CHAPTER THIRTEEN

SYSTEMATICS

The seventh functional specialty, systematics, is concerned with promoting an understanding of the realities affirmed in the previous specialty, doctrines. Our remarks will fall under five headings. First, there is to be clarified the function of systematics. Secondly, there are to be listed the options that previous discussion has already closed. Thirdly, there is to be asked the relevance of any effort on the part of the human mind to understand transcendent mystery. Fourthly, there are the complexities that arise from the fact that systematic theology seeks an understanding not of data but of truths. Finally, there will be a brief indication of the manner in which a later systematics will continue, develop, revise earlier work.

1. The Function of Systematics

For Kant understanding (Verstand) was the faculty of judgment. It is a view with antecedents in Plato and Scotus and, to a less extent, in Aristotle and Aquinas. For in the latter pair there is emphasized a distinction between two operations of intellect. In the first there are answered questions of the type, Quid sit? Cur ita sit? In the second there are

answered questions of the type, An sit? Utrum ita sit? On this showing one is led to conceive understanding as the source not only of definitions but also of hypotheses, while it is by judgment that is known the existence of what has been defined, the verification of what a hypothesis proposes.

Now this distinction between understanding and judgment seems essential to an understanding of the Augustinian and Anselmian precept, Crede ut intelligas. It does not mean, Believe that you may judge, for belief already is a judgment. It does not mean, Believe that you may demonstrate, for the truths of faith do not admit human demonstration. But very luminously it does mean, Believe that you may understand, for the truths of faith make sense to a believer and they seem to be nonsense to an unbeliever.

Out of the Augustinian, Anselmian, Thomist tradition, despite an intervening heavy overlay of conceptualism,[1] the first Vatican council retrieved the notion of understanding. It taught that reason illumined by faith, when it inquires diligently, piously, soberly, can with God's help attain a highly fruitful understanding of the mysteries of faith both

---

1) On conceptualists, see my Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas, London (Darton, Longman & Todd) and Notre Dame (University of Notre Dame Press) 1967, Index, s.v., p. 228. The key issue is whether concepts result from understanding or understanding results from concepts.

from the analogy of what it naturally knows and from the interconnection of the mysteries with one another and with man's last end (DS 3016).

The promotion of such an understanding of the mysteries we conceive to be the principal function of systematics. This specialty presupposes doctrines. Its aim is not to add a further proof of doctrines ex ratione theologica. On the contrary, doctrines are to be regarded as established by the addition of foundations to dialectic. The aim of systematics is not to increase certitude but to promote understanding. It does not seek to establish the facts. It strives for some inkling of how it could possibly be that the facts are what they are. Its task is to take over the facts, established in doctrines, and to attempt to work them into an assimilable whole.

The classic example of this distinction between doctrines and systematics is provided by the fourth book of Aquinas' Summa contra Gentiles. There chapters 2 to 9 are concerned with the existence of God the Son, chapters 15 to 18 with the existence of the Holy Spirit, chapters 27 to 39 with the existence of the Incarnation. But chapters 10 to 14 center in the question of the manner in which a divine generation is to be conceived. Similarly, chapters 19 to 25 have to do with the manner of conceiving the Holy Spirit, and chapters 40 to 49 have to do with the systematics of the Incarnation.

Elsewhere Aquinas pointed out that a disputation could be directed to either of two ends. If directed to removing a

doubt about what was so, then in theology one appealed principally to the authorities that the listener recognized. But if directed to the instruction of the student so that he be brought to an understanding of the truth in question, then one must take one's stand on the reasons that bring to light the ground of the truth and enable one to know how what is said is true. Otherwise, if the master settles the question only by an appeal to authorities, he will make his pupil certain of what is so; but so far from giving him any understanding or science, he will send him away empty.[2]

