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Robert L. Richard

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Lonergan's Contribution to the Present-Day Theological Dialog

ROBERT L. RICHARD, S.J.

THERE is nothing like an opening paragraph that starts off laying all the cards face-up on the table. It is at least a courtesy to the reader. In this spirit, then, the writer would like to declare it as his own candid judgment that, despite certain difficulties which will be discussed immediately, Fr. Lonergan deserves to be counted among the half-dozen leading Roman Catholic theologians of our time.

This statement, moreover, is not meant to be at all partisan. For what it is worth, the writer himself has publicly expressed reservation on a basic aspect of Lonergan's theological synthesis.¹ The statement is meant to be objective—objective, in the sense that, at this point, it attempts simply to take account of Lonergan's influence in and upon the contemporary theological dialog. For this influence, still in the writer's personal judgment, is rapidly coming to be more and more felt.²

As we remarked, however, there are certain difficulties.

There is, first of all, the practical difficulty in the area

¹ Cf. the writer's "Contribution to a Theory of Doctrinal Development," in *Spirit as Inquiry*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe, S.J. (Chicago: Continuum, 1964), pp. 226-227.

² In this connection, one might point to the *Continuum* Festschrift, the book form of which has just been cited, and which first appeared

of communication. Most of Lonergan's contributions to present-day theology remain embodied in Latin treatises composed primarily for the use of his students at the Gregorian University. Until these are made available in the vernaculars, and reworked from the currently unpopular 'thesis approach', they will continue to receive only limited notice.

Still in the communications area, there is the much deeper problem of idiom and background. Actually, at least in the writer's view, Lonergan's English style may be a trifle on the quaint side, but it is far from inept. Behind the lengthy sentences and paragraphs, the persistent and possibly annoying enumerations, there is a powerful sense and use of imagery. In fact, Lonergan could well be said to be creating a theological language as he moves along—a language, moreover, that is so intrinsic to his thought that it cannot be omitted from any thorough analysis of his thought.

On the other hand, Lonergan unblushingly incorporates into his theological expression an English version of the age-old Thomist and Scholastic vocabulary. For many readers, this simply will not do. The whole tenor of our times is against it. Those, consequently, who have an inclination for stereotyping will probably continue to write off Lonergan as just another voice from the best-forgotten past.

Finally, there is the question of content. What precisely is Lonergan writing about? What present-day theological problems is he attempting to solve?

Contrary to what seems to be in many quarters a fairly general impression, Lonergan has offered not a few sugges-

as the Autumn, 1964, issue (vol. 2, no. 3) of the periodical. It is also worthy of notice that Lonergan shares with Fr. Karl Rahner the dedication of a recent and important book from the pen of the highly respected historical theologian Aloys Grillmeier: transl. J. S. Bowden, *Christ in Christian Tradition* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1965). Nor can we disregard the rather lengthy article in the Religion section of *Time* magazine, Jan. 22, 1965, pp. 60-61. What the writer has still more in mind, however, is the increasing frequency with which Lonergan's name will be introduced in theological and even biblical conventions, as, e.g., at the Dec., 1964, centennial convocation of the *Society of Biblical Literature* held at Union Theological Seminary in New York City.

tions on a number of quite particular subjects that pre-occupy contemporary theology. To cite but one, and probably the most important one, he has concerned himself in recent years with the whole matter of the consciousness of Christ as God and man.³ But this specific question, especially as it touches upon Christ's human knowledge, his possession of beatific vision, and the 'reality' of his growth, in some sense, in holiness, is one of the most important questions in present-day theology. It assumes a rather central position among other extremely basic subjects upon which attention has been focused as modern exegesis and biblical theology confront, so to speak, traditional theological interpretation.⁴ In the writer's judgment, Lonergan's attempts at a break-through on this thorny point rather closely parallel those of Karl Rahner, and may even add a precision of thought that is perhaps still lacking in Rahner's otherwise more satisfactory treatment of the same problem.⁵

It remains, nonetheless, that Lonergan's chief contribution to present-day theology lies in the more general area of method and methodology.

This poses a real difficulty. In the writer's personal experience as a teacher of theology, it is, in fact, the hardest hurdle to clear. With all the problems challenging today's

³ Cf. *De Verbo Incarnato*, 3rd ed. (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1964), pp. 267-310; also 332-416. Cf. also "Christ as Subject: A Reply," *Gregorianum*, vol. 40, 1959, pp. 242-270.

⁴ The question arose at the San Francisco meeting of the *Catholic Biblical Association*, for example, in the Summer of 1963, and aspects of it are seen reflected towards the end of the article subsequently published by Fr. Raymond E. Brown, "After Bultmann, What? An Introduction to the Post-Bultmannians," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, vol. 26, no. 1, Jan., 1964, pp. 1-30.

