

NATURAL RIGHT AND HISTORICAL MINDEDNESS

The notion of collective responsibility is not without its difficulty. One may claim that, as men individually are responsible for the lives they lead, so collectively they must be responsible for the resultant situation. But that claim is too rapid to be convincing. No doubt, single elements in the resulting situation ^{are} identical with the actions or the effects for which individuals are responsible. But the resulting situation as a whole commonly was neither foreseen nor intended or, when it does happen that it was, still such foresight and intention are apt to reside not in the many but in the few and rather in secret schemes and machinations than in public avowal.

It remains that if collective responsibility is not yet an established fact, it may be a possibility. Further, it may be a possibility that we can realize. Finally, it may be a possibility that it is desirable to realize.

Such is my topic. What I have in mind is the conjunction of two elements already existing in our tradition. From the ancient Greeks we have the notion of natural right. From nineteenth-century historical thought we have come to recognize that besides human nature there also is human historicity. What we have to do, I feel, is to bring these two elements together. We have so to develop the notion of natural right as to make it no less relevant to human historicity than it is to human nature.

HISTORICITY

A contemporary ontology would distinguish two components in concrete human reality: on the one hand, a constant, human nature; on the other hand, a variable, human historicity. Nature is given man at birth. Historicity is what man makes of man.

This making of man by man is perhaps most conspicuous in the educational process, in the difference between the child beginning kindergarten and the doctoral candidate writing his dissertation. Still this difference produced by the education of individuals is only a recapitulation of the longer process of the education of mankind, of the evolution of social institutions and the development of cultures. Religions and art-forms, languages and literatures, sciences, philosophies, the writing of history all had their rude beginnings, slowly developed, reached their peak, perhaps went into decline yet later underwent a renaissance in another milieu. And what is true of cultural achievements, also, though less conspicuously, is true of social institutions. The family, the state, the law, the economy, are not fixed ^{and} immutable entities. They adapt to changing circumstance; they can be reconceived in the light of new ideas; they can be subjected to revolutionary change. Moreover, and this is my present point, all such change is in its essence a change of meaning — a change of idea or concept, a change of judgment or evaluation, a change of the order or the request. The state can be changed by rewriting its constitution; more subtly but no less effectively it can be changed by reinterpreting its constitution or, again, by working on men's minds and hearts to change the objects that command their respect,

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hold their allegiance, fire their loyalty. More generally, human community is a matter of a common field of experience, a common mode of understanding, a common measure of judgment, and a common consent. Such community is the possibility, the source, the ground of common meaning; and it is this common meaning that is the form and act that finds expression in family and polity, in the legal and economic system, in customary morals and educational arrangements, in language and literature, art and religion, philosophy, science, and the writing of history.¹ Still, community itself is not a necessity of nature but an achievement of man. Without a common field of experience people get out of touch. Without a common mode of understanding, there arise misunderstanding, distrust, suspicion, fear, hostility, factions. Without a common measure of judgment people live in different worlds. Without common consent they operate at cross purposes. Then common meaning is replaced by different and opposed meanings. A cohesion that once seemed automatic has to be bolstered by the pressures, the threats, the force that secure a passing semblance of unity but may prepare a lasting resentment and a smoldering rebellion.

As human nature differs from human historicity, so understanding human nature is one thing and understanding human historicity is another. To understand the constant, nature, one may study any individual. But to understand the variable, historicity, one has to study each instance in its singularity. So we come to what Alan Richardson has named 'historical mindedness.'² It is that to understand men and their institutions we have to study their history. For it, in history that man's making of man occurs, that it progresses and regresses, that through such changes there may be discerned a certain

unity in an otherwise disconcerting multiplicity.

Indeed, historicity and history are related as object to be known and investigating subject. In a brilliant definition the aim of Philologie and later the aim of history was conceived as the interpretative reconstruction of the constructions of the human spirit.³ The constructions of the human spirit were what we have termed man's making of man, the variable component in human ontology, historicity. The interpretative reconstruction of those constructions was the goal set itself by the German Historical School in its massive, ongoing effort to reveal, not man in the abstract, but mankind in its concrete self-realization.