In contrast with medieval procedure, Catholics in recent centuries have not merely distinguished but even separated philosophy and theology. The result was two theologies: there was a natural theology in the philosophy course; there was a further systematic or speculative theology concerned with an orderly presentation of the mysteries of faith. I think the separation unfortunate. In the first place it was misleading. Time and again students took it for granted that systematic theology was just more philosophy and so of no religious significance. At the opposite pole there were those that argued that a natural philosophy does not attain the Christian God and, further, that what is not the Christian God is an intruder and an idol. In the second place, the separation weakened both natural theology and systematic theology. It weakened natural theology for abstruse philosophic concepts lose nothin of their validity and can gain enormously in

---

2) Quodl., IV, q. 9, a. 3 (18).

acceptability when they are associated with their religious equivalents. It weakened systematic theology for the separation prevents the presentation of systematics as the Christian prolongation of what man can begin to know by his native powers. In the third place, the separation seems founded on a mistake. As long as it is assumed that philosophy goes forward with such sublime objectivity that it is totally independent of the human mind that thinks it then, no doubt, there is something to be said for issuing a claim to such objectivity for preliminary matters of concern to the faith. But the fact of the matteer is that proof becomes rigorous only within a systematically formulated horizon, that the formulation of horizons varies with the presence and absence of intellectual, moral, religious conversion, and that conversion is never the logical consequence of one's previous position but, on the contrary, a radical revision of that position.

Basically the issue is a transition from the abstract logic of classicism to the concreteness of method. On the former view what is basic is proof. On the latter view what is basic is conversion. Proof appeals to an abstraction named right reason. Conversion transforms the concrete individual to make him capable of grasping not merely conclusions but principles as well.

Again, the issue is one's notion of objectivity. If one considers logical proof to be basic, one wants an objectivity that is independent of the concrete existing subject. But while objectivity reaches what is independent of the concrete existing

subject, objectivity itself is not reached by what is independent of the concrete existing subject. On the contrary, objectivity is reached through the self-transcendence of the concrete existing subject, and the fundamental forms of self-transcendence are intellectual, moral, and religious conversion. To attempt to ensure objectivity apart from self-transcendence only generates illusions.[3]

It may be objected, however, that this transition from the abstract to the concrete, from proof to conversion, does not square with the claim of the first Vatican council that through creatures God can be known with certainty by the natural light of human reason (DS 3004, 3026).

In the first place, I would draw attention to the fact that the foregoing definition tacitly prescinds from the actual order in which we live. The third schema of Dei Filius, drawn up by Fr. Joseph Kleutgen, read in the canon: "... per ea quae facta sunt, naturali ratione ab homine lapso certo

---

3) The basic statement in this connection is by J.H. Newman, An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent, London 1870, Paperback, Garden City, N.Y. (Doubleday, Image Books) 1958, chapters 8 and 9. See also his Discussions and Arguments on Various Subjects, London (Longmans) 1924: "Logic makes but a sorry rhetoric with the multitude; first shoot round corners and you may not despair of converting by a syllogism." This passage is quoted in the Grammar, p. 90.

cognosci et demonstrari posse ..."[4] The final version, however, makes no mention of fallen man and, in view of the abstract classicism then prevalent, is perhaps most simply understood to refer to the state of pure nature.[5]

In the second place, with regard to the actual order in which we live, I should say that normally religious conversion precedes the effort to work out rigorous proofs for the existence of God. But I do not think it impossible that such proofs might be a factor facilitating religious conversion so that, by way of exception, certain knowledge of God's existence should precede the acceptance of God's gift of his love.

I have been advocating an integration of natural with systematic theology. But this is not to mean any blurring of distinctions. Separation is one thing, distinction is another. A man's body and soul can be distinct even though the man is

---

4) See J.D. Mansi, Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova et Amplissima Collectio 53, 168.

