian theologians gather to construct bridges of meaning between separated communities, their conversation – even before they have captured it in a written report – reflects constitutive acts of meaning. Common meanings may be solid or shaky, fleeting or permanent, reflective of Christian conversion or insufficiently grounded in it. But they are meaning nonetheless and have potential to reshape the communities’ future relationships with one another.

Yet constitutive meaning can also work against ecumenical relationships. Lonergan describes the darker side of the formation of meaning in *Method in Theology*:

For it is in the field where meaning is constitutive that man’s freedom reaches its highest point. There too his responsibility is greatest. There occurs the emergence of the existential subject, finding out for himself

¹Frederick G Lawrence, “Lonergan’s Search for a Hermeneutics of Authenticity: Re-Originating Augustine’s Hermeneutics of Love,” in *Lonergan’s Anthropology Revisited: The Next Fifty Years of Vatican II*, ed. Gerald Whelan (Rome, Italy: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 2015).

²Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 76ff.

that he has to decide for himself what he is to make of himself. It is there that individuals become alienated from community, that communities split into factions, that cultures flower and decline, that historical causality exerts its sway.³

In other words, separated Christians have had years to develop their unique systems of meaning, resulting in artifacts that have hardened as they have aged. ("It is there . . . that communities split into factions . . .") When they incarnate their meanings into these cultural and intellectual artifacts, adding sinew and skin to the living bones of their central convictions, Christian communities are only doing what they are supposed to do. After all, the gospel is always culturally embodied. When, however, opposition to another community becomes a scale on which embodiments are measured – when opposition itself is considered theologically valuable, even normative – then we have arrived at horizons which Lonergan described as "dialectically" opposed. "What for one is true, for another is false. What for one is good, for another is evil."⁴ The result is alienation, which threatens our common embodiment of Christ and, in turn, our effective witness to the unbelieving world.

In this article, I will examine a product of constitutive meaning in my own (Presbyterian and Reformed) community which has evolved in overt opposition to Roman Catholic theology. That artifact is the rejection of natural theology as an appropriate tool of Christian witness. It is not always clear where the Reformed opprobrium lies: on classical proofs of the existence of God, or on any exercise of the natural mind that claims to apprehend God apart from scripture. But dialectical opposition to natural theology *as we understand it* is very much alive in my Reformed, Presbyterian context, and appears to be fueled by caricatures of the Thomist tradition. Arvin Vos described a version of this mind-set thirty years ago in *Aquinas, Calvin, and Contemporary Protestant Thought*:

For many [Aquinas] serves primarily as an example of how not to do theology. After all, does the *Summa Theologiae* not begin with

³Bernard Lonergan, "Dimensions of Meaning," in *Collection*, vol. 4 of the Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan, ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doan (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 235.

⁴*Method in Theology*, 247.

arguments for the existence of God? No Christian theologians worth their salt call God's existence into question. Theology must begin with Scripture. The method Aquinas uses is precisely the method Calvin and the other Reformers rejected – and if the Reformers shunned it, we cannot do better.⁵

Recently, this writer attended a Reformed History and Theology session at the American Academy of Religion, in which scholars were critiquing the first volume of Kathryn Sonderegger's *Systematic Theology*. Professor Sonderegger spent considerable time and effort defending the "radical course change" that led her to establish her doctrine of God on a substance metaphysics that acknowledged its debt to Thomas Aquinas, rather than beginning as her Barthian colleagues do with Christ as the Word of God. Sonderegger claimed that "epistemic questions have held Trinitarian theology captive to Christology" – in other words, a fear of relying on natural knowledge has precluded Reformed theologians from thinking philosophically about the triune God *in se*. Her struggle to persuade an audience of Protestant academics that she did not intend to "spurn Christology," and that "Scripture itself has led me this way," suggested to me that the mentality Vos described in 1985 still has its influence.⁶

What is the remedy for constitutive meanings that have become frozen into place over time? As Lonergan wrote, "Not every viewpoint is coherent, and those that are not can be invited to advance to a consistent position."⁷ If Lonergan's theological method can serve as scaffolding for the creation of common meaning, then it can also provide a platform for de-calcifying intellectual artifacts and making space for fresh acts of theological understanding. Two of the eight functional specialties – dialectic and foundations – spring immediately to mind. In the spirit of dialectic, this article will articulate as irenically as possible some horizontal "roots" of the Reformed distrust in natural theology.⁸ Behind the "No" response to natural knowledge and the polemical language in which that "No" has

⁵Arvin Vos, *Aquinas, Calvin, and Contemporary Protestant Thought: A Critique of Protestant Views on the Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, DC: Eerdmans, 1985), xii.

⁶Christian Systematic Theology Section and Reformed Theology and History Group, "Engaging Katherine Sonderegger's *Systematic Theology: The Doctrine of God, Volume I*," American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting (San Antonio, Texas), November 21, 2016.

⁷*Method in Theology*, 130.

⁸*Method in Theology*, 271.

often sounded, there is a "Yes": a series of classically Christian affirmations that have been difficult for Catholic believers to perceive. Clarifying these affirmations allows us to identify the same values functioning within a Roman Catholic horizon, therefore making space for shared Christian proclamation. Engagement in dialectic also provides an opportunity to highlight Lonergan's approach to natural theology, which is a better fit for the Reformed "Yes" than caricatures of Aquinas might lead one to believe.

Ideally, this article would gather the fruit of dialectic and move immediately into foundations. Dialectic and foundations are never completely distinct from one another; therefore reference to intellectual, moral, and religious conversion will be inevitable as we go along. But a major exploration of natural theology from the perspective of conversion is beyond the scope of this article. What we can do is recommend next steps. I will conclude therefore with a proposal: an analogy between natural theology and preaching on the level of experience. Reformed Christians treasure the preaching of scripture as a locus for encounter with the persuasive power of the Holy Spirit. They may not realize that natural theology can function in a similar way. Could it be that there are phenomenological parallels between preaching and natural theology, since they are both opportunities for believers and non-believers to be "transformed by the renewal of [the] mind" (Romans 12:2)? If the goal is to build bridges between dialectically opposed horizons, probing differences "to the roots" is not enough. One must also attend to the presence and work of the Holy Spirit.

THE REJECTION IN DIALECTICAL FOCUS

One of the greatest challenges to ecumenists who work within the Reformed tradition is to identify and amplify the catholic "Yes" that is hiding behind the historically contingent "No." It is easy to list the teachings of the Western Church that Calvin and others rejected, such as the authority of tradition, the pope's standing as universal bishop, the infallibility of church councils, and the distinction between bishops and other pastors.⁹ Seen in this light, the Reformed attitude toward natural theology appears to be just another rejection among many. Yet what gives the attitude staying power is its connection to a series of positive affirmations that are dear to my community

⁹Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity World Alliance of Reformed Churches, "Towards a Common Understanding of the Church," 1990 (http://www.prounione.urbe.it/dia-int/r-rc/doc/e_r-rc_2-menu.html), paragraph 20.

and are tightly intertwined. The first is that God wants to be known (which I will call *epistemic gratuity*). The second is that God is the best witness to himself (which I will call *epistemic sufficiency*). A furnace of polemic has transmuted these affirmations into denunciation of natural theology. Yet it is still possible to separate the theological “Yes” in these affirmations from what Lonergan referred to as “stereotypes that body forth suspicions, resentments, hatreds, malice.”¹⁰

Significantly, John Calvin began his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* with a discussion of how we know God. “By the knowledge of God,” he wrote, “I understand that by which we not only conceive that there is some God, but also apprehend what it is for our interest, and conducive to his glory . . . to know concerning him.”¹¹ In other words, to know God is *good* for human beings. Therefore God “has been pleased in order that none might be excluded from the means of obtaining felicity, not only to deposit in our minds that seed of religion of which we have already spoken, but so to manifest his perfections in the whole structure of the universe, and daily place himself in our view, that we cannot open our eyes without being compelled to behold him.”¹² Out of sheer benevolence, God gratuitously desires our highest good, which is to know God – a concept which is also integral to Thomist theology. What might be surprising to Catholic readers is how this concept involved Calvin in a version of natural theology.

In this section of the *Institutes*, Calvin identifies at least two ways in which God has graciously revealed himself apart from scripture. The first he calls a *divinitatis sensum*: an innate apprehension of the Creator God and his expectations for humanity.¹³ Calvin argued that

God himself, to prevent any man from pretending ignorance, has endued all men with some idea of his Godhead, the memory of which he constantly renews and occasionally enlarges, that all to a man being aware that there is a God, and that he is their Maker, may be condemned by their own conscience when they neither worship him nor consecrate their lives to his service.¹⁴

¹⁰*Method in Theology*, 130.

¹¹John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1960), I.2.1.

¹²Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, I.5.1.

¹³Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, I.3.1.

¹⁴Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, II.6.1.

The indisputable evidence of the "sense of deity" is idolatry, which according to Calvin appears in every human culture; but idolatry can only be understood as the perversion it is from the standpoint of a positive truth, that "all are born and live for the express purpose of learning to know God."¹⁵ Secondly, Calvin affirms with Paul that aspects of God's nature "have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made" (Romans 1:19). Human beings can apprehend God's power, wisdom, goodness, and glory in nature because God has chosen it to be so.¹⁶ In fact, people have only to look within themselves to find that humanity itself is "a rare specimen of divine power, wisdom, and goodness," and that every person contains "undoubted evidence of the heavenly grace by which he lives, and moves, and has his being."¹⁷

For Calvin, God's desire to be known is a manifestation of grace and does not confine itself to scripture. Why do Reformed theologians not engage heartily in natural theology as Calvin does in these early pages of the *Institutes*? It is because historical factors brought the second positive affirmation, that of *epistemic sufficiency*, into the foreground of Calvin's thinking. Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli all insisted that God is the best witness to himself because voices all around them were proclaiming, in the vituperative language of the era, that the church's witness to God either was failing or had failed. It is important to remember that all three of these reformers were pastors, and that their dogmatic assertions flowed in large part from pastoral concerns. The *sola scriptura* principle, for example, is an answer to the believer's question: Where can I find assurance that I am saved? How do I access a knowledge of God that is unfailingly accurate and reliably salvific? No wonder Calvin defined faith as "a firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise of Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit."¹⁸ Faith itself is a kind of knowledge. Its sufficiency for salvation must rest on a deeper sufficiency: God's witness to himself, which for Calvin is found preeminently (but not solely, it appears) in the Bible.

¹⁵Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, I.3.3.

¹⁶Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, I.5.1-3.

¹⁷Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, I.5.3

¹⁸Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.2.7.

A preference for supernatural knowledge of God as revealed in scripture over natural knowledge, with particular respect to the assurance of salvation, was not an invention of the Reformers. Aquinas wrote that

the mind of man falls far short when it comes to the things of God. Look at the philosophers; even in searching into questions about man they have erred in many points and held contradictory views. To the end, therefore, that a knowledge of God, undoubted and secure, might be present among men, it was necessary that divine things be taught by way of faith, spoken as it were by the word of God who cannot lie.¹⁹

The real stumbling block for dialogue about natural theology is the way in which Calvin's catholic affirmations of epistemic gratuity and epistemic sufficiency were alchemized by his teaching on sin. The phrase "total depravity" is misleading when applied to Calvin's anthropology – but the preoccupation with corruption is certainly "total" in Calvin's writings and appears to remove whatever efficacy he has granted to natural knowledge. Although "experience testifies that a seed of religion is divinely sown in all, scarcely one in a hundred is found who cherishes it in his heart, and not one in whom it grows to maturity so far is it from yielding fruit in its season . . ."²⁰ God's self-revelation in the "magnificent theatre of heaven and earth" also fails to bring home its message regarding the power, wisdom, and goodness of God.²¹ This failure is not because general revelation is lacking in some way – Paul's affirmation in Romans 1 precludes that argument – but because our receptors are not in working order.

Calvin never systematically clarified the extent of sin's effect on thinking and perception. This is partly because it was not his purpose to provide an explanation of human comprehension in general.²² He did express admiration for the powers of human reason with respect to "earthly things," even after the Fall.²³ In Book II of the *Institutes* one finds a hymn of praise to the liberal arts, beginning with these words: "If we reflect that the

¹⁹Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, trans. Thomas Gilby, 61 vols. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964-1981), 2a2ae, 2.4.

²⁰Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.4.1.

²¹Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, II.6.1.

²²Vos, *Aquinas, Calvin, and Contemporary Protestant Thought*, 5.

²³Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, II.2.13.

Spirit of God is the only fountain of truth, we will be careful, as we would avoid offering insult to him, not to reject or condemn truth wherever it appears."²⁴ The ancient practitioners of law, philosophy, rhetoric, medicine, and mathematics were trustworthy with respect to their knowledge of this world. Due to sin, however, with respect to a knowledge of God "men otherwise the most ingenious are blinder than moles."²⁵

At this point in our dialectical exploration it is important to be very clear *why* sin (as Calvin defined it) overtakes epistemic sufficiency and debilitates natural knowledge. For Calvin, the core of human sin, and the source of much of its corrosive power, is *pride*. After the Fall, "our mind has such an inclination to vanity that it can never cleave fast to the truth of God."²⁶ Calvin identifies pride as *the* knowledge-killer in at least three ways. Firstly, pride causes human beings to be pleased with themselves when such contentment is not rationally justified. "Such is our innate pride [that] we always seem to ourselves just, and upright, and wise, and holy, until we are convinced, by clear evidence, of our injustice, vileness, folly, and impurity." God's attributes are "the only standard" by which we can come to a true estimation of ourselves.²⁷ Secondly, pride pulls natural knowledge off course and misdirects it, so that it presents to human imagination not the true God, but a series of idols. God becomes "whatever their own rashness has devised . . . With such an idea of God, nothing which they may attempt to offer in the way of worship or obedience can have any value in his sight, because it is not him they worship, but, instead of him, the dream and figment of their own heart."²⁸ Finally, and most dangerously, pride cannot receive the truth of God's benevolence toward us in Jesus Christ, because that truth is designed for those who have come to the end of their own efforts. Pride distracts from the assurance of faith, making it a pastoral problem as well as a moral and intellectual one.

It should be clear to the reader that for Calvin, natural theology itself is not the culprit. It is what pride makes of natural theology that is problematic. Reformed theology argues that the knowledge we have about God from revelation is not susceptible to pride to the degree that natural knowledge

²⁴Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, II.2.15.

²⁵Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, II. 2.18.

²⁶Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, III.2.33.

²⁷Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, I.1.2.

²⁸Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, I.4.1.

is. Revelation tells us the truth about ourselves; it does not lead to the construction of idols; by moving us to repentance, it creates in us the very humility that is required to receive it. Yet just because natural theology is more vulnerable to pride (and Paul must have considered, by the way, that he was willing to take the risk in Romans 1) does not mean that every attempt to reason from nature to God is saturated with vanity. Paul's certainly was not. Through a series of historical contingencies, however, pride and natural theology have become associated in the Reformed imagination.

One could employ the functional specialty of history to identify the thinkers and movements which helped solidify this constitutive meaning. In post-Reformation polemic, for example, Roman Catholic apologists came to stress the sufficiency of human reason in deliberate opposition to Protestant emphasis on the noetic effects of sin. Unsurprisingly the response was a hardened commitment to epistemic sufficiency on the Reformed side. One could also look to the Enlightenment period, in which the method of Catholic theology shifted away from the *quaestio* of the thirteenth century and toward "the pedagogy of the thesis," with the intention of fighting scientific rationalism on its own turf.²⁹ Observing these developments from the outside, whether fairly or no, Reformed dogmatists came to associate classical Thomism with the celebration of autonomous human reason.

If Aquinas had indeed proposed a route to knowing God that was independent from scripture, it seemed both evangelical and epistemically moral to retrieve statements like the following from Calvin and apply them to the *praeambula fidei* and the Five Ways:

The prophets and apostles do not boast either of their keenness or of anything that obtains credit for them as they speak; nor do they dwell upon rational proofs. Rather, they bring forward God's holy name, that by it the whole world may be brought into obedience to him . . . If we desire to provide in the best way for our consciences – that they may not be perpetually beset by the instability of doubt or vacillation, and that they may not also boggle at the smallest quibbles – we ought to seek our conviction in a higher place than human reasons, judgments, or conjectures, that is, in the secret testimony of the Spirit.³⁰

²⁹Bernard J. Lonergan, "Theology in Its New Context," in *A Second Collection* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1974), 57.

³⁰Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, I.7.4.

In all of this, Calvinists and neo-Calvinists did not properly attend to the distinction that Calvin made between natural theology itself and *any theology* as transmuted by pride. Karl Barth could therefore draw a parallel between the elevation of autonomous human reason in nineteenth-century liberal thinkers and what appeared to be the same dynamic in natural theology. Both promoted “the sort of understanding which aims for objective verification and certainty and which rests on the presumption that the object of faith can be captured and catalogued by human categories.”³¹ Barth’s remedy for this presumption depended heavily on a Kantian epistemology in which we, the subjects, are taking a look – or virtuously refraining from taking a look – at God, the “object of faith.”³² In any case, as suggested earlier in this article, the influence of Barth’s rejection of natural theology on contemporary Reformed theologians is ongoing and probably incalculable.

Roman Catholic readers of Barth might struggle with his Kantian framework and with his interpretation of Aquinas. But our dialectical exploration suggests that Barth’s *Nein* to natural theology is a reiteration of the Reformed “Yes” to epistemic gratuity and epistemic sufficiency. God wants to be known, and God is the best witness to himself. These are biblical affirmations that belong to all Christians. Moreover, by taking seriously the dangerous effect of pride on human knowing, Barth and Calvin were operating from the assumption that knowing is a moral issue. This is axiomatic in the Thomist universe. Just as truth is inseparable from goodness, so it is difficult to separate ignorance from sin. And pride is an expression of both. As Thomas wrote, “right reason requires that every man’s will should tend to that which is proportionate to him. Therefore it is evident that pride denotes something opposed to right reason, and this shows it to have the character of sin.”³³ Lonergan expresses the same principle in its positive form. “What is the intellectual but an intentional self-transcendence? It is coming to know, not what appears, not what is imagined, not what is thought, not what seems to me to be so, but what is so.”³⁴ Clearly, theologians in both the Roman Catholic and Reformed traditions agree that pride is destructive to our knowledge of “what is so” and therefore to our fellowship with God.

³¹John N. Sheveland, “Tears of Dependence: Anselm and Karl Barth on *Intelligere*,” *The Expository Times* 115, no. 6 (2004): 182.

³²Bernard Lonergan, “Natural Knowledge of God,” in *A Second Collection*, ed. William Ryan and Bernard Tyrrell (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 122.

³³Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 2a2ae, 162.1.

³⁴“Natural Knowledge of God,” 128.

ANOTHER VIEW OF NATURAL THEOLOGY

We have been attempting to probe the roots of Reformed skepticism toward natural theology. I am arguing that its longevity stems from its relation to theological values emphasized by Calvin, which I have called epistemic gratuity and sufficiency. On its own, natural theology does not necessarily violate these principles; corrupted by pride, however, it certainly does. From within their dialectically opposed horizon, Reformed theologians have judged their Roman Catholic counterparts to be conducting natural theology pridefully, in a way that elevates autonomous human reason. Epistemological counterpositions on both sides have surely exacerbated the tension. Yet the impasse is ironic given that in eschewing pride, Reformed theologians are echoing a classically Thomist assumption that knowing has moral dimensions. Utilizing dialectic in the manner of a scythe may have cleared some common ground on which to build new acts of constitutive meaning between separated Christians.

At this juncture it will be most helpful to probe for the values of epistemic gratuity, sufficiency, and morality within a Roman Catholic approach to natural theology. Otherwise prejudice may remain that "the other's horizon, at least in part, is attributed to wishful thinking, to an acceptance of myth, to ignorance or fallacy, to blindness or illusion, to backwardness or immaturity, to infidelity, to bad will, to a refusal of God's grace... The suggestion that openness is desirable will make one furious."³⁵ To demonstrate that natural theology – and I have in mind both the *praeambula fidei* and proofs for the existence of God – is not necessarily prideful, one needs to pay attention both to the "student" who receives it and to the "teacher" who presents it. One needs to establish (1) that natural theology is not automatically conducive to pride in the one who is receiving it and (2) that natural theology does not automatically proceed from pride in the one who presents it. Lonergan's own approach to the topic is ideal for this purpose, especially his recommendation that we regard natural theology not as prolegomena to theology but as a distinct movement within systematics.

Imagine a student in a Reformed setting who is exposed for the first time to Aquinas's work and within it, to the natural-supernatural distinction. Traditionally, the first exposure is guided by a diagram in two tiers, with

³⁵*Method in Theology*, 237.

the *praeambula fidei* "below" and the *articula fidei* "above."³⁶ This diagram appears to have been diabolically designed to stoke Reformed concerns about natural knowledge and pride. It suggests to the student that the preambles are a kind of mental ladder for climbing up to God. "Do the best you can in your own power," the diagram seems to whisper, "and then God will complete your efforts with revelation." The "lower" portion of the ladder is not presented as God making himself known in the style of Romans 1, but as an activity that humans do. There is a hint of danger that, on the way "up" the ladder to supernatural knowledge, the knower might go astray in philosophical speculation that is untouched by the aid of grace, which doesn't "kick in" until the upper level. There is also the implication that natural knowledge had no pedigree in Christian tradition until Aquinas invented it.

Many of my readers know the inadequacies of this presentation. They may not have understood the effect of it within a Reformed or other Protestant setting. Students who receive it apart from further explanation will be persuaded that Aquinas is invoking their autonomous reason. They are not likely to connect Aquinas's approach with Paul's even though Aquinas made the connection himself. "Now holy teaching goes to God most personally . . . not only because of what can be gathered about him from creatures (which philosophers have recognized, according to the Epistle of the Romans, "what was known of God is manifest in them") but also because of what he alone knows about himself and yet discloses for others to share."³⁷ In other words, they will not see the *praeambula* as rooted in God's witness to himself. Most problematically, they overestimate the "sturdiness" of the "ladder." They do not know that according to Aquinas, fallen natural knowledge cannot even apprehend natural objects – much less supernatural ones – without the assistance of grace.³⁸ Nor are they aware of Thomas's conviction that no matter how intelligent one might be, one's approach to God through reason will never be as secure and reliable as God's self-disclosure in scripture. Every person stands "in need of being instructed by divine revelation even in religious matters the human reason is able to investigate."³⁹ Aquinas too believed that God is the best witness to himself.

³⁶I confess that I have presented a similar diagram many times in the past.

³⁷Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a. 1, 6.

³⁸"Natural Knowledge of God," 118.

³⁹Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a 1, 1.

It is important to clarify these facts for students in my tradition, so that they are clear on exactly what Aquinas was inviting them to do by means of the *praeambula*. God, who gratuitously fashioned for us an intelligible world, also gratuitously ensured that revelation does not float disconnectedly from intelligibility of creation. The preambles are like a radio announcer who says, "Fortunately for you, the Good News of salvation is available in your language!" Moreover, it is not necessary for their Christian belief that students of natural theology grasp the *praeambula* by reason, when most of us cannot. Aquinas would affirm that "those things that can be known by human reason [the preambles] are to be included among the things to be believed, the *credenda*."⁴⁰ And none of this knowledge is possible apart from grace. In summary, the ideal function of the *praeambula* is to pose the question, "What needs to be true for revealed knowledge to be intelligible to us?" It is an invitation to wonder: in Lonergan's terms, to exercise the unrestricted desire to know with respect to the things of God, in full awareness that this natural desire can have only a supernatural fulfillment. "The native infinity of intellect . . . appears in that restless spirit of inquiry, that endless search for causes which, Aquinas argued, can rest and end only in a supernatural vision of God."⁴¹

Natural theology can stir up wonder, and wonder is the opposite of pride. In fact, wonder plays a key role in Lonergan's proof for the existence of God in chapter 19 of *Insight*. Quentin Quesnell has argued that chapter 19 is a cosmological proof, because it argues not from definitions alone but from empirical data.⁴² Readers make the mistake of looking for that data within the text of the proof, when the data is within their own consciousness. How useful it would be, Quesnell muses, if in proving the existence of God one could advert to "a principle grounded in a concrete judgment of fact that was not subject to revision."⁴³ In fact that is exactly what one has in the judgment, "I am a knower." Quesnell then argues that Lonergan's proof "in a nutshell is this: 'If I am seriously trying to understand fully the world I

⁴⁰Vos, *Aquinas, Calvin, and Contemporary Protestant Thought*, 71.

⁴¹Bernard Lonergan, *Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas*, vol. 2 of the Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan, ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 97.

⁴²Quentin Quesnell, "What Kind of Proof Is Insight 19?," in *Lonergan Workshop*, vol. 8, ed. Fred Lawrence (Chestnut Hill, MA: Boston College, 1990): 266.

⁴³Quesnell, "What Kind of Proof Is Insight 19?," 271.

live in, then I am already convinced that God exists."⁴⁴ The "peculiar force and power of the proof" is the demonstrable reality of the *unrestricted* desire to know and of the conscious operations that are fueled by that desire.⁴⁵ An unrestricted desire implies the existence of an unrestricted object. But a student of natural theology will not recognize the unrestricted desire to know within themselves, and be persuaded that it has an object, without intellectual, moral, and religious conversion.⁴⁶ Therefore conversion and grace are embedded in Lonergan's proof. "Natural knowledge of God," he insists, "is not attained without moral judgments and existential decisions. These do not occur without his grace. Therefore, the natural light of human reason does not suffice for man's so-called natural knowledge of God."⁴⁷

I have hoped to demonstrate that natural theology need not lead to pride in the receptor. What about in the one who presents it? Let us use Romans 1 as a test case. In drawing the reader's attention toward what can be known about God in creation, Paul is not showcasing his philosophical abilities. Instead he is an example of someone whose natural knowledge of God has been "attained" through "moral judgments and existential decisions" – namely, the life-altering decision that Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior, to which he could only have come through the grace of the Holy Spirit. Conversion, falling in love with God, is the lens through which Paul is now looking at nature, and it conditions him to see the created world as evidence of God's wisdom and power. For Paul, conversion is the *sine qua non* of natural theology. This insight also applies to the role of natural theology within the Thomist framework. If the *praeambula* are the logical underpinnings of the articles of faith – if they answer the question, "What needs to be true for revealed knowledge to be intelligible to us?" – then Thomas has only arrived at them by starting with God's revelation in scripture and working backwards, just as Paul begins with faith in Jesus Christ and works backwards to the signs of God in creation.

This inversion, rarely recognized in Reformed circles, is not motivated by pride but by love. It celebrates the marvelous grace of God who testifies to himself in nature, and who takes care to make that testimony intelligible to human reason. Thus natural theology can be a form of witness and can even function as an invitation to belief. As Lonergan reasoned:

⁴⁴Quesnell, "What Kind of Proof Is Insight 19?," 275.

⁴⁵Quesnell, "What Kind of Proof Is Insight 19?," 275.

⁴⁶*Method in Theology*, 338.

⁴⁷"Natural Knowledge of God," 133.