NATURAL RIGHT IN HISTORICITY

It was the sheer multiplicity and diversity of the practices and beliefs of the peoples of the earth that led the ancient Greeks to contrast animals and men. The habits of each species of animal were uniform and so they could be attributed to nature. But the practices and beliefs of men differed from tribe to tribe, from city to city, from region to region: they had to be simply a matter of convention.

From that premise there followed a conclusion. What had been made by human convention, could be undone by further convention. Underpinning human manners and customs there was no permanent and binding force.

The conclusion was scandalous, and in the notion of natural right was found its rebuttal. Underneath the manifold of human life-styles, there existed a component or factor that possessed the claims to universality and permanence of nature itself.⁴

However, this component or factor admits two interpretations. It may be placed in universal propositions, self-evident truths, naturally known certitudes. On the other hand, it may be placed in nature itself, in nature not as abstractly conceived, but as concretely operating.⁵ It is, I believe, the second alternative that has to be envisaged if we are to determine norms in historicity.

Now Aristotle defined a nature as an immanent principle of movement and of rest.⁶ In man such a principle is the human spirit as raising and answering questions. As raising questions, it is an immanent principle of movement. As answering questions and doing so satisfactorily, it is an immanent principle of rest.

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Specifically questions are three basic kinds: questions for intelligence, questions for reflection, questions for deliberation. In the first kind the immanent principle of movement is human intelligence. It thrusts us above the spontaneous flow of sensible presentations, images, feelings, conations, movements, and it does so by the wonder variously formulated by asking why, or how, or what for. With luck, either at once or eventually, there will follow on the question the satisfaction of having an insight or indeed a series of relevant insights. With ^{the} satisfactory answer the principle of movement becomes a principle of rest.

Still intellectual satisfaction, however welcome, is not all that the human spirit seeks. Beyond satisfaction it is concerned with content and so the attainment of insight leads to the formulation of its content. We express a surmise, suggest a possibility, propose a project. But our surmise may awaken surprise; our suggested possibility give rise to doubts, our project meet with criticism. In this fashion intelligence gives way to reflection. The second type of question has emerged. As intelligence

thrust us beyond the flow of sensitive spontaneity, so now reflection thrusts us beyond the more elementary concerns of both sense and intelligence. The formulated insight is greeted with such further and different questions as, Is that so? Are you sure? There is a demand for sufficient reason or sufficient evidence; and what is sufficient is nothing less than an unconditioned, though a virtually unconditioned (such as a syllogistic conclusion) will do.⁷

It remains that the successful negotiation of questions for intelligence and questions for reflection is not enough. They do justice to sensitive presentations and representations. But they are strangely dissociated from the feelings that constitute the mass and momentum of our lives. Knowing a world mediated by meaning is only a prelude to man's dealing with nature, to his interpersonal living and working with others, to his existential becoming what he is to make of himself by his own choices and deeds. So there emerge questions for deliberation. Gradually they reveal their scope in their practical, interpersonal, and existential dimensions. Slowly they mount the ladder of burgeoning morality. Asking what's in it for me gives way to asking what's in it for us. And both of these queries become tempered with the more searching, the wrenching question, Is it really worth while?

It is a searching question. The mere fact that we ask it points to a distinction between feelings that are self-regarding and feelings that are disinterested. Self-regarding feelings are pleasures and pains, desires and fears. But disinterested feelings recognize excellence; the vital value of health and strength; the communal value of a successfully functioning social order; the cultural value proclaimed as

a life to be sustained not by bread alone but also by the word; the personal appropriation of these values by individuals; their historical extension in progress; deviation from them in decline; and their recovery by self-sacrificing love.⁸

I have called the question not only searching but also wrenching. Feelings reveal values to us. They dispose us to commitment. But they do not bring commitment about. For commitment is a personal act, a free and responsible act, a very open-eyed act in which we would settle what we are to become. It is open-eyed in the sense that it is consciously a decision about future decisions, aware that the best of plans cannot control the future, even aware that one's present commitment however firm cannot suspend the freedom that will be exercised in its future execution.

Yet all questioning heads into the unknown and all answering contributes to what we are to be. When I ask why or how or what for, I intend intelligibility, but the question would be otiose if already I knew what the intelligibility in question was. When I ask whether this or that is really so, I intend the true and the real, but as yet I do not know what is true or what will be truly meant. When I ask whether this or that project or undertaking really is worth while, I intend the good, but as yet I do not know what would be good and in that sense worth while.

