

**(52600DTE060) Regis69 6B<sup>1</sup>**

We have handled the main elements with regard to the nature of interpretation. A few contrasts may add clarity to what I have been saying. Collingwood has conceived history as re-enacting the past. Schleiermacher has contended that the interpreter will understand the text better than the author did. There is something in these statements but they are not altogether accurate and may be misleading. To clear things up let me take a concrete example. Thomas Aquinas effected a remarkable development in the theology of grace. He did so not at a single stroke but in a series of writings over a period of a dozen or more years. There is no doubt that Aquinas was quite conscious of what he was doing on each of the occasions on which he returned to the topic. Still, on none of the earlier occasions was he aware of what he would be doing on the later occasions, and there is no evidence that after the last occasion he went back over all his writings on the matter, observed each of the long and complicated series of steps in which the development was effected, grasped their interrelations, saw just what moved him forward and, perhaps, what held him back in each of the steps. But such a reconstruction of the whole process is precisely what the interpreter does. His overall view, his nest of questions and answers, is precisely a grasp of this array of interconnections and interdependences constitutive of a single development.

What I find true, then, in Schleiermacher's contention is that the interpreter may understand very fully and accurately something that the author knew about only in a very vague and general fashion. (Not only have I had this experience in studying St Thomas, but Fr David Tracy wrote a

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<sup>1</sup> The second part of the lecture of the sixth day and the discussion session of the evening. The audio recording of the lecture and of part of the discussion can be found at 52600A0E060. The full discussion can be found at 53400A0E060.

thesis on the development of my thought on method, and he pointed out to me a number of things that I had never really connected together about my own development and the breakthrough that occurred in 1965.) The interpreter, again, may understand very fully and accurately something that the author knew about only in a very vague and general fashion. Moreover, this precise knowledge will be of enormous value in interpreting the text. But it does not follow that the interpreter will understand the text better than the author did for, while the interpreter can have a firm grasp of all that was going forward, it is rare indeed that he will have access to sources and circumstances that have to be known if the many accidentals in the text are to be accounted for. Again, with respect to Collingwood, it is true that the interpreter or historian reconstructs but it is not true that in thought he reproduces the past. I am following Donagan's interpretation. He did his dissertation on Collingwood's later philosophy. What Collingwood means is not reproducing so much as reenacting. In our example, what Aquinas was doing, was developing the doctrine of grace. What the interpreter was doing, was building up the evidence for an element in the history of the theology of grace and, while he can arrive at a grasp of the main movement, and an understanding of many details, he rarely achieves and never needs an understanding of every detail. Judgment rests on the absence of further *relevant* questions.

The reader may feel, however, that I have been arguing from a very special case, from which general conclusions should not be drawn. Certainly, I have not been arguing about a case that is universal, for I have already affirmed that there are cases in which the hermeneutical problem is slight or non-existent. The question, accordingly, is how general are the main lines of the instance from which I have argued.

First, then, my instance was from the history of ideas. It is quite a broad field and of major interest to theological method. But it is uncluttered by the complexities involved in interpreting instances of intersubjective, artistic, symbolic, or incarnate meaning. In these cases understanding the author is inadequate unless the interpreter has some capacity to feel what the author felt and to respect the values that the author respected. But this is re-enactment, not in understanding and thought, but in feeling and value judgments.

Secondly, even within the history of ideas, the selected instance was exceptionally clear-cut. But while the same clarity is not to be had in other types of instance, the points that here are clear either recur in other instances or possess different features that compensate. In the first place, there is always the distinction between the author's consciousness of his activities and his knowledge of them. Authors are always conscious of their intentional operations, but to reach knowledge of them there must be added introspective attention, inquiry and understanding, reflection and judgment. Further, this process from consciousness to knowledge, if more than general and vague, is arduous and time-consuming; it leads to the impasse of scrutinizing the self-scrutinizing self and into the oddity of the author who writes about himself writing; such authors are exceptional. Finally, the selected example was a slow development that can be documented. But any notable development occurs slowly. The insight that provokes the cry, Eureka, is just the last insight in a long series of slowly accumulating insights. This process can be documented if the author writes steadily while it is going forward. On the other hand, if he does not write until the development is completed, his presentation will approximate logical or even systematic form, and this form will reveal the nest of relevant questions and answers.