⁵ For Rahner's ideas, cf. "Dogmatic Considerations on Knowledge and Consciousness in Christ," in *Dogmatic Versus Biblical Theology*, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler (Baltimore—Dublin: Helicon Press, 1964), pp. 241-267. What Lonergan, on the other hand, would seem to supply is a clearer notion of consciousness as exclusively the psychological activation of the subject, and hence, in no sense, or in no commonly accepted sense, perception.

theologians, why should we bog down (*sic*) in method and methodology?

Our author's choice of words, however, is perhaps misleading. Method and methodology may well sound as either esoteric or marginal—the sort of thing one might expect to hear discussed behind theology's closed doors, or see made the subject of a doctoral dissertation which few, if any, are ever seriously expected to read. But in point of fact, what Lonergan intends by method and methodology drives straight to the heart of today's most pressing theological problems: the very nature and meaning of theology as an organized, scientifically respectable, body of knowledge, and the relation of this science to critical exegesis and history.

What is theology? What is a theological theory, a theological hypothesis, a theological conclusion? What is the basic approach, the objective one hopes to accomplish? What are the canons of procedure, the ground rules? Of what value is the 'finding'? And how precisely does all this stand in relation to the 'matters of fact' supplied in constantly increasing volume by contemporary exegesis and history? On a still deeper level, how does all this stand in relation to the revealed word of God, and its acceptance in Christian faith?

Or if these questions sound too technical, too far afield, the reader may prefer to look at the central question in present-day theology, and Lonergan's personal contribution towards something of a solution, from the viewpoint of a fairly clear-cut debate.

For many theologians, today the majority, what deserves to be considered 'theology in the strictest sense of the word' is that theology which is strictly positive and factual—for all practical purposes, therefore, the data and findings of exegesis and history. What is the central theme in Matthew's Gospel? What is the meaning-in-context of this particular verse? What was decided at the Council of Ephesus? What did the eucharistic act look like in the second century? What is defined doctrine on the union of the divine and the human in Christ?

For others, what deserves to be considered as 'theology in the strictest sense of the word' is what *presumes* the theology of the positive and the factual, moves out from a simple account of doctrine and from the findings of exegesis and history, and makes its own immediate task rather interpretation, understanding, and synthesis. Granted—on consultation with the exegete and the historian—the central theme of Matthew's Gospel, the latest discoveries on the meaning of this particular verse, or on what exactly had been decided at Ephesus, etc., how is all this to be put together? What, for instance, could be composed today, and precisely as modified and nuanced from incorporation of the most recent in positive finding, as an overall understanding of the mystery of the Church? What might best be presented today as a systematic account of the revelation of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the historical development of trinitarian dogma, the ultimate meaning of this mystery to the limited degree that rational theology can determine this meaning, and the significance of this same mystery for the life of the present-day believer?

To say, of course, that this debate is clear-cut, requires explanation and qualification. For the sake of initial clarity, we have oversimplified. Actually, what is clear-cut, is the opposition of two *tendencies*. It is rare that exegesis and history will not at least begin to generalize, to mark relationships, to draw conclusions. Further, while scientifically objective, and in this sense disinterested, research continues to be performed, more and more today will the exegete and the historian comment on the contemporary pertinence and value of the factual finding. The historian will speak of the development of doctrine among the pre-Nicene Fathers.⁶ The exegete or biblical theologian will treat in a single, overall view the Pauline doctrine of Baptism, its theological significance, and all very much with an eye to what should be the

⁶ J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), offers a very well organized account of this period, and one in which a 'theory' of development, as justified by the findings, is at least implicit.

impact of critical discovery on present-day Christian thought and life.⁷

On the other side of the fence, the systematic or theoretical theologian will feel the need to support and give authenticity to his conclusions by going into considerable detail on some exegetical or historical point. He will not be able to interpret the sacraments as essentially an encounter with Christ, nor put forth precisely this understanding of the sacraments as the most meaningful for our contemporary civilization, unless he has taken the time to show that such an understanding is clearly rooted in the apostolic revelation.⁸

But the opposition of tendencies remains, and it is most real. Let the exegete or the historian put all his emphasis on the factual, show a reluctance to interpret, or even (as happens) show a distinct disdain for what he considers 'theologizing', insisting all the while that 'theology in the strictest sense of the word' is exclusively factual, positive—and the systematic theologian will be quick to arms. Let the systematic theologian in turn reverse the emphasis, pay little attention to exegetical and historical detail, or even seem to dictate to exegesis and history (this happens also) from a priori generalizations—and he will just as quickly find himself a waiting and eager opponent.

The ultimate problem, then, is that of the relation between what we might call 'theological fact' and theological understanding; between exegetical and historical theology, on the one side, and systematic or theoretical theology, on the other. And this is the problem with which Lonergan is chiefly concerned.