... normally religious conversion precedes the effort to work out rigorous proofs for the existence of God. But I do not think it impossible that such proofs might be a factor facilitating religious conversion so that, by way of exception, certain knowledge of God's existence should precede the acceptance of God's gift of his love.⁴⁸

Notice that Lonergan's view of natural theology in the above quotation is exactly upside-down from what Reformed theologians might assume. He considers it axiomatic that religious conversion precedes natural theology. That is why he advocated "an integration of natural with systematic theology."⁴⁹ Lonergan made natural theology a component of systematics in his theological method because he recognized that systematics and natural theology have crucial assumptions in common. Firstly, they both assume the existence of One who wants to be known and who witnesses reliably to himself. As I have argued, they both presuppose the phenomenon of conversion in the theologian. And, because they depend on conversion, they are manifestations of the Augustinian prescription to "believe in order that you may understand."⁵⁰ It is sad and ironic that, in the Reformed tradition, natural theology became synonymous with a prideful attempt *to understand before one could believe*.

RECOMMENDED: AN ANALOGY FROM EXPERIENCE

This has been a project about constitutive meaning. Over time, theological convictions can be embedded in a tradition so deeply that they take on an eternal aspect that belies their very real contingency. Not only do the churches consider that "this is how we have always thought about X"; they also consider that "this is the only way to think about X." It takes dialectic to show that a towering assumption, such as the inherent pridefulness of natural theology to many Reformed thinkers, has feet of clay. Furthermore, it takes a delicate balance of dialectic and foundations to critique mighty assumptions and begin to replace them with formulations that speak more quietly but are more reflective of Christian conversion.

⁴⁸"Natural Knowledge of God," 339.

⁴⁹"Natural Knowledge of God," 339.

⁵⁰"Natural Knowledge of God," 336.

Further work needs to be done on this topic from a phenomenological perspective. As a Reformed theologian, when I experience Lonergan's approach to natural theology, it reminds me powerfully of how I experience preaching in my own tradition. To draw an analogy between preaching and natural theology on the level of doctrinal judgment would be very difficult. Timothy George reminds us that the Reformation churches transformed preaching from an attachment to the sacrament of penance, into a "sacrament" of its own: "an indispensable means of grace and a sure sign of the true church."⁵¹ Natural theology is not sacramental in anyone's horizon. Yet on the level of experience, an analogy between the two activities may be instructive. Both activities are the fruit of conversion in the presenter and can stimulate conversion in the recipient. Like the *praeambula fidei*, preaching appeals to the God-given reason of its audience while simultaneously pointing to the limitations of reason and the need for revelation. It can also be argued that listening well both to natural theology and to preaching requires putting pride to one side. In other words, both activities require moral conversion in the presenter *and* in the recipient.

It would be best for ecumenical dialogue and for the overall health of our churches if natural theology and preaching were to function not as identity markers within our respective horizons, but as expressions of a deeper pneumatology that is biblically and universally Christian. How do we know that God wants to be known, and that God is the best witness to himself? Because "God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us" (Romans 5:5).

⁵¹Timothy George, *Reading Scripture with the Reformers* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 234.

THE TRUTHFULNESS OF SCRIPTURE: BERNARD LONERGAN'S CONTRIBUTION AND CHALLENGES FOR PROTESTANTS

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Now what is the origin of Christian realism, the realism of the true affirmation? Clearly, it is the scriptural word of God. It is the word of God as a command in the Law; it is the word of God as a correction in the prophets; it is the precept of our Lord to the apostles in the Sermon on the Mount, "Let your speech be 'Yea, yea; nay, nay'" (Matthew 5:37). It is the word of God as conceived by St Paul in Galatians 1: 'If an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel different from the one I have preached to you, let him be anathema.' The word of God! To say it is not true would be a blasphemy; to say it does not regard reality would be an impious trifling. *And those implications of the word of God as received by the Christian communion are the real foundations and origins, I would suggest, of Christian realism.*

Bernard Lonergan, "The Origins of Christian Realism"¹

THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION has regularly been understood and characterized as a movement driven by and focused on the authority of scripture. The rallying cry of *sola scriptura* reflects those attitudes and characterizations.² Certain evaluations of the Reformation see it as

¹Lonergan gave lectures with this title on a number of occasions from May 22, 1961, to April 15, 1964. See Bernard Lonergan, "The Origins of Christian Realism (1961)," in *Philosophical and Theological Papers, 1958-1964*, vol. 6 of the *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, ed. Robert C. Croken, Frederick E. Crowe, and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 80-93, at 80n1.

²That slogan is not univocal. Protestant theologians have offered a variety of nuanced historical and theological understanding of it. For one recent account, see Kevin Vanhoozer,

a move away from the traditions of man to return to the divine truths of God perspicuously manifest in Christian scripture. While the rhetoric of posing such a sharp disjunction between scripture and tradition is perhaps overstated, I have still heard it used often among self-proclaimed Bible-believing Protestants.³ This has, unsurprisingly, happened regularly when I – a Protestant teaching at a Bible-centered Protestant university – have identified my indebtedness to Roman Catholic thinkers such as Bernard Lonergan and Henri de Lubac.⁴ In general, though, I am convinced that such thinkers have much to offer Christians, including Protestants, committed to the truthfulness and authority of scripture.

Though a number of Protestants have found value in de Lubac's studies on the history of Christian scriptural exegesis, Lonergan might seem to be a strange resource for illuminating contemporary reflection on Christian use of scripture.⁵ After all, he was not trained as a scripture scholar, he does not give direct attention to scripture in *Insight*, and he "beg[s his] readers not to be scandalized" by his limited engagement with scripture, among other fundamental Christian sources, in the introduction to *Method in Theology*.⁶ But as is evident from his extensive time as a seminary professor, Lonergan spent years seeking to understand what the responsible use and interpretation of scripture entailed in his own time. Thankfully, the recent publication of his course notes on trinitarian theology, Christology, grace theology, and theological method has finally made the fruit of that intellectual reflection available to broader audiences.⁷ The publication and

Biblical Authority after Babel: Retrieving the Solas in the Spirit of Mere Protestant Christianity (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2016).

³A number of contemporary Protestant theologians have offered nuanced and rich accounts of the nature and purpose of scripture, however. I recommend especially the work of Vanhoozer and that of the late John Webster.

⁴See Joseph K. Gordon, "Scripture in History: A Systematic Theology of the Christian Bible." PhD diss., Marquette University, 2016; Joseph K. Gordon, "Ressourcement Anti-Semitism: Addressing an Obstacle to Henri de Lubac's Proposed Recovery of Premodern Spiritual Exegesis," *Theological Studies* 78, no. 3 (2017): 614-33.

⁵See, for instance, Bryan Hollon, *Everything Is Sacred: Spiritual Exegesis in the Political Theology of Henri de Lubac* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2009); Kevin Storer, *Reading Scripture to Hear God: Kevin Vanhoozer and Henri de Lubac on God's Use of Scripture in the Economy of Redemption* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2014).

⁶Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, vol. 14 of the Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan, ed. Robert M. Doran and John D. Didosky (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017), 4, 161-62, 285-87.

⁷See Bernard Lonergan, *The Triune God: Doctrines*, vol. 11 of the Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan, ed. Robert M. Doran and H. Daniel Monsour, trans. Michael G. Shields (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009); Bernard Lonergan, *The Triune God: Systematics*, vol. 12

broad dissemination of those works should instigate a great number of fruitful studies on the history of Lonergan's own personal development, but they have more than historical interest. Such studies, alongside some of Lonergan's relatively understudied essays, which I will cite below, provide resources for contemporary Christians to both affirm and understand the truthfulness of scripture at the level of our times.⁸

A number of theologians and biblical scholars have already found great value in Lonergan's work for advancing the study of Christian scripture.⁹

of the Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan, ed. Robert M. Doran and H. Daniel Monsour, trans. Michael G. Shields (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007); Bernard Lonergan, *The Incarnate Word*, vol. 8 of the Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan, ed. Robert M. Doran and Jeremy D. Wilkins, trans. Charles C. Hefling, Jr. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016); *The Redemption*, vol. 9 of the Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan; Bernard Lonergan, *Early Latin Theology*, vol. 19 of the Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan, ed. Robert M. Doran and H. Daniel Monsour, trans. Michael G. Shields (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011); Bernard Lonergan, *Early Works in Theological Method 1*, vol. 22 of the Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan, ed. Robert M. Doran and Robert C. Croken (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), *Early Works on Theological Method 2*, vol. 23 of the Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan, ed. Robert M. Doran and Robert C. Croken, trans. Michael G. Shields (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), and *Early Works on Theological Method 3*, vol. 24 of the Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan, ed. Robert M. Doran and H. Daniel Monsour, trans. Michael G. Shields (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013).

⁸In addition to "The Origins of Christian Realism," I have in mind the following: Bernard Lonergan, "Exegesis and Dogma," in *Philosophical and Theological Papers, 1958-1964*, 141-59; Bernard Lonergan, "Theology as a Christian Phenomenon," in *Philosophical and Theological Papers, 1958-1964*, 244-72; "The Dehellenization of Dogma," in *A Second Collection*, vol. 13 of Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan, ed. Robert M. Doran and John D. Dadosky (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 11-30; and "The Origins of Christian Realism (1972)," in *A Second Collection*, 202-20.

⁹See Frederick E. Crowe, "The Power of the Scriptures: An Attempt at Analysis," in *Lonergan at the Level of Our Time*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Michael Vertin (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 279-93; Frederick E. Crowe, *Theology of the Christian Word: A Study in History* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978); Charles Hefling, "On Understanding Salvation History," in *Lonergan's Hermeneutics: Its Contemporary Development and Application*, ed. Sean E. McEvenue and Ben F. Meyer (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 1989), 221-75; Charles Hefling, *Why Doctrines?*, 2nd ed. (Chestnut Hill, MA: Boston College, 2000), 117-46; Anthony J. Kelly, "Dimensions of Meaning: Theology and Exegesis," in *Transcending Boundaries: Contemporary Readings of the New Testament: Essays in Honor of Francis J. Maloney* (Rome: Liberia Ateneo Salesiano, 2005), 41-55; Neil Ormerod, *Method, Meaning, and Revelation: The Meaning and Function of Revelation in Bernard Lonergan's Method in Theology* (Latham, MD: University Press of America, 2000); Randall Rosenberg, "The Drama of Scripture: Reading Patristic Biblical Hermeneutics through Lonergan's Reflections on Art," *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 11, no. 2 (2008): 126-48; V. George Shillington, *Reading the Sacred Text: An Introduction to Biblical Studies* (New York: T & T Clark, 2002); John Topel, "Faith, Exegesis, and Theology," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 69 (2004): 337-48; John Topel, "What Does Systematic Theology Say to New Testament Interpretation?," in *Theology and Sacred Scripture*, ed. Carol J. Dempsey and William P. Loewe (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2001), 105-24.

Sean McEvenue, for instance, has utilized Loneragan's work to illuminate historical, literary, and theological studies of the Old Testament.¹⁰ The late Ben F. Meyer has undoubtedly done the most work to bring Loneragan's achievements into the realms of contemporary scripture scholarship. Meyer has utilized Loneragan's critical realism to evaluate and advance historical Jesus scholarship and the study of the beliefs of the earliest Christian communities.¹¹ Meyer has in turn influenced more broadly read New Testament scholars such as N. T. Wright, James D. G. Dunn, and Scot McKnight.¹² A number of younger scholars such as Jonathan Bernier and Peter Laughlin are advancing the application of Loneragan's methodological work for New Testament studies in exciting ways.¹³ There is much in the aforementioned studies for helping contemporary believers to understand the richness and strangeness of the Christian scriptures in all of their historical and literary particularity. My present focus, however, is on another specific contribution that Loneragan can make for understanding scripture that is sorely needed today. The exigencies of historical consciousness require us to acknowledge the importance and value of historical investigations of the text of Christian scripture. Frequently, though, Christian believers of a variety of

¹⁰See Sean McEvenue, *Interpretation and Bible: Essays on Truth in Literature* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1994); Sean McEvenue, "Old Testament, Scripture or Theology?," *Interpretation, A Journal of Bible and Theology* 35, no. 3 (1981): 229-42; Sean McEvenue, *The Pentateuch* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1990); Sean McEvenue, "Scholarship's Impenetrable Wall," in *Loneragan Workshop: Loneragan and the Human Sciences, In Thanksgiving for the Gifts of the Past 1000 Years*, vol. 16, ed. Frederick Lawrence (Chestnut Hill, MA: Boston College, 2000):121-38.

¹¹See Ben F. Meyer, *The Aims of Jesus* (San Jose, CA: Pickwick Publications, 2002); Ben F. Meyer, "The Challenges of Text and Reader to the Historical-Critical Method," *Concilium* 1 (1991): 3-12; Ben F. Meyer, *Christus Faber: The Master Builder and the House of God* (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1992); Ben F. Meyer, *The Church in Three Tenses* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971); Ben F. Meyer, *Critical Realism and the New Testament* (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1989); Ben F. Meyer, "The Primacy of Consent and the Uses of Suspicion," *ExAud* 2 (1987): 7-18; Ben F. Meyer, *Reality and Illusion in New Testament Scholarship: A Primer in Critical Realist Hermeneutics* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1994); Ben F. Meyer, "A Tricky Business: Ascribing New Meaning to Old Texts," *Gregorianum* 71, no. 4 (1990): 743-61.

¹²See N. T. Wright, "Introduction for the New Edition," in Ben F. Meyer, *Aims of Jesus* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2002), 9a-91; N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1992), 32-144; James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 110-11; and Scot McKnight, *Jesus and His Death: Historiography, the Historical Jesus, and Atonement Theory* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2005), 5, 20, 26, 34, 37, 50, 444.

¹³See Jonathan Bernier, *Aposynagōgos and the Historical Jesus in John: Rethinking the Historicity of the Johannine Expulsion Passages* (Boston, MA: Brill, 2013); Jonathan Bernier, *Quest for the Historical Jesus after the Demise of Authenticity* (New York: T & T Clark, 2016); and Peter Laughlin, *Jesus and the Cross: Necessity, Meaning, Atonement* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2014).

perspectives react to such investigations as if they are either subversive of or outright challenges to the truthfulness of scripture.

The judgment of the truthfulness of scripture, of course, is non-negotiable for those baptized into Christ. It is a doctrinal judgment which takes its place within a constellation of other constitutive Christian judgments about divine and created reality. But making that judgment is one thing, and understanding it adequately is something else entirely. Lonergan expresses that judgment emphatically in the epigraph of this essay; he understands and explains that judgment in a nuanced way in his works. My contention in this essay is that Lonergan's explanations of that judgment could prove eminently useful for Protestants committed to the truthfulness of scripture yet bewildered by the unmistakable plurality of exegeses of scripture available in popular culture, academic biblical studies, and even among the various denominations and sects of Protestantism.

That plurality is most evident among the groups which proudly trumpet their adherence to the truthfulness of scripture. Despite Protestant insistence upon the perspicuity and authority of scripture, many Bible-centric groups nevertheless exhibit a striking "pervasive interpretive pluralism" in their use of scripture.¹⁴ The recognition of the historical locatedness of scripture is a major source of that pluralism. It has become increasingly evident that the acceptance of the historical locatedness of the language, symbols, and human authors of scripture forbids contemporary Christians from asserting its truthfulness in any sort of literalistic or univocal way. We need another way forward.

The insights of one of Lonergan's seldom engaged essays, "Exegesis and Dogma," provide resources for articulating just such a way.¹⁵ In that article, Lonergan differentiates and explains three exegetical ideals for "explaining the meaning of a text."¹⁶ Examining these exegetical ideals will provide an opportunity to comment on the precise contribution that Lonergan can make to Protestants (and Catholics, and Orthodox, for that matter) concerning the truthfulness of scripture. Lonergan's presentation in that essay is characteristically terse, and so in what follows I supplement my presentation

¹⁴See Christian Smith, *The Bible Made Impossible: Why Biblicalism Is Not a Truly Evangelical Reading of Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2010). For a spirited and useful rejoinder to Smith, see Vanhoozer, *The Bible after Babel*.

¹⁵"Exegesis and Dogma," 142-59.

¹⁶"Exegesis and Dogma," 142.

of Lonergan's own arguments with illustrations and explanations drawn from scripture itself, from insights from Lonergan's other writings, and with contributions from a variety of recent monographs and essays devoted to scriptural hermeneutics and the nature and purpose of Christian scripture. Before I do so, however, I will offer a bit of historical context by locating the essay within Lonergan's own historical development.

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND CONTENT OF "EXEGESIS AND DOGMA"

Lonergan delivered "Exegesis and Dogma" at Regis College in Willowdale, Ontario, on September 3, 1963.¹⁷ As he notes in his introductory remarks, he did not choose the subject matter of that lecture. He was asked to provide a talk, and when he inquired concerning the topic he was told that "the burning interest of the theologians was the relation between exegesis and dogmatic theology."¹⁸ Lonergan is obliging, but he notes that treating "dogmatic theology" would "[add] on unnecessary complexities."¹⁹ Instead, he limits his attention to the relationship between exegesis and "dogma" exclusively to simplify the topic. This modification, in my estimation, likely anticipates his later functional differentiation of "doctrines" and "systematics."²⁰ Those familiar with Lonergan's historical development will recall that he did not make the breakthrough to functional specialization until February 1965.²¹ The later functional distinction between doctrines and systematics, of course, depends upon his already clear distinction between judgment and understanding articulated in print as early as the *Verbum* articles and given a place of fundamental importance in *Insight*. Lonergan is on the way toward that later distinction of functions for theology in "Exegesis and Dogma." Dropping the word "theology" would allow him to focus intently on the presence of the *judgments* of Christian dogma in scripture and to leave the question of their systematic intelligibility for another time. I will have more to say about functional specialization at the end of this essay.

Lonergan's reflections on scripture in "Exegesis and Dogma" are located in his general reflections on theological method from the time of

¹⁷"Exegesis and Dogma," 142n1.

¹⁸"Exegesis and Dogma," 142.

¹⁹"Exegesis and Dogma," 142.

²⁰See *Method in Theology*, 127.

²¹See Frederick Crowe, *Lonergan* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992), 95, 106-107.

Divinum personarum in 1957 through the publication of *Method in Theology* itself in 1972.²² During this time period Lonergan faced the challenges of “introducing history into Catholic theology” squarely.²³ In a number of essays and in his classes on theological method Lonergan was wrestling with the question of the relationship between the historical-location of scripture and the later developments in understanding of the church fathers and ecumenical councils.²⁴ The development of historical consciousness looms large here. The recognition that Christian language and concepts have not remained static from the time of the New Testament to the present poses the possible specter of relativism. The recognition that the precise doctrinal formulations of the church are not “in” scripture itself raises for many the question of their very legitimacy and intelligibility. In “Exegesis and Dogma” and the other cited loci, Lonergan proposes a way of showing how it is that the dogmas “come out of the scriptures.” As I have already noted above, Lonergan faces the challenge by differentiating and contrasting three exegetical ideals, “relative exegesis,” “romantic exegesis,” and “classical exegesis.”²⁵ I will examine and comment on each of these in turn.

Scripture and Relative Exegesis

The first exegetical ideal, “relative exegesis,” “transpose[s the thought and expression of the biblical authors] into our modes of thought and expression.”²⁶ The transpositional exegete acknowledges the strangeness and difference of the language and ideas of the scriptural authors. On this side of the revolution of historical consciousness we cannot help but be taken aback by the strange new world(s) of the Bible.²⁷ But that difference

²²Robert M. Doran has provided a useful overview of this context in Robert M. Doran, “General Editors Preface,” in *Early Works on Theological Method 2*, xvii-xx.

²³Lonergan, quoted in Crowe, *Lonergan*, 98. The original quotation is in J. Martin O’Hara, ed., *Curiosity at the Center of One’s Life: Statements and Questions of Eric O’Connor* (Montreal: Thomas More Institute, 1984), 427.

²⁴See the essays cited in note 7 above and Bernard Lonergan, *The Triune God: Doctrines*, vol. 11 of *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, ed. Robert M. Doran and H. Daniel Monsour, trans. Michael G. Shields (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 28-255; *Early Works on Theological Method 1*, 73-76, 164-69, 234-59, 408-10, 415-20, *Early Works on Theological Method 2*, 37-80, 230-313, 613-41, *Early Works on Theological Method 3*, 25-27, 54, 57, 70-84, 91, 104-26.

²⁵“Exegesis and Dogma,” 148.

²⁶“Exegesis and Dogma,” 143.

²⁷See Karl Barth, “The Strange New World within the Bible,” in *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, trans. Douglas Horton (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), 28-50.

and historical distance creates a metaphorical chasm which separates us from the judgments and understandings expressed in scripture.²⁸ The transpositional exegete attempts to translate or transpose the distinctive particulars of scripture into language that reflects instead the conventions of her own particular audience. She makes Isaiah, or Paul, or Matthew, or even Jesus, "talk like us."²⁹

There are obvious problems with such an approach. The problems lie both in the generic, linguistic, and developmental diversity of the language of scripture itself and in the diversity of the commonsense horizons of those receiving such transposed texts. In "Exegesis and Dogma" Lonergan does not comment directly on the issues inherent in transposing scripture which arise precisely because of the kind of text that it is.³⁰ But these problems are manifold and we cannot avoid them if we intend to responsibly measure up to the reality of what scripture is and has been. Though Christians maintain as a matter of constitutive faith the judgments of the inspiration and authority of scripture, scripture unquestionably bears the marks of the historicity of human meaning-making. The discovery of historical consciousness has had, and must continue to have, profound impacts on how contemporary Christians engage scripture. As Francis Young puts it, "Christian tradition and Christian theology give us the Bible, a unified whole, these days bound in one volume, in a translation that gives it a homogeneous style. History gives us a collection of documents varied in language, style, origin, date, authorship, character, genre, purpose, attitude, and so on."³¹ In any contemporary translation of Christian scripture, three original languages – Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek – are mediated by one receptor language such as English. The various human authors, known and unknown, who are responsible for the texts in their early history write in various genres, at various levels of education, with distinctive vocabularies and idioms. As Lonergan puts it understatedly, the individual "Biblical writings express the mentality of a given author, in a given milieu, treating issues for particular purposes."³²

²⁸Lonergan uses the language of "chasm" to describe the historical distance between the expressions of scripture and later systematic or technical language in "*De Intellectu et Methodo*" in *Early Works on Theological Method 2*, 43-49.

²⁹*Early Works in Theological Method 2*, 143.

³⁰I treat these issues in much greater depth in Gordon, "Scripture in History," chap. 5.

³¹Francis Young, *Virtuoso Theology: The Bible and Interpretation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1993, 2002), 43.

³²*Early Works on Theological Method 3*, 79.

Additionally, the technology of codices (and screens!) brings their beautiful and sometimes shocking diversity together in convenience in a way that hides from us – almost completely – the hard yet majestic histories of their conservation and transmission. Those who pay close attention, however, can still notice that scripture everywhere reflects the particularities of the distinctive authors and communities of its historical origins. Prefaces by translators, study notes, and footnotes on textual variants bear witness to the historical diversity intrinsic to Christian scripture. While Christians also insist on the unity of our scriptures as a matter of principle, we must nevertheless remain attentive to the fact that they represent a striking diversity in that unity. This diversity is evident at almost every discernible literary level of scripture – from the two testaments on down. “[The] concrete content of the canon . . .” writes Ben Meyer, “attests [a constitutive Christian] commitment to the particularity, variety, and fullness of the normative faith-witness.”³³

It is already challenging enough to consider the plurality manifest in scripture in general. But the transpositional exegete wants to transpose that plurality into her own context. For, as Lonergan states, “if someone will transpose their thought and their expressions into our modes of thought and expression, then we will understand what is meant.”³⁴ Yet the different languages of the transpositional process – those ancient languages of the text and those contemporary receptor languages – are not commensurate or isomorphic. Neither biblical Hebrew nor Koine Greek, the primary languages of the original texts of the Old and New Testaments, equals English. English does not always equal English! Languages themselves are subject to historical development in distinct localities. Southern American English is distinct from Northeastern American English. But those two are closer in relation to one another than either is to British or Australian English. And none of those Englishes are directly equivalent to the Koine Greek of the New Testament.

The translation of the Greek word *λόγος*, which occurs repeatedly in the Gospel of John, by the English word “word,” illustrates the challenge well. That text begins as follows: “In the beginning was the *λόγος* and the *λόγος*

³³Ben Meyer, “The Primacy of the Intended Sense of Texts,” in *Critical Realism and the New Testament* (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1989), 17-56, at 30. Meyer mentions the fourfold gospel as a clear example of this plurality in unity.

³⁴“Exegesis and Dogma,” 143.

was with God, and the λόγος was God." Modern English translations almost universally render that Greek word as "word" (see the NRSV, NAB, NIV, ESV, and so forth). The word, λόγος however, was certainly among the most important words in ancient Greek philosophy, and the different schools of Greek philosophy used it in a wide variety of ways.³⁵ It had a similar weight and range of meaning in pre-Christian Greek-speaking Jewish reflection. The use of the English "word" simply does not do justice to the historically rich nuances of the Greek λόγος. There is no optimal English word for transposing the word λόγος.

Because languages are not commensurate, no translation can be exactly commensurate to its original. Both the words and the idioms of scripture must be translated and transposed. Translators must make general and specific decisions about how precisely to render their originals. Should they follow their original grammatical conventions and limit their use of vocabulary to achieve as literalistic a rendering as possible? Or should they attempt to translate the idiomatic and metaphorical dimensions of those originals into commonsense idioms better suited for their contemporary audiences? As the world becomes increasingly urban, the agricultural symbolism which permeates both testaments of scripture becomes completely foreign to many contemporary readers. How should we transpose it?

Besides all of these considerations, Christians must contend with another theological problem. Christians characteristically affirm that the good news of the gospel is to be proclaimed to all nations. The Christian message is, in some sense, universally relevant across cultures. And contemporary people "are aware," Lonergan writes in *Method in Theology*, "of many different cultures existing at the present time."³⁶ Because Christians constitutively affirm the authority and usefulness of scripture for preaching the gospel, it is not surprising that efforts at Bible translation have exploded in growth as modern Christians have become aware of the vibrant plurality of human cultures.³⁷ But translating and transposing scripture to make it available in a relevant way to the manifold extant cultures of the world will only exacerbate the problems Christians have with rightly understanding the truthfulness of scripture. The clear differences between the limited but still

³⁵So Ronald Heine, *Classical Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 35.

³⁶*Method in Theology*, 154.

³⁷For a useful overview of the many English translations which have appeared in recent years, see Bruce M. Metzger, *The Bible in Translation: Ancient and English Versions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 55-185.

numerous “standard” English translations of scripture available today – for example, the NIV, NAB, NRSV, ESV – already perplex diligent English-speaking Bible students enough! As Lonergan summarizes, the ideal of relative exegesis ultimately

... leads to as many different interpretations as there are different audiences or different sets of readers inquiring into the meaning of the text. There is a different exegesis for every nationality, every culture, every school of thought, every religious affirmation, every historical period, and this multiplicity ends up with a greater problem than the problem one started from Each finds a different meaning in the text, and these differences go right through everything. One is confronted with the problem of relativism.³⁸

The transposition of the ancient scriptures into contemporary language and thought multiplies the possible available versions of scripture and so can be seen as exacerbating the challenge of discerning the truthfulness of scripture. But this ideal is not the only possible approach to engaging scripture.