So much for judging the correctness of an interpretation. We have concentrated on the possibility of this judgment. On actual judgment little can be said. It depends on many factors and, in a general discussion, these factors can be no more than hypothetical. Let us suppose that an exegete has grasped with great accuracy just what was going forward and that his understanding of the text can be confirmed by multitudinous details. Now, if really there are no further questions, his interpretation will be certain. But there may be further relevant questions that he has overlooked and, on this account, he will speak modestly. Again, there may be further relevant questions to which he adverts, but he is unable to uncover the evidence that would lead to a solution. Such further questions may be many or few, of major or minor importance. It is this range of possibilities that leads exegetes to speak with greater or less confidence or diffidence and with many careful distinctions between the more probable and the less probable elements in their interpretations.

Finally, stating the meaning of the text. Our concern is with the statement to be made by the exegete *qua* exegete. As in the other functional specialties, so too in interpretation the exegete experiences, understands, judges, and decides. But he does so for a specific purpose. His principal concern is to understand, and the understanding he seeks is, not the understanding of objects, which pertains to the systematics of the second phase, but the understanding of texts, which pertains to the first phase of theology, to theology not as speaking to the present but as listening or coming to listen, to the past.

It is true, of course, that texts are understood in the seven other functional specialties. They are understood in research but, then, the aim of the textual critic is to settle, not what was meant, but just what was written. They are understood in history but, then, the aim of the historian is to settle,

not what one author was intending, but what was going forward in a group or community. They are understood in dialectic but, then, the aim is confrontation: interpreters and historians disagree; their disagreement will not be eliminated by further study of the data inasmuch it arises from the personal stance and horizon of the interpreters and historians; the purpose of dialectic is to invite the reader to an encounter, a personal encounter, with the originating and traditional and interpreting and history-writing persons of the past in their divergences.

As understanding texts is relevant to the dialectic that invites or challenges the theologian to conversion, so too it is relevant to the foundations that objectify the conversion though, of course, objectifying a conversion is one thing and understanding a text is quite another. No less, understanding texts has its importance for the specialty doctrines,' but there the theologian's concern is the relation between the community's origins and the decisions the community reached in its successive identity crises. In like manner, a systematic understanding of objects is something quite different from a commonsense understanding of texts, even though one learns about the objects from the texts. Finally, all this listening to the past and transposing it into the present have no purpose unless one is ready to tell people of today just what it implies for them; and so we have the eighth functional specialty, communications, concerned with the effective presentation, to every individual in every class and culture through all media, of the message deciphered by the exegete.

Now I have not the slightest objection to the existence of highly gifted individuals that can perform and do so superbly in all eight of these functional specialties. My only concern is that there be recognized that the eight performances consist of eight different sets of operations directed to eight interdependent but distinct ends. This concern is, of course, a concern

for method, a concern to obstruct the blind imperialism that selects some of the ends, insists on their importance, and neglects the rest. Accordingly, when I ask about the expression of the meaning of a text by an exegete qua exegete, I am in no wise impugning or deprecating the occurrence or the importance of many other modes of expression. H.G. Gadamer has contended that one really grasps the meaning of a text only when one brings its implications to bear upon contemporary living. This, of course, is paralleled by Reinhold Niebuhr's insistence that history is understood in the effort to change it. I have no intention of disputing such views, for they seem to me straightforward applications of Newman's distinction between notional and real apprehension. All I wish to say is that there are distinct theological tasks performed in quite different manners, that the kind of work outlined in the preceding sections only leads to an understanding of the meaning of a text, and that quite distinct operations are to be performed before entering upon the specialty 'communications' and telling people just what the meaning of the text implies in their lives.