To put it mildly, he is dissatisfied with the way things are going in the present-day theological dialog. His fear is that contemporary theology, too easily resting content with the mere determination of data and fact, is rapidly losing

⁷ The writer is thinking of Rudolf Schnackenburg, transl. G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the Thought of St. Paul* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1964).

⁸ Thus E. Schillebeeckx, O. P., *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1963).

sight of the (for him) still greater importance of theological understanding.⁹

To get down to cases, Lonergan's personal contribution to present-day theology involves two distinct, but very intimately related, steps. First, he has tried to show that 'theology in the strictest sense of the word' is theological understanding—more particularly, the theological understanding that is synthesis. Secondly, and practically in the same motion, he has further tried to show that this theological understanding, at least in its preliminary and more inventive stage, is, and long has been one of the basic dimensions in the complex historical process known as the evolution or development of doctrine.

These two steps provide a neat and obvious outline for the discussion which is to follow. But there is an additional advantage in approaching Lonergan's contribution to present-day theology in just this way. In the first step, in pinning down precisely the nature of theology as science, Lonergan reveals his initial dependence upon Aquinas. In the second step, however, in going deeply into the theological dimension of doctrinal development, he reveals no less his own originality and the extent to which he has surcharged basic and admittedly Thomist insight with a profoundly personal sense both of human psychology and of historical evolution.

I. THEOLOGY IN THE STRICTEST SENSE OF THE WORD

There is, of course, an immediate objection: who can possibly talk, especially these days, about 'theology in the strictest sense of the word'?

Is this not, in fact, being arbitrary in the extreme? Does it not reduce to having made up one's own mind on the only legitimate use of a fairly common word, and demanding, to say the least rather naively, that everyone else follow suit?

⁹ For the most detailed and strongly expressed statements, one would best consult B. Lonergan, *De Deo Trino. II. Pars systematica*, 3rd ed. (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1964), chapter 1. Cf. also *De Deo Trino. I. Pars dogmatica*, 2nd ed. (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1964), p. 273.

Lonerган, however, is not at all concerned over the mere propriety of words—at least not in the sense implied. He is concerned, rather, with reality, the divine reality as mediated through the Judaeo-Christian revelation, and as grasped in faith. With attention upon this grasp in faith, he is concerned with the expansion of the believer's faith, if one may be allowed to express it so, in the direction of a limited, but nonetheless valid and fruitful understanding of the self-revealing God.¹⁰

Lonerган is quite aware that man's knowledge of God passes through many stages, many levels.¹¹ He would have no desire, therefore, to quarrel with someone who wished to have it that 'theology in the strictest sense of the word' was the written word of God in the Old and New Testaments, nor with someone else who argued instead that 'theology in the strictest sense of the word' was the teaching of the Church.

At the same time, he would want to point out two things. First, when the English language (and most, if not all, others similarly) speaks of '(o)logies', it is speaking of *sciences*—of bodies of knowledge intellectually organized according to causes and principles. From this point of view, then, it is far from arbitrary to say that 'theology in the strictest sense of the word' is theology in the scientific sense of the word. Secondly, and in any case, Lonergan would want to point out that man's multi-levelled grasp of the divine reality *terminates* logically and reasonably, not at the biblical phrase, not at the statement of one of the Fathers, not at the declaration of an Ecumenical Council, but at theological understanding and synthesis.

¹⁰ This is brought out in the methodological first chapter of *De Deo Trino. II.*, just cited, and in Lonergan's frequent appeal throughout this chapter to the famous passage on the point in Vatican I: "*Ac ratio quidem, fide illustrata, cum sedulo, pie et sobrie quaerit, aliquam Deo dante mysteriorum intelligentiam eamque fructuosissimam assequitur tum ex eorum, quae naturaliter cognoscit, analogia, tum e mysteriorum ipsorum nexu inter se et cum fine hominis ultimo...*" (Denz. 3016).

¹¹ This is likewise implicit in the same chapter, as, e.g., on p. 46 where Lonergan speaks of the same revealed truth existing in the biblical, patristic, conciliar, theological, and contemporaneously ecclesiastical and theological expressions of itself.

The biblical, the patristic, the conciliar, the everyday teaching of the Church—each of these engages our Christian faith. Yes. But faith itself can go one step further: granted sufficient intelligence and opportunity, the believer, as the First Vatican Council itself asserted, can and should ask after the inner meaning and coherence of what he believes.¹² It is then that the elements of faith are put together, that relationships are drawn, that careful and modest generalization is at least attempted. Clearly, therefore, this is the last step along the road of man's intelligent grasp of the divine, and it is the step of theology precisely as science. Thus, not without objective ground, does Lonergan consider 'theology in the strictest sense of the word' to be the theology of understanding and synthesis.

And it is here, as noted, that Lonergan shows his dependence upon St. Thomas.¹³ It might be well to indicate this in more detail, and at the same time avail ourselves of an opportunity to enlighten by a fairly simple example what has thus far in our discussion been expressed perhaps too much in the abstract.