Scripture and Romantic Exegesis

While the exegetical ideal of “relative exegesis” acknowledges the contemporary need to transpose the message of scripture for its dissemination throughout the world, that ideal *merely assumes* the truthfulness of scripture. It does not provide an explanation of its truthfulness. The “relative exegete” does not give concentrated attention to the diversity of perspectives present in scripture as a matter of principle either. In addition to our awareness of the plurality of cultures existing in the present, though, “we are aware of the great differences that separate present from past cultures.”³⁹ It is possible to make the diversity of the historical particularity of scripture one’s primary focus. Historical consciousness has thus made possible a second exegetical ideal, which Lonergan names “romantic exegesis.”⁴⁰

As I noted above, while Christians hold the judgment that the scriptures are inspired and truthful, the exigencies of historical consciousness make

³⁸“Exegesis and Dogma,” 143.

³⁹*Method in Theology*, 154. See also esp. 325.

⁴⁰“Exegesis and Dogma,” 142. The language is potentially problematic.

it necessary for us to recognize that the scriptures nevertheless reflect the distinctive humanity of their specific authors and tradents. People moved by the Spirit wrote words inspired by the Spirit which are profitable for moving readers in accordance with the Spirit's intentions. Yet the authors of scripture do not write all of the same things all of the time. *Each author and each discourse* has its own unique particularity. At the end of his chapter on interpretation in *Method in Theology*, Lonergan draws on the work of Albert Descamps to indicate that historical consciousness entails the affirmation that there will be as many different biblical theologies in scripture as there are inspired authors.⁴¹ It is possible to consider each of these in its distinctiveness. In fact, it is possible for the romantic exegete to make just one biblical perspective the object of her entire life's work.

While relative exegesis makes each author of scripture speak like us, the romantic approach allows exegetes to imaginatively "think and talk the way the original author did."⁴² I have chosen the adjective "imaginatively" in the previous sentence deliberately, and that choice is significant. The romantic exegete must *imagine* her way into the mind of the human author of a text of scripture on the basis of the extant data of scripture itself and on the basis of other extant literary and artefactual culture antecedent to contemporaneous with the biblical material. She must also draw on her own awareness of the experience of what it is to be a desiring, understanding, judging, and self-transcending human person. "One has to feel one's way," Lonergan writes, "into the author's soul, into his imagination, his mind, his emotions, his will, his mode of speech."⁴³ Recognizing the plurality of perspectives evident within scripture, the romantic exegete devotes laser-like focus to the identification and explanation of just one or two of those distinctive perspectives. "Romantic exegesis," Lonergan writes, "... stresses a real apprehension, real reentry into the mind of the original writer."⁴⁴

The "romantic" ideal has its origins in the reflection of Friedrich Schleiermacher. When he surveyed the diversity of hermeneutical procedures operative in the legal, literary, and scriptural interpretation of his day, Schleiermacher saw the need to develop a generalist hermeneutic which would identify and lay bare the principles which made possible all textual

⁴¹*Method in Theology*, 161.

⁴²"Exegesis and Dogma," 143.

⁴³"Exegesis and Dogma," 143.

⁴⁴"Exegesis and Dogma," 152.

understanding.⁴⁵ Schleiermacher identified the author's psychological intention as the goal of textual interpretation. As Lonergan notes, Schleiermacher made the affective dimensions of religious piety the primary focus of his work.⁴⁶ The romantic exegete assumes a consonance between her own psychic processes and the psychic processes of the persons who were ultimately responsible for the language of scripture. Romantic exegesis is a pursuit of the rich humanity evident in the text. This approach "goes back to the text as it is, and it brings the text to life; it reads the text aloud, as it were, adding a tone of voice, an accent, and emphasis, a modulation, as if Isaiah or Paul or John were speaking to you."⁴⁷ As the transposition of scripture into contemporary terms is necessary for the communication of the truthfulness of scripture, so "romantic exegesis" is necessary for appreciating and measuring up to its strangeness and distinctiveness. Lonergan notes that such exegesis has as its aim the "total restoration" of the ancient cultures to which ancient literatures such as scripture provide us access. "Within this total reconstruction," he states, ". . . lies the interpretation of each text in its concreteness, its particularity, its strangeness and oddity, all its wealth of detail, all its fascination and profundity."⁴⁸

This work has its own integrity and Lonergan even argues for the relative autonomy of such historically oriented scripture scholarship over against other theological tasks. "[It] has its own ends and its own methods," he writes, "and the only way it can attain its ends is by its methods."⁴⁹ The processes and methods of romantic exegesis, of course, are ongoing. Its results, as the history of modern historical-critical scholarship demonstrates, are always subject to further nuance and correction. Only specialists are able to devote the time and energy necessary to develop the proficiency in ancient languages and ancient material culture that can make such insight possible. If and when the romantic exegete reaches her goal, however, she arrives at "some one mode of thought and speech which, however, is not accessible to any of us who have not spent a lifetime in scriptural scholarship."⁵⁰ The ideal

⁴⁵See Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics and Criticism*, ed. Andrew Bowie (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998); and Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics: The Handwritten Manuscripts*, trans. James Duke and Jack Forstman (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977).

⁴⁶"Exegesis and Dogma," 151.

⁴⁷"Exegesis and Dogma," 152.

⁴⁸"Exegesis and Dogma," 152.

⁴⁹"Exegesis and Dogma," 157.

⁵⁰"Exegesis and Dogma," 143.

of romantic exegesis takes scripture out of the hands of everyday Christians and puts it in the hands of the few experts able to undertake the ascetic formation which allows them to transform their horizons to make space for the ancient worlds envisioned in scripture in their own selves.

Even worse, the legitimate disinterestedness of romantic exegesis can truncate into an inattention to and even refusal to countenance the existential and religious exigencies of the judgments about reality – divine and created – which the authors of scripture mediate. As Lonergan writes,

The art of empathy, *Einfühlung*, the scholarship that gradually acquires a commonsense understanding of the commonsense of another people, language, culture, epoch is not easily combined with the grasp of fundamental philosophical and theological issues, their criteria, their possible solutions, their endless implications.⁵¹

While the products of relative exegesis make it more difficult for contemporary Christians to recognize and affirm the truthfulness of scripture because of their very plurality, the products of romantic exegesis are completely inaccessible to most Christians and can bury the existential and normative claims which scripture elicits under mountains of tangled erudition.

The romantic exegete can lose herself in the historic play of symbols and language, the psychically charged dimensions of the ancient writ. The particularity of scripture, which the romantic exegete makes the focus of her study, is charged with psychically rich imagery. Such symbolic language, however, is notoriously slippery. While “symbols have a particularly effective, and quite necessary, role in penetrating our sensibility and moving our affectivity,” Lonergan writes, “they are fairly unreliable in communicating truth.”⁵² As Lonergan puts it in another essay, “The New Testament speaks to us in vivid terms that move us in many ways, but the exact meaning of the New Testament is something on which exegetes and commentators have worked for nearly twenty centuries, and there is no proximate end in sight to their labors.”⁵³ Romantic exegesis again sets the challenge of relativism before contemporary believers.

⁵¹“Exegesis and Dogma,” 153.

⁵²*The Triune God: Doctrines*, 209.

⁵³“Theology as a Christian Phenomenon,” 267.

Consider for instance the language of the prologue to John's gospel, which I mentioned above: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). Aside from questions concerning the historical background of *logos* in Greek and Hellenistic Jewish reflection, which I have noted above, this passage invites countless other questions: Who or what is this Word? Does "Word" here refer to Jesus or scripture?⁵⁴ How can the "Word" both be "with God" and be God? The Gospel of John is full of such imagery, and such imagery invites potentially endless commentary.⁵⁵ But such questions do not invite us merely to consider the contours of the historical circumstances of the gospel author or the relations of the various symbols invoked by that author. In the New Testament, Lonergan writes in a later essay, "one is to find . . . in the first instance evidence on the language and beliefs that were current in the territory and at the time of writing and diffusion of the various books that make up the New Testament."⁵⁶ But the words of scripture can be taken not just as evidence of the historical perspectives of the authors and communities represented by those texts; they are evidence of the beliefs of those communities *about reality*. Such statements mediate judgments about extra-textual reality – they are judgments concerning the identity of the God of scripture and the intelligibility and actuality of God's redemptive work. We would fail to measure up to the intentions of the human authors of scripture if we ignored their audacious claims concerning divine and created reality. The final exegetical ideal which Lonergan proposes, however, provides resources for intellectually measuring up to those claims.

⁵⁴Christians customarily refer to both Jesus Christ and to scripture as the Word of God. Which is in view here? Most might take for granted – given the literary context – that the referent is obviously the Son who was with the Father from eternity, but I have heard Christians argue in good faith but complete ignorance that the "Word" here is a reference to scripture.

⁵⁵Lonergan notes at the time of writing "Exegesis and Dogma" that "over the past twenty-five years there has been a nearly endless bibliography on John's gospel, and perhaps a dozen full-scale commentaries on St. John, and they do not all just repeat one another" ("Exegesis and Dogma," 146). Since he wrote that essay, the bibliography has increased exponentially. A recent New Testament introduction lists twenty major critical commentaries on John in English, all of which have been published since Lonergan wrote "Exegesis and Dogma."

⁵⁶Bernard Lonergan, "Christology Today: Methodological Reflections," in *A Third Collection*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1985), 74-99, at 81.

Scripture and Classical Exegesis

While both the communication of the gospel and the historicity of human meaning make "relative" and "romantic exegesis" necessary endeavors, both approaches can potentially obscure the truthfulness of scripture. The former approach emphasizes the relevance of scripture for every particular culture, past and present. The latter emphasizes the diverse historical particularity evident within scripture itself as an essential dimension of its being as a product of human meaning making. In their laudatory attention to the particularities of scripture, however, neither does justice to the universal relevance of scripture as a divinely privileged medium of the truth about the Triune God's work in the economy of creation and redemption.

A third approach to scripture, which Lonergan labels "classical exegesis," provides a way of identifying the truthfulness inherent in the symbolic language of scripture. In this third way, "the exegete conveys a meaning that is more intelligible, more accessible, than that of the original text, because [she] transposes the original text to a mode of thought and speech common to all [people] insofar as they are rational."⁵⁷ In *The Triune God: Doctrines*, Lonergan gives an historical account of how the early Christians wrestled with the language of scripture and worship in order to transpose such language into clear statements concerning the divinity of the Son of God and the relationships of the persons of the Trinity.⁵⁸ The combination of the charged but ambiguous symbolic language of scripture and the level of commitment required of Christian faith created an exigency for the development of Christian realism.⁵⁹

From the beginning of the Christian faith, believers read scripture as the word of God and so gave it utmost respect as authoritative and truthful.⁶⁰ But they could only repeat the symbolic language of scripture for so long before countless theoretical questions emerged concerning the referents and intelligibility of that symbolic language. "If the only interpretation of scripture were symbolic," Lonergan writes, "then you

⁵⁷"Exegesis and Dogma," 143-44.

⁵⁸*The Triune God: Doctrines*, 28-255.

⁵⁹See Lonergan's two essays with the title "The Origins of Christian Realism."

⁶⁰This commitment begins, of course, with their deference to the ancient Jewish scriptures that contemporary Christians know as the Old Testament. It continues through the process of discernment involved in the recognition of a New Testament of literature. I have given a historical and theological evaluation of these processes in Gordon, "Scripture in History," chap. 5.

could never settle what the symbols are symbols of. If you are going to say that the symbols are not just symbols of more symbols, then you have to have some idea of reality."⁶¹ Beyond their conviction of the authority of scripture, they *stressed the fulfillment and finality* of the work of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the coming of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and the outpouring of God's Spirit on all flesh. This position has its roots in Jesus' own remembered words (see Matthew 5:21-48; Luke 4:21-24, 24:13-35; John 5:39). Jesus positioned himself as the complete fulfillment of all of the expectations of God's people. The profound language of the prologue of the Gospel of John, to which I have referred a number of times, reflected early Christian adherence to that conviction. And it is evident throughout the New Testament and even conditioned the early Christian use and interpretation of the ancient Jewish scriptures.⁶²

According to the authors of the earliest Christian writings, all of the institutions and rituals described and commanded in the ancient Jewish scriptures found their fulfillment and convergence on Jesus.⁶³ It is certainly possible to trace the history of such images. But the presentation of the New Testament authors demands a response beyond a mere historical analysis. Jesus' question to the disciples "Who do you say I am?" (see Mark 8:27-29) is directed as much to the readers of that gospel as it was to the disciples. The authors of both the third and fourth gospels state directly that they have written their works in order to give answers to that question for the sake of those who believed (Luke 1:1-4; John 20:30-31).

Giving an adequate response to the question posed concerning the identity and character of Jesus of Nazareth is ultimately a matter of existential decision. Implicit in the question of existential commitment is Pontius Pilate's question to Jesus: "What is truth?" (John 18:37). The answer to that question is the person of Jesus Christ himself (John 14:6), but the commitment required to the person entails a commitment to take a stand on reality. Aside from requiring a response of us at the level of decision, it also requires a response at the level of affirmation and judgment. I quote Lonergan at length:

⁶¹"The Origins of Christian Realism (1961)," 89.

⁶²For a few key loci, see John 1:1-18, Romans 1:2-4; 16:25-27, Galatians 4:4-7, Ephesians 1:3-14, Philippians 2:6-11, Colossians 1:15-20, Hebrews 1:1-4 (and *passim*), and 1 Peter 1:3-12.

⁶³For discussion, see Meyer, *The Early Christians*, 39-52; and Meyer, *Christus Faber*, 59-80.

The dogmas of the church from Nicaea to the Third Council of Constantinople, from 325 to 681, are dealing with the question raised in the Synoptics. What think you of the Son of Man? And some say he is Elias, and others John the Baptist, and others a prophet. But the questions that were met in the councils were in an entirely different mode. Is he God, or is he not? Yes or no? That is the Council of Nicaea. The Council of Ephesus: Is one and the same, not somebody else, both God and man? The Council of Chalcedon: Does that mean that he has two natures, a human nature and a divine? And two sets of properties, divine properties and human properties? And the Third Council of Constantinople: Does that mean that he has two natural wills? And two natural operations? – and the whole emphasis falls on the word “natural.”⁶⁴

Various groups emerged which answered these questions in ways that would not line up with later orthodoxy. But the questions themselves had to be answered in a way that maintained the possibility of giving absolute allegiance and worship to Jesus as savior and lord. Docetism denies the humanity of Jesus. “Gnostic” groups designated every distinct name in scripture as a different mediating demigod and denied that the God and Father of Jesus Christ had created the material world. Patripassians stated that the Father himself suffered on the cross. Tertullian argued that the Son and the Father were one because they were made of the same stuff. Arius later stated that Jesus was the first creation of the sovereign one. Such developments required responses. Is Jesus human? Is Jesus divine? Is Jesus one with the Father? What is the relationship of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? What is the relationship between divine and created reality? Such questions demanded answers then. They likewise demand answers today. As Lonergan notes, the process of raising and answering such questions allowed the early Christians to transpose the symbolic language of scripture into a discursive mode to parse out the precise distinctions and affirmations entailed in their commitment to worshipping and following Jesus Christ as Lord.⁶⁵

To be sure, the processes of classical exegesis do not give an exhaustive reading of the texts of scripture. Its processes require a sole focus on restricted questions of judgment and intelligibility: “Is or is not, is the same

⁶⁴“Exegesis and Dogma,” 149.

⁶⁵“Exegesis and Dogma,” 149.

or different, is the same in one respect and different and another, and so on."⁶⁶ Classical exegesis is inherently sterilizing. It turns aside from or brackets out the emotionally charged, evocative language of scripture. The risk of anachronism is also great with this approach, and the risk of classicism looms large with classical exegesis as well. The questions of the church fathers are not the questions addressed in any direct sense by the authors of the New Testament. The judgments and understandings concerning reality entailed in Christian commitment must have their basis not in the supposition of a single normative culture but instead in the authentic interiority of the one who affirms them.⁶⁷

It remains true that one will not get far in appropriation of the perspectives of the New Testament without an authentic appreciation of the absoluteness of the claims of its authors. Such an absolute posture invites the questions of affirmation and distinction. Christian faith is primarily a matter of commitment to a person, but such commitment entails certain judgments about the intelligibility of divine and created reality. Scripture mediates such judgments in commonsense, symbolic, dramatic, and artistic registers. But classical exegesis lays bare the affirmations and distinctions inherent in those judgments with technical precision. It is not a means of going beyond or against the language of scripture, but instead of expressing its judgments and their intelligibility in a clear and technical way for the sake of maintaining the proclamation that God is reconciling all things in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit.

CONCLUSION

In another brief work, delivered in 1962, Lonergan notes that the New Testament may be engaged from a number of different perspectives. It can be thematized as ancient word usage, as expression or *Ausdruck* of its human authors (giving rise to romantic hermeneutics), as an occasion for existential encounter, as a source of multiple historic encounters (of tradition, doctrine, or system), as event or testimony to event, as an exegetical puzzle, or as the word of God.⁶⁸ These variegated approaches to scripture, among others,

⁶⁶"Exegesis and Dogma," 149.

⁶⁷On the risks of sterility, anachronism, and classicism, see "Exegesis and Dogma," 149-51, 155-56.

⁶⁸Bernard Lonergan, "The Theological Argument from Sacred Scripture," in *Shorter Papers*,

have created a cacophonous situation for contemporary Christians, whether Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox, or of any other variety. But such approaches are united because each emerges from the questioning, wondering, understanding, judging, and deciding subjects who read scripture. The questions that each approach raises are legitimate questions. The criteria for the proposal and resolution of each set of questions remains the same: "genuine objectivity is the fruit of authentic subjectivity."⁶⁹

Lonergan's functional distinctions can provide a significant resource for those who are perplexed by the apparent disunity of scripture today. The exigency of the mission of God still requires that the good news be preached to all nations. So the processes of translating scripture must go on. "Relative exegesis" has its place in what the later Lonergan labels communication, the transposition of the Good News for the sake of every culture.⁷⁰ But such communication already presupposes much prior collaborative work. Our awareness of the historicity of human meaning requires that work continue in "romantic exegesis" as well. That process, though, the discernment of the precise meaning of a specific work by a unique author, already presupposes the historical identification of data for research and takes its place in the exegete's assessment of "what was going forward" in the histories reflected in both testaments of scripture. The judgments and understandings of ancient historians concerning past meaning must themselves be refined through the process of identifying positions and counterpositions.⁷¹

Historically, classical exegesis emerged as a Christian reading approach because the early church accepted scripture as authoritative and true but simultaneously recognized the need to state its truths in a way more explicit than the figural and symbolic particularity of its own language. They had to distill the doctrines of scripture concerning the identity of Jesus of Nazareth and his relationships to humanity and to the Father and Holy Spirit. Classical exegesis gives us these doctrines, which the Roman Catholic Church identifies explicitly as dogma.⁷² But Christians must take a stand not only in commitment to the Triune God whose work is truthfully mediated

vol. 20 of the *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, ed. Robert C. Croken, Robert M. Doran, and H. Daniel Monsour (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 251-55, at 254-55.

⁶⁹*Method in Theology*, 273.

⁷⁰*Method in Theology*, 327-40.

⁷¹I am here referring to all of the functional specialties on the mediated side of doing theology: research, interpretation, history, and dialectics. See *Method in Theology*, 141-249.

⁷²See *Method in Theology*, 275-309.

in a privileged way in scripture, we must also take a stand on the possibility and exigencies of truthful affirmation itself.⁷³ Such refinement is not a fall into Hellenism, but the exigency of the truthfulness of the gospel itself. We are unlikely to get to the refinements of technical precision necessary for classical exegesis apart from having our own horizons radically altered in conversion through the love of God flooding our hearts (Romans 5:5), fundamentally reorienting us toward what is good and true. Commitment to the language of scripture ultimately forced the early church to the truthfulness of affirmation of that which is virtually unconditioned. The attentive reading of scripture can be a medium evoking such intellectual transformation for Protestant Christians today.

⁷³Scripture thus had a fundamental historic role in "foundations." It still does today. See *Method in Theology*, 250-74.

THE PRIMACY OF THE INTENDED SENSE OF TEXTS

Ben F. Meyer

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I. NINETY-FIVE THESES ON GENERAL AND BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

THE PURPOSE OF the following theses is to outline a full rationale for the following hermeneutical proposition: the text has a primary claim on the reader, namely, to be construed in accord with its intended sense.

The effort to state the full rationale of this proposition seems to be especially worthwhile at a time when interpretation – the construal of the intended sense – is widely rejected in theory, for example, with the counterthesis that an "intended" sense is neither the primary nor even a possible goal of interpretation, and abandoned in practice by literary critics, classical scholars, and biblical exegetes in favor of analytic studies either alternative to interpretation (e.g., structuralist analysis) or logically presupposing interpretation (social-scientific, psychological, or historical analysis). But the outline, in thesis form for the sake of succinctness, is also meant to serve as the basis for a follow-up study, part two of the present article, offering further detail on "intention," "the historical consciousness," and contemporary possibilities of the theological interpretation of scripture.

1. *Communications*

1.1. To deprive an adult person of all or nearly all communication is to subject that person to a severe ordeal; to deprive a child in this way would fundamentally damage the child. The capacity and appetite for

communication is rooted in our rational and social nature. We are meaning beings with a natural drive for the mediation of meaning to and from our fellow human beings.

1.2 Among human resources for the mediation of meaning language is primary and peerless. By analogy, other resources are so many languages (the alphabet of symbols, body language, the languages of art and architecture, etc.).

1.2.1 Language is an encoding resource shared by a speech community. From this resource we choose words and phrases that by the conventions of ordinary usage are more or less apt to encode the meanings that we wish to express.

1.2.2 Language is thus conventional and instrumental: conventional inasmuch as its ordinary meaningfulness is established by common usage, and doubly instrumental inasmuch as it is used to express meaning and the expression of meaning itself serves ulterior human purposes.

1.2.3 Both the classical view of language (namely, that it is the vehicle of thought) and the Leibnizian view of language (namely, that it is the determining medium of thought) are true as affirmations and false insofar as either is made to negate the other. They are reconciled in a higher viewpoint, which permits the distinction between ordinary linguistic meaning and original linguistic meaning. "All men enjoy flashes of insight beyond meaning already stabilized in etymology and grammar" (Whitehead).¹

1.3 The drive to communicate is as complex as the entire social dimension of the life of the human being. But there is a common note that runs through its many performative modes (to request, to inform, to persuade, to command, to entertain, etc.) and other modalities (spontaneous/deliberate, private/ public, oral/written, etc.): the will to transmit intended meaning.

1.3.1 Transmission envisages reception and normally envisages some response from the receiver. Response effects a reversal of roles: the receiver becomes a transmitter and the original transmitter now receives.

1.3.2 The receiver's response indicates how the receiver has construed (= decoded) the original transmission. To the extent that this does not correspond to what the transmitter intended, grounds appear for distinguishing between "intended transmission" and "effective transmission."

1.3.3 There are two possible sources for the gap between the two: the original transmission failed to express adequately the sense that the

¹A. N. Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* [1933] (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1942), p. 263.

transmitter intended; the receiver failed to construe the transmission accurately. By repeated efforts of exchange defects in either source or in both are eliminated or at least reduced.

2. Writing and Reading

2.1 Writing calls for a more deliberate use of language than is usual in ordinary speaking. This deliberateness reflects a recognition that by writing one may transmit without being personally present and so able to enter into an exchange with the receiver, making good any failures of communication. The deliberateness of writing, then, is first of all the writer's special efforts to ensure that the transmission adequately incorporate the intended meaning and meet in advance the foreseeable receivers' foreseeable problems in construing it.

2.1.1 In writing, the transmission is a "text," that is, a written word sequence encoding the message of the writer. The "message" is whatever the writer intends to encode and succeeds in encoding. The writer, then, expresses a message in a text and the reader construes a text with a view to receiving its message. ("Message" so defined is a technical term to be differentiated from the "lesson" or "moral" of a story, or from the noble sentiments that many Victorians looked for in poetry.)

2.1.2 "Intention" or "intended meaning" is thus not only in the writer; it is also intrinsic to the text insofar as the text objectifies or incorporates or encodes or expresses the writer's message.

2.1.3 It follows that the dismissal of the *mens auctoris* as irrelevant to interpretation (Gadamer)² and the rejection of the so-called "intentional fallacy" (Wimsatt and Beardsley)³ are themselves products of an oversight: intended meaning is not merely in the writer and extrinsic to the text; it is precisely the text's main intrinsic determinant.

2.1.4 The prime object of interpretation is that sense which is the formal cause (*causa essendi*) of the singular configuration of the text, and to which this singular configuration is, in turn, the index (*causa cognoscendi*). Inasmuch as this is none other than the sense that the writer has managed to encode or

²Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, 2d ed. (Tübingen: Mohr, 1972), pp. xix, 276f; Eng. trans. *Truth and Method* (New York: Seabury, 1975), pp. xix, 259f.

³W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe D. Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy" [1954], *The Verbal Icon* (New York: Noonday, 1958), pp. 3-18.

objectify in the text, hermeneutics is "author-based."⁴

2.1.5 It does not follow from this that the intended sense is *a priori* deeper or truer or humanly more interesting or important than senses that accrue to the text in the course of its journey through time. What does follow is the need to distinguish these diverse senses so as to do justice respectively to the text, to the history of its impact (*Wirkungsgeschichte*: Gadamer),⁵ and to the ties – be they fragile and fortuitous, or firm, intrinsic, and intricate – between the two.

2.1.6 We should distinguish with Ferdinand de Saussure between "language" (the linguistic resources shared by a speech community) and "utterances" (instances of actual linguistic expression)⁶; with E. D. Hirsch between "sense" (i.e., originally intended sense) and "significance" (new, superadded senses)⁷; and with Gottlob Frege between "meaning" (the intelligible content of an expression) and "reference" (the object[s] to which the expression refers or applies).⁸

2.1.7 From the vantage point of the interpreter, the study of "language" is ordered to the study of "utterances"; the prime concern is with "sense," though "significance" is a resource for the quest of the sense as well as a distinct concern in its own right; finally, both concerns break down into the effort to grasp "meaning" and "reference."

2.2 To read signifies, first, to construe a text with a view to grasping its message or intended sense.

2.2.1 One construes a text progressively and cumulatively, by spiraling into its sense, that is, attending to the reciprocally mediating opposites that define the hermeneutic circles, for example, "whole and parts," "things and words," "reader and text."

⁴E. D. Hirsch coined the phrase and made the point in "Carnal Knowledge: Review of Frank Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy*," *New York Review of Books* 26 (June 14, 1979), p. 18.

⁵Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, p. 285 and *passim* thereafter; Eng. trans. *Truth and Method*, p. 267 and *passim* thereafter.

⁶Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959), pp. 17-20.