Again, Rudolf Bultmann has employed categories derived from the early philosophy of Martin Heidegger to express his apprehension of the theology of the New Testament. His procedure imitates that of St Thomas Aquinas, who used Aristotelian categories in his scripture commentaries. I have not the slightest doubt about the propriety of a systematic theology, but the procedures to be employed in developing one are not outlined in an account of hermeneutics as a functional specialty. Similarly, I hold for a doctrinal theology, but I refuse to conclude that the language of the exegete qua exegete is to be that of Denzinger's *Enchiridion* or of theological textbooks. Finally, I believe in a theology of encounter, but would not confuse theology and religion. Theology reflects on the religion; it promotes the religion; but it does not constitute religious events. I consider religious

conversion a presupposition of moving from the first phase to the second, but I hold that that conversion occurs, not in the context of doing theology, but in the context of becoming religious. I point out to the exegete that coming to understand himself may be the condition of his understanding the author, his words, and what the author meant. Nonetheless, I conceive that coming to understand himself, not as part of his job as an exegete but as an event of a higher order, an event in his own personal development.

The exegete qua exegete expresses his interpretations to his colleagues technically in notes, articles, monographs, commentaries. The expression is technical in the sense that it puts to full use the instruments for investigation provided by research: grammars, lexicons, comparative linguistics, maps, chronologies, handbooks, bibliographies, encyclopedias, etc. The expression, again, is technical inasmuch as it is functionally related to previous work in the field, summarizing what has been done and is accepted, bringing to light the grounds for raising further questions, integrating results with previous achievement.

Besides speaking to his colleagues, the exegete also speaks to his pupils, and he must speak to them in a different manner. For notes, articles, monographs, commentaries fail to reveal the kind of work and the amount of work that went into writing them. That revelation only comes in the seminar. It can come to a great degree by working with a director on some project that he has still in process. But I think there is much to be said for the value of a seminar that repeats previous discovery. This is done by selecting some complex and basically convincing monographs, finding in the original sources the clues and trails that led the author to his discoveries, assigning one's students tasks based on these clues and trails so that they may repeat his discoveries. Even though it is only rediscovery, it is an exhilarating experience for students, and also it is well for them in one of

their seminars to have been confronted with a finished piece of work and to have understood why and in what sense it was finished.

However, the exegete has to speak not only to his colleagues in his own field and to his pupils but also to the theological community, to exegetes in other fields, and to those engaged principally in other functional specialties. Here there are, I suggest, two procedures, one basic and the other supplementary.

The basic procedure I derive from a description by Albert Descamps of the biblical theologian qua exegete. It occurs in *Sacra Pagina*. He argued that biblical theology must be as multiple and diverse as are, for the alert exegete, the innumerable biblical authors. So there will be as many biblical theologies as there were inspired authors, and the exegete will aim above all to respect the originality of each of them. He will appear to be happy to proceed slowly, and often he will follow the ways of beginners. His descriptions will convey a feeling for things long past; they will give the reader an impression of the foreign, the strange, the archaic; his care for genuineness will appear in the choice of a vocabulary as biblical as possible; and he will be careful to avoid any premature transposition to later language, even though that language is approved by a theological tradition. Any general presentation will have to be based on the chronology and the literary history of the biblical books. If possible, it will be genetic in structure; and for this reason questions of date and authenticity, which might be thought secondary in biblical theology, really have a decisive importance. Further, general presentations will not be very general. If they regard the whole bible, they will be limited to some very precise topic. If their object is more complex, they will be confined to some single writing or group of writings. If a biblical theology were to aim at presenting the whole or a very large part



of the bible, it could do so only by being content to be as manifold and internally differentiated as some general history of Europe or the world.

It is true, Bishop Descamps admits, that there are those that dream of some sort of short-cut, of a presentation of the divine plan running through the history of the two testaments; and many of them would claim that this is almost the proper function of biblical theology. But he himself is of a contrary opinion. A sketch of the divine plan pertains to biblical theology only in the measure that a historian can feel at home with it; not even the believer reaches the divine plan except through the manifold intentions of the many inspired writers.