In the Fourth Book *Contra Gentiles*, St. Thomas had begun his treatment of the Trinity by simply observing that there was generation, paternity and sonship in the Godhead. This truth, he can, and does, take for granted. On what basis? On the basis that it is the clear teaching of Sacred Scripture, and the unmistakable assertion of Christian belief.¹⁴

¹² Cf. note 10 above.

¹³ On the theoretical level, an early and yet clearly worked out expression of Aquinas' theological ideal is found in the treatise *In Boethii de Trinitate*. Cf. B. Decker, *Sancti Thomae de Aquino Expositio Super Librum Boethii de Trinitate*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: E. J. Brill 1959). For a study of this treatise, the reader might consult R. L. Richard, S.J., *The Problem of an Apologetical Perspective in the Trinitarian Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1963), Part II, chapter 2, pp. 113-136.

¹⁴ Cf. C. G., IV, c. 2. For an account of this treatise on the Trinity in the *Contra Gentiles*, the reader may wish to consult the writer's work, *Problem of an Apologetical Perspective*, just cited, pp. 137-203.

But how is this to be taken? How is it to be understood? These are the constantly recurring formulas as St. Thomas sets out to interpret and understand (to whatever extent possible) the revealed mystery. We know that there is generation in God; but we go on to ask: what kind of generation? generation in what sense? generation how differing from generation in animal and human nature? For obviously, there is no matter in God. Therefore, the Son cannot be generated by the Father, come forth from the Father, in the way one material being might be said to come forth, or to emanate, from another, nor in the way common to plant, animal, or even human life. There is left, in fact, only the sort of generation that would be purely spiritual, mental, intellectual. And so at long last, and after having excluded every other possibility, Aquinas was able to draw the conclusion that the Son must come forth from the Father in a way that would at least remotely, but truly, resemble the coming forth of the concept in human intellectual activity.¹⁵

And after all—so Aquinas finds corroboration for his conclusion—did not John the Evangelist explicitly identify the Son of God as God's eternal *Word* (the Latin *Verbum*, the original Greek *Logos*)? and 'word', 'inner word', '*verbum*', was simply the proper designation in Aristotelian-Thomist psychology for the intellectual concept or idea emerging in the mind from the act of understanding.¹⁶

For us, today, the process is not, and cannot be, quite so simple. Nor is Lonergan under the slightest delusion that it either is or should be—as we will see in the second part of our present discussion. But it is important to determine judiciously what precisely it is that has to be changed; and on this quite different issue, Lonergan will take a rather firm stand against a major trend in present-day theology.

Aquinas simply assumed the basic truths of Christian faith, and at least linked his assumption to the 'clear' teaching of Sacred Scripture. Later, so to speak, in his famous biblical commentaries, he would develop in much greater de-

¹⁵ The main argument is in *C. G.*, IV, c. 11.

¹⁶ Cf. especially, *ibid.*, c. 13.

tail this same teaching of Sacred Scripture. So it was not that he had no real interest in Sacred Scripture; quite the opposite, in fact. On the other hand, and for what is more in line with our immediate purpose, St. Thomas certainly felt that the elaboration of theological science could take its start from the 'clear' meaning of the biblical text. And of course, it is right here that we would have to move much more slowly and critically today.

The Schoolmen, and indeed Christian theologians of a far later day, were well aware that the New Testament literature had been composed in the Greek language, and against the background of an unsophisticated culture. But they were not aware of how far-reaching this cultural separation actually was. The recognition, in fact, is relatively modern. Positively, then, they were inclined to see in *verbal* identity an identity, or at least affinity, in meaning. If this or that thirteenth-century Latin word translated St. Paul's Greek word, the thirteenth-century concept behind the word, along with much of its overtone, might likewise be assigned to the conscious intention of St. Paul.

Thus, in the example already alluded to, we see St. Thomas doing precisely this. For today, and in the light of contemporary critical exegesis, it is far from certain that the 'Word' (*Logos*) idiom of John's Prologue had any intellectualist intent at all—to say nothing of the highly specific intellectualist significance presumed for it by Aquinas. More probably, it was the spoken word that John was thinking of: a portrayal of the Son as God's eternal utterance, the primordial self-expression and breaking out of transcendent silence within the Godhead. At least such a meaning is suggested from its discovery in a famous passage of St. Ignatius of Antioch, dating from very early in the second century and close to John both in time and influence.¹⁷

For reasons such as these, therefore, present-day theology lingers deep into the night at the 'positive' stage that Aquinas

¹⁷ Cf. Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Magnesians*, 8, in *The Apostolic Fathers*, ed. L. Schopp (New York: Cima Publishing Co., 1947), p. 98. For Greek original, cf. *R.J.* 45.

all but skipped over entirely. Its legitimate and extremely fruitful concern is with the biblical and patristic text, with the primitive liturgy, and the expressions of ancient Christian art—seeking in all these testimonials, but especially in the biblical text, for the detail and nuance of the authentically apostolic tradition. Only then, if at all, will it 'move ahead', so to speak, in the direction of understanding and synthesis. For the data, what we might continue to call the 'factual', can no longer be simply presumed. We have, it is true, the credal summary of our Christian faith. But we also have the right and duty to look beyond this summary in an effort to absorb more and more all the detail, perspective, nuance and emphasis of the original revelation. And we cannot do this without painstaking exegetico-historical investigation.

