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Q&A October 11, 1979

Question: Well, we've questions with lengthy preambles. The first: to what extent and how does the love of other human beings facilitate or ground one's authenticity?

Lonergan: Well, you can read the parable of the Good Samaritan. The man was stopped by robbers and beaten up and stripped of his clothes and wounded and left half-dead by the roadside, and a priest went by and passed on without stopping, and a Levite went by and passed on without stopping, and a Samaritan, one of the enemy folk, one of the really bad people – it wasn't racism, as we would say today, but the effect was similar, in other words cultural effects, since cultural differences can have the same effect as racism; it's easy to talk of racism, because it's a matter of seeing one's color, and you don't have to understand anything much for that; the Samaritan came along, and he did everything for the man and he took care of his wounds and brought him to an inn and gave the innkeeper money to pay his keep and promised to pay him more when he came back again, and so on. And the question is, 'Who is my neighbor?' Who was the neighbor? The man who did good. And the answer was that the Samaritan went on his way justified, but the others didn't get any profit out of it. So there's a relation between loving your neighbor and justification, charity. And the thing is that if you love God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind, you'll also love your neighbor. And if you love your neighbor in that fashion, as a fruit of that, you'll also have the love of God. It's the same love with more than one object. You love your neighbor because he's God's child, and you love God because he's God. The fundamental motive in both cases is the divine excellence. The love of God, like ... 'Love me, love my dog.' If you love me, well, you'll obviously be very nice to my dog too. You won't kick him around, and so on.

Question from audience: If you don't have charity, then your loving is always going to be selfish?

Lonergan: Well, you have to distinguish between the state of pure nature and the state before the fall and since the fall. Without charity, you won't have that total disinterestedness that is involved in the love of God. It's like, you can be a good bookkeeper. As they say of the virtues, without charity they're unformed by charity. You're living in a different kind of way.

Question: Faith is the knowledge born of religious love. With faith one is given eyes that can discern God's self-disclosure. He who does not have faith will have great difficulty discerning God's self-disclosures, among them God's gift of love. So not only does the gift of love give you faith, but you have to have faith to know you have the gift of love. Does this follow?

Lonergan: Well, it depends on what the gift of love is. If it's like Schleiermacher's experience of total dependence, so that if you don't experience total dependence you haven't got religion in Schleiermacher's sense, since that's the root of religion. But when you say that the infusion of grace is experienced, you mean it's conscious; you don't mean it's an element in sensitive consciousness or the sort of feeling that is associated with sensitive consciousness, a sense of abasement, the feelings expressed by Uriah Heep in one of Dickens's stories. 'Your humble servant.' It is a habit, an infused habit. It's like sight. You can have it, and it can operate without your ever having thought about it, just as you can see and learn to see and learn to see and learn to see things in focus. Piaget has two volumes on the performance of his three children in the period from 0 to 24 months. And one of his remarks is, What does the infant see first? It sees the light. He describes the child being carried by the mother and looking over the mother's shoulder, and its eyes are focused on the window, where the light is coming from. To get things in perspective and know how far away they are ... (infant putting his hand up at different distances, and so on). You have to learn distances and so on, and associate in your habitual spontaneous action the reactions that combine both your sense of distance and your sense of sight. What's within your reach and what isn't? And there you'll stand on your two feet, keep your balance, and so on. It takes a lot of time. Before that, you crawl. You actually do a better job of it. It's an ability to do something. It's a habit. Aristotle distinguishes – and this is the basis of the Scholastic terminology – between a disposition and a habit. A habit is a disposition that isn't easily done away with. It sticks with you. You keep on doing it until you break the habit. Like smoking. People can be very abundant on that topic today. So, you know about your sight by the things that you do because you can see. You have to perform experiments to realize the difference it would make if you couldn't see. My nephew was living – he was about four years old – in the French part of Montreal during the second world war. And he met a little French boy and started speaking to him in English, and he got no response. 'Are you stupid? Can't you talk?' He could talk his own language, but not English. He [the nephew] had to discover there were different languages.

So, 'Faith is the knowledge born of religious love. He that does not have faith will have great difficulty discerning God's self-disclosures, among them God's gift of

love.’ Well, if faith is unformed ... In other words, you can have faith that’s not alive but dead. It’s part of your culture, and you know the right things to say. You can rattle off your catechism and your bible history, and so on. But it’s not part of the living you. What makes the difference between formed faith and unformed faith is the presence or absence of God’s gift of his love. And you know that there exists that gift of God’s love because it says so in scripture, Romans 5.5 and elsewhere. ‘God’s love has flooded our hearts with the Holy Spirit he has given us.’

