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7 Special Theological Categories

We have considered foundational reality, the sufficiency of the foundational reality, pluralism in expression, pluralism in theology, categories, and general theological categories. There remain two topics: special theological categories and use of the categories.

Special theological categories. Medieval theologians took over Aristotle, adapted him, but also extended him. What they got out of Aristotle they called the natural, and what they added on in terms of God, Christ, the Church, and grace, they connected with another type of category which they called the supernatural. We distinguish, in the same fashion, between general and special categories. General categories shared by theologians with other subjects, and special, those proper to theology. In theoretical theology, such as was developed in the Middle Ages, where common sense and theory are differentiated, but interiority is not differentiated from theory, sanctifying grace is thought of as an absolutely supernatural entitative habit radicated in the essence of the soul. It is a metaphysical conception of sanctifying grace, and it has a lot of properties that bring you into the religious dimension later on, but the fundamental conception is metaphysical. In a methodical theology, one conceives one's religious entities in terms, basically, of religious experience. Consequently, your basic categories will come from studies of the spiritual life. Sanctifying grace as leading to the purgative way, overcoming temptations, and the illuminative way, advancing in appreciation of spiritual realities and thought and exercises, and the unitive way. What we said in the section on religion is the fundamental source of religious categories, this fundamental element, namely, studies of personal development, studies from the viewpoint of religious experience, of personal development. But from the studies of individuals one can advance in one's categories

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from subject to subjects, to the community, the religious group, and from the religious group to its history, an ongoing tradition, its development, and so on.

Again, the fundamental category is a dynamic state of being in love without reservations. From the love one can go to its source: to God, the doctrine of the Trinity, the Incarnation.

Again, from differentiations of consciousness, all the differentiations of consciousness that we have in our general categories, one can go on to differentiations in religious consciousness and, particularly, the radical differentiations between authenticity and unauthenticity.

Again, in our chapter on the human good, we spoke of progress and decline, and religion. Well, that is a third category, redemption. 'Be not overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.' As far as method is concerned, it just sets up the general character of special theological categories, namely, one starts from religious experience, the development of the individual in the religious life, the community, the religious group; the religious group, its history, its origins. From religious experience as love to the one that is love, to God. From the general differentiation of human consciousness to the differentiation of religious consciousness; and, then, from progress and decline – progress and decline are your general categories – one has the religious category of redemption, overcoming evil, overcoming the surd produced by sin.

8 Use of the Categories

One has to attend, in every case of setting up any category or developing categories, above all to the transcultural base. The transcultural base for the general categories is authentic or unauthentic man; and, for special categories, the authentic or unauthentic Christian. The derivation of the categories is a matter of the subject's self-appropriation. In other words, it is not so much a matter of Descartes's clear and distinct ideas – while they are very good – but rather, in each case, of Newman's real apprehension as opposed to a notional apprehension. By finding out what the reality is in yourself, or the way it

affects yourself, you have a far fuller and more exact apprehension of that reality. It is that apprehension of the reality that is more important than the expression, because if you really have hold of it you will succeed in communicating, even though your language is deficient.

There is a purification of the categories prepared by dialectic, the study of opposed positions. The history of theology provides a way in which one can make one's categories ever less subject to the various types of deviation to which man is subject, which method tries to eliminate. The purification is prepared by the dialectic, the exhibition of oppositions, but it is effected through conversion, through the objectivity that is the result, the fruit, of self-transcending subjectivity.

General categories occur and are employed in any of the eight functional specialties. But with special categories, their genesis is in dialectic – well, in the first four, but they come out clearly in the dialectic. Explicit commitment to them is in foundations, commitment to the fundamental special categories, namely, those of being in love with God. In foundations you have the explicit commitment. And, then, whether the extensions of the fundamental categories are just models, or hypotheses, or descriptions, occurs in the process of doctrines, systematics, and so on.

Further, all method is an interaction of two blades, it is a scissors movement. You have data on which you are working and the heuristic structure within which you are operating on the data. Your categories are challenged by the data, they become more and more refined and differentiated from interaction with the data. Physics is not just mathematics, and it is not just experimenting; it is an interaction between the two: a selection of mathematical functions in the light of the data, and deductions from the functions as specified by the data, to give you the basis for further experimentation. It is a constant process of interaction between the two.

Similarly, your categories set up in your foundations provide a matrix that becomes specified through the data on which you are operating, becomes more

particularized by them, and it leads to a further clarification in your categories, an ongoing process.