5) See my article, "Natural Knowledge of God", Proceedings, Catholic Theological Society of America, 23 (1968) 54 - 69. Hermann Pottmeyer, Der Glaube vor dem Anspruch der Wissenschaft, Freiburg (Herder) 1968, pp. 168-204. David Coffey, "Natural Knowledge of God: Reflections on Romans I, 18 - 32", Theological Studies 31 (1970) 674 - 691.

still alive. Similarly, what is natural in a theologian's operations and what is supernatural, are distinct, even though one part is not assigned to a philosophy department and the other to a theology department. Again, there is the intelligibility of what cannot be otherwise, and there is the intelligibility of what can be otherwise; the two are distinct, even though a single explanation consists partly of one and partly of the other. Finally, there is the intelligibility within the reach of the human mind, and there is the intelligibility beyond it, and there is the intermediate, imperfect, analogous intelligibility that we can find in the mysteries of faith; the three are distinct but there is no occasion to separate them.

I would note that I am not proposing any novelty. I am proposing a return to the type of systematic theology illustrated by Aquinas' Summa contra Gentiles and Summa theologiae. Both are systematic expressions of a wide-ranging understanding of the truths concerning God and man. Both are fully aware of the distinctions mentioned above. Neither countenances the separation that later was introduced.

If the aim of systematics is, as I hold, understanding, then it must present a single unified whole and not two separate parts that tend to overlook the primacy of conversion and tend to overemphasize the significance of proof.

2. Closed Options

From the very first chapter we have moved out of a faculty psychology with its options between intellectualism and

voluntarism, and into an intentionality analysis that distinguishes four levels of conscious and intentional operations, where each successive level sublates previous levels by going beyond them, by setting up a higher principle, by introducing new operations, and by preserving the integrity of previous levels, while extending enormously their range and their significance.

Several consequences follow. The fourth and highest level is that of deliberation, evaluation, decision. It follows that the priority of intellect is just the priority of the first three levels of experiencing, understanding, and judging.

Secondly, it follows that the speculative intellect or pure reason is just an abstraction. Scientific or philosophic experiencing, understanding, and judging do not occur in a vacuum. They are the operations of an existential subject who has decided to devote himself to the pursuit of understanding and truth and, with greater or less success, is faithful to his commitment.

Thirdly, there arises the possibility of an exception to the old adage, nihil amatum nisi praecognitum. Specifically, it would seem that God's gift of his love (Rom 5, 5) is not something that results from or is conditioned by man's knowledge of God. Far more plausibly it would seem that the gift may precede our knowledge of God and, indeed, may be the cause of our seeking knowledge of God.[6] In that case the gift by itself

---

6) Cf. Pascal's remark: "Take comfort, you would not be seeking me if you had not already found me". Pensées vii, 553.

would be an orientation towards an unknown. Still, the orientation reveals its goal by its absoluteness: it is with all one's heart and all one's soul and with all one's mind and all one's strength. It is, then, an orientation to what is transcendent in lovableness and, when that is unknown, it is an orientation to transcendent mystery.

Now an orientation to transcendent mystery is basic to systematic theology. It provides the primary and fundamental meaning of the name, God. It can be the bond uniting all men despite cultural differences. It provides the origin for inquiry about God, for seeking assurance of his existence, for endeavoring to reach some understanding of the mysteries of faith. At the same time, it is quite in harmony with the conviction that no system we can construct will encompass or plumb or master the mystery by which we are held. As the fourth Lateran council declared: "... between creator and creature no similarity can be noted without a greater dissimilarity being noted" (DS 806). As the first Vatican council added: "The divine mysteries so exceed created intellect that, even when given in revelation and received by faith, they remain covered over by the very veil of faith itself...." (DS 3016).

Again, an orientation to transcendent mystery illuminates negative or apophatic theology which is content to say what God is not. For such a theology is concerned to speak about a transcendent unknown, a transcendent mystery. Its positive nourishment is God's gift of his love.

However, if there is to be an affirmative or kataphatic,

as well as a negative or apophatic, theology, there must be confronted the question whether God is an object. Now certainly God is not an object in the naive realist sense of what is already out there now, or already up there now, or already in here now. Further he is not an object if one retreats from naive realism to an empiricism, a naturalism, a positivism, or an idealism. But if by an object one means anything that is intended in questions and known through correct answers, anything within the world mediated by meaning, then a distinction has to be drawn.