Questioning heads into the unknown, yet answering has to satisfy the criterion set by the question itself. Otherwise the question returns in the same or in another form. Unless insight hits the bull's-eye, the question for intelligence returns. How about this? How does that fit in? A self-correcting process of learning has begun, and it continues until a complemen-

tary and qualifying set of insights have stilled the flow of further relevant questions for intelligence. In like manner questions for reflection require not just evidence but sufficient evidence; until it is forthcoming, we remain in doubt; and once it is had, doubting becomes unreasonable. Finally questions for deliberation have their criterion in what we no longer name consciousness but conscience. The nagging conscience is the recurrence of the original question that has not been met. The good conscience is the peace of mind that confirms the choice of something truly worth while.

I have been speaking of nature as a principle of movement and of rest, but I have come up with many such principles and so, it would seem, with many natures. There are different questions: for intelligence, for reflection, for deliberation. Each is a principle of movement. Each also is an immanent norm, a criterion, and thereby a principle of rest once the movement is complete.

It remains that the many form a series, each in turn taking over where its predecessor left off. What is complete under the aspect of intelligibility, is not yet complete under the aspect of factual truth; and what is complete under the aspect of factual truth, has not yet broached the question of the good.⁹ Further, if what the several principles attain are only aspects of something richer and fuller, must not the several principles themselves be but aspects of a deeper and more comprehensive principle? And is not that deeper and more comprehensive principle itself a nature, at once a principle of movement and of rest, a tidal movement that begins before consciousness, unfolds

through sensitivity, intelligence, rational reflection, responsible deliberation, only to find its rest beyond all of these? I think so.¹⁰

The point beyond is being-in-love, a dynamic state that sublates all that goes before, a principle of movement at once purgative and illuminative, and a principle of rest in which union is fulfilled.

The whole movement is an ongoing process of self-transcendence. There is the not yet conscious self of deep sleep. There is the fragmentarily conscious self of the dream state. There is the awakened self aware of its environment, exerting its capacities, meeting its needs. There is the intelligent self, serializing and extrapolating and generalizing until by thought it has moved out of the environment of an animal and toward^a a universe of being. There is the reasonable self, discerning fact from fiction, history from legend, astronomy from astrology, chemistry from alchemy, science from magic, philosophy from myth. There is the moral self, advancing from individual satisfactions to group interests and, beyond these, to the overarching, unrelenting question, What would be really worth while?

Yet this great question commonly is more promise than fulfilment, more the fertile ground of an uneasy conscience than the vitality and vigor of achievement. For self-transcendence reaches its term not in righteousness but in love and, when we fall in love, then life begins anew. A new principle takes over and, as long as it lasts, we are lifted above ourselves and carried along as parts within an ever more intimate yet ever more liberating dynamic whole.

Such is the love of husband and wife, parents and children. Such again, less conspicuously but no less seriously, is the loyalty constitutive of civil community, where individual advantage yields to the advantage of the group, and individual safety may be sacrificed to the safety of the group. Such finally is God's gift of his own love flooding our hearts through the Holy Spirit he has given us (Rom 5, 5). For it was by that divine gift that St Paul could proclaim his conviction that "... there is nothing in death or life, in the realm of spirits or superhuman powers, in the world as it is or in the world as it shall be, in the forces of the universe, in heights or depths — nothing in all creation that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8, 38 f.).

THE DIALECTIC OF HISTORY

I have said that people are responsible individually for the lives they lead and collectively for the world in which they live them. Now the normative source of meaning, of itself, reveals no more than individual responsibility. Only inasmuch as the immanent source becomes revealed in its effects, in the functioning order of society, in cultural vitality and achievement, in the unfolding of human history, does the manifold of isolated responsibilities coalesce into a single object that can gain collective attention.

Further, the normative source of meaning is not the only source, for the norms can be violated. Besides intelligence, there is obtuseness; besides truth there is falsity; besides what is worth while, there is what is worthless; besides love there is hatred. So from the total source of

meaning we may have to anticipate not only social order but also disorder, not only cultural vitality and achievement but also lassitude and deterioration, not an ongoing and uninterrupted sequence of developments but rather a dialectic of radically opposed tendencies.