The foregoing account of the expression proper to an exegete qua exegete speaking to the theological community seems to me eminently relevant, sane, and solid. Many perhaps will hesitate to agree with the rejection of general presentations of the divine plan running through scriptural history. But they too will come around, I think, when a distinction is drawn; such general expositions are highly important in the functional specialty, communications; but they are not the vehicle by which the exegete communicates his results to the theological community.

It remains, however, that the basic mode of expression just described has to be supplemented. While every theologian has to have some training in exegesis, he cannot become a specialist in all fields; and while the exegete of ancient texts very properly gives an impression of the foreign, the strange, the archaic, his readers cannot be content to leave it at that. This need would seem to be at the root of efforts to portray the Hebrew mind, Hellenism, the spirit of Scholasticism, and so on. But these portraits too easily lead to the emergence of mere occult entities. Unless one oneself is a specialist in the field, one does not know how to qualify their generalities, to correct their simplifications, to avoid mistaken inferences. What is needed is not mere

description but explanation. To talk about the Hebrew mind is to describe. If people were shown how to find in their own experience elements of meaning, how these elements can be assembled into ancient modes of meaning, why in antiquity the elements were assembled in that manner, then they would find themselves in possession of a very precise tool, they would know it in all its suppositions and implications, they could form for themselves an exact notion, and they could check just how well it accounted for the foreign, strange, archaic things presented by the exegetes.

Is this a possible project? Might I suggest – and it is only a suggestion – that the section on stages of meaning that as last treated in the chapter on meaning offers a beginning? What is generally meant by ‘the Hebrew mind’ is undifferentiated consciousness, which is what people are arguing for. If transcendental method coupled with a few books by Ernst Cassirer and Bruno Snell could make this beginning, why might not transcendental method coupled with the at once extensive and precise knowledge of many exegetes in many fields not yield far more? The benefits would be enormous; not only would the achievements of exegetes be better known and appreciated but also theology as a whole would be rid of the occult entities generated by an inadequately methodical type of investigation, thought, and expression.

There follows Discussion 6.

The first set of questions is very indistinct on the recording, but seems to have involved the relation of issues for communications with the items that Lonergan has been talking about.

*Would liturgy as celebrated fall within the functional specialty ‘communications’?*

Yes, I think so, yes. That's one of the functions of liturgy, but not the only one.

*A second question, almost inaudible, raised something about biblical theology and salvation history, and was answered very briefly with a reference to communications.*

By 'biblical theology' do you mean *sola scriptura*?

*Well, a theology that is based just on the scriptures, research on the scriptures and then communicated, without attention to developments that may have occurred.*

In other words, can you teach the people biblical theology? Well, it depends on what you mean by biblical theology.

*Well, something like salvation history as a tool in catechetics.*

Communications, using scripture as the basis of communications. Would you want to teach it this way and add nothing to it?

*No, but based on salvation history as in the OT and NT.*

Yes, and that's what the early Christians were taught.

[Something about differentiated and undifferentiated consciousness.] If they have further questions, you have to answer them. The little boy says, 'Mommy tells me Our Lord is God. Is that right?' How would you answer? These questions arise. You can't just burke them. They're genuine Christian questions.

*What is the relation between psychology and sociology in relation to the functional specialties in theology? For example, psychological or social*

*research on the meaning of marriage or the divorce rate or the meaning of celibacy or research on the meaning of human sexuality. How would you relate this to the eight functional specialties?*

Sociological and theological study are distinct. The interdisciplinary relations of theology and other disciplines is one aspect of communications. Communications is theology; it is not merely communication in the sense of speaking and communicating revelation to all classes and all cultures, it also has an interdisciplinary aspect to it, relations between theology and natural science, human science, history, philosophy, etc. The history we are talking about is one of the eight specialties; it is history as it has a direct bearing on theology itself.