Once again, however, it is not with this 'return to the sources' movement, or with its necessity, that Lonergan disagrees. His disagreement is simply: but are we going to stop here? Are we going to examine into the factual, but then move on—retaining this valid aspect of the Thomist ideal—in the direction of synthesis, or are we going to examine the factual, and rest content with the factual, or at least with interpretations and generalizations so close to the factual particular that they could be considered theological synthesis only in a very narrow and truncated sense?¹⁸

The reader might wonder at this juncture whether or not the writer is himself in sympathy with Lonergan's position.

In the writer's judgment, Lonergan may be at some fault for not allowing exegesis and biblical theology an open game. For even in the 1964 editions of his treatises on the Incarnate Word and on the Trinity, the biblical discussion

¹⁸ The writer considers this a faithful reconstruction and summary of the main argument in *De Deo Trino. II.*, c. 1. The companion volume, *I*, however, states the same position in its Introduction, pp. 5-14, and follows it, so to speak, in practice—moving systematically from a detailed historical examination of the pre-Nicene period, through a consideration of the great moments in the evolution of trinitarian dogma as defined by the Church, to a discussion of the possibility of theological understanding in the so-called 'psychological analogy'.

of these central mysteries is restricted to what we might call 'doctrinal' exegesis: to exegesis, i.e., that is primarily, if not exclusively, concerned with locating in the sacred text the roots of subsequent doctrinal articulation.¹⁹ In his biblical Christology, for example, Lonergan is only concerned with showing how 'true humanity' and 'true divinity' are actually contained (however expressed) in the New Testament literature.²⁰

Now this, of course, is *per se* a valid procedure. As Pius XII pointed out, in the Encyclical *Humani Generis*, it is theology's noble task to trace the actual continuity between the later teaching of the Church and what was immediately contained and expressed in the fonts.²¹ But it is a procedure, today, that must presume an earlier, someone might say more objective or more disinterested, investigation in which the same sacred text has been allowed, as it were, to speak for itself, and as strictly scientific exegesis has been able to determine the immediately conscious intention of the human author. And to make this observation, is no more than to spell out what the same Pope Pius XII had also enjoined upon the Catholic exegete in his earlier Encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu*.²²

Lonergan, however, does not include this preliminary objective or disinterested exegesis in his theological treatises. Consequently, the writer, as a teacher, has found it necessary to employ towards the beginning of his own courses upon these same subjects, both in his seminary classes and in his college classes, the well-known and highly respected volume of Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament*.²³

¹⁹ Cf., where the Trinity is concerned, *ibid.*, pp. 120-128; 158-170. On the Incarnate Word, cf. *De Verbo Incarnato*, 3rd ed. (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1964), *passim*—i.e., wherever an appeal is made for biblical support.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 16-102. Note carefully the *supposita* under #1 and #2 at the bottom of p. 16.

²¹ Cf. *Denz.* 3886 *ad fin.*

²² Cf. especially *Denz.* 3826.

²³ O. Cullmann, transl. S. C. Guthrie and C. A. M. Hall, *The Christology of the New Testament*, revised ed. (Philadelphia: West-

It is not exactly here, however, but rather at a point which will arise only towards the end of our discussion, that the writer may be seriously inclined to part ways a bit with Lonergan. For on the present issue, there seems to be a perfectly sensible and legitimate question of specialization and selection. Somewhere, the systematic theologian must draw the line and decide just how far he can conduct a personal inquiry into exegetico-historical material himself, or even present in his own works an explicit summation of what has been made available to him by his colleagues. To deny him this right, is to require that he say little or nothing about anything in less than a thousand, perhaps several thousand, pages of text. And this is patently absurd.

2. THEOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING AS THE KEY TO THE PROBLEM OF DOCTRINAL DEVELOPMENT

As already mentioned, Lonergan's contribution to the present-day theological dialog cannot be properly evaluated unless, along with his idea of theological understanding as such, we consider at the same time his idea of the role played by theological understanding in the historical development of Christian doctrine. For when all is said and done, Lonergan considers theological understanding the key to the problem of development; and the problem of development itself is surely one of the most crucial for contemporary theology.