On what I have called the primary and fundamental meaning of the name, God, God is not an object. For that meaning is the term of an orientation to transcendent mystery. Such an orientation, while it is the climax of the self-transcending process of raising questions, none the less is not properly a matter of raising and answering questions. So far from lying within the world mediated by meaning, it is the principle that can draw people out of that world and into the cloud of unknowing.[7]

However, withdrawal is for return. Not only can one's prayer consist in letting lapse all images and thoughts so as to permit God's gift of his love to absorb one, but also those that

---

7) I have found extremely helpful William Johnston's The Mysticism of the Cloud of Unknowing, New York, Rome, Tournai, Paris (Desclée) 1967. Readers wishing to fill out my remarks will find in his book a position very largely coherent with my own.

pray in that exhausting fashion can cease to pray and think back on their praying. Then they objectify in images and concepts and words both what they have been doing and the God that has been their concern.

But God comes within the world mediated by meaning in far more common ways. One's fundamental concern springs from God's gift of his love, but one's questions begin from the world and from man. Could the world be mediated by questions for intelligence if it did not have an intelligent ground? Could the world's facticity be reconciled with its intelligibility, if it did not have a necessary ground? Is it with man that morality emerges in the universe so that the universe is amoral and alien to man, or is the ground of the universe a moral being? Such questions invite answers and, as the questions intend, so too the answers can reveal an intelligent, necessary, moral ground of the universe.

Above all, in a religion that is shared by many, that enters into and transforms cultures, that extends down the ages, God will be named, questions about him will be asked, answers will be forthcoming. In still another manner God becomes an object in the very precise sense of what is intended in questions and known by correct answers. Nor is this meaning in any way invalidated by the fact that naive realism, empiricism, positivism, idealism, or phenomenology cannot think of God and consequently cannot think of him as an object.

There is a still further consequence of the shift from a faculty psychology to intentionality analysis. It is that the basic terms and relations of systematic theology will be not

metaphysical, as in medieval theology, but psychological. As has been worked out in our chapters on method, on religion, and on foundations, general basic terms name conscious and intentional operations. General basic relations name elements in the dynamic structure linking operations and generating states. Special basic terms name God's gift of his love and Christian witness. Derived terms and relations name the objects known in operations and correlative to states.

The point to making metaphysical terms and relations not basic but derived is that a critical metaphysics results. For every term and relation there will exist a corresponding element in intentional consciousness. Accordingly, empty or misleading terms and relations can be eliminated, while valid ones can be elucidated by the conscious intention from which they are derived. The importance of such a critical control will be evident to anyone familiar with the vast arid wastes of theological controversy.

The positive function of a critical metaphysics is twofold. On the one hand it provides a basic heuristic structure, a determinate horizon, within which questions arise. On the other hand, it provides a criterion for settling the difference between literal and metaphorical meaning and, again, between notional and real distinctions.[8]

---

8) On the meaning of heuristic structure, of reality, and of real and notional distinctions, see Insight, Chapters two, fourteen, and sixteen.

Since knowledge of intentional consciousness can develop, it follows that the whole foregoing structure admits development and thereby escapes rigidity. At the same time, the structures ensures continuity, for the possibility of development is the possibility of revising earlier views, and the possibility of revising earlier views is the continuing existence of the structure already determined. Finally, the approach eliminates any authoritarian basis for method. One can find out for oneself and in oneself just what one's conscious and intentional operations are and how they are related to one another. One can discover for oneself and in oneself why it is that performing such and such operations in such and such manners constitutes human knowing. Once one has achieved that, one is no longer dependent on someone else in selecting one's method and in carrying it out. One is on one's own.