It remains that in such a dialectic one finds 'writ large' the very issues that individuals have to deal with in their own minds and hearts. But what before could be dismissed as, in each case, merely an infinitesimal in the total fabric of social and cultural history, now has taken on the dimensions of collective triumph or disaster. Indeed, in the dialectic there is to be discerned the experimental verification or refutation of the validity of a people's way of life, even though it is an experiment devised and conducted not by human choice but by history itself.

Finally, it is in the dialectic of history that one finds the link between natural right and historical mindedness. The source of natural right lies in the norms immanent in human intelligence, human judgment, human evaluation, human affectivity. The vindication of natural right lies in the dialectic of history and awesomely indeed in the experiment of history. Let us set forth briefly its elements under six headings.

First, human meaning develops in human collaboration. There is the expansion of technical meanings as human ingenuity advances from the spears of hunters and the nets of fishers to the industrial complexes of the twentieth century. There is the expansion of social meanings in the evolution of domestic, economic, and political arrangements. There is the expansion of cultural meanings as people reflect on their

work, their interpersonal relationships, and the meaning of human life.

Secondly, such expansions occur on a succession of plateaus. The basic forward thrust has to do with doing, and it runs from primitive fruit gatherers to the ^{wealth and power of the} ancient high civilizations of Egypt, Mesopotamia, and other lands. Development then is mainly of practical intelligence, and its style is the spontaneous accumulation of insights into the ways of nature and the affairs of men. There ^{also} is awareness of the cosmos, of reality being more than nature and man, but this awareness has little more than symbolic expression in the compact style of undifferentiated consciousness.

An intermediate forward thrust has to do mainly with speech. Poets and orators, prophets and wise men, bring about a development of language and a specialization of attention that prepare the way for sophists and philosophers, mathematicians and scientists. There occurs a differentiation of consciousness, as writing makes language an object for the eye as well as the ear; grammarians organize the inflections of words and analyze the construction of sentences; orators learn and teach the art of persuasion; logicians go behind sentences to propositions and behind persuasion to proofs; and philosophers exploit this second-level use of language to the point where they develop technical terms for speaking ^{compactly} about anything that can be spoken about; while the more modest mathematicians confine their technical utterances to relations of identity or equivalence between individuals and sets; and similarly the scientists have their several specialized languages for each of their various fields.

On a third plateau attention shifts beyond developments in doing and in speaking to developments generally. Its central concern is with human understanding where developments originate, with the methods in natural science and in critical history which chart the course of discovery, and more fundamentally with the generalized empirical method that underpins both scientific and historical method to supply philosophy with a basic cognitional theory, an epistemology, and by way of a corollary with a metaphysics of proportionate being.

On this plateau logic loses its key position to become but a modest part within method; and logical concern — with truth, with necessity, with demonstration, with universality — enjoys no more than marginal significance. Science and history become ongoing processes, asserting not necessity but verifiable possibility, claiming not certitude but probability. Where science, as conceived on the second plateau, ambioned permanent validity but remained content with abstract universality, science and history on the third plateau offer no more than the best available opinion of the time, yet by sundry stratagems and devices endeavor to approximate ever more accurately to the manifold details and nuances of the concrete.

These differences in plateau are not without significance for the very notion of a dialectic of history. The notion of fate or destiny or again of divine providence pertains to the first plateau. It receives a more detailed formulation on the second plateau when an Augustine contrasts the city of God with the earthly city,^{or} when a Hegel or a Marx set forth their idealistic or materialistic systems on what

history has been or is to be. A reversal towards the style of the first plateau may be suspected in Spengler's biological analogy, while a preparation for the style of the third plateau may be discerned in Toynbee's Study of History. For that study can be viewed, not as an exercise in empirical method, but as the prolegomena to such an exercise, as a formulation of ideal types that would stand to broad historical investigations as mathematics stands to physics.¹¹

In any case the dialectic of history, as we are conceiving it, has its origin in the tensions of adult human consciousness, its unfolding in the actual course of events, its significance in the radical analysis it provides, its practical utility in the invitation it will present to collective consciousness to understand and repudiate the waywardness of its past and to enlighten its future with the intelligence, the reasonableness, the responsibility, the love demanded by natural right.