Now, what are your data for theology? You can say it is solely scripture; and that has been a common doctrine in certain sections of the Christian world for several centuries. You can say it is the Christian reality, and then one studies it from its origins up to the present time among your data; and one can be doing sociological studies in that area. There is a relationship between sociology and psychology, on the one hand, and history on the other. For example, the more the historian knows the human sciences the better equipped he will be to handle certain historical questions. For example, when economic theory is well understood it is possible to write the economic history of the Roman Empire and understand the economics of the Roman Empire in such a way as no Roman could have understood it. Similarly, the Monophysite heresy; a lot of it was a matter of sociological problems; problems between the Syrians and the Egyptians against the Byzantine Greeks. There are things like that; and these have to be brought into the history of the Gospels, the history of the doctrines, etc. It is relevant to it and to understanding what was going on. We have the same challenge with the Second Council of Constantinople.

*How would you describe the relationship between the via analytica and the via synthetica in your De Deo Trino in relation to the eight functional specialties?*

Doctrines and Systematics. The *pars synthetica* is Systematics; the *pars analytica* is Doctrines. Of course, what is most clearly understood in any exegetical task is differences; that is when things get moving. If St Thomas says the same thing two hundred times you don't understand it any better than if he had only said it once. But if there are ten topics on which he keeps changing his mind year by year, and they are all interlocked, you can figure out just what is meant with an accuracy that is very difficult to attain by any other method. Similarly, you can be much clearer on Trinitarian doctrine by considering the first three centuries than by just considering the first thirty years. It is only at the tail of the New Testament that the our Lord is called God; but it is on every line, nearly, of Ignatius of Antioch, etc. So in general, what is clear is that things are perceptible when they are in motion; and that is the importance of genetic method.

Of course, you don't get many people that develop the way St Thomas did. Some people think that Thomas always said the same thing; one has to be awfully stupid to say the same thing during a whole lifetime. St Thomas was extremely bright; changing an awful lot of times; although on some points that we think were extremely difficult he was the same all through. But when one doesn't have a man like Thomas who is changing a lot, the thing to do is to take a succession of people. When you start investigating and comparing successive positions and trying to find out the reason for the change, the why – not in some speculative moment – but into some data which is provided by a later discussion and wasn't present in the earlier discussion. With St Thomas, what text of Augustine crops up now?

*Would you relate the existential aspect of interpretation with faith, conversion, foundations.*

The fact that you have this existential aspect as something relevant and something to be mentioned in hermeneutics, in your discussion of Interpretation, means that these eight functional specialties are tied together. Conversion isn't one of the functional specialties; it is not a theological event but a religious event. It can happen at anytime, even after you have done all the eight functional specialties or before you have started them. But it makes the fact that you can have a different understanding of what it is to be a man in this world. Your interpretation is – the questions one asks which are going to be different, etc. What you find interesting is going to be different. Gadamer on this subject is extremely good; Gadamer has a book over four-hundred pages on *Truth and Method*; and his point is, of course, that a method won't give you the truth. He has all this existential concern coming in, along with his idea of causal history or *Wirkungsgeschichte*: the classics create the culture that produces the interpreters of the classics.

*What makes the human sciences scientific, as contrasted with interpretation and history?*

The human sciences are sciences because they give general results. The difference from interpretation and history is that interpretation are and history understanding individuals. It is theoretically possible that two men independent of each other could write the *Divine Comedy*, or *Hamlet*, or *Faust*. Theoretically, it is possible because they are materially individuated; but de facto, the way things work out, those things are all individual. There is a different intelligibility to be attained. Interpretation is working on an individual meaning. History, historical events can recur; there could be an eternal return. Theoretically it is possible: another Socrates, another

Aristotle, etc. But in general, because human living is informed by meaning and value, and these develop, what you are really dealing with is a series of individuals, in the same sense as before. You are narrating what is going forward, what is going forth in one country at one time. Understanding it may be a help towards understanding something else; but when it really is an understanding of something else it means another exegetical or historical investigation of that something else. There is no guarantee that it won't belong to some class. But the sciences get general results. Dynamic psychology is a genetic thing too. But it is a general idea of a process, the knowledge of the way the process can go: here and there, etc. However, it is still something general. It does not attempt to say what any individual might want; it prepares you to move in and interpret this individual to himself. It helps equip the historian as do the human sciences: economics, sociology, etc. It enables the historian to say that you would expect such and such; it accounts for the general picture. But the historian is not interested in routines, i.e., what will happen in any place, under certain conditions: that's routine. The historian is just not interested in routines. The more you know of the human sciences the better interpreter or historian you can be; but the object is not the same. Again, the more good histories are written, the more materials there are for psychologists, sociologists, etc., to work on. Because you don't get the data for the human sciences at a cross-section, at an instant in time; it is over time. And the more time it is over, the larger the data you have to work on. However, you have to have the historian reconstruct the past, and he does so with his individuality insofar as he can. We will talk about this later.