With some risk of oversimplification, we might recast Lonergan's position as follows.²¹ Theological understanding in the most proper sense is theological synthesis, and synthesis with a very precise meaning: the reconstruction, namely, of an entire field of knowledge beginning from the apex of its ultimate cause or principle, and thus understanding everything whatever in the same field as extrapolating from such a cause or principle. To put it perhaps more simply, it is to

minster Press, 1963). A comparison of the precise material treated by Cullmann with what Lonergan presupposes and does not incorporate (cf. note no. 20 above) would seem to be significant at this point.

²¹ Once again, our chief source is c. 1 of *De Deo Trino. II*.

understand every succeeding item precisely as *in* such an ultimate cause or principle.²⁵

St. Thomas' trinitarian synthesis in the First Part of the *Summa Theologiae* will serve to illustrate. Here, his declared purpose is to discuss the whole of trinitarian theology, and to do so according to a certain order, the order of synthesis.²⁶

To begin, then, Aquinas sets down the universal principle that in all spiritual reality there is immanent procession, the procession of concept or inner word in intellect, and the procession of love in will. So it is, he observes, with God himself. In God, too, there is this two-fold immanent procession: the procession of the Son or Word as 'God understood' in 'God understanding', and the procession of the Holy Spirit as 'God beloved' in 'God loving'.²⁷

Upon these two divine processions, there are grounded, so to speak (for there is no true causality in God), the trinitarian relations: the relation of the Father to the Son, of the Son to the Father, and the relation of Father-and-Son to the Holy Spirit, of Holy Spirit to Father-and-Son.²⁸ These relations 'constitute' the three divine Persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.²⁹ And these are the three Persons whom we 'meet', so to put it, at the level of experience, at the point where our knowledge of them first began, in the redeeming and sanctifying 'missions' of the Son and the Holy Spirit in human history.³⁰ In this way, then, the way of synthesis, the whole mystery of the reality and activity of the Trinity is

²⁵ For the exposition of theological synthesis, cf. *ibid.*, especially pp. 33-41.

²⁶ Cf. *S. T.*, I, q. 27, prologue. Aquinas' word here for the order of synthesis is "*ordo doctrinae*."

²⁷ *Ibid.*, a. 1, c. Actually, a brief historical introduction precedes his setting down of the universal principle. The *corpus* of a. 3 gives the neat presentation of the two divine processions upon which our own brief summary has been based. Lonergan is using the same example, *loc. sup. cit.*

²⁸ The relations are introduced and treated in q. 28.

²⁹ Cf. q. 29, and especially q. 30, aa. 1 and 2.

³⁰ The 'missions' are introduced in the final question of the trinitarian synthesis, q. 43.

at least in a limited, analogous and hypothetical manner understood as deriving from its ultimate quasi-cause or principle: the one God in whom there is immanent procession.

The reader might well ask, however, with what justification does St. Thomas set down this universal principle of immanent procession in spiritual beings, and then go on to build upon this principle the whole of his vast trinitarian synthesis? For surely, this is not a principle known to natural reason or human philosophy. If it were, then the Trinity of Persons would not be a mystery at all. It would be a truth easily deducible from the general principle that there must be a two-fold procession in every spiritual being—therefore also in God.³¹

The justification of Aquinas' mode of procedure, however, has already been seen. We saw it when we took a look at the Fourth Book *Contra Gentiles*. For what we were observing at this point was how Aquinas arrived at his generalization in the first place. From Sacred Scripture, he noted, we know that there is generation, paternity and sonship in the Godhead. But how is this divine generation to be understood? And as we saw, it can be understood, Aquinas argued, only in terms of an immanent procession in intellect. (Subsequently in the same Fourth Book, he applied the same line of theological reasoning or analysis to the understanding of the procession of the Holy Spirit in terms of an immanent procession in will.)³²

The generalization upon which he builds his trinitarian synthesis in the *Summa*, therefore, is not something accessible to pure reason, nor a principle of human philosophy, but the final conclusion of a laborious theological analysis.³³ This

³¹ It is precisely with this question of a priori demonstration and the nature of St. Thomas' generalization, that the writer's own study, cited above in note no. 13, is concerned.

³² The argument is extended to the Holy Spirit in *C. G.*, IV, c. 19.

³³ For a more thorough discussion of this question, one might consult the writer's *Problem of an Apologetical Perspective*, pp. 224-231; 280-310.

analysis, moreover, is not merely theological understanding in its preparatory, inventive or investigative phase; it is to be identified, at least in part and with qualification, with the development of Christian doctrine.³¹ For much of it is an effort of theological reasoning that has been assimilated, over the centuries, and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, into the authentic life and teaching of the Church.