⁷E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967), pp. 210f. He attributes this distinction to August Boeckh; but, since Boeckh does not clearly draw it, Hirsch should be credited with having invented it.

⁸See Anthony Quinton, "Connotation and Denotation," in *The Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought*, ed. Alan Bullock and Oliver Stallybrass (London: Fontana Books, 1977). This entry correlates Frege's distinction with those of John Stuart Mill (connotation and denotation) and of Adolf Carnap (intention and extension).

2.2.2 The circle of whole and parts: "I understand the whole only in function of understanding the parts; I understand the parts only in function of understanding the whole." Logically, the circle is vicious; actually, it is broken open by acts of insight that, alternating between whole and parts, mediate an ever firmer grasp of the work in both aspects.

2.2.3 The circle of things and words: "I understand words by understanding the things they refer to; I understand things by understanding the words that refer to them." The first limb states a fundamental insight: "Whoever does not understand the things cannot draw the sense from the words" (Luther).⁹ The second limb states how one moves through a grasp of words to a firmer grasp of things: the reader understands things, with the writer, by means of his words.

2.2.4 If it is a fact that readers regularly understand things through the mediation of the writer's words, the so-called "myth of transparency" (Kermode)¹⁰ is itself mythical, that is, mistaken and misleading. On the contrary, readers are and always have been spontaneously and keenly intent on the realities evoked by the text and as evoked by the text .

2.2.5 The circle of reader and text: "I understand myself in virtue of understanding the text; I understand the text in virtue of understanding myself." This is a straightforward specification of the circle of things and words, focusing on one of its fundamental aspects: the limitations on understanding imposed by the limits of one's self-understanding. It also suggests the possibility of modifying one's self-understanding under the stimulus of even fragmentary insight into another's meaning.

2.3 As geometric figures are functional to geometric ideas, so in some kinds of writing language is severely functional to abstract meaning. Thus, the sound of the words is irrelevant; other words with other sounds might do as well. But in poetry the medium is part and parcel of the message, that is, the material text is included in the intended sense. The words as sounded (and, often enough, as seen printed on the page) belong as well to what the writer intends to communicate as to the "how" of the communication. As the meaning of a statue is inseparable from its embodiment in the statue itself, so the meaning of a poem is imperfectly separable from its unique material text.

⁹Cited by Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, p. 162 ; Eng. trans. *Truth and Method*, p. 151.

¹⁰Frank Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), pp. 118f.

2.3.1 Interpretation takes account of aspects inadequately distinct from the message, namely, the text's illocutionary intentions (such performative modalities as to attest, to argue, to promise, to threaten, etc.) and its perlocutionary intentions (i.e., the intending of effects, e.g., to move to shame, instill pride, elicit wonder, provoke reflection, incite enthusiasm).¹¹

2.3.2 The intrinsically appropriate stance of the interpreter is not doubt nor scepticism nor suspicion, but goodwill, empathy, the readiness to find truth, common understanding, agreement (Newman, Gadamer, G. Ebeling, Peter Stuhlmacher).¹²

2.3.3 To grasp another's meaning I must not only have a pre-understanding (*Vorverstandnis*) of, and, indeed, vital relationship (*Lebensverhältnis*)¹³ to the things that the other refers to; I must furthermore project horizons and find in myself a range of resources akin to those actualized in and called for by that message. This is hardly possible apart from an antecedent stance of openness, receptiveness, empathy vis-a-vis the message.

2.3.4 This initial stance does not foreclose critique. It supposes a distinction between understanding and critique, between their respective objects and requisites, and so between the stances appropriate to each. Finally, this view acknowledges accurate understanding as a *sine qua non* condition of valid critique.

2.3.5 The dynamism of interpretation is toward "encounter," that is, vital contact with another's intended sense. "All real living is meeting" (Buber)¹⁴; so is all real interpreting.

¹¹On the terms "illocutionary" and "perlocutionary," see J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*, ed. J. O. Urmson (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962).

¹²John Henry Newman, *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* [1878], Ch. 3, Sect. 1, para. 1 and 2 (Garden City: Doubleday, 1960), pp. 115-117; Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, pp. 276-281; 529; Eng. trans. *Truth and Method*, pp. 259-265; Gerhard Ebeling, "Dogmatik und Exegese," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 77 (1980), 269-285, esp. 274-276; Peter Stuhlmacher, *Historical Criticism and Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), pp. 83-87.

¹³On pre-understanding, see Rudolf Bultmann, "The Problem of Hermeneutics" [1950], in *Essays Philosophical and Theological* (London: SCM Press, 1955), pp. 234-261, see 239, 252f.; "Is Exegesis Without Presuppositions Possible?" [1957], in *Existence and Faith: Shorter Writings of Rudolf Bultmann* (Cleveland: World [Meridian], 1960), pp. 289-296; *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (New York: Scribner, 1958), pp. 49f.; on "vital relationship," see "The Problem of Hermeneutics," pp. 241-243, 252f.; 255f.; "Is Exegesis Without Presuppositions Possible?"; *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, pp. 50-52.

¹⁴Martin Buber, *I and Thou* [1923], 2d ed. (New York: Scribner, 1958), p. 11.

2.3.6 The circles of things and words and of reader and text underscore the ordering of interpretation to encounter. The labor of construing an eminent text yields to vital contact with the new world thus brought to light. In one's understanding of Hosea or Heraclitus, of Dante or Rilke, there may occur modifications both of horizon and of self-understanding on the part of the interpreter. (On the other hand, some changes of this sort may, in accord with the limits of the prospective interpreter, be prerequisite to the interpreter's understanding of Hosea or Heraclitus, of Dante or Rilke.)

2.3.7 Encounter is the nexus between interpretation and critique, and critique is above all a report on encounter.

2.3.8 Among specific objects of critique: the text as work of art, as representation of reality, as claimant to truth, as qualitatively comparable to other works. Here critical distance and "the hermeneutic of suspicion" in the sense of attention to bias, to ideology, to rationalizing explanations, to screening devices, and so on, not only in the text but also in the critic, are indispensable to critique (Lonergan).¹⁵

2.4 Immediately and variously related to interpretation (though, unlike interpretation, not limited to the harmonics of authorial intention) is the placement of the text in the history of tradition before and after it.

2.4.1 The text generates a tradition of interpretation and critique, which thereafter conditions access to it. Ideally; the consciousness of the interpreter is informed not only by the tradition that the text to be interpreted has generated (*wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein*: Gadamer)¹⁶ but by the critically illuminated history of the tradition, as well. Tradition constitutes a contextual unit of literary intelligibility; an intelligibility heightened by critical history.

2.5 Reading primarily regards the intended sense. Nevertheless, readers may read with other, special, purposes. Such is the police detective's reading of a ransom note, or a social historian's reading of an ancient encomium. Such special purposes, however, suppose rather than detract from the primacy of reading for the intended sense. If the detective did not recognize

¹⁵On "the hermeneutic of suspicion," see Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), pp. 32-36. On how to make the hermeneutic of suspicion function productively rather than subversively, see Bernard Lonergan, "The Ongoing Genesis of Methods," *Studies in Religion! Sciences Religieuses* 6 (1976-77), 341-355, esp. 349-353; reprinted in *A Third Collection* (New York: Paulist, 1985), pp. 146-165, esp. 156-163.

¹⁶Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, p. 285 and *passim* thereafter; Eng. trans. *Truth and Method*, p. 267 and *passim* there after.

the note as a demand for ransom, he would not bother with further analysis of it. If the social historian did not recognize the encomium as an encomium, it would not serve the purposes of further, specialized, inquiry.

2.5.1 Reserving "interpretation" for reading in the primary sense, we shall use "analysis" for all the secondary; specialized kinds of reading (structural analysis, psychological analysis, socio-economic analysis, etc.). Some modes of analysis (text-critical, form-critical, etc.) prepare the way for interpretation; others, however, make interpretation a point of departure for some ulterior goal.

2.5.2 If the dynamism of interpretation is toward "encounter," the dynamism of analysis is toward problem-solving. A satisfactory definition of the phenomenon of myth, for example, is an analytic solution of a problem. Though relevant to the interpretation of mythical texts, it is not itself interpretation. Analysis directly centered on texts may degenerate all too easily into pure application or illustration of what the analyst already knew before analyzing the text (e.g., that all consciousness is socially determined; that human motivation operates as Freud described it, etc.).

2.5.3 The analyst is looking through or past patent meaning in search of latent meaning; the stance appropriate to this task is one of critical distance, scepticism, "suspicion" (Ricoeur).¹⁷

2.5.4 Just as psychoanalysis is a kind of analysis, not a kind of literary critique, so there are modes of analysis, equally distinct from literary critique, appropriate to texts consciously or unconsciously distorted by psychic bias, individual bias, group bias, general bias.¹⁸ As concerned with latent and even unintended meaning, such modes of analysis instantiate a hermeneutic of suspicion, as psychoanalysis does.

3. *The Historical Consciousness*

3.1 A historical consciousness – a tendency to view all things human in an overarching context of historical change has increasingly pervaded the

¹⁷Paul Ricoeur, "Philosophical Hermeneutics and Theological Hermeneutics," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 5 (1975-76), 14-33, see 31f.

¹⁸On individual, group and general bias, see Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (London: Longman and Green, 1957; reprinted London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1983), pp. 218-242; on psychic bias, see Robert M. Doran, *Psychic Conversion and Theological Foundations* (Chico: Scholars Press, 1981), pp. 149-154. One example of the modes of analysis referred to in this thesis is "ideology critique."

West over the past two hundred years and the world at large in the course of the present century.

3.1.1 This historical consciousness was gradually established by complementary insights into the potent but limited impact of human acts of meaning. First, by our acts of meaning we are equally the maker of ourselves and of the world we live and move in. Second, every act of meaning is embedded in a context, and these contexts inexorably change.

3.1.2 The human subject is a self-maker in accord with a process whereby, acknowledged or not, all human acts of meaning enter into the forging of selfhood. Though this has always been true, it has become known only with the rise of the historic consciousness. The human subject has discovered autonomy: the possibility of deliberately setting out to reshape oneself and one's world.

3.1.3 If every act of meaning is embedded in a context subject to inexorable change, the human subject in time is never wholly one and the same. Humankind today is not what it once was, and it will not be what it now is.

3.2 This new consciousness and the insights that have generated it are transforming but neither foundational nor complete. Transforming: among a vast public the historical consciousness has massively demystified tradition, culture, society, wealth, power. Not foundational: the historical consciousness has differentiated the consciousness of rationalists, idealists, empiricists, materialists, existentialists, and so on, while inducing neither a revision of their principles nor a reconciliation of their differences in a higher synthesis. Nor complete: theories of knowledge and reality, of humankind and history, give concrete shape to the historical consciousness as it actually exists in groups and individuals.

3.2.1 Thus, the autonomy implied in self-making is open to interpretation and realization as absolute or as "under God." The grasp of relativity to context may be accompanied by the affirmation or by the denial of transcontextual constants and the transposability of meaning from context to context.

3.2.2 A leading theory, which has successively taken Enlightenment, nineteenth-century, and twentieth-century shapes, proposes freedom as the goal of humankind. If the chief expression thereof has been an emancipation from the normative past and an ever more thoroughgoing secularization, one of the twentieth-century variations on the theme has celebrated

humankind's coming of age as "son" (Gal 4:5) and as "heir of the world" (Rom 4:13) (Gogarten),¹⁹ so demonstrating that the historical consciousness and even secularization itself are open to potentially decisive redefinition.

3.2.3 Antedating the rise of the historical consciousness and in time widely merging with it was the Cartesian recoil from any but indubitable affirmations. The first of Descartes' four rules was

to avoid precipitation and prejudice in judgments, and to accept in them nothing more than was presented to my mind so clearly and distinctly that I could have no occasion to doubt it (*Discours de la methode*).²⁰

3.2.4 The mind-set betrayed by this principle became the Enlightenment's "prejudice against prejudice" (Gadamer)²¹; it debunked belief and tradition; it defined "critical" intelligence as methodically sceptical. A potentially antihistorical element thus entered into the historical consciousness.

3.2.5 For Descartes the immediate data of consciousness were a rock of certitude in a sea of doubt. For Marx and Freud, "masters of suspicion" (Ricoeur),²² the immediate data of consciousness were sources of illusion.

3.2.6 In its commonsense mode the contemporary historical consciousness of the West is Cartesian and Marxian, Vichian and Nietzschean, Hegelian and Freudian – in short, rife with latent contradiction.

3.2.7 If modern Western culture is consciously experimental and developing, and pervaded by a historical consciousness charged with competing and incompatible tendencies, it nevertheless derives some unity from a central ideal, controlling in theory and at least significant in practice, which northern Europeans and North Americans established in the late Enlightenment: human dignity, conceived in terms of political self-determination and individual human rights.

3.3 The thesis of the more or less radical unknowability of the past (hard-line historical relativism) is doubly grounded: first, in the practical difficulty of reconstituting the common sense of another time and place; second, and more fundamentally, in one or another mistaken theory of knowledge (for

¹⁹Larry Shiner, *The Secularization of History: An Introduction to the Theology of Friedrich Gogarten* (Nashville, New York: Abingdon, 1966), pp. 25-35 offers an excellent summary of Gogarten's mature thought on this theme.

²⁰René Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, ed. L. J. Lafleur (New York: Liberal Arts, 1950), p. 12.

²¹Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, pp. 256-261, Eng. trans. *Truth and Method*, pp. 241-245.

²²Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, pp. 32-36.

example, to know anything, one must know everything: or, the human subject exhibits no transcontextual constants, and so is flatly discontinuous with both forbears and progeny.)

3.3.1 While the historical consciousness has intensified the recognition of difficulties (for example, the historically conditioned diversity of common sense) in interpreting texts from outside the horizons and perspectives habitual to the interpreter, it has also developed a hitherto unimagined array of interpretative resources designed to meet and resolve these difficulties.

3.3.2 The root possibility of understanding texts, including even texts from another time zone and language zone, another culture and civilization, is grounded in invariant structures of human intentionality (e.g., experience-understanding-judgment).²³

3.3.3 True judgment bearing on the past is grounded, like every instance of true judgment, in a grasp of the virtually unconditioned (i.e., of a conditioned whose conditions are known and known to be fulfilled).²⁴ Inasmuch as these conditions and their fulfillment are finite and knowable in principle, valid interpretations of texts from the past and true judgments bearing on past reality are possible and in fact occur.

3.4 History studies historical reality, that is, human self-making and the making and the remaking of the world. The inquiry alternates between efforts to know (a) who wanted what, and (b) what possibilities actually found fulfillment, and why.

3.4.1 "Historical criticism" globally signifies the resources, techniques, and proximate norms of historical inquiry. Such criticism presupposes not only the historical consciousness but some view of what, in principle, is knowable, of what is proper and what alien to historical inquiry, of what is worth knowing and what most worth knowing, and so on.

3.5 The rise of the historical consciousness, its determination by diverse and partly conflicting theories of knowledge, of the human subject, of history, the widespread cultivation of historical curiosity and knowledge and the sophistication of historical criticism have had an irresistible impact on contemporary thinking, writing, reading.

3.5.1 Among the more conscious results: the reader today no longer

²³Loneragan, *Insight*, pp. 271-278; "Cognitional Structure," in *Collection: Papers by Bernard Lonergan* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1967), pp. 221-239, esp. 222-227.

²⁴Loneragan, *Insight*, pp. 280-287; "Insight Revisited," in *Second Collection* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1974), pp. 263-278, esp. 273-275.

assumes a seamless historical continuum with writers of other times and places. It is widely recognized that the reading of an eminent text requires an account of its historical context as well as an introduction to its conceptual and linguistic idiom.

3.5.2 Among the less conscious results: without the slightest effort in the direction of theory, contemporary commonsense readers have taken in bits and pieces of conflicting theories and ideals – Cartesian, Vichian, Kantian, Hegelian, Marxian, Freudian, and so on. Cultural clarity is thus muddled by cultural confusion, adding to the alloy of common sense by common nonsense.

3.5.3 In the modern age the ideal of working out an understanding of the intended sense of a text, judging how accurate this understanding is, and expressing what one judges to be an accurate understanding of the intended sense of the text²⁵ has often been realized by professional interpreters more fully and effectively than ever before, owing to the exploitation of more exact and elaborate resources (textual criticism, lexicography, linguistics, social, cultural, and literary history) than have ever previously been available to interpreters.

3.5.4 Professional interpreters appear to differ markedly from commonsense readers and, on technical aspects of interpretation (use of linguistic, philological, historical resources), they do. In other respects, however, for example, encounter with the text, report on encounter, critique of truth and value, the superiority of the professionals is random and unreliable.

3.6 Eminent texts are eminent in virtue of their bringing “things counter, original, spare, strange” into deep coherence. Since the full secret of their sweep and unity defies definition, “a classic is a writing that is never fully understood” (Friedrich Schlegel).²⁶

3.6.1 The difficulty of interpretation does not, however, explain the contemporary flight from interpretation (i.e., from construal of and encounter with intended meaning): the limiting of interpretation to elucidation of detail; the drift into trackless historical conjecture²⁷; the preference for analysis (so-

²⁵Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1972), pp. 155-73.

²⁶Cited by Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, p. 273, note 2; Eng. trans. *Truth and Method*, p. 524, note 194.

²⁷See Dennis J. McCarthy, “Exod 3:14: History, Philology and Theology,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 40 (1978), 311-322, esp. 319-322.

biological, structuralist, Marxian, Freudian, etc.) over interpretation, with an accompanying domestication of intended meaning either by translating it systematically into more congenial terms or by judging it on the basis of some conventional standard or some closed system.

3.6.2 Eminent texts and the effort to interpret them bring to light the cultural confusions of the interpreter. Recoil from cognitive dissonance is accordingly a key factor in the contemporary flight from interpretation.

3.6.3 Inasmuch as encounter with eminent texts enlightens, corrects, and refines, perseverance in interpretation is the primary schooling of the interpreter.

3.6.4 A more radical and thoroughgoing solution supposes the discovery of an adequate account of human intentionality²⁸ and its personal appropriation. It proceeds to a dialectic of competing theories of knowledge, the human subject, and history. It consists in the act of discriminating among them between true and false, real and illusory.

4. *Theology and the Bible*

4.1 Biblical literature has a twofold claim to eminence: literary and religious. Though distinct, these are inseparable aspects of one phenomenon. The literary excellence of the Bible is interwoven with the quality of the response to God of God's people. This is a communitarian and public response, calling for linguistic and, eventually; literary expression.

4.2 By the resurrection of Christ, Christianity was bound to the scriptures of Israel, for the resurrection vindicated Jesus' election-historical mission, which supposed and climaxed the election history of biblical Israel.

4.2.1 The first Christians understood salvation in Christ as fulfillment: the coming to realization of what had been foreshadowed (1 Cor 10:6; Rom 8:32), promised (Gal 3:8; 4:28f.; Rom 4:13-25; 15:8; Acts 2:16-21, 33), and prophesied (Luke 24:26f., 46f.; Acts 2:23, 34f.; 3:18, 22); the coming to perfection of what had been provisional (Matt 5:17); the coming to completion, that is, to foreordained eschatological measure, of time (Mark 1:15), sin (Matt 23:32; 1 Thess 2:16; Rom 1:29), suffering (Col 1:24), and the whole drama of history (Eph 1:9f.; cf. 2 Cor 1:20). Hence, the scriptures

²⁸"An adequate account of human intentionality" refers to Lonergan's *Insight*, to his essay "Cognitive Structure" (see note 23 above), and to the chapters "Method," "The Human Good," and "Meaning" in *Method in Theology*, pp. 3-99.

of Israel were both the word of God and an indispensable source of the understanding of salvation in Christ.

4.2.2 Jesus himself initiated the interpretation of his career as the fulfillment of biblical type (e.g., the motifs of "Son of man," Matt 10:23; Luke 17:24-30; Servant, Mark 9:31; 10:45 par.; 14:24 par.; covenant, Mark 14:24 par.), promise (e.g., Matt 5:3f.; cf. Isa 61:1f.), and prophecy (e.g., Matt 11:5 par.; cf. Isa 35:5-7; 29:18f., 61:1f), the perfecting of the provisional (Matt 5:17), and the filling up of eschatological measure (Matt 5:21f., 33f., 38f., 43f.; cf. Luke 14:22-24).

4.2.3 If for early Christianity the scriptures of Israel were the word of God, so was the proclamation of their fulfillment (1 Thess 2:13; 2 Cor 2:17; 5:19f.; cf. 1 Cor 9:16f.).

4.2.4 Marcionite repudiation of the Old Testament and gnostic interpretation of biblical and liturgical texts elicited orthodox responses reaffirming the Old Testament as the word of the one and only God and appealing to "the rule of faith" (Gal 6:16; cf. Rom 12:6) as the norm of scriptural interpretation

4.2.5 The formation of the authoritative canon of New Testament scriptures attests early Christian commitment to the unity of faith; the concrete content of the canon (cf. especially the maintenance of distinct gospels) attests commitment to the particularity, variety, and fullness of normative faith witness.

4.3 The practice of Christian interpreters in the early centuries likewise attests their commitment both to the particularity of the texts and, in accord with the analogy or rule of faith, to their coherence with the faith heritage attested by the scriptures as a whole.

4.3.1 Their treatment of the literal sense of biblical texts exhibited both aspects; their treatment of the "spiritual" sense, by which, for example, the Old Testament scriptures pointed to Christ and to the sacraments of baptism and the eucharist, highlighted the second aspect.

4.3.2 Rooted in New Testament practice and developed by expositors from the second to the fourth century, the Fathers' favorite method of exposing the spiritual sense of scripture was allegorical interpretation. The positive function of this interpretation was to witness repeatedly and creatively to the faith as a comprehensive unity.

4.3.3 Conceptual tools borrowed (partly through Arabic mediation) from Greek philosophy transformed the interpretative resources of

theologians in the high Middle Ages. Among the results were an analytically penetrating style of interpretation and an elegant systematization of "the senses of scripture."²⁹

4.3.4 From the late fifteenth century to the present the most significant changes in theological interpretation, as in interpretation generally, related to the rise of the historical consciousness. Renaissance humanists introduced a rudimentary use of philological methods. The Reformers' appeal to "scripture" against "church" gave impetus to the break with allegory.

4.3.5 Catholic hermeneutics from Irenaeus to the present appeals to the faith heritage of the apostolic church as theological criterion (the "analogy" or "rule" of faith). Protestant hermeneutics from the Reformers to the present has restructured the role of tradition in interpretation, maximizing concentration on the literal sense and appealing to the *claritas interna* and *externa* of the scriptural text as well as to the Spirit's unmediated illumination thereof.³⁰

4.3.6 To determine what the precise theological differences are that currently control these two hermeneutic stances is a task unfinished until the differences are not only located but refined and resolved.

4.3.7 Immeasurably more significant than the historic theological differences between Protestants and Catholics was the sheer fact of the shattering of church unity. "Nothing could have made Christian faith more unbelievable at the dawn of the modern age than the splitting apart of the church' (H. U. von Balthasar).³¹

4.3.8 However deep, however true, however relevant the message of the scriptures to "a world split apart" (Solzhenitsyn),³² a church split apart witnesses not only for but also against the credibility of that message.

4.4 Once biblical scholarship in the historical-critical mode had made its appearance under unlikely auspices (Benedict Spinoza and Richard Simon, followed by the English deists), it was taken over by European Protestants, who sponsored its most striking advances.

²⁹See Henry de Lubac, *Exegese medievale: Les quatre sens de l'Écriture*, 4 vols. (Paris: Aubier, 1959-63), vol. 1, pp. 11-39; 110-118.

³⁰Peter Stuhlmacher, *Vom Verstehen des Neuen Testaments: Eine Hermeneutik* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979), pp. 92-95; see 93 on Luther's readiness to cite the Apostles' Creed and other church symbols and dogmas as "valid signposts" to his theology.

³¹Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Glaubhaft ist nur Liebe* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1963), p. 12.

³²Alexander Solzhenitsyn, "A World Split Apart," in *East and West* (New York: Harper & Row [Perennial], 1980), pp. 39-71.

4.4.1 Historical-critical methods have been historically associated with many intellectual movements (rationalism, idealism, positivism, historical relativism, existentialism, etc.), so repeatedly giving the impression that the methods were not of themselves ideologically neutral, but were locked into this or that theory of knowledge, of the human subject, of history, and so on. But since these methods have been laboriously separated from one ideology after another, it now appears that of themselves they are, in fact, ideologically neutral, functional to whatever controlling theories are adopted by the interpreter. Theological problems are accordingly traceable, not to the methods, but to the theories with which they have been fused in particular cases.

4.5 Apart from confessional disputes, the theological problems in question derive from all the sources of cultural dissonance in the modern West, for example, the Cartesian conception of critical intelligence; rationalist repudiation of transcendence and tradition; Kantian subversion of the assurance of knowing the real; undifferentiated historical relativism, as in Ernst Troeltsch; hermeneutic systems that eliminate "false scandals" by eliminating whatever exceeds the limits of reason (demythologizing, etc).

4.5.1 Three theological roots of allegorical interpretation from the primitive to the medieval church point up, by contrast, what is often lacking in modern New Testament interpretation: a sense of the text's theological depth-dimension, a grasp of its total religious context, and responsiveness to the note of definitive fulfillment.

4.5.2 If "Antioch" be taken to signify the primacy of the literal (that is, intended) sense of the text, and "Alexandria" the affirmation (e.g., by allegory) of the full scope and unity of divine revelation, the ascendancy of Alexandria in the eras before the rise of the historical consciousness was a theological necessity. The lack of a sense of history, of historic change, development, and reversal, of the unpredictable and far-reaching diversity that human development entails, and the corresponding lack of historically oriented interpretative resources made it impossible simultaneously to affirm the unity and coherence of divine revelation and to maintain in practice the primacy of the literal sense of scripture.

4.5.3 When Antioch and Alexandria are not brought together in synthesis, Antioch signifies a hermeneutics closed to transcendence or, as Newman put it apropos of the historic school of Antioch, bound to the principle that "there

is no mystery in theology."³³ Under this constraint, devotion to the literal sense is wholly unequal to encounter with the New Testament.

4.5.4 The most pressing exigence in biblical hermeneutics today is for a critical synthesis of Antioch and Alexandria, that is, for the projecting of horizons at once fully differentiated by a historical consciousness and fully open to the transcendent mystery of salvation.

4.5.5 Inasmuch as scripture carries its own powerful if mysterious warrants, the satisfaction of such theological exigencies comes first of all from a persevering quest of the intended sense of the scriptures.

4.5.6 Openness to the transcendent mystery of salvation, though realized in significant measure by vital contact with the scriptures, is antecedent to the scriptures as a question is antecedent to an answer, for the ground of this openness is the radical question that the human subject not only has, but is, whereas the scriptures present themselves as the answer to this question.³⁴

4.5.7 Communion in faith with the church of apostolic times is hardly more than an illusion if it fails to include credal commitments to the same revelation. Thus, the maintenance of authentic Christian identity is the ultimate theological rationale of insistence on the intended sense of scriptural texts. Communion in faith with the church of all times imposes a like commitment to the intended sense of credal, liturgical, and doctrinal texts.