3. Mystery and Problem

Man's response to transcendent mystery is adoration. But adoration does not exclude words. Least of all, does it do so when men come together to worship. But the words, in turn, have their meaning within some cultural context. Contexts can be ongoing. One ongoing context can be derived from another. Two ongoing contexts can interact. Accordingly, while mystery is very different from the problems of common sense, of science, of scholarship, of much philosophy, still the worship of God and, more generally, the religions of mankind stand within a social, cultural, historical context and, by that involvement, generate the problems with which theologians

attempt to deal.

Our reflections on the differentiation of human consciousness have brought to light some of the general types of context within which religious and theological discourse occur. The expression of man's apprehension of God can be largely symbolic; then inadequacies of expression are corrected by reinterpretation, by so modifying the symbol that undesired meanings are excluded and desired meanings are elucidated. Next, in the Presocratic world of a Xenophanes or the post-systematic world of Clement of Alexandria anthropomorphic speech about God will be discredited. The biblical God that stands or is seated, that has a right hand and a left, that waxes angry and repents, is not taken literally. God is conceived in terms of the transcendental notions of intelligibility, truth, reality, goodness. Such rethinking of God the Father entails a rethinking of his Son, and the rethinking of the Son generates a tension between the Son as rethought and the Son as depicted in the New Testament. There followed the crises provoked by Arius, by Nestorius, by Eutyches, and the post-systematic pronouncements of Nicea, Ephesus, and Chalcedon. The minimal use of technical expressions in the Greek councils and the late Byzantine concern with theology as a whole prepared the way for the total rethinking of Christian doctrine in systematic terms by medieval theologians. There resulted a legacy that interacted with the ongoing context of church doctrines up to the second Vatican council. Meanwhile, modern science had eliminated much of the biblical apprehension of man and his world.

Modern scholarship had kept revising the interpretation of biblical, patristic, medieval, and subsequent sources. Modern philosophy entailed a radical shift in systematic thinking.

Accordingly, while mystery is not to be confused with problem, the ongoing contexts within which mystery is adored and adoration is explained are anything but free from problems. Least of all, at the present time is the existence of problems to be ignored. For now problems are so numerous that many do not know what to believe. They are not unwilling to believe. They know what church doctrines are. But they want to know what church doctrines could possibly mean. Their question is the question to be met by systematic theology.

The answer to that question is a gradual increase of understanding. A clue is spotted that throws some light on the matter in hand. But that partial light gives rise to further questions, the further questions to still further answers. The illuminated area keeps expanding for some time but eventually still further questions begin to yield diminishing returns. The vein of ore seems played out. But successive thinkers may tackle the whole matter over again. Each may make a notable contribution. Eventually perhaps there arrives on the scene a master capable of envisaging all the issues and of treating them in their proper order.

That order is not the order in which the solutions were discovered. For the course of discovery is roundabout. Subordinate issues are apt to be solved first. Key issues are likely to be overlooked until a great deal has been achieved. Quite distinct from the order of discovery is the order of teaching. For a teacher postpones solutions that presuppose other

solutions. He begins with the issues whose solution does not presuppose the solution of other issues.

Such was the ordo disciplinae that Aquinas wanted in theology books for beginners.[9] To give a brief illustration we note that in the first book of the Scriptum super Sententias there is no separation of the treatment of God as one and of God as Trinity; at random questions regard either the first or the second. But in the Summa contra Gentiles a systematic separation is effected: the first book deals solely with God as one; chapters 2 to 26 of the fourth book deal solely with God as Trinity. In the first part of the Summa theologiae questions 2 to 26 regard God as one, while questions 27 to 43 regard the Trinity. What in the Contra Gentiles was treated in very separate books, in the Summa theologiae is united in a continuous stream. For questions 27 to 29 are still concerned with God, while the elements of trinitarian theory are gradually constructed. Question 27 asks, not whether the Son proceeds from the Father, but whether there are processions in God. Question 28 asks whether these processions give rise to relations in God. Question 29 asks whether these relations are persons.[10]

Not only does the order of teaching or exposition differ from the order of discovery, but also the terms and relations of systematic thought express a development of understanding over and above the understanding had either from a simple

---

9) See Aquinas, Summa theologiae, Prologus.