For Lonergan, there are three distinct but inseparable movements within the single historical process that is the development of Christian doctrine: a cultural transposition, a theological transposition, and finally, an assimilation or incorporation of both on the part of the Church.³⁵

First, then, there is the trans-cultural phenomenon with which contemporary exegetical and historical studies have been largely concerned. The New Testament writers spoke of the identity and work of Jesus, his relationship to the Father and to the Spirit, all in the basically hebraic idiom and thought patterns of their own first-century culture. Thus, their language and point of view was extremely concrete, symbolic, dramatic. They did not think of Son, and Father, and Spirit in terms of nature and person, property and relation—much less in terms of immanent procession!—but rather pictured the Son, the Father, and the Spirit, each as exercising a special role or function in salvation history. From this point of view, we may justly say that the ‘trinitarianism’ of the New Testament was only ‘functional’ or ‘elemental’.

The time was soon to come, however, when a more sophisticated, hellenically orientated Christianity would seek to bring to light what was only implicit in the primitive revelation, and would do so, as we should expect, not in the hebraic categories of the first century, but in the more hellenic categories of the second, third, fourth and fifth. How precisely is Christ related to the Godhead? Is he truly, unequivocally, divine? Has he the same being or substance as the Father? If so,

³¹ Cf., for a brief statement of Lonergan's careful identification, *De Deo Trino: II*, pp. 34-35.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 42-53. There is an excellent summary statement on p. 45.

how is he yet distinct from the Father? And how are the same questions to be extended to include the Holy Spirit?³⁶

In the year 325, for instance, the Fathers of Nicea attempted to settle once and for all the Arian equivocations on the divinity of Christ by declaring that the Word was 'consubstantial' with the Father. This was the famous *homooúision*. The term itself was obviously and admittedly non-biblical, non-hebraic. But the cultural transposition here goes quite beyond any mere use and difference of words. Not only was the term nowhere to be found in the New Testament; but the whole pattern of thought was nowhere to be found in the New Testament, nor anywhere else in the ancient formative period of the Christian Church. For as already mentioned, the New Testament writers and their contemporaries were simply not concerned with such technical, or at least quasi-technical, ideas as being or substance. If the Fathers of Nicea, then, were passing on a truth nevertheless contained in the Christian revelation, they were at least understanding, conceiving, and expressing this truth in the constants of their own later, and quite different, culture.

We do not have to delay, however, on this 'if'. For as Lonergan exposes the problem of development, the 'if' is automatically taken care of once we appreciate that there was more involved than the merely cultural transposition, and comprehend what precisely this something more was.

Secondly, then, there is the strictly theological transposition. Within the movement from biblical thought and expression to the later patristic and conciliar thought and expression, there is, in Lonergan's analysis, a deeper and more significant movement from what is prior in the order of human experience and thus relative to ourselves, on the one hand, and what is prior in objective reality and thus relative to things as they are in themselves—absolute, in other words—on the other.³⁷

³⁶ Lonergan best shows his personal grasp of this transcultural phenomenon in the lengthy historical essay at the beginning of *De Deo Trino. I.*, pp. 17-112.

³⁷ Lonergan's technical terms are *priora quoad nos* and *priora quoad se*. They are explained in *De Deo Trino. II.*, pp. 42-53.

The biblical writers portrayed Christ at the level of experience, in terms, we might say, of his immediate impact either upon themselves directly or at least upon such others as they knew. They portrayed the Father and the Spirit as an extension of this same relative point of view. Of course, there was something very relative, in a non-pejorative sense 'self-centered', 'self-reflecting', in the Nicene point of view also. Being and substance, hence 'consubstantiality', is strictly fourth-century East. Lonergan, moreover, shows that he is quite aware of this.³⁸ But he wants to show that there is something more than a transposition from one relative to another. For in the very same movement in which the 'biblical *prius*' was transformed into the 'Nicene *prius*', one relative to another therefore, there was also a simultaneous transformation from the relative (*priora quoad nos*) to the absolute or, perhaps better and less misleading, to the objective (*priora quoad se*).³⁹

What happens to have been relative to Nicea, and to have been taken over into Church life and teaching from that day on, was precisely the desire to see things as they are in themselves. For to think of the Word as consubstantial with the Father, is to think of him as he is in himself. Moreover, and while we recognize that there is no true causality in the Godhead, it is to think of the Word according to the ultimately determined quasi-cause that makes him be what he is in himself—namely, as possessing a being, or substance, or essence, the same as the Father's. When all is said and done, then, it is to think of the Word scientifically, theologically.

Yet, there is still something else, and this brings us to the third and final element in Lonergan's idea of the development of doctrine: the activity of the Church.