The functional specialty, foundations, then, is concerned largely with the origins, the genesis, the present state, the possible developments and adaptations of the categories employed by Christians in talking about themselves, their traditions, and so on. It is the general framework within which one thinks and it derives mainly from the realms of transcendence and interiority.

There remain three further functional specialties to be treated: doctrines, systematics, and communications. Doctrines: in the light of the commitment contained in foundations, doctrines are selected from the oppositions presented in dialectic. Systematics is concerned with the coherence of the doctrines internally and their coherence with what we know from other sources. Communications, finally, is the task of communicating the understood doctrines to the men and women in every class and every culture.

Question 101: You specified foundations as the ground of Christian theology. Is that appropriate, or is it more general than that?

Lonergan: You can have it more general than that. In other words, this method is perfectly general.

Question 102: You said that the base of foundations is the religiously self-transcending, religiously as existentially converted subject. Does the theologian have to undergo religious conversion to be a theologian?

Lonergan: I was at a meeting at Notre Dame when they were setting up their graduate program in theology. Dean Young from Religious Studies at Princeton was there among others. Someone was saying, 'You have to be a Catholic to teach in a Catholic graduate school of theology.' And he said, 'No, I have a man who can teach my Catholic pupils their religion better than anyone they have had previously and he is not a Catholic.' I think you have to be a religious person to do theology. In other words, it is not to be

simply something that you are reporting on. If you are to take it seriously yourself, to be committed to it, you have to be a religious person, but you don't have to be a person of a specific denomination. Is that clear? In other words, you have to have some religious experience, know what that means.

Question 103: So one who is explicitly an atheist could not?

Lonergan: If he really was and not just an anonymous Christian. I think there are limitations on a person who is nonreligious or irreligious in the field of theology.

Question 104: The question is in terms of possibility of doing theology.

Lonergan: Oh: Well, I never discuss possibility. The only way you can discuss possibility is from facts. Discussing the possibility is Scotist, conceptualist.

Question 105: Could you name a work which you would consider largely in the functional specialty, foundations?

Lonergan: No. I don't think so. First of all, it is foundations on the fourth level, and we have been doing theology on the first three levels.

Question 106: Is it amenable to be treated in a book?

Lonergan: Perhaps not. Well you see, in other words, once dialectic is done and you set up all these oppositions then, obviously, there is going to be a decision to be made. That decision is in terms of conversion, fundamentally. It is people being different. It is something fundamentally personal, but not arbitrary. It is the horizon, it is a matter of a horizon, the horizon within which religious doctrines and values, religious doctrines have meaning and religious values are regarded as values. That horizon.

Question 10: Is some of Von Balthasar's work in this direction?

Lonergan: Yes, he is concerned with it.

Question 108: How do categories relate to concepts?

Lonergan: They are fundamental concepts. In other words, you are setting up a set of basic terms. My set of basic terms are names of conscious operations: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching; inquiring, understanding, formulating; reflecting, marshalling and weighing the evidence, judging; deliberating, evaluating, deciding, doing. Now, all these terms are related to one another, and those relations are also given in consciousness by the dynamism when one operation then leads on to another. These operations, each singly, has a partial object: the seen, the heard, the understood, and so on: these partial objects. There is a compound object of elements from experience, understanding, judging, and evaluating. The objects are defined by the correlativity to the operations. The objects and their compoundness start giving you a metaphysics. Your religious categories introduce further elements and their objects. You move from the subject to the community to the history of the community, to God, to questions like revelation, and so on. All these questions come up. But you start out from interiority. The way these things are constructed, clarified, and so on.

Question 109: Are categories expressions of acts of understanding of oneself, or are they expressions of judgments, and so on?

Lonergan: They are experiencing, understanding, judging, evaluating; the fruits of all the lot. Self-appropriation is the foundation of the categories. The categories themselves are the expression of the self-appropriation. As opposed, for example, to the categories you have in St Thomas, which are fundamentally metaphysical categories – talking about entitative habits and operative habits, and good operative habits and evil operative habits, and so on.

Question 110: If the heuristic structure provides the basis for questions, the heuristic notion is pretty well the transcultural invariant. Is the heuristic structure also invariant?

Lonergan: It develops with the culture. For example, we have heuristic structures at the present time that were unknown in the Middle Ages.

Question 111: So Aristotle and Einstein question reality in different ways and so heuristic structures develop?

Lonergan: As science develops, your heuristic structure also develops. The discovery or invention of the calculus made possible heuristic structures that otherwise are not possible. You can write down a differential equation, and its solutions are bound to contain a law. Which is the law relevant to this matter is determined by taking boundary conditions and so on.

