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Question period, Second day, August 3 1971

Question:Yesterday in the question period you hesitated to call theology a science, preferring the term ‘scholarship.’ May I press the question: ‘Utrum sacra doctrina sit scientia?’

Lonergan: A word like ‘science’ has not one meaning; it has a historical series of meanings. There is Aristotle’s *epistēmē*, there is the notion of science entertained at the medieval period, there is the array of disciplines to which the name ‘science’ is given at the present time. Certainly natural science is considered science at the present time. There are people who hold that there are behavioral sciences, and that is a fairly secure position, because all they do is apply the same methods as are applied in the natural sciences. There are people who speak about the human sciences – in other words, psychology and sociology can be done not merely from a behavioral viewpoint. You have a functional viewpoint in Talcott Parsons’ sociology and a power-conflict model in C. Wright Mills; then New School of Social Research in New York that imported phenomenology and gives you an intentional school in sociology. You can have a series.

What shall we say about theology? I was thinking particularly of the fact that St Thomas does not have a very good answer to the objection that science deals with the universal, but in theology we deal an awful lot with particulars: the Father, the Son, the Holy Ghost, St Peter, St Paul, and so on. When we are dealing with particulars the work, as such, is scholarly rather than scientific. Scholarly work is concerned to know what a particular text means, as uttered by a particular man, and so on. History is concerned not to set up universal rules; it may be able to go on to universal rules, but the historian’s job is to understand what was going forward at a given place and time. It may be that the historian’s understanding of a particular process, or nest of problems, is very relevant to

other instances, but it is only by historical study that you can say whether there is any other instance to which it is equally relevant.

Now, we will find that there are eight functional specialties in theology, and that you do very different things in each one of the eight. I think we had better go through the eight before we decide what parts of theology can be called scientific and what parts can be called scholarly, and what can be more safely referred to as 'academic disciplines,' which is the usual way out.

Question: Your statement this morning that philosophy is no longer to be considered the *ancilla theologiae* and that it was not a matter of importing philosophy into theology sounds similar to Oscar Cullmann's deploring the importation of Greek metaphysics into theology. To what extent do you agree with his position?

Lonergan: I said that the relation between philosophy and theology is something more precise than the metaphor of the handmaid, that the theologian has an intrinsic need of philosophy, from the viewpoint that he has to know what his own mind is and how it operates. The need of method is not only to set up a theology. It is also needed to reveal what is true and false with regard to interpretation, what is critical history and how this idea of critical history fits in with the historians' ideas of history. There has been a very complex development in the notion of history.

So one has to understand human knowing both as it occurs in theology, and in particular with reference to the new disciplines in theology. For example, for twenty-five years I taught dogmatic theology on an impossible basis. It was presupposed that the dogmatic theologian knew inside-out the Old Testament, the New Testament, the Apostolic Fathers, the ante-Nicene Fathers, the Greek and Latin Fathers, the Oriental Fathers, all the medieval theologians, the Renaissance theologians, and contemporary thought. You could not do it, but the whole setup was on that basis; it was a

seventeenth-century idea. The problem of method in theology is how to get out of that box without losing everything.

With regard to Oscar Cullmann deploring the importation of Greek metaphysics into theology, well, there was very little metaphysics in the Greek Fathers, unless you use 'metaphysics' in some very vague sense. Koch, who has done a book on Origen, says that Origen was no metaphysician; a lot of people think he was. Another approximation to a metaphysician is Gregory of Nyssa; he is perhaps the one who can push thoughts pretty far. But it was not an importation of Greek metaphysics, it was a matter of categories that the Greek metaphysicians knew nothing about. The 'consubstantial' of Nicea was not a notion derived from Plato or from Aristotle or from the Gnostics. It was a new coin. Similarly, 'person' and 'nature.' We will come around to this later, and we will have something to explain about it.

My position differs from that of Aristotle and St Thomas insofar as for me metaphysics is not first. It's third. You have cognitional theory, epistemology, and metaphysics as a conclusion. In that way your metaphysics is grounded, and any metaphysical question will be reduced to a question on cognitional theory.

Deploring Greek metaphysics is largely a matter of knowing very little about Greek metaphysics and knowing very little about what the importation of metaphysics into theology amounted to, and still amounts to. The fundamental function of metaphysics in theology is to draw distinctions between literal meanings and metaphorical meanings, and to know whether you are saying the same thing in two different sentences or saying different things. It is a matter of a certain elementary hard-headedness, and I have no objection to it whatever.

Question: What is the relation between transcendental method and the 'universal viewpoint' of chapter 17 of *Insight*?

Lonergan: Something similar to the universal viewpoint appears in a different form in the present work. We talk about it in chapter 10, on dialectic. We'll talk about it then.

Question: How do you see the difference between 'transcendental method' in the way you use the term and 'transcendental method' as it is used, for example, by Coreth, Muck, or Rahner?