Question: In what measure and how does the love of other human beings lead one to recognize the continually lavished gift of God’s love?’

Lonergan: Well, it’s continually lavished on people who continually have it. But they lose it from serious sin, from a fundamental option against God. ‘That’s what you think, but I have my own opinion. I’ll do as I please. That doesn’t make sense to me.’ And the final object is always ‘me.’

Question: What function does it serve, for example, in the preparation for justification, in facilitating the infusion of justifying grace?

Lonergan: Well, the infusion of justifying grace and the infusion of charity are the same thing. Or you can draw a distinction if you want so that grace is the root and charity the consequence but that’s a further distinction. We needn’t go into it at the present time. I can’t explain the whole of theology. We’re dealing with presuppositions in these first five chapters, things we’re going to be using. And if you know the whole of theology, well, little explanation is needed. And if you don’t know theology at all, well, you need a four-year course: four years of high school course in theology. And we can’t catch up on that. The connection is simply that if you’re in love with some human being, or with a whole flock of human beings, you have a certain amount of self-transcendence. At least you know what self-transcendence means. You don’t always think of yourself. At times you’re thinking of other people. And that’s a start. The idea of self-transcendence isn’t totally alien to you. You don’t feel you wouldn’t be yourself if there was any self-transcendence involved. But being in love with God with your whole heart and your whole soul and all your mind and all your strength is the top of self-transcendence. It’s the whole show.

A very eloquent proponent of the spiritual life whom we had the good fortune to have at our workshop in June, Sebastian Moore, said that we begin as repentant sinners and end up in some ... St Paul: in fear and trembling make out your

salvation. So the thing about it is that you know about the presence of charity in you by the results, by peace and joy and kindness and gentleness and patience, and so on. Has a person got mystical experience? Well, you read a good book on mysticism that would tell you the elementary aspects of mystical experience and then you don't explain that these questions are about mystical experience because that would terrify the person who has no idea what a mystical experience means. And you go by the answers they give to these questions ... and they'd be horrified if you made the mistake of telling them they're mystics. 'That's not for me.'

Question: [The question as it appeared in writing; Lonergan did not read it at this point.] A question that arises out of the reading of G. Morel on St John of the Cross. Even were one to admit of unrestricted love, how does one verify these experiences and dis-verify pseudo-mystical experiences, as in reality the counterpulls in a discernment of spirits?

Lonergan: Morel, *Le sens de l'existence chez saint Jean de la Croix*, The sense of existing, the meaning of existing, in the writings of St John of the Cross. One of his contentions was that man is the symbol of God. You begin to understand what it is to be a man when you understand something about God. 'Our hearts are restless till they rest in Thee.' When you understand the violence of human hatreds, as well as the aspirations of the saints from that restlessness, then man is the symbol of God. He has not left the whole universe, as people sometimes complain ... (mumbling). The embers are still there.

'Even were one to admit certain experiences of unrestricted love, how does one verify these experiences and dis-verify pseudo-mystical experiences, as in reality the counterpulls in a discernment of spirits?' Well, as I said, you go by the results. And you remember, of course, that no one's a saint until he's dead. Mystical experience is not the grace of final perseverance. How does one verify these experiences? Well, you verify them and you help someone else to verify them by studying the subject. Poulain, *Les grâces d'oraison*, the graces of prayer. He was a mathematician, and he did an experimental study, going around convents and monasteries, and so on, getting an account of their experiences and putting them together into a book ... It's not the prayer that counts, it's the fruits of the prayer in the life. That's what people go by. We Jesuits have a period after we've finished our studies, called tertianship. It's another noviceship, only it's one year instead of two ... In the long retreat our tertian master said to us, 'Now some people wonder if they should take the vow of perfection. He said the trouble with that is that they don't know exactly what it means. Sometimes you're told that so-and-so has taken the vow of perfection, and you're very surprised to learn it! And if you want to

take something that would be a little more controllable, well, you take a vow such that whenever you see you're not doing your job properly, you get down to learn doing it. The duties of your state of life – all your perfection is there. So the verification is by the way a person lives. And if a person is very concerned whether or not he or she is a mystic, well, it isn't an important question. The important question is, How is he living? What is he doing? How does he do it? In general, it's not an important question to verify it, because it itself is one thing and objectifying it is another. What counts is the thing itself, which is conscious, but the fact that it's conscious doesn't mean that you know it, just as your inhibitions are none the less real even though you don't know you have inhibitions.