Again, there is the final way insofar as these scientists, these psychologists, sociologists, economists are talking bodies of doctrine. Theology is a body of results, and its relationship to other bodies comes up

in communications. This is fundamental; the over-arching unification is through method. We will come to this later, but in general the Aristotelian idea of the unity of the sciences presupposes that the sciences are a set of static doctrines, deductively constructed, and you relate them by considering their formal objects, their material objects, and the hierarchy in which they stand, etc. De facto, modern sciences are ongoing processes, and the control lies in the method. Insofar as you have a transcendental method you have the key element in any method, and you can understand what they are doing. In general, you can't become a psychologist, or sociologist, etc. to learn what is particular. There is an a priori element and the a posteriori. Just as physics is the interaction between mathematics and the data of physics – there is an upper and lower blade that acts like a scissors; the physics comes out as the mathematics closes in on the data. Similarly, with this method and the data generally, they act as a scissors and part of the upper blade is always transcendental method.

*You have to know the historical context? Does the exegete have to be a historian?*

Up to a point. In other words, the historical context is needed for interpretation; and that context has all sorts of degrees to it. It is like dropping a stone in a pond; the ripples go out in circles, and the further you move from one's center of interest, the less the relevance of the things far away. The thing is to investigate what is central; doing interpretation is doing all that bears on the interpretation. There are all sorts of things around; and the more first-hand information one has the better. But it is this particular specialty, and its problems that is central, i.e. Interpretation. The distinction is not between specialists but between specialties. The difference is that there are different operations to be performed when one is doing



history and when one is doing exegesis. You get the distinction between them coming out when the degree of refinement becomes extremely high, when the degree of development becomes extremely high. Take New Testament textual criticism. You can spend your whole life at it; you have to do history; and the history you do is the history of the manuscripts; it is a very special sort of history. There is the business of collecting manuscripts because they have the same sort of mistake, etc. There you have research at a very high level, specialized criticism. To be an exegete, for example, you have to know something about this but you don't have to be a specialist in textual criticism for the particular area you work in; you have to have good training to know what these people are doing with their critical apparatus, etc., what they are doing in their methods of choice; and the alternatives. The exegete will have to know this to talk about the different traditions and know how they differ, etc. But it still does not have to be a personal discovery of his; it is a matter of having done good courses.

*A long comment on interpretation in relation to textual criticism.*

*What do you mean by reconstructing the past?*

You don't reproduce the past. Understanding Plato is not doing Plato's thinking for him; you are Plato. Again, I said you reconstructs the past; you put together the past as well as you can from the sources that are available. But in any text you will find further complexities that don't make any great difference; you don't know why this word was used and not that one, etc. You don't understand everything about the text, i.e., the way the author understood it if he had total control; but you can have an understanding that the author may not have had. The author just develops and develops the doctrine; he is interested entirely in the doctrine, and not in the history of his work. The history of his work is a further investigation; he might do it

himself if he were interested; usually it is done by somebody else. Doing that reconstruction is a fundamental step in coming to understand the text or a dogma, a series of texts. Collingwood, in the preface to his *Idea of History* – it was edited posthumously – is helpful on this point. However, there is much criticism of Collingwood's work, and for a clarification of his thought see the book by Donagan, *The Later Philosophy of R.G. Collingwood*; you should find that enlightening, but Collingwood's position is complicated by idealistic tendencies. He wanted this reenactment not merely to know what the author was thinking about but in the sense of the past living on into the present. There is that element to modern history; and it is distinct from Husserl, for whom objectivity is intentionality, and public, in the sense that it is independent of the subject; I rely on the virtually unconditioned as a means of knowing an object.