4.5.8 A particular theological problem at the present time is the widespread incapacity among biblical and especially New Testament interpreters to differentiate between texts that are genuinely contradictory and texts that are conceptually diverse and unharmonizable, but whose meanings are neither contradictory nor incompatible.

4.5.9 The radical and thoroughgoing solution of the theological problems besetting biblical interpreters lies in the practice of three functional specialities: dialectic, foundations, and doctrines (Lonergan).³⁵

³³Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* [1878] Ch. 5, Sect. 2, para. 3 (Garden City: Doubleday, 1960), p. 186.

³⁴Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity* (New York: Seabury, 1978), pp. 17-43 and *passim* thereafter. Compare Augustine's sudden act of self-understanding, under the impact of a friend's death: "Factus eram ipse mihi magna quaestio."

³⁵On these functional specialities, see Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, pp. 235-333.

Summary of Part One

The hermeneutical primacy of the intended sense of texts is grounded in the social character of communications (1.1; 1.31.3.3), particularly in the use of language (1.2-1.2.2), and still more particularly in the correlative acts of writing and reading (2.1-2.3.3). The rise of the historical consciousness (3.1-3.1.3) has differentiated hermeneutics, facilitating a more effective grasp of the intended sense (3.5.3), but also underscoring and in some sense increasing its difficulty (3.3f., 3.6). Theology adds its own reasons (4.5.3-4.5.8) for insisting on the primacy of the intended sense of biblical, credal, liturgical, and doctrinal texts.

The contemporary flight from interpretation on the part of literary critics (3.6.1), their preference for analysis (cf. 2.5-2.5.3), and the increasingly ideological character of critique (cf. 2.3.9 and 3.6.1) are indices to cultural crisis and confusion (3.2.3-3.2.7; 3.5.2, 3.5.4, 3.6.1f.).

Partly similar results in the field of biblical scholarship are the product of a hermeneutics closed to transcendence (4.5.3). The challenge today is accordingly to articulate a critically grounded hermeneutics open and committed on the one hand to history and the intended sense of the text, and on the other to the transcendent intelligibility and unity of the mystery of salvation (4.5.2-4.5.6).

As "self-correcting," interpretation holds out an element of hope for interpretative progress (3.6.3, 4.5.5). But it would be excessively optimistic to suppose that attention to the intended sense of the scriptures would be sufficient of itself to meet the complex cultural situation reflected in the shortcomings of current biblical interpretation (3.6.4, 4.5.9). This calls, rather, for a vital realization of the functional specialties of dialectic, foundations, and doctrines (4.5.9).

II. INTENTION, HISTORY, AND THEOLOGY

The first part of this paper has several purposes and uses, but for the present I am happy to weight them in favor of two aims. The first is to restore the intelligibility of the intended sense of the text as the object of interpretation. The second is to integrate this view of the object of interpretation into a program of biblical interpretation open to divine revelation as the transcendent and coherent *mysterium Christi*. If the aims are two, the

headings below will be three: a contemporary debate on the intended sense; the impact of the historical consciousness on the issue; and application to biblical interpretation.

The thesis form adopted above had the advantage of being concise, and concision allowed a large context to be outlined in a few pages. But among the disadvantages of the form is to leave unarticulated much of what pertains to persuasion: leisurely clarification and the consideration of objections. I would like to offer just these clarifications and considerations in this second part of this paper.

Finally, I am especially concerned with interpretation as indispensable to Christian life and, within that broad sphere, with interpretation as indispensable to the enterprise of contemporary Christian theology. As indispensable to Christian life in general, interpretation belongs under the functional specialty "communications"³⁶; but as indispensable to the collaborative enterprise that is theology, interpretation is a functional specialty in itself.³⁷ "Communications" calls for as many modes and styles of interpretation as there are audiences with a right to the Christian heritage. My own primary interest here, however, is in the functional specialty "interpretation." Interpretation in this sense is weighted, above all, in favor of precision, and excellence among interpreters and their work shows a tendency toward convergence.

An Unsatisfactory But Instructive Debate

In 1967 E. D. Hirsch tried to make the case for the intended sense of the text as the object of interpretation.³⁸ His position, however, as well as the arguments that supported it, were defective at several points. First, he failed to differentiate consistently between the intention of the author as in the author and extrinsic to the text and the intention of the author as intrinsic to, or encoded in, or expressed by the text. So Hirsch, from the first chapter of his book, could envisage the marginal case in which the author himself decided: "by these words [i.e., his text] I meant so and so, but I insist that from now on they shall mean something different." An event of this kind, Hirsch says, is "unlikely," but it "could occur." In that case the single text,

³⁶See "Communications" in *ibid.*, pp. 355-368

³⁷See "Interpretation" in *ibid.*, pp. 153-173.

³⁸E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967).

according to Hirsch, has not changed in meaning; it now has two meanings, and it is up to the interpreter "to decide which of the author's two meanings he is going to concern himself with."³⁹

Here Hirsch has indeed fallen victim to an intentional fallacy. He has converted the text into an index to the history of the author, which has thus become the real object of interpretation. At one time the author meant such and such by the text; later, he meant something else.

We should pause over this example. Hirsch does not work it out in any detail, perhaps because it is exceedingly unpromising for his thesis. He does not, for example, say whether the author's second meaning is as well supported by the text as his first. Why not? Here as elsewhere Hirsch has so one-sidedly insisted on meaning as an act of "authorial will" as to pass over without notice the series of practical insights-bearing, for example, on the choice and arrangement of words-by which the author realizes or implements the authorial will to communicate something to some audience.

We can make up for Hirsch's lack of detail by supposing, first of all, that the author's second act of authorial will offers as plausible a sense of the text as his first. But, second, we must insist that the object of interpretation be not the history of the author, but the sense of the text itself. It then follows that we are not dealing with actually known, successive meanings of a text that is clear, but with possible meanings of a text that is ambiguous. The interpreter would be wise not to begin by taking the author's word on the successive meanings of the text, nor to settle simply on one of its purported meanings, nor even to take up both in isolation from one another. His task is to construe the text as it stands, determining whether more than one possible meaning is textually actualized, and, if so, how the meanings are related-by reference not to the testimony of the author but to the particulars of the text. Otherwise, the to-be-interpreted ceases to be the text itself. (For the quite legitimate but, in our context, irrelevant task of investigating the author, the testimony of the author on his change of mind about the meaning of the text is, of course, a useful and interesting datum.)

Another of Hirsch's examples: a poet intends in a four-line poem to convey a sense of desolation. It turns out, however, that even the most competent readers fail to catch this. "Obviously," says Hirsch, the poet's "intention to convey desolation is not identical with his stylistic effectiveness

³⁹*Ibid.*, p. 9.

in doing so." Does the poet's lack of effectiveness make any difference? Not to Hirsch. "The only universally valid meaning of the poem is the sense of desolation."⁴⁰ How awkward. The only valid interpretation of the poem is one that, owing to the poet's incompetence, readers cannot find their way to, other than by interrogating the poet or his diaries. Besides being awkward, the conclusion is fallacious. The sense of desolation that the poet lacked the effectiveness to express is *eo ipso* extrinsic to the text, a merely unrealized intention that belongs to the personal history of the poet. In the absence of successful expression, authorial will is futile.

So, from the opening pages of his 1967 book, Hirsch had subverted in advance the long, hard, and in many respects admirable and effective following effort to establish the intended sense as the object of interpretation. On the other hand, his critics outdid him in obscuring the issues, easily matching Hirsch's confusions with their own flimsy and sophisticated critiques.

Monroe C. Beardsley mounted an attack on Hirsch's "identity thesis" (the meaning of the text is the meaning of the author) soon after Hirsch's book appeared.⁴¹ The identity thesis, claimed Beardsley, could be "conclusively disproved" by three arguments.⁴²

The first argument: some texts, formed without authorial meaning, nevertheless have a meaning and can be interpreted. The first example is provided by the *New Yorker*, citing the *Portland Oregonian*:

"It showed that there is at least one officer on the Portland police force who had not seen Officer Olsen drunk," Apley quietly observed.

In contrast to Apley, Jensen argued like a man filled with righteous indignation.

Beardsley's one-sentence analysis: "Here there *is* no 'authorial will,' since the final phrase is inadvertent."⁴³ But this analysis fails. It is true that the authorial will of the reporter did not find apt expression (whether by his own fault or that of the printer). Still, we are on safe ground in reconstructing from the text the reporter's authorial will to evoke Jensen's "righteous indignation." Moreover, the comic effect of the text as it stands depends

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁴¹Monroe C. Beardsley, "Textual Meaning and Authorial Meaning," *Genre I* (1968), 169-181.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 174.

⁴³*Ibid.*, 174f.

on the final phrase, to which Beardsley denies an authorial will; but final phrase and comic effect alike are fully intended by the *New Yorker*. It seems clear, then, that Beardsley's first example has failed to illustrate "meaning" without "authorial meaning."

Beardsley's second example:

When Hart Crane wrote "Thy Nazarene and tender eyes," a printer's error transformed it into "Thy Nazarene and tinder eyes"; but Crane let the accident version stand as better.⁴⁴

No analysis is provided. The example is presumed to illustrate, self-evidently, meaning without authorial meaning. But does it? Hardly. The only reason why the second reading is not a mere misprint is that Crane "let the accident version stand as better." It thus entered into the intended sense of Crane's text.

Beardsley's third example is computer poetry:

While life reached evilly through empty faces
 While space flowed slowly o'er idle bone
 And stars flowed evilly on vast men
 No passion smiled.

Here Beardsley anticipates the objection that "there is something like a hovering 'authorial will,' expressed in the instructions of the programmer." Quite right. Is the objection answered by noticing that, whereas the instructions were general, the poem "is a particular new composition of words," and that "it has meaning, but nothing was meant by anyone"?⁴⁵ Hardly. That there is "meaning" in this piffing twaddle is unmysterious: the programmer used words, especially "poetic" words, saw to it that they were used in accord with intelligible syntax, and even provided line divisions. But, in accord with the generality of the instructions, the meaning is suspended somewhere in the no-man's-land between *langue* and *parole*. Measured as *parole*, it is failed meaning. Confused and flat, the computer product fails to meet the specification of real meaning without real authorship. What Beardsley really needs is an exception to the principle

⁴⁴Ibid., 175.

⁴⁵Ibid., 175.

of causality. The computer can hardly be credited with providing one. If one were to add another ten or twelve lines of computer poetry to these four, the text would be still less meaningful. The theoretical issue, on the other hand, would be that much clearer: the text improves only in the measure in which the programmer's instructions are controlling. Beardsley has done no more than prove the undisputed point that words and syntax are elements of meaning, and that the ratio of more or less "happy" combinations of words will rise in accord with reduced randomness and fall in accord with increased randomness. So much for the examples meant to make Beardsley's first argument persuasive.

His second argument is that the meaning of a text can change after its author has died. The probative instance is from Mark Akenside's mid-eighteenth-century poem, "The Pleasures of Imagination," II, 311-313, referring to "the Sovereign Spirit of the world":

Yet by immense benignity inclin'd
To spread about him that primeval joy
Which filled himself, he rais'd his plastic arm . . .

"Plastic arm," says Beardsley, has acquired a new meaning in the twentieth century. This "forces" us to distinguish between what these lines meant and what they mean today.⁴⁶

I would say, rather, that this forces us to look up "plastic" in the Oxford English Dictionary, inasmuch as the dominant twentieth-century sense is evidently inappropriate here, yielding only interference, a jarring, irrelevant comic effect. Beardsley's "proof" is thus counterproductive.

His third and last argument is that a text can have a meaning that its author is not aware of. Hirsch had offered an example of this: a critic points out to an author that he had emphasized an intended similarity by a parallel construction. "How clever of me!" says the author, welcoming the observation, but admitting that he had not previously adverted to the rhetorical device.⁴⁷ But Hirsch, as Beardsley pointed out, did not know how to incorporate the example into his theory, and so dealt with it in terms of distinctions tangentially relevant at best (meaning vs. subject matter,

⁴⁶Ibid., 175.

⁴⁷Validity, p. 21.

consciousness vs. self-consciousness).⁴⁸ This, it seems to me, is of a piece with Hirsch's overlooking or undervaluing the fundamental distinction between intention and the textual realization of intention. Just as a hapless poet may well fail to realize his intention textually, so a competent poet may in some particular realize it better than he knew. This tells us a truth, if a minor truth: the textual realization of intention sometimes involves effects not specifically intended, and not all of them are bad. Beardsley and many others think that it tells us a great and hermeneutically seminal truth: the text is simply autonomous vis-à-vis its author. But such a judgment is far from exigent. It would take much more than Hirsch's example to prove Beardsley's thesis, though Beardsley and the many who agree with him seem to be invincibly unaware of this.⁴⁹

What emerges from this brief review of an unsatisfactory debate is, first, Hirsch's failure to make the intended sense explicitly intrinsic to the text. Hirsch might have successfully fielded all objections if he had defined the object of interpretation as the sense that the author both intended and managed to encode or express in the text.

Second, Beardsley, the inventor (with William K. Wimsatt, Jr.) of "the intentional fallacy," offers a not atypical critique of Hirsch. He understands his refutations of Hirsch to be "conclusive." On examination, however, they turn out to be jerry-built and easily dismantled.

Finally, out of the enormous influx of French and German theory into North American literary criticism since the time of the debate on Hirsch's *Validity in Interpretation*, we can offer no more than a comment, and that on a tendency of many movements, but especially of the movement called reader-reception theory. The quite unjustified break with the notion of "the intended sense of the text" prepared the way for abandoning the age-old idea epitomized in Max Weber's correlative terms, *Sinnsetzung* (expression of meaning) and *Sinndeutung* (interpretation of meaning) in favor of *Sinndeutung* alone. The rise of reader-reception theory was accordingly no surprise. If it is qualified, under alien influence, by an exaggerated view

⁴⁸"Textual Meaning," 176f.

⁴⁹In the 1984 "Afterword" to his *Language of Fiction*, 2d. ed. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966, 1984), David Lodge rightly rejects on the basis of "practice," i.e., his own practice as a novelist, the currently popular literary critical view of the text as "authorless." And he does this, it should be noted, while considering himself an anti-intentionalist "in the Wimsattian sense." (In fact, Lodge has attributed to Wimsatt and Beardsley his own better balanced and more discriminating grasp and formulation of the issue of intention.)

of "intertextuality" and the denial of "reference" to extratextual reality, it becomes manifestly indefensible. Normally, however, it takes the familiar form of trying to convert the text's unknown meanings and references into knowns. In particular cases, then, actual interpretation may turn out to differ only marginally from application of the theory defended here.⁵⁰

There is a sense in which the active correlative, *Sinnsetzung*, is a constituent element of interpretation theory, for it is necessarily implied by the object of interpretation, that is, the *intended* sense of the text. Nevertheless, there is an observation made by the ancients and sporadically repeated across the centuries: unlike living speech, texts are helpless. They "question" the reader only metaphorically. They cannot literally "enter into dialogue" with the reader, calling attention, for example, to the earlier but now forgotten passage, the significant but overlooked detail. No matter how careful, the writer is finally at the mercy of the reader. The readership's reading determines what actual impact a book is to have, what in fact it will mean to the world.

Shall we conclude that the reader is king? Not exactly, for the reader is still obliged to measure up to the text. So, there are two sides to the matter. On the one hand, "a book is a mirror," as G. C. Lichtenberg observed: "If an ass peers into it, you can't expect an apostle to look out."⁵¹ On the other hand, interpretation is a matter of finding a reader who can meet the challenge of the text, a matter of sending a thief to catch a thief – and if the history of modern exegesis tells us anything, it tells us over and over again that asses do not catch apostles.

Aspects of the Impact of the Historical Consciousness on Interpretation

Interpretation is an effort to meet questions that have arisen about a text. The questions that interpretation (as distinct from analysis and from critique) seeks to answer are specifications of the general query, "What does the

⁵⁰Still, there is a world of difference between the characteristic mentalities associated with the two theories. For Joachim Jeremias, an outstanding seeker after the intended sense of the text, "Exegese ist Sache des Gehorsams!" *Die Abendmahlsworte Jesu*, 3rd. ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1960), p. 6, whereas Stanley Fish, a proponent of reader-reception theory, announces: "No longer is the critic the humble servant of texts . . ." (cited in *Encounter* 65 [July-August, 1985], 21). Such lively proclamations of autonomy are commonplace in the literature of the movement.

⁵¹Wystan Hugh Auden cited this text, without, unhappily, providing references.

text mean?" Still, one era's, and even one generation's, questions about the text differ from another's. With few exceptions, nineteenth-century biblical commentaries are painfully dated and unreadable today. The problem is not so much that the resources – say, the philological resources – of the interpreters are obsolete. Not infrequently they are richer than in average exegesis today. The difficulty is rather that a shift in the focus of interest has taken place. We are just not interested, for example, in what were once the burning questions of liberal theology.

Over the past two hundred years there has hardly been a shift in focus to compare with the rise of the historical consciousness. Philology and history generated extraordinary new possibilities for biblical interpretation. Their reduction to act has been a continuing triumph of "historical-critical" interpretation especially of the Old Testament but also quite markedly of the New. Deuteronomy has become, for the first time in two millennia of Christian interpretation, the biblical book of *agape, par excellence*. Owing to the analysis of new linguistic finds, texts from the Psalms, from Job, from Qoheleth and other works, that had been misunderstood for well over two millennia of guesswork sanctified by tradition, now yielded a clear and solidly grounded original sense. Lengthy, thematically unified passages such as Rom 9-II, which through almost the whole Christian era had been thoroughly and disastrously misunderstood, were now recovered in their pristine passion and lucidity. *Dikaiosyne theou* in Paul was no longer allowed to be misconceived on the model of the *justitia* of Roman law. I pass over in Ciceronian silence the revolution in textual emendation, lexicography, morphology and syntax, analysis of genres and forms, chronology and geography.

We might pause, however, over the new possibility of a critical history of traditions opened up by historical interpretation. Such interpretation insists on the original sense of the text not only for its own sake but as a condition and starting point of such history. Some have supposed that this insistence on an original sense entails maximizing it as the only sense that counts or at any rate as the truest or most significant sense. If that were the case, the new possibility of the critical history of traditions would have lost much of its point before getting underway. The exclusivist supposition, however, is mere bias and is happily separable from historical interpretation itself (cf. thesis 2. r. 5). So far from stifling the pursuit of the text's history of impact (*Wirkungsgeschichte*), historical interpretation makes possible an ever

fuller, more exact and instructive, history of tradition. One need think only of the studies of Isa 53 by Dalman, Billerbeck, Zimmerli, and Jeremias and his students,⁵² who collectively have traced the journey of this text through time, its formative influence on key texts in Zechariah, Daniel, and Wisdom, on Synagogue traditions both Greek and Aramaic, on Christianity at its birth, and on Judaism and Christianity respectively through the ages. This hermeneutically rational inquiry has taken over a good part of the functions of "multiple sense" theories from patristic and medieval times.

The idea of the intended sense is age-old, but, as the possibility of retrieving it underwent fundamental transformation under the impact of a historical consciousness in Europe, new resources and tools of inquiry came into being that allowed the intended sense to be retrieved far more fully and precisely than had previously been thought possible. While twentieth-century theoreticians were making the "intended sense" an object of deep suspicion-often misunderstanding it in the light of poor theory and worse practice on the part of those who made biographical research the interpretative key to texts – twentieth-century practitioners have repeatedly succeeded in recovering the intended sense of even quite short, self-contained texts. Here, to be sure, the experts are not all of one mind. But I would propose as representative examples of extraordinarily adroit recovery, over the past fifty years or so, of short but charged New Testament texts the pre-Pauline faith formulas in the Epistle to the Romans (e.g., 1:3f.; 3:25f.; 4:25; 8:34; 10:9f.) and the work of Karl Georg Kuhn,⁵³ Joachim Jeremias,⁵⁴ and others⁵⁵ on the Our Father as word of Jesus and as diversely shaped liturgical text.

⁵²Out of the large number of works (brought together in numerous bibliographies on Isa 53-e.g., that prepared by Joachim Jeremias for the article "p̄is theou" in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* V, pp. 654-656) I would signal the following: S. R. Driver and A. Neugebauer, *The Fifty-Third Chapter of Isaiah According to the Jewish Interpreters* (1876-77, repr. New York: KTAV, 1969); Gustaf Dalman, "Der Leidende und der sterbende Messias der Synagoge im ersten nachchristlichen Jahrtausend," *Schriften des Institutum Judaicum Berlin* (1888); Paul Billerbeck, "Hat die alte Synagoge einen praexistenten Messias gekannt?" *Nathaniel* 21 (1905), 89-150; Walther Zimmerli and Joachim Jeremias, *The Servant of God*, 2d. ed. (London: SCM, 1957, 1965); Harold Hegermann, *Isaiah 53 in Hexapla, Targum und Peschitta* (Giitersloh: Bertelsmann, 1954).

⁵³Karl Georg Kuhn, *Achtzehngebet und Vaterunser und der Reim* (Tiibingen: Mohr, 1950).

⁵⁴Joachim Jeremias, "The Lord's Prayer in the Light of Recent Research," in *The Prayers of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1974), pp. 82-107 [German original, 1962].

⁵⁵R. E. Brown, "The Pater Noster as an Eschatological Prayer," in *New Testament Essays* (New York-Ramsay: Paulist, 1965), pp. 217-253; Philip B. Harner, *Understanding the Lord's Prayer* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975).

The exploits of historical-critical method have not, of course, preserved biblical interpretation from perversity and triviality, as Western society and culture abandoned its religious and philosophic legacies. Biblical interpreters were not exempt from these currents and biblical interpretation from Spinoza to the present has often betrayed a crippling estrangement from the biblical text. The methodical limits of historical interpretation allowed it to be pressed into the service, first, of a religiously neutral, then of an alienated and hostile, vantage point. As Screwtape explained to Wormwood, "The Historical Point of View, put briefly, means that when a learned man is presented with any statement in an ancient author, the one question he never asks is whether it is true."⁵⁶ Historical relativism, taken in by the modern with his mother's milk, tended to make implicitly moot the whole array of truth claims from the ancient world. Undiscriminating religious critics thought that historical method was itself to blame for this. More discerning spirits differentiated historical method from the philosophic assumptions that were often gratuitously fused with it. Despite appearances, Enlightenment ideology has always been gratuitous, though leading lights from Strauss through Troeltsch to Bultmann could not free themselves from identifying selected aspects of this ideology with the techniques that constituted historical method itself. The question today is why anyone should willingly prolong this ever more evidently bankrupt philosophic tradition.

For there are alternatives. Collingwood has long been read and admired, but it has been too little noticed what a work of demolition and liberation his *Idea of History* was.⁵⁷ On a still broader front, Lonergan has performed a like task, tracing the collapse of the cult of necessity from the Renaissance critique of Aristotle down to our own time. Mistaken philosophies can blend with science, but, like the theories of early sociologists of religion such as Tylor and Spencer, fanciful and wrongheaded opinions are finally exposed

and, once exposed, forgotten. Forgotten like the Euclidean structure of space exorcised by Einstein and Minkowski, like the necessity that ruled physical process up to quantum theory, like the iron laws of

⁵⁶C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters and Screwtape Proposes a Toast* (London: Bles, 1966), p. 121.

⁵⁷R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946). A striking anomaly: Collingwood's clear and coherent theory subverts in advance the thinking of roughly half the people who cite him favorably. An example: J. M. Robinson, *A New Quest of the Historical Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 1959).

economics trumpeted on political platforms up to the depression of the early thirties.⁵⁸

Gradually cleansed of ideological parasites, the procedures of historical interpretation are today more than ever a peerless (though by no means the exclusive) tool at the disposal of biblical scholarship. But they are just a tool. A tool is not to be blamed for its use in the pursuit of perverse or trivial objects. Tools can as well be made to function in the service of the drive to truth as in that of overt or covert ideology or of the spell of trivia (*fascinatio nugacitatis*).

In his treatment of interpretation as a functional specialty in theology, Lonergan has outlined the conditions of the possibility of interpretation and has left the matter at that. "Anyone can . . . interpret," he says, and "conversion is not a requisite."⁵⁹ But, of course, not anyone can interpret well. To interpret well, and especially to interpret biblical literature well, calls precisely for the authenticity that hinges on a manifold conversion.⁶⁰ Once we pass beyond the conditions of the possibility of interpretation to consider the conditions of the possibility of excellence in interpretation, the main focus of hermeneutics shifts to the authenticity of the interpreter. Given this authenticity, the clean beauty of the technical resources of historical-critical interpretation has, in fact, often appeared and still appears and will, no doubt, continue to appear.

This, as I remarked above, is not the exclusive tool of biblical scholarship. It is suitably supplemented by other tools, such as structuralist

⁵⁸Bernard Lonergan, "Method: Trend and Variations," in *A Third Collection: Papers by Bernard J. F. Lonergan*, ed. F. E. Crowe (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist, 1985), pp. 13-22, at p. 20

⁵⁹*Method in Theology*, p. 268. In "An Interview with Fr. Bernard Lonergan," *Second Collection: Papers by Bernard J. F. Lonergan*, ed. W. F. J. Ryan and B. J. Tyrrell (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1974), p. 217, Lonergan makes it clear that the word "can" in the phrase "anyone can do research, interpretation, history" stands for "is welcome to." The functional specialties do not set up conditions of membership: everyone is welcome to try. But Lonergan does not expect that all will do these things well, for undifferentiated consciousness "finds any message from the worlds of theory, of interiority, of transcendence both alien and incomprehensible" (*Method*, p. 287). Diversity in self-definition (cf. B. F. Meyer, "On Self-Definition" in *The Early Christians: Their World Mission and Self-Discovery* [Wilmington: Glazier, 1986] pp. 23-31) accounts for why one person understands and welcomes a message from the world of transcendence whereas another misconstrues or ignores or despises it. The manifold "conversion" thematized by Lonergan is calculated to effect such changes in self-definition as would open the subject to the boundless sweep of the intelligible, the true, the real, the good, the beautiful, the holy.

⁶⁰See B. F. Meyer, "Conversion and the Hermeneutics of Consent," *Ex Auditu* 1 (1985), 36-46.

interpretation.⁶¹ With the passage of time it will itself develop, and will be diversely supplemented, in ways that we cannot foresee. But we are concerned with the present. My intention is to say how the main resources of the present might be made to serve the religious and theological needs of the present. The precise context is the functional specialty "interpretation." (I do not intend to treat the question of how this relates to the functional specialty "communications.")