Our third topic is the ideal proper to the third plateau. Already in the eighteenth century it was anticipated in terms of enlightenment and emancipation. But then inevitably enough enlightenment was conceived in the well-worn concepts and techniques of the second plateau; and the notion of emancipation was, not a critique of tradition, but rather the project of replacing traditional backwardness by the rule of pure reason.

Subsequent centuries have brought forth the antitheses to the eighteenth-century thesis. The unique geometry of Euclid has yielded to the Riemannian manifold. Newtonian science has been pushed around by Maxwell, Einstein, Heisenberg to modify not merely physics but the very notion of modern science. Concomitant with this transformation has been the even more radical transformation in human studies. Man is to be known

not only in his nature but also in his historicity, not only philosophically but also historically, not only abstractly but also concretely.

Such is the context within which we have to conceive enlightenment and emancipation, not indeed as if they were novelties for they have been known all along, but in the specific manner appropriate to what I have named the third plateau.

the / As always enlightenment is a matter of ancient precept, Know thyself. But in the contemporary context it aims to be such self-awareness, such self-understanding, such self-knowledge, as to grasp the similarities and the differences of common sense, science, and history, to grasp the foundations of these three in interiority which also founds natural right and, beyond all knowledge of knowledge, also knowledge of affectivity in its threefold manifestation of love in the family, loyalty in the community, and faith in God.

Again, as always, emancipation has its root in self-transcendence. But in the contemporary context it is such self-transcendence as includes an intellectual, a moral, and an affective conversion. As intellectual, this conversion draws a sharp distinction between the world of immediacy and the world mediated by meaning, between the criteria appropriate to operations in the former and, on the other hand, the criteria appropriate to operations in the latter.¹² Next, as moral, it acknowledges a distinction between satisfactions and values, and it is committed to values even where they conflict with satisfactions. Finally, as affective, it is commitment to love in the home, loyalty in the community, faith in the destiny of man.

We come to our fourth topic. It is the critique of our historicity, of what our past has made us. It will be an ongoing task, for the past is ever the present slipping away from us. It will be an empirical task but one within the orbit of human studies and so concerned with the operative meanings constitutive of our social arrangements and cultural intercourse. Accordingly, it will be a matter of the research that assembles the data, the interpretation that grasps their significance, the history that narrates what has been going forward.¹³ It remains that all empirical inquiry that reaches scientific status proceeds within a heuristic structure. Just as mathematics provides the theoretical underpinning of the exact sciences, so there is a generalized empirical method or, if you prefer, a transcendental method that performs a similar role in human studies.¹⁴ It sets forth (1) general critical principles, (2) a basic division of the materials, and (3) categories of analysis. On each of these something must be said.

The general critical principles are dialectical.¹⁵ We have conceived emancipation on the third plateau to consist in a threefold conversion, intellectual, moral, and affective. But we do not postulate that all investigators will be emancipated. If some have been through the threefold conversion, others will have experienced only two, others only one, and some none at all. Hence we must be prepared for the fact that our researchers, our interpreters, our historians may exhibit an eightfold diversity of results, where the diversity does not arise from the data but rather from the horizon, the mind-set, the blik, of those conducting the investigation.

A basic division of the materials is provided by the three plateaus already described. There will be meanings such as

prove operative in men of action; further meanings that involve a familiarity with logical techniques; and a still further plateau of meanings that attain their proper significance and status within a methodical approach that has acknowledged its underpinnings in an intentionality analysis. It is to be noted, of course, that all three have their appropriate mode of development, that their main developments differ chronologically, still the proper locus of the distinction between the plateaus is not time but meaning.

Categories of analysis, finally, are differentiations of the historian's concern with "what was going forward." Now what was going forward may be either (1) development^o or (2) the handing_A on of development and each of these may be (3) complete or (4) incomplete. Development may be described, if a spatial metaphor is permitted, as "from below upwards:" it begins from experience, is enriched by full understanding, is accepted by sound judgment, is directed not to satisfactions but to values, and the priority of values is comprehensive, not just of some but of all, to reveal affective conversion as well as moral and intellectual. But development is incomplete when it does not go the whole way upwards: it accepts some values but its evaluations are partial; or it is not concerned with values at all but only with satisfactions; or its understanding may be adequate but its factual judgments faulty; or finally its understanding may be more a compromise than a sound contribution.