*More about interdisciplinary relationships?*

First, there are interdisciplinary relationships in the sense of general relationships; interdisciplinary relationships insofar as there is teamwork in approaches. There are interdisciplinary relationships insofar as the exegete, if he knows a given science, will have ideas and understand things that otherwise he wouldn't. And similarly for the historian. And knowledge of another discipline is essential if you are going to write its history; if you are going to write the history of mathematics and your knowledge of mathematics is mediocre, then your history will probably be nonsense; you will be emphasizing things of minor importance and missing things of major importance, etc. The same can be said for all the history of physics or chemistry or theology or anything else. The best way to understand a doctrine is to understand its history; but to write the history you have to know the doctrine.

*Would psychology and sociology have perhaps another function in a way – if Christ is the revelation of God and as such is man, would not psychology and sociology be very handy tools, insofar as they enable us to understand what man is, allowing us to have a fuller notion of what we mean by Christ as man than people in the past might have had?*

Yes. A sociologist remarked to me that a theologian who had done a good job on the Church would have done much better if he had known that the sociologists had been over that ground for quite some time. In other words, where does the systematic theologian get his ideas? Well, the problem with the church in the past was that it was too juridical; but for centuries the only human science practically was law. They had no other tools to draw on. So you get a juridical notion of the Church. Without finding any fault at all, you can correct the balance by drawing on all the other sciences that we have at the present time.

*Can you comment further on the last points you were making in the lecture on interpretation?*

You can take the section on interpretation, chapter 17 of *Insight*. Here I talk about distinguishing levels of expression, etc. It is a matter of the study of expression. I found enormously illuminating Bruno Snell, *The Discovery of Mind*. I found enormously illuminating Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. I found them illuminating, not only because of their work, but because of the amount of my own thinking that could dovetail with that. Insofar as exegetes become interested in this method of theology and are struggling with the problem of the expression of meaning, they can communicate, as Bishop Descamps says, by talking with an air that gives the people a sense of the archaic forms, etc; this sort of communication is fundamentally artistic and literary. But there is also the possibility of

accounting for differences of mentality, expression, and so on; constructing the possibilities of the way in which people think. For example, linguistic studies of different systems that are tied in with the systems of grammar, etc. Besides ways of expression there are the ways in which feelings and intelligence develop. Lévi-Strauss talks about the totemic operator. Can we think about things like that, which would enable us to assemble a theoretical construct of the ways in which people think. Lévy-Bruhl, Cassirer, and others talk about participation and the lack of distinction. Just take the ordinary doctrine of distinctions and you can see the complexity involved in it: verbal distinctions, technical distinctions, real distinctions, and so on. Are two things separate when one can separate them physically? Or is there a distinction when one can say that one is not the other, make the negative comparative judgment? This complexity of distinctions is one of the reasons why the primitive has difficulty in keeping things distinct. That is just one instance of it; there are other instances in which ways of thinking that are unfamiliar to us can be explained in basic terms; and that is what I'm trying to suggest. To do that the exegete has to be familiar with those languages, and so on. It is not enough to be familiar with cognitional analysis; you have to get the two together. If this happens, then things in the future won't have the same possibility of being misconstrued as such words like Hellenistic and Hebraic have done.

*What about differences in interpretation, e.g., Catholic and Protestant?*

Our dialectic is a matter of listening to all the differences in exegesis, all the differences in history – history of doctrine, and so on, and putting together the exegetes and historians that seem to think alike and the people in the pews that think that way; and clarifying where the differences are, which differences are superficial and which are profound, etc. The fundamental

aim in dialectic is clarification. However, it will allow for religious differences or differences of non-religious people. It will consider positions, what is necessary to have this method in theology, viz., the transcendental set-up: the rejection of bias, the affirmation of values. It presupposes intellectual and moral conversion. And with these one can do a lot on an interfaith basis or even in relation to people without faith; it is simply a matter of clarifying. The exegete's job is not to answer the questions that arise from dialectic; his job is to say what this text means, what was meant, and not into which pigeon hole you put it.