III. A SYNTHESIS OF ANTIOCH AND ALEXANDRIA

Some years ago, taking a cue from Newman's remarks on the ancient schools of Antioch and Alexandria (Antioch, he said, was "the fountain of primitive rationalism"⁶² and "the very metropolis of heresy,"⁶³ in accord with the principle that "there is no mystery in theology"⁶⁴), I argued that the issue on which Christian theologians fundamentally defined themselves was whether salvation was a transcendent mystery (i.e., the kind of mystery that came to be defined, following Philip the Chancellor in the thirteenth century, as "supernatural"). Those who said yes I called Alexandrines and those who said no, Antiochenes. Among contemporary Antiochenes I took Bultmann, then still living, to be *facile princeps*.⁶⁵

To Alexandrines the gospel is an invitation and initiation into the secret (to *mysterion*) that is Christ (see 1 Cor 2; Col 1:24-29; Eph 1:3-10; 3:1-13; cf. Rom 16:2 5f.). This description would satisfy most Antiochenes, as well, with the proviso that it be understood in concrete human terms and, accordingly, that all objectifications – incarnation and expiation, redeemer and redemption, the scheme of the future: parousia (1 Cor 15:23), the transformation of the living and the resurrection of the dead (1 Cor 15:50f.), the final delivery of "the reign" to God the Father (1 Cor 15:24)⁶⁶ – be so resubjectified as at one stroke to dispose of Christianity's mythical remnants and lay bare its existential thrust.

⁶¹See John J. Collins, "The Meaning of Sacrifice: A Contrast of Methods," *Biblical Research* 22 (1977), 19-34.

⁶²*Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, Ch. 4, Sect. 2, para. 10 (Garden City: Doubleday, 1960), p. 155.

⁶³*Ibid.*, Ch. 7, Sect. 4, para. 5, p. 327.

⁶⁴See above, note 33.

⁶⁵B. F. Meyer, *The Church in Three Tenses* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1971), p. 171f.; cf. 151-154.

⁶⁶See J. M. Robinson, "Hermeneutic Since Barth," in *The New Hermeneutic*, ed. J. M. Robinson and John C. Cobb (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), pp. 31-33.

In this proviso it was authenticity that was at stake: authentic proclamation, authentic response, the authentic existence (radical obedience symbolized by the cross) into which the respondent stepped.

Authenticity, in fact, is the heart of the matter in both Antiochene and Alexandrine worlds of discourse. Though both are intent on the twofold authenticity of human subjectivity and of the Christian heritage, it would be fair to say that whereas the contemporary Antiochene puts a premium on what is authentically human, his Alexandrine counterpart puts it on what is authentically Christian. In the millennium and a half prior to the rise of the historical consciousness, these two ways of settling priorities could find no resolution in a higher synthesis (thesis 4.5.2). Today, however, these pivotal choices invite the question of whether we can find a third point of vantage and field of vision in which one is no longer constrained to favor one set of demands over the other. Such an ideal solution would impinge in conspicuous fashion on the practice of interpretation. In patristic Christianity the concern for coherence stood behind the ancient Alexandrine's recourse to allegorical interpretation; recoil from the arbitrary governed the ancient Antiochene's insistence on the letter of the text. This kind of tension has persisted into modern times. Ronald Clement, for example, has recently traced the laborious retreat, under pressure of commitment to the intended sense of the text, from classic schemes of messianic prophecy and fulfillment to the fall-back position of a generalized history of messianic hope.⁶⁷

So there will be at least three elements in a theologically responsible biblical hermeneutics: first, the claims of the biblical text, that is, the primacy of its intended sense; second, the claims of human authenticity, that is, Antiochene rejection of premature and artificial interpretative solutions; third, the claims of Christian authenticity, that is, Alexandrine insistence on the intelligibility and cohesiveness of salvation and of the scriptures that attest it in hope and in celebration.

Antioch and Alexandria signal opposed hermeneutic faults. Thus, "Antiochene" means not only the interpreter's commitment to the literal sense but also the rationalist's recoil from mystery. The historic Antiochene⁶⁸ seized on the Alexandrine weak point, the recourse to exegetical

⁶⁷Ronald Clement, "Messianic Prophecy or Messianic History?" *Horizons in Biblical Theology* I (1979), 87-104.

⁶⁸On historic Antioch, I am referring, first of all, to a period from the mid-fourth to the mid-fifth century (and specifically to Diodore, who became bishop of Tarsus in 378; to Theodore, who became bishop of Mopsuestia in 392; and to Nestorius, who became bishop of Constantinople

artifice in affirming the mystery of salvation. So far, so good; but in the face of New Testament texts, the Antiochene style in any age is slated for failure. The text is an initiation into mystery. Rationalism is a recoil from mystery. The fatal flaw in Antiochene exegesis has been a resultant flight from unwanted meaning.

This is what made hermeneutics so important in Bultmannianism. Its task was to justify the flight from the intended sense whenever the text called for belief in what "we cannot sincerely consider true."⁶⁹ To Bultmann mystery was contradiction. The New Testament did indeed intend a mystery to the will (the contradiction of appetite). At the deepest level of its intending, however, it did not intend a mystery to the mind (the contradiction of intelligibility). "The deepest level of intending" posited a duality in intending: the surface level of the text attested an ostensible intending; its deep level, an authentic intending. For example, in I Cor 15, Paul did and did not intend "a history of final things."⁷⁰ The result was a rupture between the act of meaning and its consciously produced internal term, namely, what is meant.

At one level the Bultmannian interpreter was aware that in I Cor 15:21-28 "a history of final things" was precisely what was meant. But besides being unacceptable in itself, this failed to correspond to the interpreter's hard-won understanding of what was most genuinely Pauline. How could Paul have been so unPauline and anti-Pauline? This kind of question has tortured dogma-free exegesis in Germany for over a hundred years.⁷¹ The only real breakthrough answer has been that of Bultmann, who had recourse here to cognitive theory. Experience engendered expressive symbols; meaning was this act of expressing; and interpretation recovered the act of meaning. The crucial point was that the recovery took place, not by fixing attention on the objectified symbols generated by the act of cognition, but rather by finding in one's own life the experience that generated them. The

in 428); second, to a tendency in interpretation (accent on the literal and historical, suspicion of allegory); third, to a style of christological theorizing that was stronger on duality than on the unity allowing a *communicatio idiomatum* in christological predication. On historic Alexandria, I am referring to the tradition that ran from Clement and Origen through Athanasius to Cyril, a tradition quite at home with allegory, inclined to put a high premium on mystery, and especially to champion a high christology against the "inspired man" christology of Antioch.

⁶⁹Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (New York: Scribner, 1958), p. 17.

⁷⁰See note 66 above for reference to Bultmann's view.

⁷¹For a particular instance, see my "Did Paul's View of the Resurrection of the Dead Undergo Development?" in *Theological Studies* 41 (1986), 363-387.

interpretative question, then, was not “What did Paul’s symbols symbolize?” “What did it mean that all died by solidarity with Adam and would be brought to life again by solidarity with Christ, that Christ must reign until all enemies will have been put under his feet, but that once this had happened, he would turn over the reign to his Father?” The controlling question, rather, was “What was the vital drive and experience that engendered this set of extravagant symbols?” Thus, the authentic, undogmatic, existential Paul comes into view – but at the price of the exegete’s having deconstructed the correspondence between meaning and meant.⁷²

Alexandrine exegetes and theologians, by definition committed to the *mysterium salutis*, interpret the Christian heritage in transcendent terms. But there is also a hermeneutic fault that is specifically Alexandrine. It, too, is a selective flight from the intended sense of the text, but for reasons diametrically opposed to those of the Antiochene. For the Alexandrine is tender-minded. In the name of theological postulates, for example, the internal unity of divine revelation, he is self-blinded to concrete problems and tempted to affirm premature, unverifiable, hermeneutic harmonies. There is no need to rehearse grossly uncritical instances of the Alexandrine syndrome. A refined example, one of many, is the stout refusal of many a New Testament scholar to acknowledge that the scheme of the future supposed by Jesus corresponds to none of the eschatological schemes proposed in early Christianity.⁷³ The kind of rounded unity and coherence that the Alexandrine formerly affirmed in the guise of interpretation

⁷²Objectification is an aspect of intentionality, i.e., of acts of meaning. We objectify the self by meaning the self and we objectify the world by meaning the world. Of its nature this meaning is related to a meant, and what is meant may or may not be so. The short-circuiting into which the pre-World War II theorizing of Hans Jonas and Rudolf Bultmann fell was the failure to acknowledge this intrinsic correspondence. Thus, what was meant by 1 Cor 15 was not, according to Bultmann, a *Schlussgeschichte* (history of final things) – all that was mere objectification. What was meant was the pinning of all hope on commitment to the Christ of faith. I have nothing against this thesis of hope, so far as it goes. But since meaning projects a meant, since to posit a severing of this tie is to posit the impossible, I would say that what was meant by 1 Cor 15:21-28 was precisely a *Schlussgeschichte*, a scenario of post-historical salvation, Christ’s triumph over the last enemy, death, and the realization of the reign of God in its fullness; and I would connect Paul’s passionate expression of hope with this same scenario..

⁷³On the altogether distinctive eschatological scenario of Jesus (recovered by brilliant detective work in C. H. Dodd’s *Parables of the Kingdom* [London: Nisbet, 1935] and brought to the high polish of precise formulation in an essay of Joachim Jeremias [*Theologische Blätter* 20 (1941) col. 216-222]), see B. F. Meyer, *The Aims of Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 1979), pp. 202-209. Though the work of Dodd and Jeremias has not been refuted, neither has it been accepted. One cannot help suspecting that the explanation lies in a simple recoil of contemporary scholars from unwanted meaning.

must now be reconceived as an object of anticipation likely at best to find laborious, discontinuous, piecemeal verification. This sober sense of limits clips the wings of Alexandrine "interpretation." Such is the indispensable contemporary transposition from triumphant exegesis to the explicit recognition that the exegetical task is perennially unfinished and that there are exegetical problems either permanently or at least currently irresolvable. Where once the Alexandrine had recourse to interpretative artifice and skilled evasion, his contemporary successor will incorporate into his results the products of *docta ignorantia*: embarrassingly numerous instances of acknowledged uncertainty and impasse.

It seems to me important that the task envisaged here be differentiated, on the one hand, from interpretation in the context of the secular university, where biblical literature is treated under the heading of the history of religions, and, on the other hand, from interpretation as a "communications" task in the church. As a functional specialty in theology; interpretation cannot simply abstract from such questions and projects as biblical theology and the correlation of the Old and New Testaments. To that extent, the characteristic foci of interest in modern secular history of religions do not quite measure up to the challenge of interpretation as a functional specialty in theology. That is, by comparison with the quite distinct interests, ethos, and practice in contemporary history of religions, interpretation as functional specialty is a kind of *kirchliche Schriftauslegung* (ecclesial interpretation of scripture), but it is very different indeed from the *kirchliche Schriftauslegung* recently proposed by Heinz Schürmann.⁷⁴

Schürmann, who does not distinguish between interpretation as a functional specialty in theology and interpretation as an immediate resource for preacher and catechist, urges a *kirchliche Schriftauslegung* in what I would call the Alexandrine mode. The categories of Old Testament prophecy and New Testament fulfillment are boldly rehabilitated in the light of "faith." As elements of "scripture," all individual affirmations are "dehistoricized" and transposed to the "time of the Church," "relativized" by being connected at once to the "center" of scripture and to its total ambit, and "actualized" to apply to the present. The New Testament is conceived on the model of an ellipse with two poles: the kerygma of the resurrection of Jesus and Jesus' proclamation of the advent of the reign of his Father. Each makes the other

⁷⁴Heinz Schürmann, "Thesen zur kirchlichen Schriftauslegung," *Theologie und Glaube* 72 (1982), 33of.

intelligible, and the result is avoidance both of a pure kerygma theology and a pure Jesus theology.

My purpose in evoking the tenor of Schiirmann's proposals is not to contest particular points in the context of "communications" (though I find much here that calls for further discussion). It is simply to clarify, by contrast with "communications," the traits of interpretation as a functional specialty in theology. Here, ideally, the interpreter sublates and synthesizes Antioch (as precise a retrieval as possible of the intended sense of texts) and Alexandria (as deft as retrieval as possible of the text's depth-dimension and salvation-historical context; see thesis 4.5.1). Interpretation conceived in these terms does not do everything. It does not trace or evaluate the canonization of the scriptures; it does not offer a theory of inspiration; it does not present a ready-made resource for preacher and catechist. It does not try to do all theology, but limits itself to the single question "What is the intended sense of the text?"

MODERN PROTESTANT THEOLOGY

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MODERN PROTESTANT THEOLOGY may be broadly construed as the result of the heritage of the Reformation confronting modern scientific rationalism, which is the heritage of the Enlightenment. This confrontation ultimately meant that Christianity could no longer assume a common starting point for theological reflection and development in the shared beliefs of ordinary citizens or the learned. Thus modern Protestantism faced a problem at the beginning of any theological statement. What is the ground of any such theology?¹

As reformers they could not affirm that church tradition was a trustworthy foundation for theology. They all believed that sometime in the Middle Ages the Christian church had gone seriously astray. Thus, tradition could not be relied on to teach theological truth.² Secondly, modern Protestantism took from the reformers a hostility to the marriage of faith and reason, a marriage that Catholics cherish. Luther, for example, asserted that Aristotle taught blasphemy.³

Unable to trust the tradition of the church and hostile to the coming together of faith and reason exemplified in the concept of transubstantiation, Calvin claimed that the belief in the “real presence” was created in the Middle Ages by devious priests under the influence of Satan.⁴

¹Compare with Diarmid McCullough, *The Reformation: A History* (London: Penguin, 2004); Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007). For a masterful treatment of the effects of the Reformation see Brad Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012). Also valuable is E. A. Burt, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Science* (London: Keegan Paul, 1924).

²Martin Luther, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, ed. Erik Hermann and Paul Robinson (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2016).

³Martin Luther, *To the Nobility of the German Nation*, ed. James Estes and Timothy Wengert (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2016).

⁴John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia:

Reformation Protestantism's hostility to the coming together of faith and reason, and its claim of a breakdown in then the tradition of the church, left a large gap in the foundation of Christian theology. For the reformers, what filled this gap was the absolute commitment to the infallibility of scripture. All Christians shared the conviction that scripture was God's sure word to humanity. But the reformers were literalists. Scripture was open to any reader and did not require philosophical or theological training to understand it.⁵ In the 1978 "Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy" over three hundred conservative Protestants called this "total biblical inerrancy."

Genesis, for example, tells the story of creation, especially its order and time frame plainly. No one needs the rich commentary of St. Augustine with its roots in Platonism. Because natural law in any form relies on reason, the reformers rejected it. Calvin, for example, teaches that moral truth can only be known in the context of Christ's redemption.⁶

Fundamentally, the reformers claimed that scripture was more than merely inspired by God. It was the inerrant word of God. In this framework, scripture was sometimes held to be actually "dictated" by God to the writer. Calvin gives a clear presentation of this view in his commentary on Jeremiah 36:4-6:

Here the prophet declares that he dictated to Baruch, a servant of God, what he had previously taught. But there is no doubt that God suggested to the prophet what might have been effaced from his memory; for not all things which we have formerly said always occur to us; therefore the greater part of so many words must have escaped the prophet had not God dictated them again to him. Jeremiah, then, stood between God and Baruch, for God, by his Spirit, presided over and guided the mind and the tongue of the prophet. Now the prophet, the Spirit being his guide and teacher, recited what God had commanded We see hence that he did not dictate according to his own will what came to his mind, but that God suggested, whatever he wished to be written by Baruch.⁷

Westminster/John Knox, 1960), book II, chap. 17.

⁵For analysis and background on biblical inerrancy, see Norman Geisler and William Reach, *Defending Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012); John Woodbridge, *Biblical Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Press, 2015).

⁶Ralph Hancock, *Calvin and the Foundations of Modern Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989); Georges de la Gardie, *Recherches sur l'Esprit Politique de la Reforme* (Paris: Plon, 1926).

⁷John Calvin, "Commentary on Jeremiah 36:4-6," in *The Commentaries of John Calvin*, 46

There is a serious debate about whether this dictation framework is Calvin's final word on the inspiration of scripture. This cannot be discussed here. My only point with this quote was to show how strictly the reformers took the idea of scriptural inerrancy.⁸

This way of looking at scripture to fill the gap resulting from giving up reason and tradition came up against modern science in the Enlightenment, the nineteenth century, and the twentieth century. The first approach of many Protestant churches and members was to deny the truths claimed by modern science. For example, a literalist biblical chronology showed that the earth was only a few thousand years old. As such, the geological science that showed otherwise must be wrong. Calculations that show that there is not enough water to cover the whole earth must be mistaken because the biblical story of the flood claims differently.⁹

The fundamentalist response to the challenge of modern science denied science. This tradition I shall not treat here. The alternative was to affirm modern science and "reconstruct" Christian theology such that the resulting "theology" could not conflict with any modern science.

Broadly, modern science presented itself as a better way of understanding nature without the influence of classical metaphysics or Christian theology. Baconian science held that it was a waste of resources to try to have a comprehensive understanding of nature involving Aristotle's four causes. All that was required were efficient cause, that is, how something was made, and material cause, that is, what it was made of. Formal and, especially, final cause were useless for the mastery of the world that modern science promised.¹⁰

vols. (Edinburgh: The Calvin Translation Society, 1843-1855), vol. 39:118.

⁸E. A. Dowey, *The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952); Henk van den Belt, *The Authority of Scripture in Reformed Theology* (Leiden: Brill, 2006); T. H. Parker, *Calvin: Introduction to His Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1995); John Murray, *Calvin on Scripture and Divine Authority* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1978); John Thompson, "Calvin as a Biblical Interpreter," in Donald McKim, ed. *Cambridge Companion to Calvin* (London: Cambridge, 2004), 58-74.

⁹John C. Greene, *The Death of Adam* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1961); David Montgomery, *The Rocks Don't Lie* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2012); Neal Gillespie, *Charles Darwin and the Problem of Creation* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1982); Robert M. Hazen, *The Story of Earth* (New York: Penguin, 2013); Ronald Numbers, *The Creationists* (New York: Knopf, 1992); Peter Harrison, *The Bible, Protestantism, and the Rise of Natural Science* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

¹⁰Francis Bacon, *The New Organon*, ed. Lisa Jardine and Michael Silverthorne (London: Cambridge University Press, 2000); for a competent analysis see Paolo Rossi, *Francis Bacon: From Magic to Science* (London: Taylor and Francis, 1978).

Moreover, to understand creation a knowledge of or even belief in a creator was unnecessary and even wrong. To understand DNA you need biochemistry. No knowledge of the creator, if there was one, is needed.

By the materialist terms of the Enlightenment, any theology that makes essential claims in conflict with the Enlightenment must be seen as irrational. Protestant thinkers who wanted to meet this challenge directly had to develop a theology that was immune to this conflict. For this task, they turned theology into a study of how Christ appears to the subject, that is, the believer in the pew.

After both the reformers and much of the Enlightenment, especially Kant, pronounced the irrelevance and impossibility of a metaphysics that engaged the external world, a world including God, theologians turned to what the late Gordon Kauffman, one of its most distinguished recent representatives termed "the available God," that is, the God that modern man can believe in. Since Kant, especially, argued that the actual, mind-independent world can never be known; we are left with the world that we experience.¹¹

The theological import of this position is obvious. If we cannot know the actual Christ as presented, for example, in the Nicene Creed or by the tradition, we must rely on a concept of Christ tailored to us. Of course, this conforms Christ to us, not as Christianity has generally held, conforming persons to Christ through grace.

I believe that, in a vastly oversimplified manner, we can identify four versions of the modern Protestant turn to the subjective as the grounding for a new Protestant theology.

FEELING

Immanuel Kant died in 1804. Five years before his death a 31-year-old pastor published a seminal work that disputed the Enlightenment critique of religion of which Kant was the summation. The work was titled *Reden über die Religion* (*On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*). The 31-year-old author was Friedrich Schleiermacher.¹²

Schleiermacher did not dispute the Enlightenment rejection of religion in general, or Christianity in particular, on grounds that the Enlightenment

¹¹Gordon Kauffman, *God the Problem* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972).

¹²Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to the Cultured Among Its Despisers*, trans. Richard Crouter (New York: Scribners, 1964).

would find reasonable. He did not provide a new argument for the existence of God, or for the truth of the Christian faith. Rather, he argued, that the very rationalism regarding religion advanced by, for example, Leibniz or Aquinas, and disputed by Hume and Kant, was an erroneous starting point.

On this view, religion in general and Christianity in particular, is not a rationally grounded enterprise, employing the tools of philosophy and modern science in defense of the belief in God. Monotheistic religion should not employ arguments such as versions of the cosmological argument or the design argument of watch and watchmaker fame, even as this argument has been amplified by modern science.¹³

Nor is Christianity aided by the traditional arguments about the reality of, and witnesses to, the resurrection, such as St. Paul's claim about five hundred witnesses in First Corinthians 15. Another favorite "proof," especially among British divines, was the argument from miracles. Only a God can perform miracles, for example, calming the sea, healing the sick, raising Lazarus from the dead. Since Jesus did all of these things, he must be divine. All of these sorts of arguments or others were also irrelevant or even worse since they assumed that the truth of Christianity was rooted in rational proofs.¹⁴

Christianity is not, fundamentally, a set of beliefs that can be defended, articulated, or developed with the tools of reason. Rather, religion is a certain sort of feeling. In contemporary language it is a "right brain," not a "left brain," phenomenon. In brief, religion is a special sort of feeling of absolute dependence on the divine or the transcendent.

On Religion has five sections. Schleiermacher calls them "speeches." We would call them chapters. Only two of the speeches are relevant here. In the second of the five speeches Schleiermacher describes the "essence" of religion.

In order to take possession of its own domain, religion renounces, herewith, all claims to whatever belongs to those others and gives back everything that has been forced upon it. It does not wish to determine and explain the universe according to its nature as does metaphysics. It does not desire to continue the universe's development

¹³For background see B. A. Gerrish, *A Prince of the Church: Schleiermacher and the Beginnings of Modern Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 1984); Richard R. Neibuhr, *Schleiermacher on Christ and Religion* (New York: Scribners, 1964).

¹⁴For an overview see Robert Burns, *The Great Debate on Miracles from Joseph Glanville to David Hume* (Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1981).

and perfect it by the power of freedom and the divine free choice of a human being, as does morals. Religion's essence is neither thinking nor acting, but intuition and feeling. It wishes to intuit the universe, wishes devoutly to overhear the universe's own interpretations and actions, longs to be grasped and filled by the universe's immediate influences in childlike passivity.¹⁵

In speech five, Schleiermacher begins his defense of Christianity as the superior religion. "The original intuition of Christianity is more glorious, sublime, more worthy of adult humanity, more deeply penetrating into the spirit of systematic religion and extending farther over the whole universe" than any other religion. Schleiermacher argues that the first Christians were not philosophers or scientists who trusted too much in their own learning. Rather they were those whose "God consciousness" was as strong as anyone's could be.¹⁶

Later, when he was professor of theology at the University of Berlin, he published his comprehensive theological statement, *The Christian Faith*. Here, he treats Christ extensively. The result is that Christ is the person with the perfect "God consciousness" or feeling of absolute dependence on God. He is our redeemer because he embodies or shows us the perfect dependence on God that frees us from the ways of the world.¹⁷

Schleiermacher is the first, but certainly not the last, major thinker who avoided contesting the Enlightenment critique of religion with rational argument. There are no rational arguments in his work because Christianity is not a set of rationally defensible beliefs. Christian theology had no stake arguments for the existence of God, the concept of immaterial substance, or the idea of a "hypostatic union" which is essential in understanding the Chalcedonian formula of Christ as both fully human and fully divine.

Christianity is not understood as grounded in scripture nor in a coming together of scripture and classical philosophy. Rather, it is grounded in the perfect "God consciousness" Jesus. To become and grow as a Christian is to develop one's absolute dependence on God.

¹⁵Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, 101.

¹⁶Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, 213.

¹⁷Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, trans. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart (Edinburgh: T & T. Clark, 1928).

MORAL TEACHER

Beginning in the middle of the nineteenth century, a number of thinkers started to emphasize the moral core of Christianity, almost to the exclusion of any other element of the Christian faith. The first important thinker associated with this move of defending Christianity via ethics was the Lutheran theologian Albrecht Ritschl, who was the most important Protestant theologian in the last half of the nineteenth century.¹⁸

Like Schleiermacher, Ritschl rejects patristic, medieval, and scholastic theology. He agrees with Kant that metaphysics, either of the patristic, platonic sort or scholastic Aristotelianism, is no longer possible. In his work, Ritschl borrows heavily from the late nineteenth-century German idealist Hermann Lotze in his claim that all knowledge, including that from perception, is "value conditioned" or "value laden."¹⁹ With this framework as a starting point, Ritschl sees theological beliefs as always having a moral component. Thus, for him, theology is not merely connected to or a ground for morality. Theology is morality.

For Ritschl, the core theological claim is the statement in I John 4:8 that "God is love." And the purpose of God's love for us is the moral organization of humanity in the Kingdom of God, that is, the church. Faith does not know, and does not need to know, God in the context of the traditional "omni" attributes, the trinitarian understanding of Nicaea, or the Christological settlement of Chalcedon. "Faith knows God in his active relation to the Kingdom, the Church, not as something to be analyzed."²⁰

Ritschl's conviction that the belief that "God is love" is the basis of a Christian theology that puts morality at the center of a proper statement of Christian faith. From the point of view of the tradition this is not entirely wrong. It is, however, incomplete. Unless we antecedently know that Christ is Divine, then why should his moral teaching be preferred over, say, Kant's or Mill's? Though his theology is seriously defective, Ritschl did

¹⁸Albrecht Ritschl, *The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation*, trans. H. R. Mackintosh and A. B. Macauley (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1900); D. L. Mueller, *An Introduction to the Theology of Albrecht Ritschl* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969); Darrel Jodock, *Ritschl in Retrospect* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1995); James Richmond, *Ritschl: A Reappraisal* (London: Collins, 1978).

¹⁹Friedrich Beiser, *Late German Idealism: Trendelenburg and Lotze* (London: Oxford University Press, 2013); William Woodward, *Hermann Lotze: An Intellectual Biography* (London: Oxford University Press, 2015).

²⁰Ritschl, *The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation*, 241.

mark a turning point in modern theology by focusing on morality as the foundation of Christianity. One fundamental problem for those who saw Christianity in almost wholly moral terms was this: Why is Christianity the superior religion? The idea that God is fundamentally loving, merciful, compassionate, and forgiving is found all through the Old Testament, especially the Psalms. Why not be Jewish?

The fundamental problem of why Christianity was the superior religion was "answered" in moral terms by Wilhelm Hermann in a 1901 work, *Ethik*. This work is the most powerful statement of the connection between Christianity and morality. Hermann agrees with nineteenth-century Protestant thought in rejecting complexities of patristic and medieval theology. This much is a given.

His importance is that unlike Ritschl, who starts with a revealed claim about God, Hermann starts with Kant. Liberals had often started with the conviction of Christ as a supreme moral teacher or exemplar and then viewed human moral systems in that light. Hermann reverses the direction. For him the essence of true morality is found in the first version of the categorical imperative as developed in the *Groundwork* and the second critique. Whether this fully represents all of Kant's later moral philosophy is a matter of debate that is not relevant here. What Hermann took from Kant was the categorical imperative.²¹

For Hermann, Christianity was true because the central moral principle of the New Testament was, in his view the "golden rule," one statement of which is in Matthew 7:12: "in everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this sums up the law and the prophets." For him the golden rule was another way of stating the categorical imperative. Hermann's move from Kant to Christ, however, entails a selective reading of the New Testament and a very human, and only human, Christ.²²

Whether the golden rule and the categorical imperative are equivalent or merely similar is a much-debated question that we are not discussing here. They are both purely formal and avoid any view of the human good, such as presented in the gospels. Nor does this view say much about the church. The church is only valuable insofar as it remains the bearer of the moral proclamation of Jesus.²³

²¹Wilhelm Hermann, *Ethik* (Tubingen: J.B.C. Mohr, 1901).