10) I have treated the matter more fully in my Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas, pp. 206 ff.

inspection or from an erudite exegesis of the original doctrinal sources. So in Thomist trinitarian theory such terms as procession, relation, person have a highly technical meaning. They stand to these terms as they occur in scriptural or patristic writings much as in modern physics the terms, mass and temperature, stand to the adjectives, heavy and cold.

The existence of this divergence between religious sources and theological systems is a necessary consequence of the view expressed in the first Vatican council that, while it is the same dogma, meaning, position that is being understood, still that understanding grows and advances down the ages (DS 3020). In our chapter on Doctrines, we were concerned to affirm the permanence of dogma despite the historically shifting contexts within which dogmas were understood and expressed. In the present chapter on Systematics we have to advert to the reverse side of the coin and, while maintaining the permanence of dogmas, attend principally to systematic developments.

Such developments occur in widely differing contexts. They were initiated in the ancient Greco-Roman and Byzantine worlds. They reached a high perfection in the statically conceived systems of medieval thought. They are being invited to emerge within the ongoing context of modern science, modern scholarship, and modern philosophy.

Unfortunately, though very humanly, all such developments are under the sign of contradiction. No less than understanding, misunderstanding can express itself systematically. Again, while genuine understanding tends to be unique, misunder-

standing tends to be a manifold. Just as there are conflicting interpretations, conflicting histories, conflicting foundations, conflicting doctrines, so too one is to expect an array of conflicting systems.

To deal with such multiplicity, once more one must appeal to dialectic. One has to assemble the manifold, ascertain differences, reduce differences to their grounds. Such grounds may lie in some social, cultural, historical context, in the native endowment or the formation of given authors, in the presence or absence of intellectual, moral, or religious conversion, in the manner in which the method and task of systematic theology were conceived. On the basis of such analysis and in the light of one's own foundations and method one will judge which systems express positions and which express counter-positions.

4. Understanding and Truth

Already we have had occasion to distinguish data and facts. Data are given to sense or to consciousness. They are the given just as given. They are, of course, hardly noticed unless they fit in with one's understanding and have a name in one's language. At the same time, with an appropriate development of understanding and language, they will be noticed and, if important from some viewpoint, they will be insisted upon.

While data are just a single component in human knowledge, facts result from the conjunction of three distinct levels. Facts have the immediacy of what is given, the precision of what is somehow understood, conceived, named, the stubborness

of what is affirmed because a virtually unconditioned has been reached.

Now one can understand data and one can understand facts. The understanding of data is expressed in hypotheses, and the verification of hypotheses leads to probable assertions. The understanding of facts is a more complicated matter, for it supposes the existence of two types or orders of knowledge, where the facts of the first type supply the data for the second type. Thus, in critical history we distinguished two inquiries: a first inquiry aimed at finding out where one's witnesses got their information, how they checked it, how competently they used it; this was followed by a second inquiry that employed the evaluated information to construct an account of what was going forward in a given milieu at a given place and time. Similarly, in natural science one can start from the facts of commonsense knowledge and use them as the data for the construction of scientific theories; and inversely one can return from scientific theory through applied science, engineering, technology to use the transformation of the commonsense world.

bring about

Now the peculiarity of such understanding of facts is that two orders or types of knowledge call for two applications of the notion of truth. There is the truth of the facts in the first order or type. There is also the truth of the account or explanation reached in the second type or order. Moreover, while initially the second depends on the first, ultimately the two are interdependent, for the second can lead to a correction of the first. The critical historian's discovery of what was going forward can lead him to revise his evaluation of his

witnesses. The scientific account of physical reality can involve a revision of commonsense views.