Question (not read): *Insight*: '... for as the philosophic counterpositions appeal to experience generally against the 'Yes' of rational consciousness, so they (pietists and modernists against dogma) appeal to religious experience against the 'Yes' of articulate faith.' How do the pietists' and modernists' pseudo-religious experiences differ from that of the Yes-saying experience of the doctrinal speculative theologian? Granted a phenomenology of science (*Insight*, the first 10 chapters) must be matched by a phenomenology of religion (*Method*, chapter 4) there is in your later work a conspicuous absence of verifying God's gift of his love. In *Verbum* you point out (chapter 5) that the second procession remains by and large in the mists of obscurity for most theologians because of a hop, skip, and jump over the first procession on truth. But the same criticism could be brought against the author of *Method* inasmuch as the above downward vector of God's gift has no verification. Could it be that the praxiological level of intentional consciousness, level four, is at odds with the first three levels, in which the speculative theologian attempts the task of winnowing off the vacuous theological concepts for the pure analytic wheat of cognitional theory?

Lonergan: Well, the pietists and modernists against dogma are not experiences; they're statements. They're against dogma – 'that's wrong. We don't want any of it.' And unless a community knows what it stands for, it's due to fall apart. *Quot homines tot sententiae*, the number of men is equal to the number of opinions. So, admit certain experiences, admit the existence of people who de facto, whether they know it or not, do love God with some approximation to total love. And if you want to find out about such people, go to the lives of the saints.

Question from floor: Aren't they notoriously bad hagiography? What's a good one, for instance? Not Butler.

Lonergan: Well, there's a taste to these things, eh? Have you tried reading 1920s novels? (Yes.) Do you like them? Well, try Dickens, then.

Questioner: But they are notoriously awful ...

Lonergan: Well, you have to have a certain breadth for understanding other people, eh. We'll come shortly to the question of interpretation. To be able to interpret is to be able to enter into another's world and understand how he thinks or she thinks and how they think. That's the whole key to interpreting. We all live in different worlds. We don't notice it among people from the same village as ourselves, but there the differences are quite slight. But move from your church to another church and you'll bump into rather profound differences, and that's within the same city, even within the same town. And successive generations find mutual incomprehension very easily. And different countries. There are as many types of common sense as there are villages. And when you get to different continents, different nations, different centuries, you move into an entirely different mode of thinking and doing. And interpretation is a matter of bridging the differences.

Questioner: Would you agree with Steiner, *After Babel*, where he says we usually think translation is from some other – French, German – but also within the same language. It sort of has put me into a linguistic turn ...

Lonergan: Well, he certainly is excellent on translation. Translation is a terrifically difficult thing, and very poorly paid. Part of the hagiography you don't like is that it's poor translation. It's also from different centuries, and so on.

Well, anyway. There's the Yes of rational consciousness for dogmas, and the Yes of rational consciousness against dogmas. It's not a matter of pseudo-experiences. It's a matter of true and false judgments. And it's not the Yes-saying experience of the doctrinal speculative theologian. It's the Yes-saying of the person who recites the Creed. Of course, Professor Pelikan at Yale said to me of the Divinity School at Yale that you can't presuppose that they ever heard of the Apostles' Creed. Well ... It's when they start doing theology that they discover that ... affirmation.

'Granted a phenomenology of science must be matched by a phenomenology of religion there is in your later work a conspicuous absence of verifying God's gift of his love.' Well, if it's an experience in the sense of smelling or hearing, and so on, how do you verify that? Well, you have to do the smelling and the hearing to find out. If someone else smells, it doesn't help you the least bit. Now, God's gift of his love is not something sensitive. It's not, 'O my God, I love Thee.' Anyone

could do that. It's just putting on an act, or need be no more than putting on an act. It's known by the results. 'By their fruits you shall know them.' That's why I quote Galatians 5.22. The harvest of the Spirit ... and he gives you a list of beautiful things. And if you advance in them, you will become angry less frequently, and hit people more rarely, and so on and so forth. You know you're advancing ... charity. '... absence of verifying God's gift ...' It's verified in its fruits. And each one verifies them for himself if he wants to find out if he has that gift. And 'judge not your neighbor, and you won't be judged yourself.' You don't have to verify it in anybody else ...