²²All biblical quotes are from the New American Bible.

²³Harry Gensler, SJ, *Ethics and the Golden Rule* (New York: Routledge, 2013); J. Wattles, *The*

At the same time that Hermann was reducing the substance of Christianity to the moral teaching of Kant, and Jesus to a moral teacher, of kantianism, the most well-known theologian in Germany was making much the same claim for Jesus as a supreme moral teacher. In the winter of 1899-1900, Adolf Harnack, professor of theology at the University of Berlin, gave a series of lectures that were published under the title *Das Wesen des Christentums*. They were translated into English under the title *What Is Christianity?*²⁴

Though written in an appealing rhetorical and non-technical manner, a close reading shows that Harnack has given up most of the tradition held sacred by the patristic, medieval, and reformation church. One telling example is his discussion of Jesus' claim that he is the "son of God."

It is knowledge of God that makes the sphere of divine sonship. It is in this knowledge that he came to know the sacred being that rules heaven and earth as father, as his father. The consciousness which he possessed of being the Son of God, therefore, is nothing but the practical consequence of knowing God as the father, and as his father. Rightly understood the name son means nothing but the knowledge of God.²⁵

Read even modestly closely this passage omits most of the central teaching of classical theology. Jesus is the Son of God because he has the right "God consciousness," that is, the right knowledge or awareness of God. There is no mention of Christ being "consubstantial" with the Father, that is, having the same divine substance with the Father, as declared at Nicaea. Nor is there any reference to Jesus being fully human and fully divine in hypostatic union as proclaimed in the formula of the Council of Chalcedon in 451.²⁶

Since traditional philosophical and theological beliefs are not essential to Christianity, what then is its core? "In the combination of these ideas – God

Golden Rule (London: Oxford University Press, 1966).

²⁴Adolf Harnack, *What Is Christianity?*, trans Thomas Saunders (New York: Harper, 1957). Also see Harnack's magisterial seven volume *History of Dogma*, trans. Neil Buchanan, Amazon ebook; For a study of Harnack, see *Adolf Harnack: Liberal Theology at Its Height*, ed. Martin Rumschiedt (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991); also see the magisterial overview of the period in Garry Dorrien, *Kantian Reason and Hegelian Spirit: The Idealistic Logic of Modern Theology* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013).

²⁵Harnack, *What Is Christianity?*, 128.

²⁶Aloys Grillmeier, SJ, *Christ in the Christian Tradition: From the Apostolic Age to the Council of Chalcedon*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 1975).

the father, providence, the position of men as God's children, the infinite value of the human soul – the gospel is expressed." Of course, our being "children of God" must be only in the "God consciousness" sense in which Jesus saw himself as the "son of God."²⁷

In Harnack's view Jesus is the supreme moral teacher or exemplar of "higher righteousness." On this connection between religion and morality he writes, "religion may be called the soul of morality and morality the body of religion." What then is this "higher" morality? This "righteousness" can fundamentally be reduced to one word, "love." "What he freed from its connection with self-seeking and ritual elements and recognized as the moral principle he reduces to one root and to one motive. He knows of no other, and love itself whether it takes the form of love of one's neighbor, or the enemy, or love of the Samaritan, is one kind only." We might note that these are all love of other human beings. What he omits in this list is the love that Christ puts first, love of God.²⁸

The substantive deficiencies of the tradition of Ritschl, Hermann, and Harnack are serious. At least Ritschl and Harnack, though, believed that the synoptic gospels gave an accurate account of the message of Jesus from which we could recover a Christian "theology" that could be fully accepted by modern men and women. Most of these "moralists," Harnack, especially, dismissed the Gospel of John as having anything to do with the historical Jesus, because the metaphysical pre-existent "logos" of John I:1-18 required a theology of the divine, the Trinity, and the incarnation that could not really be accepted in modernity. The synoptic gospels, however, did present a more human Jesus from which a moral core of truth could be extracted.²⁹

GESCHICHTE UND HEILSGESCHICHTE

Harnack's expertise was church history and the history of dogma, not systematic or philosophical theology. One of his students became the most important Protestant theologian of the twentieth century: Karl Barth. Every theologian of the last century, Catholic or Protestant, had to take account of him. For Catholics this was especially true of thinkers like Rahner and von

²⁷Harnack, *What Is Christianity?*, 68.

²⁸Harnack, *What Is Christianity?*, 72.

²⁹Harnack, *What Is Christianity?*, 19.

Balthasar who shared with Barth the rejection of classical metaphysics as helpful for theology.³⁰

Born in Basel, Switzerland, Barth was the son of Basel theologian Fritz Barth. His original training was under Hermann and especially Harnack, who was his mentor. He was also deeply influenced by the other Basel theologian Franz Overbeck, who was a deep metaphysical skeptic.³¹

Barth's importance is not that he carried on the liberal moralism of his teacher Harnack. Rather, he came to be its fiercest critic, while still being rooted in the Protestant critique of reason and the Enlightenment rejection of classical metaphysics.

Barth's light bulb moment came in the midst of World War I. In 1914, his teacher, Harnack, and many other prominent German intellectuals, signed a *Manifesto of the Ninety Three German Intellectuals to the Civilized World*, which explicitly supported German war aims.³²

For Barth, this put Christian theologians in support of an earthly war for earthly goals. In a deep way this was putting Christianity on the side of Augustine's city of man, not the city of God. Unlike Catholicism, however, where a serious just war theory, might offer support for war to save and protect helpless innocents, Protestants must look to scripture for support. Thus, unless they were pacifists, they had few resources aside from cultural and national pride to judge that one side of the war was just or unjust.

In 1919 Barth's critique was published as *The Epistle to the Romans*. This work is not a technical commentary like the volumes of the *Anchor Bible*. Rather it uses the text of St. Paul's Letter to the Romans as a starting point for making a serious theological statement. In this, his work is much like Calvin's commentaries. Like Barth's work, Calvin's commentaries are not technical, scholarly works. They are vehicles for Calvin to develop his own theology and connect it, however tenuously, to the biblical text.³³

³⁰B. M. G. Reardon, *Liberal Protestantism* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1968); B. M. G. Reardon, *Religious Thought in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

³¹John Webster, ed. *Cambridge Companion to Barth* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Kenneth Oakes, *Reading Karl Barth* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011); G. W. Bromily, *Introduction to the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmanns, 1979); Thomas Torrance, *Karl Barth: Biblical and Evangelical Theologian* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1990). For placing Barth and Bultmann in their context, see John Macquarrie, *Twentieth-Century Religious Thought* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2002).

³²Martin Henry, *Franz Overbeck: Theologian?* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1995).

³³*Manifesto of the Ninety Three* (At [Wikipedia.Org/wiki/Manifesto_of_The_Ninety_Three](https://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manifesto_of_The_Ninety_Three)).

Barth used an analysis of Romans to develop his own powerful critique of theological liberalism. His main point was that the God who is revealed on the cross pronounces a judgment against any attempt to connect God with any human politics, achievements, philosophies, or possessions. The manifesto of the ninety-three intellectuals is a prime example of such a move. Also a prime example is the work of one of Barth's teachers, Wilhelm Hermann. As we have just seen, Hermann tried to justify the superiority of Christianity by showing that Christian ethics, supposedly summed up in the golden rule, mirrored the antecedently known greatest human moral system: Kant's "categorical imperative."

What has been called the "culture-Protestantism" of the late nineteenth century, for example, Ritschl, Harnack, Hermann, Troeltsch, and others, was fundamentally flawed because they confused the human with the divine, time with eternity. Essentially they baptized the culture of the era.³⁴

In this theology, "the Son of God" was "demoted" and the human elevated beyond what Christians should ever believe. For Barth, the cross pronounces a definitive rejection of any attempt to mix the human and the divine. As Barth writes in the crucial preface to the much revised 1922 edition of *The Epistle to the Romans*: "If I have a system it is limited to a recognition of what Kierkegaard called 'the infinite qualitative distinction' between time and eternity and to my regarding this as possessing negative as well as positive significance. God is in heaven and thou art on earth."³⁵

Barth's critique of fin-de-siecle Protestant liberalism was devastating. The liberals may have sounded Christian but at their core they tamed Christianity of its theological and critical power to make it fit for the fashions of the age.

If the theological liberalism of the tradition in which Barth was trained is deeply flawed, then what is to replace it? How can Protestant theology be reconstructed such that it remains fully Christian and also avoids fundamentalist literalism. Here the Barth of *The Epistle to the Romans* only hints at a move that will become central in twentieth-century Protestant theology.

To see this move in a powerful instance let us consider one of the most central claims of Christianity. I quote from the creed: "He died and was buried and rose again on the third day in accordance with the scriptures."

³⁴Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Edwin Hoskyns (London: Oxford University Press, 1933).

³⁵George Rupp, *Culture Protestantism* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1987).

The crucifixion itself poses no difficulty for modern persons. Crucifixion was the Roman way of dealing with troublemakers. Six hundred, for example, were crucified after the Spartacus rebellion was crushed.

The idea of the resurrection is much more problematic for modernity. At Romans 6:4 we read: "We too were buried with Christ through baptism into death. So that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of faith."

In reflecting on this passage Barth writes: "The future of the resurrection . . . is a parable of our own eternity. But is it only a parable? We have already seen that the raising of Jesus from the dead is not an event in history elongated so as to still remain an event in the midst of other events. The resurrection is the non-historical relating of the whole historical life of Jesus to its origin in God. It follows, therefore, that the pressure of the power of the resurrection, which of necessity involves a real walking in newness of life cannot be an event among other events in my present, past, or future."³⁶ Carefully analyzed, what Barth is pointing to is that the resurrection should not be understood as a normal historical event such as the death of Socrates, the assassination of Julius Caesar, or the destruction of the second Jewish Temple in 70 AD. It is something different than a normal event like these. Barth is suggesting that the theological understanding of the significance of the resurrection event is crucial to any proper understanding of it. For a theologian this is certainly true. But isn't the event also just like a regular event, for example, the assassination of Abraham Lincoln?

What Barth is suggesting here is a supposed distinction that has become central in much of modern theology, especially, but not only, Protestant theology. This is a distinction between what the Germans call *Geschichte* and *heilsgeschichte*. Between what in English is called "history" and "salvation history." History is what historians study. For example, is the empirical evidence strong enough to confidently assert that Julius Caesar was assassinated on March 15, 44 BC?

Salvation history is the province of the church. It is history as proclaimed in the Christian kerygma. If, for example, the resurrection is *heilsgeschichte*, history as kerygma, then the question of it being an actual historical event like the fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Empire in 1465, it is rendered largely irrelevant. History becomes theology. Mind-independent fact, largely becomes mind and Holy Spirit dependent theology.

³⁶Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 10.

This reading of Barth's analysis of the resurrection in *The Epistle to the Romans* is richly confirmed in his 1924 lectures on First Corinthians 15, which were published in 1933. A fine English translation is available. The first part of this work is an overview of First Corinthians as a whole. The second part is an overview of chapter 15. The crucial part for our purposes is the third and last section. This is Barth's analysis of chapter 15.³⁷

In this text, Barth's theology is explicit, though very carefully stated. Early in this section he quotes 15:3-7, where Paul provides a list of witnesses, omitting as was customary at that time, women: Peter, the twelve, five hundred people, James, and Paul himself. The reader seems to be provided here a list of witnesses to this core belief of the Christian faith, "He rose again on the third day."

Barth, however, denies this normal reading of the passage, "as regards this it must be emphasized that neither for Paul, nor for the tradition to which we see him appealing here, was it a question of giving a so-called resurrection narrative, a narrative of the historical fact of the resurrection of Jesus or even historical proof of the resurrection." In another place he writes that verses 5-7 "have nothing whatsoever to do with supplying a proof" of the resurrection. The seemingly most common way of reading these verses is to read them as providing a refutation for those who claim that Christ has not been resurrected. This obvious reading is supported by the way that Paul immediately argues that if Christ has not been resurrected from the dead then there is no resurrection and our faith is in vain. But Christ has been resurrected. So our resurrection is assured.³⁸

Barth, however, reverses the flow of the passage. "The whole meaning of verses 12-28 is indeed this, that the historical fact of the resurrection of Jesus stands or falls with the resurrection of the dead generally. What kind of historical fact is that reality of which, or at any rate the perception of which, is bound up in the most express manner with the perception of a general truth which, by its nature cannot emerge on the confines of all history, on the confines of death."³⁹ If there is no "general truth" about the resurrection of human beings, then Christ's resurrection cannot have happened. Ignoring the reality that Christ is fully human and fully God, Barth's move, again, reduces the divine to the human, the eternal to the temporal.

³⁷Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 195.

³⁸Karl Barth, *The Resurrection of the Dead*, trans. H. J. Stenning (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2003), originally published by Flemming Revell in 1933.

³⁹Barth, *The Resurrection of the Dead*, 131.

By making the truth of Christ's resurrection dependent on a general claim about a universal resurrection of all persons, Barth has covertly reduced the status of Christ to that of a human person. He has also severely reduced the value of the witnesses of verses 3-7. If the truth seemingly attested to by the witnesses stands or falls on the existence of a general resurrection, then the preaching of Christ's resurrection can never be the preaching of a historical fact. Since we have no hard evidence of a general resurrection, and, by the nature of the case, can have none until time ends, the profession of Christ's resurrection must only be kerygma, a profession of *heilsgeschichte*.⁴⁰

AUTHENTICITY

A contemporary of Barth who shared his worldview but stated it in a much bolder fashion was the German Lutheran scholar, Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1974). Bultmann was one of the most influential New Testament scholars of the twentieth century. Even scholars who disagreed with his conclusions, could not ignore them. From his conclusions about the New Testament flowed a radical theological statement that challenged every part of traditional theology.⁴¹

Unlike Harnack who only rejected the Gospel of John as having anything to do with the historical Jesus, Bultmann dismissed all four gospels. The gospels told later readers, he argued, what the early church proclaimed about Jesus, not what actually happened. The gospels were kerygma, not fact.⁴²

One example of what Bultmann means by this sort of kerygma is from Luke 3:18-19. Here Jesus reads in the synagogue from Isaiah 61: "The spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and to announce the year of the Lord's favor."

⁴⁰Barth, *The Resurrection of the Dead*, 133

⁴¹On Bultmann, see Konrad Hammann, *Rudolf Bultmann: A Biography*, trans. Devenish Philip (London: Polebridge, 2013); David Congdon, *Rudolf Bultmann: A Companion to His Theology*. (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2016); John Macquarrie, *The Scope of Demythologizing: Bultmann and His Critics* (New York: Harper, 1966); John Macquarrie, *An Existentialist Theology: A Comparison of Heidegger and Bultmann* (New York: Harper, 1965).

⁴²Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press); Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. Kendrick Grobel (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2nd ed., 2007).

In Bultmann's view, Jesus here adapts the passage from Isaiah and applies it to himself without any actual historical evidence to support this connection. This, for him, is precisely what theologians today must do. Theologians today must preach a renewed and modernized message that persons today can accept. They must not engage in a futile search for what the historical Jesus actually taught, not even the limited teaching that Harnack and his allies allowed.

Kerygma becomes the core of Christianity because that is what the gospels are. They are not a history. They are a proclamation of what the early church believed about Jesus. The early church turned Jesus of Nazareth into Christ, the second person of the Trinity. The Christian proclamation must, therefore, be constantly renewed as the situations in which the Christian faith must be preached are constantly changing. In this task theologians are only following what the early church did.

If this is what theologians must always do then what is an adequate statement of Christian theology today? Bultmann's well-known 1941 essay, "New Testament and Mythology," is his most powerful statement of both the need for a modern proclamation and what the core of any adequate statement must be in the modern world.⁴³

At the outset, Bultmann argues that the cosmology of the New Testament must now be wholly rejected. "The cosmology of the New Testament is essentially mythical in character. The world is viewed as a three storied structure, with earth in the center, the heaven above, and the underworld beneath." The earth is a battlefield between God and Satan. Unlike Manichaeism though, God is certain to win. For the New Testament, according to Bultmann, "the end will come very soon and will take the form of a cosmic catastrophe . . . then the judge will come from heaven, the dead will rise, the last judgment will take place, and men will enter into eternal salvation or damnation."^{44, 45, 46}

Part of what Bultmann claims are also mythological beliefs are: (1) Christ's position as the eternal second person of the Trinity, (2) his incarnation, (3) atoning sacrifice on the cross, and (4) the resurrection. These all must be

⁴³This essay is available in Rudolf Bultmann, *New Testament and Mythology and Other Writings*, trans. Schubert Ogden (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1984).

⁴⁴Bultmann, *New Testament and Mythology and Other Writings*, 2.

⁴⁵Bultmann, *New Testament and Mythology and Other Writings*, 3.

⁴⁶Bultmann, *New Testament and Mythology and Other Writings*, 39.

demythologized, that is, reinterpreted such that they do not conflict with modernity, especially modern science. "For all of our thinking today is shaped irrevocably by modern science."

About the core belief of historic Christianity, without which St. Paul says our faith is in vain, Bultmann is blunt: "A historical fact which involves a resurrection from the dead is utterly inconceivable." The resurrection is not an event of history. It is a "mythical event" whose "objective historicity" cannot be established no matter how many witnesses are cited. There can never be any such evidence because the event to which such evidence is supposed to lend credence is literally "impossible." At this point, Bultmann simply does not consider the difference highlighted by St. Paul in First Corinthians 15:44: "It is sown a natural body. It is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body." Whatever might be the difference stated by St. Paul between the resurrection "body" and our normal physical bodies, any idea of personal resurrection is dismissed by Bultmann.

An excellent example of what Bultmann's program of demythologizing amounts to is his reinterpretation of St. Paul's discussion of the Holy Spirit. Paul "regards the spirit as a mysterious entity dwelling in man and guaranteeing his resurrection." Here, Bultmann give a succinct, reasonable statement of Paul's teaching in Romans 11:8: "the one who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also, through his spirit that dwells in you."

This idea of an "immaterial spirit" is impossible to accept in Bultmann's post-Enlightenment world. Hence, it must be reinterpreted to make sense for "modern man." For Bultmann, Paul "clearly means by spirit" the possibility of a new life that is opened up by faith. "The spirit does not work like a supernatural force. Nor is it the permanent passion of the believer. It is the possibility of a new life that must appropriated by a deliberate response." The transcendental heart of the Christian teaching has been watered down to a statement of psychology.⁴⁷

If the Christian kerygma cannot be what it has been for two millenia, what, in his view, must it now become? Though Bultmann claimed that his views could not be seen as merely those of his Marburg colleague Martin Heidegger, this claim seriously understates the relationship between them. Bultmann took over fundamental categories from Heidegger. In so doing he seriously misinterprets Heidegger for his own purposes

⁴⁷Bultmann, *New Testament and Mythology and Other Writings*, 22.

On Bultmann's view Christ cannot be what he has been understood to be in Christianity, for example, the second person of the Trinity and the incarnate logos of the first chapter of the Gospel of John. What then remains when this "mythical" understanding is stripped away?

Above all, Heidegger's existentialist analysis of the ontological structure of being would seem to be no more than a secularized philosophical version of the New Testament view of human life. For him, the chief characteristic of man's Being in history is anxiety. Man exists in a permanent tension between the past and the future. At every moment he is confronted with an alternative. Either he must immerse himself in the concrete world of nature, and thus inevitably lose his individuality, or he must abandon all security and commit himself unreservedly to the future, and thus alone achieve his authentic Being. Is that not exactly the New Testament understanding of human life?... one should be startled that philosophy is saying the same thing as the New Testament and saying it quite independently.⁴⁸

What this passage demonstrates is deep reliance on categories derived from Heidegger. Though he adds a "moral" preference for "authenticity" that is missing in Heidegger, the categories of authentic and inauthentic are from Heidegger. Thus, Jesus, on this account becomes the pure example of the "authentic person" who lives not for the present, but for the always coming future. In a trenchant line he writes: "The very fact that it is possible to produce a secularized version of the New Testament conception of faith proves that there is nothing mysterious or supernatural about the Christian life."⁴⁹

In both Barth and Bultmann the fundamental claim is that Christian theology must be reconstructed such that "modern man," that is, the post-enlightenment world of "science," can accept Christianity. Thus, the distinction between ordinary history and "salvation history" is crucial to this task.

Separating the kerygma from the actual in a certain sense re-mythologizes the Christian faith. It is not the ancient mythology about which Bultmann is so passionate. But it is not the reality of actual flesh and blood history. To use

⁴⁸Bultmann, *New Testament and Mythology and Other Writings*, 24-25.

⁴⁹Bultmann, *New Testament and Mythology and Other Writings*, 26-27.

a phrase widely employed in modern theology, the Jesus of history becomes the Christ of myth. Never the twain shall meet.

BERNARD LONERGAN

Bernard Lonergan does not seriously analyze modern Protestant theology in any of his works. His references to any of the thinkers I have discussed or their associates are few. All of the scattered references are generally negative in tone. Some may be generously thought of as neutral. None are positive.

This follows from the fact that Lonergan does not accept the Enlightenment premises of much of modern thought. Lonergan starts at a different place than Aristotle or Aquinas, and he proceeds in a way that modernity does not acknowledge. His masterpiece, *Insight*, develops a natural theology out of the process of knowing when a knowing subject comes to know.⁵⁰

He starts with examples of a knowing subject coming to grasp a bit of knowledge in a moment of "insight," for example, Archimedes running naked through the streets of Syracuse shouting "eureka" after his insight about the principle of displacement discovered in the baths. Other examples follow from mathematics such as when a student has a fundamental insight about how differential calculus works.

Thus, Lonergan starts where modernity starts, with the subject, the knowing subject who has an insight, like Archimedes or Newton's falling apple. Lonergan does not start with objective truth coming to the person who then becomes a knower, a sort of receptacle of truth. Rather, like Aquinas, the knower plays an active role in knowing. The knower's insight is an appropriation of truth in the process of coming to know. Before the moment of insight the subject experiences the object, understands the object, and judges the object. Thus, the act of knowing is an insight of the knower into the reality that comes to be known.

By starting with an insight that all admit is a grasp of truth that no one doubts and then examples of mathematics that are undoubtedly truth, but immaterial truth, Lonergan starts at a place that even the Enlightenment cannot doubt. Grant this, and something further follows. First, truth is not

⁵⁰Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, vol. 3 of the Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan, ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992).

in the subject, truth comes to the subject. Second, truth exists in an ambit of truth. The principle of displacement does not exist in isolation. It is necessarily connected to, for example, gravity. One math equation rests on a network of other mathematical truths. Truth is all around us.

From understanding the process of the subject coming to know, the object, truth, has opened up to us. Is there any reason, except prejudice, to believe that this same process cannot "reveal" truth in other realms such as theology? Lonergan thinks not. For example, in the process of thinking through and writing his magisterial work, Kant sought to know the truth of the world around us, especially the cognitive world of our knowing. This cognitive world is not just Kant's. If he is right, this cognitive world is the world of every knower. Starting from the subjectivity of the knower, Kant seeks a truth that is not just his alone, a truth that is independent of him and every other knower. If this truth is a substantive truth, which he believes it is, it is not an empirically verifiable truth. In a sense, Kant's process is much like what Lonergan argues it must be. Yet the process undermines Kant's skeptical claims about a knowledge of external reality.

Thus, we recognize the foundation of a deep critique of both Barth and Bultmann and, by extension, modern Protestant theology as a whole. In his most direct criticism, in *Method in Theology*, he writes: "The resultant historicism penetrated into biblical studies and there the resounding reactions were the work of Barth and Bultmann. Both acknowledged the importance of moral and religious conversion. In Barth this appeared in his contention that, while the bible is to be read historically, it was also to be read religiously In Bultmann, on the other hand, religious and moral conversion is the existential response to the appeal or challenge of the kerygma. But such a response is a subjective event and its objectification results in myth."⁵¹

Later, in the same discussion, Lonergan says that Barth is a fideist, and Bultmann a secularist in his biblical study. These descriptions are accurate. Barth did hold that faith was different than knowledge. Faith was grounded in the revelation of God in Christ. Though the historical veracity of the texts which reveal Christ to us are open to serious doubt. Bultmann started with a secularist, materialist worldview and antecedently held that if the New Testament states as fact an event that contradicts this construct, the text, at that point, cannot be relating an actual event.

⁵¹Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 318.

Lonergan disagrees with any such limitation. To limit knowledge in this way is to call into question the very idea of knowing. Unless we are omniscient like God we cannot know what the limits of the knowable are. To place such limits is an act of faith every bit as much as much as any Christian ever had.

LONERGAN AND DEVELOPMENT: A SOURCE FOR PROTESTANTS?

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RECENT YEARS HAVE seen a resurgence of interest in the connection between Reformed Protestantism and its historical heritage. Historically, the work of Richard A. Muller and others has established a formidable body of scholarship which traces the development of Reformed theology in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries against the background of the theological and exegetical work of the patristic fathers and of the medieval scholastics.¹ Theologically, the late John Webster reignited interest in establishing the historical catholicity of Reformed theology, a project which has been taken up and developed by Reformed theologians, Michael Allen and Scott Swain.² The result of both of these streams has been a renaissance in understanding how the specific traditions of Reformed theology connect to the wider patterns of Catholic theology. It is now clear that much of the theology of the magisterial Reformation was rooted in the reception of Augustine, Aquinas³ and others, and that both Roman Catholicism and Protestantism share a significant number of theological commitments and traditional sources for theological construction.

Against this background of renewed historical sensitivity in Reformed theology, the famous statement of John Henry Newman in his *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* poses a challenge: "To be deep in history is to cease to be Protestant." The question of history, specifically doctrinal history, is a knotty one for both Catholics and Protestants but at least, as

¹See Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003).

²Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain, *Reformed Catholicity: The Promise of Retrieval for Theology and Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015).

Newman's statement (written while still a Protestant), Catholics can point to the magisterium of the church as providing an historical entity which guides doctrinal development. Protestantism, through its assertion of a number of aspects of its understanding of scripture – sufficiency, self-attestation, perspicuity – would appear to make itself vulnerable either to an ahistorical understanding of doctrine which is manifestly incorrect or to the problem of criteria for judging legitimate developments over against illegitimate ones.

The question of doctrinal development for Protestants is not, as for Catholics, a primarily ecclesiological one because Protestantism denies the magisterial authority of the institutional church. Instead, the church has a ministerial authority subject to the Word. Therein lies a host of theological assumptions and therein also lies the complexity of the issue of authoritative doctrinal development in Protestantism.