Again, the handing on of development may be complete or incomplete. But it works from above downwards: it begins in the affectivity of the infant, the child, the son, the pupil, the follower. On affectivity rests the apprehension of values. On the apprehension of values rests belief. On belief follows the growth in understand-

ing of one who has found a genuine teacher and has been initiated into the study of the masters of the past. Then to confirm one's growth in understanding comes experience made mature and perceptive by one's developed understanding. With experiential confirmation the inverse process may set in. One now is on one's own. One can appropriate all that one has learnt by proceeding as does the original thinker who moved from experience to understanding, to sound judgment, to generous evaluation, to commitment in love, loyalty, faith.

It remains that the process of handing on can be incomplete. There occur socialization, acculturation, education, but education fails to come to life. Or the teacher may at least be a believer. He can transmit enthusiasm. He can teach the accepted formulations. He can persuade. But he never really understood and he is not capable of giving others the understanding that he himself lacks. Then it will be only by accident that his pupils come to appropriate what was sound in their tradition, and it is only by such accidents, or divine graces, that a tradition that has decayed can be renewed.

Our fifth observation has to do with the ambiguity of completeness that arises when ^{first-plateau} _^ minds live in a second-plateau context of meaning, or when first and second-plateau minds find themselves in the a third-plateau context. On the first plateau what has meaning is action; lack of completeness is lack of action; and so when the first-plateau mind examines a second or third-plateau context, he diagnoses a lack of action, and insists on activism as the only meaningful course. On the second plateau there is the further range of meanings accessible to those familiar with classical culture. Second-plateau minds have no doubt that activists are just barbarians, but they criticize a third-plateau context for its neglect of Aristotle or Hegel.

However, such remarks as the foregoing should not be taken to imply that plateaus are uniform. For instance, the third plateau, characterized by method, also is marked by a whole series of methodological blocks. Linguistic analysts and Heideggerian Presocratics would confine philosophy to ordinary language. Offspring of the Enlightenment restrict knowledge to the exact sciences. Critical historians may praise human studies provided they are value-free. Humanists are open to values generally yet draw the line at such self-transcendence as is open to God.

Sixthly and finally, beyond dialectic there is dialogue. Dialectic describes concrete process in which intelligence and obtuseness, reasonableness and silliness, responsibility and sin, love and hatred commingle and conflict. But the very people that investigate the dialectic of history also are part of that dialectic and even in their investigating represent its contradictories. To their work too the dialectic is to be applied.

But it can be more helpful, especially when oppositions are less radical, for the investigators to move beyond dialectic to dialogue, to transpose issues from a conflict of statements to an encounter of persons. For every person is an embodiment of natural right. Every person can reveal to any other his natural propensity to seek understanding, to judge reasonably, to evaluate fairly, to be open to friendship. While the dialectic of history coldly relates our conflicts, dialogue adds the principle that prompts us to cure them, the natural right that is the inmost core of our being.

NOTES

- 1) Collection. Papers by Bernard Lonergan edited by F. E. Crowe, New York and London, 1967. Pp. 254 f.
- 2) Alan Richardson, History Sacred and Profane, London: SCM, 1964. P. 32.
- 3) Peter Hünermann, Der Durchbruch geschichtlichen Denkens im 19. Jahrhundert, Freiburg: Herder, 1967. Pp. 64 f., 106 ff.
- 4) Leo Strauss, Natural Right and History, Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1953. P. 90.
- 5) Cf. Eric Voegelin, "Reason: The Classic Experience," The Southern Review, 10 (1974) 237-264.
- 6) Phys., II, 1 192^b22.
- 7) Cf. B. Lonergan, Insight, London and New York 1957, ch. 10.
- 8) Cf. ibid. 207-42; 627-34, 696-703, 718-29.
- 9) On the human good, B. Lonergan, Method in Theology, London and New York 1972, ch. 2.
- 10) On horizontal and vertical finality, cf. Collection, pp. 18 ff., 84 ff. Aristotle's qualified rationalism appears Eth. Nic. X, 7, 1177^a12 ff.
- 11) Cf. Method in Theology, p. 228.
- 12) Cf. Insight, pp. 387 ff.
- 13) Cf. Method in Theology, ch. 6 - 9.
- 14) Cf. ibid. ch. 1.
- 15) Cf. ibid. ch. 10.

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