*When is such a method likely to be accepted?*

I don't know; give us time. Karl Marx, in the 19th century, was just an old man, with a big beard, wasting his time in the British Museum.<sup>2</sup>

*The question has to do with exegesis and interpretation.*

I like very much C.H. Dodd. Perhaps the reason is I don't know much about the subject. The reason I like him is he gives the reasons for his opinions. Someone who is really an expert in the field might not need that. Stephen Neill, *Interpretation of the New Testament 1860-1960* (or whatever) praised Lightfoot. He said that if had anything to do with drawing up theological studies for students, he would make them read 500 pages of Lightfoot's *Apostlic Fathers*. He said that what Lightfoot did was just put an end absolutely to a theory, settle something for all time, namely, the idea that the New Testament was late second century. How did he do it? There were about thirteen epistles attributed to Ignatius of Antioch. He went to work and showed that seven of them were authentic. He was able to take those seven and use the references in them to the New Testament to show that the work

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<sup>2</sup> The recording on the tape that has the lecture ended halfway through the next question. However, the full question period is recorded at [www.bernardlonergan.com/534R0A0E060](http://www.bernardlonergan.com/534R0A0E060), and the remainder of the transcript is taken from that recording.

was done in the first century. Now that is the research – it's not exactly exegesis but history, but it's that type of work that settles something. We spoke for years about the oral tradition behind the New Testament, but we didn't get down to saying much about it. Bultmann wrote about it, though, and people have been working on it since he wrote that. It's something that's being investigated. And consequently, Bultmann is a man who has made his mark. You may not agree with him, but he did something that people keep working on.

*The question (hard to hear) has something to do with common sense, theory, and interpretation.*

There are rules set up in certain Councils – it isn't something that anyone is going to understand right away. You have to know the history and what the questions really were. There comes a point where this just cuts on one side ...

*Would you comment on whether an interpreter can really understand what the author really meant?*

It is possible, but if the author has written in a language that is now dead, if the literature in that language is now scattered, and so on, the possibility of any secure interpretation is quite limited. In other words, there are conditions that have to be fulfilled, and insofar as these conditions are fulfilled, then the possibility of accurate understanding increases. In general, ... data ... Take this deciphering the script that was on some pottery, the man who specialized in breaking codes. He broke through, found the language, and figured out the meaning. That's a very simple example. If you define what sounds the codes stand for and what language those sounds belong to. Similarly, you can get in on the meaning, just as you can break a code. The point is to be able to get away from preconceptions of any kind. There were

about 80 different letters, so he concluded it wasn't an alphabet like ours. It was different consonants written – there was a different sign for each consonant combined with vowel: fa, fe, fi, fo, and so on. You don't start out from our own preconceptions. And the big moment in arriving at someone's mentality is the ecstatic moment, not in the sense of the devotee but in the sense of insight. You break away from your own questions, your own preconceptions, and move in on what the other fellow is thinking about. We'll be talking about that tomorrow in history, because there it's still more difficult, in a sense, because what's going forward in any time is usually what contemporaries do not know. Because you've been in a battle doesn't mean you can write the history of the battle.

*What is the function of conversion in understanding the text?*

Well, there's the possibility you'll misunderstand because the author's talking over your head. And if he's talking over your head in a very radical fashion, conversion becomes relevant.

*Not necessarily religious conversion, though.*

Not necessarily. If you are a religious man, you can understand it. But if you're not, the question arises. I was at Notre Dame when they had their faculty discussion on setting up their graduate program in theology a few years ago. Among the outsiders was the Dean of Religious Studies at Princeton. The question came up whether to teach Catholic theology you had to be a Catholic. And he said, 'I've got [non-Catholic] people who teach my Catholic students their religion better than they were ever taught before.' I've reflected on that, and the conclusion I came to was that if the person is a religious man he can do that because he is in love with what fundamentally is needed to convey a religious truth.