Question: 'In *Verbum* you point out (chapter 5) that the second procession remains by and large in the mists of obscurity for most theologians because of a hop, skip, and jump over the first procession on truth.' Well, what's a hop, skip, and jump? It's not adverting to what rational consciousness is. It's not adverting to the fact that *because* can be *a* cause. 'Why do you say that?' 'Because.' The definition is because of the insight. The judgment is because of the grasp of sufficient evidence. The act of will is because of the judgment of value. And the judgment of value is because of the deliberation, 'Is this a good thing?' That 'because' gives you some remote analogy, imperfect analogy, to the Trinitarian processions. It doesn't eliminate the mystery, but it enables the possibility of a certain amount of intelligibility even in our minds, which are not infinite. 'Because' and effect are really distinct. But it doesn't follow that what is 'because' and why, the 'why' that you grasp when you have the 'because,' involves ... the analogy doesn't hold but you have something there. It isn't exactly the same as cause and effect. The generation of the Son from the Father is not cause and effect, as in finite things. It's 'because.' It's something like in the unity of your own consciousness you both grasp the evidence and make the judgment of value and go on to making the corresponding decision. You're responsible for the whole lot.

Audience: Something about final cause. There would be no final cause in the trinitarian analogy?

Lonergan: There isn't any causality in the strict sense, because you haven't got real distinctions. There's one God. The Son is God in the same sense that the Father is God. There's nothing about God that the Father is not. The Father is God. Anything that's true of God is true of the Father. Anything that's true of God is true of the Son.

Same person: But why truth and goodness? They're also transcendentals.

Lonergan: Well, we're not talking about them. We're talking about being God. We can't talk about everything all the time. Being God is any of the transcendentals, all of the transcendentals.

Same person: Then why the Trinity?

Lonergan: It isn't a matter of proving the Trinity to anyone. It's making it possible for you to see that there's a step beyond the causality that does involve a real distinction, a real division.

Same person: But the real distinction is not essence and existence.

Lonergan: *A* is not *B*. The reality of *A* is not the reality of *B*. There's a real distinction. They may be major and minor, and so on and so forth. These things are gone into in great detail for a couple of months in the treatise on the Trinity. And in the treatise on the mysteries, it's explained that you don't understand them in the perfect way you can understand chemistry and quantum theory. They're totally within the reach of your understanding. This is not the same.

Same person: But a mystery is not an absurdity either.

Lonergan: No, no. An absurdity is a contradiction.

Same person: It's a stretch for me.

Lonergan: It takes time! But this is not a course in theology. We have to do some theology to explain certain things. And that idea, namely, that there's a 'because' that's not causality, is something that Thomas knew about and was overlooked by theologians ... I'm talking about the 'because' ... You have bits of it in Augustine ... but not the same clarity as in Thomas.

'... the same criticism could be brought against the author of *Method* inasmuch as the above downward vector of God's gift has no verification.' Well, it has no verification; in other words, you have to have it in your own experience, and not merely as conscious, but as known, for it to be verified. And that is not verification, that's objectification of a datum of consciousness. You can verify it in its effects insofar as the effects are so signal that there's no doubt about it. Or, a person wants to know whether or not he's in the state of grace; and he can have a prudent judgment.

Question from audience: Is it correct to say that in some sense there's a verification of our love of God because I'm in love unrestrictedly and therefore the person I'm in love with has to be transcendent.

Lonergan: Yes, yes. In other words, if it's really unrestricted then it points to an unlimited object. And you know it's unrestricted, not from your performance but from statements in Deuteronomy and Mark and so on, on charity.

[‘Could it be that the praxiological level of intentional consciousness, level four, is at odds with the first three levels, in which the speculative theologian attempts the task of winnowing off the vacuous theological concepts for the pure analytic wheat of cognitional theory?'] Well, the praxiological level, level four, differs from the previous three. It sublates them. It preserves them, goes beyond them, perfects them, directs them to a higher end, just as intelligence sublates sense, and judgment sublates intelligence and sense, so it sublates all three. But sublation is not ‘being at odds with.’ It's just the opposite of being at odds with. It preserves and perfects. One isn't able to pitch nine innings of baseball all night without having acquired a great deal of skill as a pitcher. Skill is acquired. And the later stages sublata the previous stages. They eliminate the mistakes that used to be made and have perfection that previously was not attained ... sublation of a lower by a higher. And we won't go into the vacuous theological concepts because that's just talk. They can be vacuous, but they needn't be. They are vacuous as long as you don't take the trouble to understand them. And they remain that way.