We have already seen that, in Lonergan's view, more important than the merely transcultural movement, is the underlying movement of theological understanding. For ultimately, the fundamental continuity in belief between Nicea and the New Testament can be explained only in terms of the

³⁸ *Ibid.*, especially p. 46.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

one and the same truth, not being changed or added to, but simply being transposed in and through its own understanding to a different level of knowledge and expression—to the theological, or to what we might at least call the quasi-scientific.⁴⁰

At the same time, Lonergan has been equally at pains to insist all along that theological understanding, left to itself, cannot pass an absolutely certain verdict on its decisions.⁴¹ In the last analysis, what we might call the verification of its decisions or conclusions—that, e.g., consubstantiality is true to the meaning of the primitive revelation—rests uniquely with the Church. Only when and inasmuch as and insofar as the Church of Christ, to whom the deposit of revealed truth and its authentic interpretation has been bequeathed, has assimilated into her life and teaching some effort of rational theology, can the conclusion be called a dogma of faith, Christian teaching in the strictest sense of the word.⁴²

For instance, that God is one in three distinct persons, is a dogma of faith, not merely theological understanding. That there is no difference or otherness in the Godhead except that which is exclusively a matter of the proper and the relative, this too is a dogma of faith. These points of doctrine, in fact, have received conciliar ratification—the second at Florence, the first perhaps as far back as the First Council of Constantinople. On the other hand, while St. Thomas' theological synthesis has always received a peculiar respect and deference, we could not say that the *final step* in Aquinas' trinitarian theology—the principle or quasi-cause of immanent procession—is a dogma of faith. It remains an effort, however intellectually impressive, of theological understanding.

Lonergan, then, has underscored the nature and necessity of a theology whose last purpose would still be, as it was for Aquinas, to organize the elements of revelation and his.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* Note the stress on "*idem*" here.

⁴¹ Cf., e.g., p. 35 in the same section.

⁴² Cf. *ibid.*, p. 46.

torical development under the total view of a more or less strictly scientific synthesis. In the writer's judgment, he has thus exposed the actual and serious danger at the present moment that theology may lose sight of its speculatively and theoretically scientific nature, and thus deteriorate, for want of principles of unity and intellectual structure, into mere historicism or even antiquarianism.

Further, Lonergan has also shown the fact and—rightly understood—the necessity of this intellectual movement towards true synthesis as an element, from the psychological point of view the key element, in the historical process of doctrinal development. This again, in the writer's judgment, is important to recognize.

It does not mean, however, that either present-day theology, or the gradual assimilation of its more useful and meaningful conclusions into the life and teaching of today's Church will always and necessarily follow the specifically Thomist or Scholastic *type* of synthesis.

Actually, there is an extremely complex problem here, and we can only touch upon it at the moment. What does it mean, for instance, to interpret the sacraments as essentially an 'encounter'? On the one hand, it would be wrong to say that this is simply New Testament exegesis, or the mere incorporation of patristic thought. 'Encounter'—with all its implicit inclusion of contemporary inter-personal and inter-subjective emphases—is no more a New Testament expression, or a New Testament way of thinking, than 'consubstantiality'. For though it may well be closer in spirit to the New Testament mentality than the Nicene *homooúision*, it is nevertheless a generalization, an understanding in search for the universal by relating sacrament, as much as is possible, to ultimate concepts of modern man's self-insight.

On the other hand, anyone familiar with Lonergan's general thrust of thought would have to add that, at least in Lonergan's mind, such quasi-phenomenological universals do not and cannot constitute synthesis in the strictest sense of the word. Lonergan considers the authentically Thomist metaphysic—person, nature, being, therefore—as the necessarily

final step, inasmuch as its basic categories represent the incapable postulate of man's self-appropriation as conscious, intelligent, rational and morally responsible. There may be a question, then, as to just what stage in synthesis this particular present-day understanding of the sacraments attains.

There may also be a question as to whether or not Lonergan has been a bit too hasty in concluding that theological understanding in general should find its proper point of departure, and in every instance, in doctrinal articulation—in the teaching of the Church as such, and not, at least also, and under certain circumstances, in the immediacy of the biblical text.⁴³ It is on this point, that the writer is inclined to part ways with Lonergan.

In the writer's judgment, the position presumes that doctrinal articulation, while achieving clarity and precision on a particular aspect of a given mystery, carries over, at the same time, and re-expresses, the totality of what is essential to this mystery. But would Lonergan want to say that transubstantiation, along with all subsequent Church teaching in which stress was on the aspect of 'real presence', actually carried over the sociological aspects of the eucharistic mystery—the re-possession in community of the presence of God begun in Baptism, or would he rather want to concede that this particular point in contemporary theological synthesis required working directly and immediately from the biblical text? A similar question could be asked with regard to the doctrine of satisfaction, the extent to which it carried over the full mystery of Christ's redemptive work, and especially in what concerns the centrality of the Resurrection.

In the main, however, the writer candidly supports Fr. Lonergan's views. He believes, moreover, that as these views come to receive greater and more thoughtful attention, a great step will be made in checking the present-day tendency to reduce theology in *every* respect to the merely factual.

⁴³ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 21. Note, however, a degree of hesitation in Lonergan's choice of words here. It seems clear that he appreciates the existence of a problem in this area, and the consequent need for further reflection and discussion.