Question 112: As I understand it, the realm of meaningful transcendence brings about and exists in a differentiated consciousness.

Lonergan: It heads towards that.

Question 113: What would be the religious character of primitive man, who seems, by definition, to be of an undifferentiated consciousness?

Lonergan: In the primitive, the religious merges with the common sense. Everything is full of gods. The differentiation of the sacred and the profane is not primitive. The primitive is undifferentiated.

Question 114: So there isn't an understanding of religion?

Lonergan: No. There is a specialization in religion when you start getting hierophanies, specific hierophanies: when you have the God of Bethel or the God of Jacob. Religious consciousness is becoming differentiated from everyday consciousness. When you start having a priesthood, it is even more so; you are having specialists.

Question 115: You stress that with the move from the world of theory to the world of interiority there is a corresponding shift in theological concepts and categories from metaphysical to experiential; but since a fully differentiated consciousness still maintains this other world of theory, will there remain in theology a great deal of metaphysical categories and analysis or not?

Lonergan: Yes. I think so. In other words, *Insight* doesn't exclude metaphysics; it provides a basis for metaphysics in which your metaphysical concepts are far clearer and

far less open to question, because you are able to pin them down in term of elements of experience. Your metaphysics reduces to a cognitional theory and an epistemology. In that way you have a control over your metaphysics, and you are able to present metaphysical questions with a precision and a clarity and an avoidance of fallacy that otherwise is not possible. *Insight* is for a methodical metaphysics and, similarly, your theology will include a metaphysics but it also will be more surefooted in its metaphysics.

Question 116: Can you say a bit more on why mediating theology doesn't require a conversion and how it can yet be considered theology, doing theology?

Lonergan: Well, if you want to pin theology down into something static, you will lay down definitions of what is and what is not theology. And you'll require faith in your doing of history and in your doing of interpretation and you will have a Catholic type of interpretation and a Catholic type of history and so on, and a Catholic type of apologetics. But, de facto, what is needed is the assimilation into theology of the interpretation and the history and so on. While Catholics or religious people do that differently from non-religious people because in their interpretations they have a different self to understand and in their history they have a different horizon within which they are making the past intelligible, it is theology because there are religious people doing the interpretation and the history and so on, and the research. But that horizon is operating not as an explicit criterion but as a concrete fact. As long as there are religious people doing some of the interpretation and some of the history, you have appearing in the dialectic the religious alternative along with others. That is what you want. There is no sense in talking about Catholic interpretation. There is sense in talking about Catholics doing interpretation or Christians doing interpretation. The interpretation itself, the rules, an account of what a good interpretation is, is something that is not univocal. The interpretation depends upon one's self-understanding, and different interpreters have different selves. An account of what interpretation is is open. An account of what critical history is is open. Our account of critical history said that as far as this goes we are in a

relativism. But to handle that problem of relativism you go on to the next level, dialectic. It is there that you handle that problem. So you have not got as an explicit criterion in your interpretation and in your history a religious element. But it is a de facto element, if religious people do interpretation and history. This is from the nature of interpretation and the nature of history; they presuppose a subject that they don't control, and they presuppose a horizon that they don't control. That control comes on the level of dialectic. Now, your whole eight functional specialties are moving on simultaneously. It is not one occurring after the other but in interdependence. Your dialectic is always present to let the historian know what other people are thinking and so on, and the way they are going about it.

Question 117: In your own categories, is there a specific Christian conversion as distinct from a religious conversion?

Lonergan: In terms of description of religious experience, the event, I don't think so. Because God gives his grace to all people; he gives his grace to all men. And sufficient grace is charity, sufficient grace for salvation. So you can find this anywhere. But the Christian context, or the Catholic context, supplies a context for that experience, that interprets it in a fashion that another religion will not. The experience is not something outside a tradition, outside a context. So from that angle you have differences.

Question 118: Would you care to comment on what might be the Christian mission to a non-Christian religious person?

Lonergan: No. I am not prepared to discuss that. That is a big topic. It has concerned the missionaries considerably since Vatican II.

Question 119: How would you distinguish between the primitive who sees God in all things and the mystic who sees God in all things?

Lonergan: Well, the fundamental problem is primitive consciousness itself. When the mystic sees God in all things, he sees all things in God. God is the primary reality and all things are further manifestations of God. The primitive case is indistinct; the mystical

case is quite distinct. You can't in two words transpose people into what a primitive mentality is. It is only by a long description that you approximate to it, in terms of early language, and so on.