Question [not read all at once]: At what point does one cease to answer questions in the presence of absolute mystery? The problem with the question just asked is that the unrestricted drive to know doesn't stop in mystical experience. What, then, is the positive content of the mystical void? Why is it an exhausting manner of prayer, or why even considered a slightly advanced manner of prayer? Is your own manner of prayer Christocentric or Trinitarian?

Lonergan: ‘At what point does one cease to answer questions in the presence of absolute mystery?’ Well, you don't think of two things at once. Your attention is limited. You won't be learning much about method in theology ... thinking about it clearly and distinctly. In the presence of absolute mystery: Well, the mysteries – God is mystery; that's the way Rahner talks. He objects to the fact that in the First Vatican Council they speak of the mysteries as truths that we do not comprehend but we have some imperfect understanding of. When you're talking about absolute mystery and it really is absolute, well, what do you mean? You can talk about the state to which St Paul refers when he said that we shall know as we are known, and

conceive that not as understanding God as he understands himself but having some limited understanding. But it is true that we never understand God as God understands himself. And that's what meant by comprehension. And that's common to both the Eastern and the Western church.

'What, then, is the positive content of the mystical void?' Well, the mystical void can be that what the mystic is talking about is nothing that you've ever smelt or seen or touched. It can be a rejection of naive realism. It can be a rejection of anything that an idealist would attempt to explain. It's a quite plausible explanation of the fact that nirvana is the experience of nothing. It's no-thing, and 'thing' can mean things in this world. The habit of precise logical thought is something that started with the Greeks, and not at the start but about the fourth century, after centuries of development, literary development, language. It developed in Byzantine Scholasticism in Constantinople, in medieval Scholasticism. Whitehead, *Religion in the Modern World* (RD: *Religion in the Making*) explains that modern science comes out of the Scholastic thinkers. They defined what they were talking about. What is the positive content? Well, one theory of so-called mystical experience is that it's something extremely real. Because you can't say what it is doesn't mean that it isn't a real experience and a transforming experience. All it means is that the person you're talking to hasn't had anything like that transformation. And if he wants to have it, then he'll find that there are people teaching, schools of asceticism and mysticism not only in Christian religion but also in non-Christian religions, in India, China, Japan. Eliade, *Le Shamanisme*, Shamanism; and the subtitle is 'Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy.' He interprets the experiences of the shaman, very closely related to some type of mysticism.

'Why is it an exhausting manner of prayer?' Well, it involves a good deal of concentration and a non-exercise of a large part of human faculties. Doing nothing can be very tiring, and seeming to be doing nothing is almost as tiring.

'Is your own manner of prayer Christocentric or Trinitarian?' I don't know how you could separate them. It's very hard to think of Christ without thinking of the Father to whom he prayed and whom he taught us to pray to, or of Christ without the Holy Spirit which he sends to us and through whom we have the gift of his love. The only distinction there is something less than Newman's distinction between a notional and a real apprehension. You get down to merely verbal apprehensions when you want to have a difference between the two, separation.

Question: Is Chesterton, in his *Orthodoxy*, a theologian?

Lonergan: Well, I'm afraid it's about 50 years since I read Chesterton's book entitled *Orthodoxy*. The most recent thing I read was Gary Wills on Chesterton, and I got through a couple of chapters on that and I discovered that he was imitating Chesterton's style. Chesterton's style is very luscious, a very rich diet, and after reading him a bit you can read a paragraph and then have to quit. It's organ music all the time. In his experience at the ... school, he really was struggling with fundamental philosophical problems, and he'd never had any philosophical studies. Such revealingly philosophical problems under those circumstances leads to writing that is extremely profound and rich but not thought out. The purpose of philosophical and theological studies is thinking these things out.

Question from floor: About O'Collins and Chesterton.

Lonergan: He [Chesterton] certainly has influenced many people. It's Communications, the eighth functional specialty, Communications.

We've finished – there weren't many questions on functional specialties. It's the easiest chapter in the book, and the main point is – well, we also had Research in that.