Far more complicated is the case of our eight, directly or indirectly, interdependent, functional specialties. Each of the eight is the work of all four levels of intentional consciousness. Consequently, each of the eight results from experience, insights, judgments of fact, and judgments of value. At the same time each is a specialty inasmuch as each is concerned to perform one of eight tasks. So research is concerned to make the data available. Interpretation to determine their meaning. History to proceed from meaning to what was going forward. Dialectic to go to the roots of conflicting histories, interpretations, researches. Foundations to distinguish positions from counter-positions. Doctrines to use foundations as a criterion for deciding betweeen the alternatives offered by dialectic. Systematics to seek an understanding of the realities affirmed in doctrines.

Our present concern is with doctrines and systematics. Both aim at understanding the truth, but they do so in different manners. Doctrines aims at a clear and distinct affirmation of religious realities: its principal concern is the truth of such an affirmation; its concern to understand is limited to the clarity and distinctness of its affirmation. On the other hand, systematics aims at an understanding of the religious realities affirmed by doctrines. It wants its understanding to be true, for it is not a pursuit of misunderstanding. At the same time, it is fully aware that its understanding is bound to be imperfect, merely analogous, commonly no more than probable.

~/Doctrines

There are, then, in doctrines and systematics two instances of truth and two instances of understanding. Doctrines are concerned to state clearly and distinctly the religious community's confession of the mysteries so hidden in God that man could not know them if they had not been revealed by God.[11] Assent to such doctrines is the assent of faith, and that assent is regarded by religious people as firmer than any other. At the same time, the measure of understanding accompanying the assent of faith traditionally is recognized as highly variable. Irenaeus for instance acknowledged that one believer could be far more articulate than another, but he denied that the former was more a believer or the latter less a believer.[12]

In contrast, the views set forth in a systematic theology are commonly considered no more than probable, but the understanding to be reached is to be on the level of one's times. In the medieval period it was static system. In the contemporary world it has to be at home in modern science, modern scholarship, and modern philosophy.

---

11) On confessions of faith in the New Testament, see V.H. Neufeld, The Earliest Christian Confessions, Leiden (Brill) 1963, vol. V of New Testament Tools and Studies edited by B.M. Metzger.

12) See Adv. haer. I, 10, 3; Harvey I, 84 - 96.

Here perhaps may be inserted brief answers to the accusations often made against systematic theology, that it is speculative, irreligious, fruitless, irrelevant, elitist. Now a systematic theology can be speculative, as is clear from German idealism; but the systematic theology we advocate is really quite a homely affair. It aims at an understanding of the truths of faith, a Glaubensverständnis. The truths of faith envisaged are church confessions. Again, a systematic theology can become irreligious. This is particularly true when its main emphasis is, not conversion, but proof, or when positions are taken and maintained out of individual or corporate pride. But when conversion is the basis of the whole theology, when religious conversion is the event that gives the name, God, its primary and fundamental meaning, when systematic theology does not believe it can exhaust or even do justice to that meaning, not a little has been done to keep systematic theology in harmony with its religious origins and aims. Thirdly, systematic theology has its fruitless aspects, for just as understanding can be systematized, so too can misunderstanding. As the former type of system will be attractive to those that understand, so too the latter type will be attractive to the usually larger number of those that do not understand. Dialectic cannot be simply exorcized. But at least one no longer is totally at its mercy, when one methodically acknowledges the existence of such dialectic, sets up criteria for distinguishing between positions and counter-positions, and invites everyone to magnify the accuracy or inaccuracy of his judgments by developing what he thinks are positions and by reversing what he thinks are

counter-positions. Fourthly, systematic theology is élitist: it is difficult, as also are mathematics, science, scholarship, philosophy. But the difficulty is worth meeting. If one does not attain, on the level of one's age, an understanding of the religious realities in which one believes, one will be simply at the mercy of the psychologists, the sociologists, the philosophers, that will not hesitate to tell believers what it really is in which they believe. Finally, systematic theology is irrelevant, if it does not provide the basis for the eighth functional specialty, communications. But to communicate one must understand what one has to communicate. No repetition of formulas can take the place of understanding. For it is understanding alone that can say what it grasps in any of the manners demanded by the almost endless series of different audiences.