Central to Protestant thought, of course, are the concepts of the sufficiency and clarity (or perspicuity) of scripture. Taken together, these mean that the Bible is the ultimate norming norm of all theological statements; and that the Bible speaks clearly on fundamental Christian doctrines such that a magisterial teaching authority, such as that claimed by Rome, is unnecessary. The theoretical detachment of doctrine from institution might also be seen as a detachment of doctrine from history and therefore as precluding any notion of doctrinal development. Yet no reflective Protestant would claim that such is the case: everyone knows, for example, that the word "Trinity" is not scriptural but the result of subsequent church reflection on the teaching of the Bible. This is a simple – obvious! – point but does raise the question of how we might articulate that process by which such terms are developed and deployed. Scriptural clarity and sufficiency would not in themselves seem to offer an obvious answer.

SCRIPTURAL PERSPICUITY IN REFORMATION PROTESTANTISM

While the Reformation was from the outset a protest against established forms of authority, it was not until the Leipzig Disputation (1519) that Luther became fully conscious of this. Church opposition to his protest against indulgences and the sacramental implications of his emerging theology of salvation represented implicit critiques of the church's authority, but it was only when he asserted that the Council of Constance had erred in its condemnation of Huss that the full implications of what he was doing

became clear to him. If the pope can err and councils can err, what is left? The answer is scripture.

It is one thing to assert the authority of scripture, another thing to parse exactly what this means. For Luther, the authority for interpretation is no longer the pope or the college of cardinals but the church as a whole as the place where the Holy Spirit dwells. This is a point he makes in his 1520 treatise, *An Appeal to the German Nobility*. In so doing, he wants to avoid the authoritarian claims of the Catholic hierarchy. Yet he also wishes to avoid the radical subjectivism of the Anabaptists and those who claim to be led directly by the Spirit without reference to the Word. This problem became particularly pressing in Wittenberg in late 1521 and early 1522 when Luther was in hiding in the Wartburg Castle and his colleagues, Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt and Konrad Zwingli, were leading the Reformation in a more iconoclastic direction with the help of the Zwickau Prophets, three men who claimed direct leading from the Spirit.

In 1522, Luther returns from the Wartburg and Karlstadt and his allies are routed. From then on, Luther's thinking on scripture is driven both by concerns about Roman claims and by fear of Anabaptist spiritualist excess which tended to set the direct leading of the Holy Spirit over against scripture as the source for authority. This reached its finest exposition in his 1525 response to Erasmus, *On the Bondage of the Will*. Famous for its vigorous assertion of an anti-Pelagian understanding of the human will, it is simultaneously an articulation of the doctrine of the perspicuity of scripture. In the face of Erasmus's assertion of the fundamental uncertainty of the Bible on the issue of the will's bondage, and thus of the basic obscurity of scripture, Luther asserts that scripture was clear on the issue to any who cared to look.

Luther argues that perspicuity is to be understood in two ways. First, there is internal perspicuity which refers to the relationship of faith between the individual and the content of scripture. It is one thing to know that Christ rose from the dead; it is quite another to know that he rose from the dead for me and to trust him therefore for my salvation. This real, existential understanding of scripture is based upon the action of the Spirit in opening the understanding. In this sense, the meaning of scripture is not clear to the eyes of unbelief.

Luther also asserts that scripture has an external perspicuity. This refers to the fact that the words of scripture can be understood in a basic way

by all. I may not have faith but I can understand from hearing the Bible read and preached that, for example, the gospel writers make the claim that Christ rose from the dead. I may choose to see that claim as false or I may fail to see it as having any existential significance for me as an individual but I can nonetheless understand what is being said.³

Of course, even as Luther writes against Erasmus, the Eucharistic controversy with Huldrych Zwingli is beginning, with its focus on disagreement over what the words “This is my body” mean. Further, Luther is aware that some doctrines are more clearly taught than others, and so he qualifies perspicuity by pointing to such and conceding that less important ones might be more obscure. Thus, from its very inception the doctrine of scriptural perspicuity was both a necessary Protestant doctrine, in that it was foundational to the critique of both Roman Catholicism and Radicalism, but also contentious in that the actual results of the doctrine seemed to belie its claims.

Given this latter point, it is not surprising that the doctrine underwent considerable elaboration and refinement in the later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as Protestantism both consolidated its theology and responded to Roman Catholic polemics. One area was the development of the idea of “fundamental articles” – those points of doctrine considered so vital to the faith that Protestants needed to maintain their utter transparency in scripture. The idea is clearly already there in Martin Luther, but it becomes a formal locus of doctrine in later Protestant systems. While the number of fundamental articles varied – and differed between Reformed and Lutherans, given the need of the latter to maintain a distinctive view of the communication of properties – they typically covered trinitarianism, Christology, and salvation by grace through faith. This development was a clear acknowledgment that the doctrine of perspicuity on its own was not enough to safeguard orthodoxy but needed to be set within a wider structure.

The elaboration of this wider structure is usefully summarized in the *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae*, a collection of theological disputations from Leiden University in the early seventeenth century. Disputation 5 is entitled “About the Perspicuity and the Interpretation of Holy Scripture.”⁴

The Disputation starts by locating the doctrine as a corollary of the doctrine of God. Because God is light, therefore the scriptures that proceed

³WA 18, 653.

⁴A modern critical edition of the Latin text, with parallel English translation, is Dolf TeVelde (ed.), *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae Disputations 1-23* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 128-49.

from him must be the most pure truth and light.⁵ Thus, scripture is objectively clear because of its relationship to God, but this does not mean that it is subjectively clear to individual Christians.⁶ The argument is reminiscent of the medieval idea that God is the most knowable of beings because he possesses the most being, and yet this does not mean that individual humans find him to be the most knowable in their personal experience. Thus, the question of scripture's clarity is the question of how human beings relate to scripture and its interpretation.

The *Synopsis* makes the same distinction that we found in Luther, between the "natural man" who can interpret and understand much of scripture based upon a simple grasp of the technicalities of language, and the "spiritual man" who is able to discern scripture's meaning and apply it personally because of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.⁷ Here, the *Synopsis* notes that it disagrees with the Roman Catholic Church by asserting that scripture is so worded, and the Spirit works in such a manner, that individual Christians are able to discern its basic meaning on matters essential to the faith for themselves.⁸

Yet the *Synopsis* is also acutely aware of the restrictions that must be placed on the doctrine of perspicuity. It acknowledges that even scripture itself points to the fact it contains passages of obscurity (2 Peter 3:15-16).⁹ It asserts a necessary connection between private interpretation and public proclamation of the Word. The two things must be held together, as public proclamation sharpens private interpretation.¹⁰

This point is no doubt implicit in Luther's own position. Given that he was writing at a time when most Christians would have been illiterate, the primary access to the Word would have been through the reading of the Bible in public and understanding would then have been guided by its public proclamation. Yet this immediately qualifies scriptural perspicuity in fundamental ways. It connects the doctrine to the church, it connects the doctrine to educational practice, and it thereby connects the doctrine to history. For only ordained men can preach the Word, only the church

⁵*Synopsis*, 128.

⁶*Synopsis*, 130.

⁷*Synopsis*, 130.

⁸*Synopsis*, 132.

⁹*Synopsis*, 132.

¹⁰*Synopsis*, 136-38.

ordains men for the task, and such men need first to be trained. Perspicuity is not as practically simple as it might first appear.¹¹

The training of Protestant pastors, and the general method by which they exegeted scripture, also points to the fact that scriptural perspicuity cannot stand in isolation as an axiom from which the formulation of theology follows in a simple and direct fashion. Pastors were routinely trained in the biblical languages; commentaries and sermons show extensive use of the commentary tradition; and even the proof texts used in confessional documents were not intended as isolated and self-evident demonstrations of the doctrinal point being made but functioned rather as markers directing the reader to the exegetical tradition on the passage cited. Thus these did not separate scripture from tradition but rather served to highlight the connection between the two.¹²

What this does, of course, is point to the fact that Protestant notions of the scripture principle in theory cannot in practice be conveniently disconnected from traditions of exegesis and dogmatic formulation. The Reformers were aware that they were not doing theology in a vacuum and, indeed, did not want to be original in their doctrinal proposals. The battle of the Reformation was a battle between rival claimants to the *true* tradition and thus a battle about the authorities by which the true tradition could be established.

This point about tradition does need to be qualified in one sense. The idea of historical development does not appear to be one upon which the Reformers – or their opponents, for that matter -- dwelt at any length. In fact, the polemics of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were typically played out as simple recapitulations of earlier clashes and therefore as comprehensible within standard polemical categories: Anti-Pelagians versus Pelagians, Nicenes versus Arians and so forth. The dynamics of doctrinal development were not a topic of reflection.

In short, we might perhaps say that the reformers certainly did develop doctrine but that they were not really aware that this was what they were doing, and they offered no account as to how such developments might take place. They had no concept of that in mind as they did so and definitely did not want to commit the heinous sin (at least in the sixteenth century)

¹¹Scriptural perspicuity, so important to Protestantism, is not a doctrine which has received significant elaboration and defense in recent years. One exception is Mark D. Thompson, *A Clear and Present Word: The Clarity of Scripture* (Carol Stream, ILL: IVP Academic, 2006).

¹²See Richard A. Muller and Rowland S. Ward, *Scripture and Worship: Biblical Interpretation and the Directory for Worship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007), 70, 72.

of doctrinal originality. So they dialogued with the past and they desired to read scripture in a manner informed by careful sifting of the exegetical and doctrinal work of previous eras as well as their own. But this was not in a manner which revealed a self-conscious understanding of the dynamics and logic of doctrinal development. Rather, as the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) states the matter in Chapter 1.6:

The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men.

In short, doctrinal formulation is the result of express statements of scripture or legitimate inferences that can be drawn from such statements. The idea that any particular doctrinal formulation or complex of doctrines might carry with it its own logic and thus shape future theological discussion in terms of its specific history was not one upon which the Reformers expended any intellectual energy. Yet this "good and necessary consequence" principle simply cannot give an adequate account of why Christian doctrine takes the specific shape of Christian which it does.

NEWMAN AND THE CHALLENGE OF DEVELOPMENT

Much had changed for Christianity by the nineteenth century. The internal challenge came from Christian liberalism which sought to reconstruct the Christian faith on the basis of religious psychology rather than dogma. Thus, religious self-consciousness became the central point of interest. Externally, various forces were bringing to the fore an increasing historical consciousness and thus an incipient potential relativism and historicism concerning dogmatic formulations. Hegel's philosophy placed the historical process right at the center of metaphysics and even before Darwin, the work of men such as Lamarck had helped establish the notion of some form of evolution as a plausible account of biological development over time. The question, then, of the transcendent authority or stability of any given moment or epoch of history was coming to the fore in a manner unknown at the time of the Reformation.

It is in this context that the famous book by John Henry Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, becomes emblematic of the theological age. Newman famously wrote the book as an Anglican but published it as a Roman Catholic. As such, it represents his own account of the inadequacy of Protestant notions of authority to account for doctrinal developments – specifically, to account for how one can discern a legitimate doctrinal development from an illegitimate one.

Even as a Protestant, Newman had an intense dislike of the Reformation and inclined toward the study of patristic writers, especially those of the fourth century. Thus, as he wrote his essay, he was neither well disposed toward seeing the Reformation as a legitimate example of such, nor was he particularly sympathetic toward the Protestant approach to theology as a whole. Against this background, he presented his theory of development.

Central to any account of development is the question of legitimacy: How can one discern a legitimate development over against an illegitimate one? Or, to put it another way, how does one avoid the situation where a theory of development becomes merely a means of legitimating those present positions of which one approves as opposed to those of which one does not approve?

To guard against this temptation of subjectivity, Newman in his *Essay* offers seven criteria for discerning a legitimate development: preservation of its type; continuity of its principles; power of assimilation; logical sequence; anticipation of its future; conservative action upon its past; and chronic vigor.¹³ Each of these stands in relation to the others, and together they offer a developmental model which requires robust consistency, both with prior formulations, other doctrinal loci, and future conclusions. Thus one might see the Nicene doctrine of the Trinity as consistent with earlier claims regarding the unity of God, the simplicity of God, and the truth of Christ's divinity, as well as pointing forward to the coherence of the Chalcedonian Definition which safeguards the incarnation in the light of Nicaea. That the creed has stood the test of time so vigorously is the final element which indicates its authority.

Yet a few comments are in order. First, throughout the discussion Newman's imagination is clearly gripped by images and analogies drawn from nature, of plants growing from seeds, of caterpillars turning into

¹³John Henry Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 169-206.

butterflies, and so on. Like so many analogies, we might note that these are therefore both helpful and unhelpful in equal measure. Helpful, in that they highlight the changing nature of dogmatic formulation over times; unhelpful in that they too easily serve as a posteriori justifications for whatever development Newman wishes to argue is legitimate, however strong the appearance to the contrary might be. Doctrine develops with a forward impulse; analysis of that process is retrospective and likely shaped the doctrinal or ecclesiastical convictions of the one doing the analysis.

This goes to the second comment, a point raised by Scottish theologian William Cunningham in an early review of the *Essay*. Cunningham notes that when it comes to doctrinal development, there is a need to make a distinction between what he calls subjective and objective developments. The former is the unfolding and elaboration by the church of that which has already been revealed. Thus, the Westminster Confession, with its assertion of the sufficiency of scripture and of true doctrine as that which is clearly stated therein or drawn therefrom by good and necessary consequence, is entirely consistent with the notion of objective development.

The latter, however – subjective development – involves the continuing addition of further revelation and not simply the elaboration of that which is already there in scripture. Now, Newman's analogy of the development of doctrine to that of a seed growing into a tree certainly implies that he is building his model of development in terms of the subjective. But in actual fact his acceptance of much Roman dogma arguably indicates that he is also accepting the reality of the objective. As Cunningham argues, Newman really conflates the two by failing to make that fundamental distinction.¹⁴

This is critical because the distinction really lies at the heart of the difference between Protestantism and Catholicism on the point of development and leads us to rephrase the obvious question about what constitutes legitimate versus an illegitimate development: When is a development an addition, and when is it merely an extrapolation or elaboration of an earlier formula? Nicaea to Chalcedon is one thing. Original sin to Immaculate Conception is quite another.

In his recent study of Vincent of Lerins, Thomas Guarino makes a valiant attempt in the final chapter to demonstrate that Newman's view of development is that of the subjective variety but he ultimately fails to

¹⁴William Cunningham, "Romanist Theory of Development," in *Discussions on Church Principles: Popish, Erastian, and Presbyterian* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1863), 35-77, 56.

convince. From a Protestant perspective, there is simply too much in Roman dogma which stands at too great a distance from the biblical text and even from earlier oral traditions to make the case compelling. The Immaculate Conception may arise out of a context which seeks to develop and defend a high Christology, but the connection it forges between Mary and Christ is neither stated in scripture nor, to use Westminster language, derived therefrom by good and necessary consequence – even if that is understood in the broadest terms of the cumulative logical and semantic force of prior doctrinal formulations. While Newman himself sought to argue otherwise in an unpublished paper in 1868, it is clear that the most he is able to claim is that the Immaculate Conception is merely consistent with Paul's teaching and not a necessary dogmatic consequence of his teaching.¹⁵ Arguably, the dogma also fails a number of Newman's own criteria for legitimate development. The only means of claiming it as legitimate is that it is a dogmatic decision of the institutional church which does not contradict scriptural teaching but operates within a model allowing for the objective development of doctrine. And that again becomes vulnerable to accusations that such a theory of development becomes merely an a posteriori justification for whatever the church decides.

Yet Newman's approach to development still raises that serious question which Protestants must address – that of the nature of change in dogmatic formulation over time. It is clear that scriptural perspicuity and good and necessary consequence do not account for the precise shape of Christian doctrine. For example, the specific language of substance, essence, hypostasis, and subsistence is neither in scripture nor necessarily inferred therefrom, though it may well help to explicate scriptural concepts. And this language brings its own issues – semantic and so forth – into the field of dogma which then need to be addressed.

As noted above, Protestant commitment to scriptural perspicuity and sufficiency has always typically involved attention to the history of exegesis and doctrinal formulation. In Luther perspicuity was specifically tied to the public ministry of the Word and thus rooted in the kind of training which a minister of the Word would receive, one that connected him clearly to the past and to the church's history of doctrinal formulation. The lack of a self-conscious concept of development did not mean that Protestants were

¹⁵The paper is cited, quoted, and discussed by Ian Ker, *Essay*, xxiii-xxv.

not deeply involved in developing doctrinal formulations in terms of the dynamics connected to ongoing discussion of theological formulas. But to understand the dynamics of development would seem to be an appropriate and helpful ambition.

LONERGAN AND DEVELOPMENT

If Newman raises significant challenges for Protestants and perhaps offers more questions than answers, it is arguable that Lonergan offers an account of development which might prove helpful to Protestant discussion of the issues. Two works are important in this regard: *Method in Theology* and *The Way to Nicea*.¹⁶ In *Method in Theology*, he devotes a short but significant section to the idea of doctrinal development, and in *The Way to Nicea*, he offers both a prolegomenon on development and then, by tracing the contours of anti-Nicene discussions, provides an example of an application of his proposal.¹⁷ Given his status as one of the most significant contributors to the discussion of theological method in the latter part of the twentieth century, and as one who builds self-consciously on the legacy of Newman, it is worth as a Protestant reflecting upon his contribution to this issue.

In *The Way to Nicea*, Lonergan points to four basic aspects of development: objective, subjective, evaluative, and hermeneutical.¹⁸ The objective involves the twofold difficulty of moving from biblical text to dogmatic statement. There is both a transition of genres, from say gospel narrative to doctrinal proposition, and the isolation of a single doctrinal strand from a text which may touch on numerous doctrines.¹⁹

The subjective aspect refers to what Lonergan calls "differentiated consciousness," whereby the knowing subject focuses on the issue of the truth of a statement. This consciousness is not instinctive but is developed through a slow and intentional learning process.²⁰

The evaluative aspect involves the differentiated consciousness passing judgment on dogmatic statements, and in such a manner that "the whole

¹⁶Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972); Bernard Lonergan, *The Way to Nicea: The Dialectical Development of Trinitarian Theology*, trans. Conn O'Donovan (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976).

¹⁷*Method in Theology*, 305-20.

¹⁸*The Way to Nicea*, 1.

¹⁹*The Way to Nicea*, 1-2

²⁰*The Way to Nicea*.

tenor and direction of life" is affected. In short, the intellect makes a truth judgment on doctrinal formulations which then makes a practical demand upon the will.²¹

Finally, the hermeneutical aspect is that which sees God's word as true. It is the truth of the word that binds together the orthodox in every age and which provides the transcendent horizon by which the other three aspects can be understood and regulated.²²

In *Method in Theology*, Lonergan approaches the issue from a different, though not incompatible, direction. Here his approach falls into two basic parts. First, he discusses the development of doctrine considered in itself as a historical phenomenon. Second, he discusses the development of doctrine considered in terms of the wider epistemological frameworks for human knowledge as these developed over time.

On the first, the example he uses is the Chalcedonian definition:

On this showing, Chalcedon mentions person and nature because it is aware that people may ask whether divinity and humanity are one and the same and, if not, how is it that the Son our Lord Jesus Christ is one and the same. To forestall this doubt the council speaks of person and nature: the Son our Lord is person; divinity and humanity are two natures.²³

The point is simple: the church deploys language that allows for a clear distinction to be made between Christ's humanity and divinity while also emphasizing his unity in order to be able to express his single personhood and his existence as both fully God and fully human.

Yet there is a further context, a metaphysical one, which allows for the fine-tuning of the language and an understanding of said language which makes it coherent. Referring to the work of Leontius of Byzantium and the refinement of the notion of *hypostasis*, he comments:

About seventy-five years after Chalcedon, Byzantine theologians discovered that if Christ is one person with two natures then one of the natures must be personless. There followed not a little discussion

²¹*The Way to Nicea*, 6-7.

²²*The Way to Nicea*, 9-10.

²³*Method in Theology*, 308.

of *enhypostasia* and *anhypostasia*, that is, of being a nature with and without being a person.²⁴

While Protestants might perhaps want to try to argue that this came about "by good and necessary consequence," and Newman would have seen it as the organic development of a fully-fledged doctrinal structure from a seed, Lonergan sees it more in terms of the increasing metaphysical self-consciousness of the church and also of the need therefore to offer precise terminological distinctions and to connect Christian doctrine systematically to a wider set of metaphysical commitments – a process he sees as reaching its apex in the schoolmen of the High Middle Ages. Lonergan thus also connects doctrinal development, particularly in the medieval period, to wider cultural developments in which theology was embedded and in which it played such a constructive part.²⁵ In this, Lonergan's approach seems far more satisfactory than either that of Protestant "good and necessary consequence" or that of Newman's natural growth analogies.

To this, Lonergan also adds a further and vital dimension to doctrinal development by pointing to its dialectical nature. The logic of doctrinal development is not a straightforward unfolding of the Bible's teaching but often emerges in response to specific positions set forth in a historical context.²⁶ This is a simple historical fact but also crucial for how doctrine is formulated. For example, the specific refinements of the meaning of terms such as *hypostasis* by the Cappadocian Fathers can only be understood when set against the background of the multi-faceted christological struggles of the 360s and 370s. Again, Protestant notions of good and necessary consequence and Newman's natural analogies do not give sufficient place to this dialectical aspect of development.

What is therefore clear in Lonergan's approach is that he has a more thoroughgoing awareness of the historical nature of doctrinal development. It is therefore perhaps not surprising that his discussion in *Method in Theology* is framed as a whole in terms of the historical transformation of human self-understanding, culminating as he sees it in a turn to interiority which raises a whole new set of questions for doctrinal development precisely because it requires a recasting of old ontological and epistemological certainties.²⁷

²⁴*Method in Theology*, 308.

²⁵*Method in Theology*, 309.

²⁶*Method in Theology*, 319.

²⁷*Method in Theology*, 305.

Historically, Lonergan sees the epistemological concerns and challenges that arise during the late seventeenth century and following as decisive for understanding doctrinal development.²⁸ In a manner which marks his approach off from both traditional Protestant approaches to the development of doctrine and from Newman, Lonergan is more acutely aware of the epistemological challenge. In this context, it is interesting that the Newman he cites in his discussion of development is the Newman of *A Grammar of Assent*, not that of the essay on development. The dogmatic development Newman of the *Essay* is thus largely supplanted by the epistemological Newman.²⁹

This turn ultimately gives Lonergan's approach to doctrine, and thus to the development of doctrine, a strong historicist bent. Thus:

[D]ogmas are statements. Statements have meaning only within their contexts. Contexts are ongoing, and ongoing contexts are related principally by derivation and by interaction. Truths can be revealed in one culture and preached in another. They may be revealed in the styles and fashion of one differentiation of consciousness, defined by the church in the style and fashion of another differentiation, and understood by theologians in a third. What permanently is true, is the meaning of the dogma in the context in which it was defined. To ascertain that meaning there have to be delved the resources of research, interpretation, history, dialectic. To state that meaning today one proceeds through foundations, doctrines, and systematics to communications. Communications finally are to each class in each culture and to each of the various differentiations of consciousness.³⁰

The translation of the meaning of a dogma into the terms of a different time, a different place, and a different culture are therefore set not so much by the intrinsic nature of the dogma itself as by the context in which it originally occurred and the new context in which it is to be restated. While Lonergan states that the truth of a dogma does not change because it is a revealed truth, he both allows for better and better understanding of the truth over time and combines this with the contextualization and historicism of the above quotation. That would seem to depend upon a radical separation of

²⁸*Method in Theology*, 316-17.

²⁹*Method in Theology*, 316, 333.

³⁰*Method in Theology*, 325-36.

dogmatic form and truth content and thus make the latter itself a somewhat historicized phenomenon, or at least inaccessible except in an impenetrably historicized form. And this is where the church plays such a key role, as the guardian and arbiter of the dogmatic deposit of the faith.³¹

LONERGAN: CONCLUDING PROTESTANT REFLECTIONS

As noted above, there is much in Lonergan's approach to the development of doctrine to which an orthodox Protestant can assent. While scriptural clarity and sufficiency are principles at the heart of what separates Protestants from Rome, in practice Protestantism has always engaged with the church tradition, exegetical, credal, and doctrinal in its own confessional formulations, ministerial pedagogy, and approach to the biblical text. While historical consciousness and a true sense of doctrinal development in orthodox Protestant circles has only emerged since the early nineteenth century, in practice it was always the case that theology was undertaken in an implicitly historical manner. The key difference between the Reformers and their Roman Catholic opponents was not that between biblicists and those who had regard to tradition but rather between those who we might in retrospect cast as believing only in subjective doctrinal development and those who believed also in objective doctrinal development.

In these terms, Lonergan's discussions of the logical and metaphysical contexts for development are helpful to Protestants, as is his noting of the dialectical nature of development. Protestants can also affirm with gusto his emphasis upon the truth of God's word as that which provides the universal horizon for theological reflection across the ages.

Further, his nuanced approach offers an account which is entirely plausible. Neither the Westminster Confession's statement on good and necessary consequence, nor Newman's natural analogies, can really give a fully adequate account of why doctrine develops the way it does. The dialectical note, apart from anything else, is missing. In order, for example, to understand the importance of the anhypostatic/enhypostatic distinction, one has to understand the history of Christology. This is the same for other dogmatic claims, such as dyothelitism. These developments are not simply the result of the natural and inevitable unfolding of earlier doctrines but are

³¹*Method in Theology*, 327, 329.

also connected by way of antithesis to heretical positions, many of which might also have been positively connected to those same earlier doctrines.

Where orthodox Protestants might be concerned, however, is in the historicist bent of his understanding of doctrine, particular as articulated in *Method in Theology*. Orthodox Protestantism would certainly acknowledge the impact of specific contexts on doctrinal formulation, but it would not see the context as overwhelming the basic meaning either of scriptural revelation nor of the doctrine which takes its ultimate cue from the same. While Lonergan does not go so far as to do that, his statements in *Method in Theology* seem rather vague on how such historicism might be regulated.

Protestantism would also not see the diversity of historical contexts as requiring a thorough recasting of doctrine for every later shift in context. Indeed, in order to do so, one would first need to understand how to identify and assess a change in context. On this, Lonergan is silent. Certainly, Protestants must acknowledge that the debate about the Trinity in the fourth century, for example, was not simply a debate about appropriate terminology but also a debate within a wider metaphysical culture which was necessary to give the language its meaning and which was contested for precisely that reason. Nevertheless, it would seem easier to learn the meaning of terms such as essence, substance, and hypostasis by learning about the original context than to expend energy on trying to translate those terms into modern equivalents, thereby risking a thoroughgoing loss of meaning.

There are obviously other points of contention between Rome and Protestantism on the issue of the development of doctrine. First and foremost is the question with which Newman wrestled: How does one identify which developments are legitimate and which are not? That question ultimately requires more reflection on authority and thus on ecclesiology and on scriptural authority, opening myriad other matters, from canon to hermeneutics. But, setting aside these wider matters, I would suggest that for Protestants seeking to start reflecting not so much upon the theory of scriptural authority but upon the practical reality of doctrinal development, Lonergan might prove an excellent place to start.