5. Continuity, Development, Revision

Four factors make for continuity. Of these one first may consider the normative structure of our conscious and intentional acts. In saying that the structure is normative I mean, of course, that it can be violated. For such acts may be directed, not to what truly is good, but to maximizing individual or group advantage. Again, they may be directed, not to the truth that is affirmed because a virtually unconditioned has been grasped, but to any of the misconceptions of truth that have been systematized in sundry philosophies: naive realism, empiricism, rationalism, idealism, positivism, pragmatism, phenomenology,

existentialism. Finally, they may be directed, not to increasing human understanding, but to satisfying the "objective" or the "scientific" or the "meaningful" norms set up by some logic or method that finds it convenient to leave human understanding out of the picture.

The structure, then, of our conscious and intentional operations can be violated in various manners. There results the dialectic of positions and counter-positions. But the fact of this dialectic only objectifies and manifests the need for man to be authentic. At once, it invites him to intellectual and to moral conversion, while it points to the social and the cultural failure of those peoples that have insisted they could get along very well with neither intellectual nor moral conversion.

A second factor in continuity is God's gift of his love. It is a gift, not something due to our natures, but something that God freely bestows. It is given in various measures. But it is ever the same love, and so it ever tends in the same direction, to provide a further factor for continuity.

A third factor is the permanence of dogma. The mysteries that God alone knows, that he has revealed, that the church has defined, may in the course of time become better understood. But what is to be understood, is not some item within the ambit of human knowledge. It is just what God has revealed, and so dogma in this sense is permanent. Human understanding of it has ever to be <u>in eodem dogmate, eodem sensu eademque sententia</u> (DS 3020).

A fourth factor making for continuity is the occurrence

in the past of genuine achievement. I have done two studies of the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas. One on Grace and Freedom, the other on Verbum. Were I to write on these topics today, the method I am proposing would lead to several significant differences from the presentation by Aquinas. But there also would exist profound affinities. For Aquinas' thought on grace and freedom and his thought on cognitional theory and on the trinity were genuine achievements of the human spirit. Such achievement has a permanence of its own. It can be improved upon. It can be inserted in larger and richer contexts. But unless its substance is incorporated in subsequent work, the subsequent work will be a substantially poorer affair.

Besides continuity there is development. There is the less conspicuous type of development that arises when the gospel is preached effectively to a different culture or to a different class in the same culture. There is the more conspicuous type of development that arises from the various differentiations of human consciousness. Finally, there are the fruits as well as the evils of dialectic. Truth can come to light, not because truth has been sought, but because a contrary error has been affirmed and repulsed.

Besides continuity and development, there also is revision. All development involves some revision. Further, because a theology is the product not simply of a religion but of a religion within a given cultural context, theological revisions may have their origin, not primarily in theological, but rather in cultural developments. So at the present time theological

development is fundamentally a long delayed response to the development of modern science, modern scholarship, modern philosophy.

There exists, however, a distinct question. Even though fundamentally current theological revision is just an adaptation to cultural change, there remains the possibility that these adaptations will in turn imply still further revisions. Thus, the shift from a predominately logical to a basically methodical viewpoint may involve a revision of the view that doctrinal developments were "implicitly" revealed.[13] Again, just as the Alexandrian school refused to take literally the anthropomorphisms of the bible to bring about a philosophically based demythologization, so it may be asked whether modern scholarship may not bring about further demythologizations on exegetical or historical grounds. Such questions, of course, are very large indeed. Unmistakably they are theological. They accordingly lie outside the scope of the present work on method.

---

13) See J.R. Geiselmann, "Dogma", Handbuch theologischer Grundbegriffe, hrsg. v. H. Fries, München (Kösel) 1962; I, 235.