Lonergan: In them there is very little knowledge of insight. They have the German *Verstehen*, which is a matter of catching on in human relationships and in human studies. But the connotation is limited to that, and it is associated with a lot of feeling, interpersonal feeling as well, or empathy. Their structure has not the study of mathematics, physics, common sense, and so on, that you find in *Insight*. For me, transcendental method is transcendental in both the Scholastic and the Kantian sense. It is transcendental in the Scholastic sense because it is not confined to some one category of objects. It is a matter of exploiting the opportunities and resources of the human mind as distinct from exploiting the opportunities and resources of a given particular field of study. They are categorial methods, particular methods. Transcendental method is the method that is not confined to a certain limited field of objects. That is one sense. Another sense, of course, is that transcendental method is the condition of the possibility of any other method, because it includes all the main features of any other method. Coreth asks, Where do we start? There is the question about the starting point and so we will start from the question, and the condition of the possibility of asking a question is being. So for him metaphysics is the *Grund- und Gesamtwissenschaft*. Where I differ from Coreth precisely you will find in the last paragraph of my article 'Metaphysics as Horizon,' which you will find in *Collection*. Fundamentally, my point is that there is a dialectic, a range of opposing viewpoints, and that that is the fundamental problem in science and philosophy, especially in philosophy and theology. To be able to sort them out in a fundamental way one has to start with the subject, his cognitional and moral

processes. Coreth wants to start with being. I think that that is a position that was at one time valid but, with the separation of the sciences from philosophy, with the autonomy of the sciences, with the physicists setting up their own fundamental concepts, and the chemists setting up theirs, and the biologists setting up theirs, and so on, a mere general term behind it all is not particularly helpful. What is helpful is to move in on their methods, and method, of course, is what the scientist really accepts; it is the method that makes his science something ongoing.

Question: Do you think that in the following limited sense it is true to say that an insight cannot be experienced? The act of insight, the actual transition from not seeing the point to seeing it, seems always to occur so suddenly that one cannot attend to it as it occurs; one only knows that it has occurred.

Lonergan: The act of insight is not just the actual transition; it is the transition and what remains after it. The insight remains as long as the relevant image remains. When you drop the image, well, the … (Here the tape fades. -Ed.) **12:45**

Question: [When the tape resumes, **14:00**, Lonergan is responding to a question about becoming a virtuous person.]

Lonergan: It starts with the period from one to three years, when the child is living in an affective symbiosis with the mother. From about the ages of three to six years you have the so-called oedipal period, in which the father recognizes the potentiality of a human person in his child and sets before him or her the rewards of being an independent adult, and the example of a good independent adult, and a fairly regular flow of good advice. I was at my niece's recently, and their boy, having eaten an apple, threw the core on the floor and was about to step on it and press, when his father said, 'Stop: Did you ever see me doing that? Did you ever see your mother doing that? Did you see Uncle Bernie doing that?' This process, in which good moral judgments are communicated through fear and through affection, in all sorts of ways, brings us on to what is called the age of reason. At

the age of six or seven the child is able, or at least was once supposed to be able, to distinguish to some extent between right and wrong. And so it goes on to boyhood, girlhood, puberty, and one comes eventually to the existential crisis, when one discovers that one's deciding not merely affects other people and other objects but also determines what one is to make of oneself. It is at that point that you have the emergence of the existential subject in his authenticity.

While you cannot handle this stuff logically, you can understand it as a process. And not everyone succeeds in becoming a virtuous man, of course – most of us succeed to some extent – and that is why it is best for us not to be too dogmatic in our moral judgments.

Question: Can values be objects of belief?

Lonergan: Yes.

Question: Please explain what you mean by the virtually unconditioned.

Lonergan: I distinguish the virtually unconditioned and the formally unconditioned. The formally unconditioned has no conditions whatsoever and there is one instance of it – God. The virtually unconditioned has conditions, but they are fulfilled, and consequently, insofar as the conditions are fulfilled, you have something that may be called virtually unconditioned. It is a contingent being, something that de facto does exist or occur. More on that in chapter 10 of *Insight*, in which that notion of the virtually unconditioned is applied to a whole series of different types of judgments.

[Back to the previous question]: Can values be objects of belief? In the whole process of growing up, for example, values are being made objects of belief.

Question: Would you expand on the criterion of the happy conscience and relate it to the various instances of reaching the unconditioned which are dealt with in the chapter in *Insight* on reflective understanding? Is it similar to the judgment on the correctness of an

insight, which hinges on the absence of further relevant questions, but now with the further component of meeting satisfactorily the demands of our moral feelings?

Lonergan: I think that could be said, namely, that it's like the insight which hinges on the absence of further relevant questions, but now with the further component of meeting satisfactorily the demands of our moral feelings. Of course, this is an abstract way of talking about the thing. Moral judgments and moral feelings are occurring all the time; there is nothing recondite or rare about them. 'What a brute he is': or, 'What a nice person'; most human conversation is praising or blaming somebody or something. You could possibly build it into an analogy with judgments of fact or possibility, in terms of the virtually unconditioned, but that is a little removed from the actual process. In the actual process it is like knowing you have an insight. 'Gee, I've got it.' Similarly, the moral judgment on a particular issue is something that can come very slowly, be maturing over a long time – people make retreats and elections, and so on. One's moral being is satisfied when one comes up with a sound judgment, just as one's intellectual being is satisfied when one understands. Perhaps one cannot do too much in formulating the true moral judgment. It is something that has all sorts of facets to it; trying to put it into syllogisms is more or less evacuating it.

Question: Is your present account of feeling as apprehending value related not only genetically but also dialectically to your comments on feelings in chapter 17 of *Insight*?

Lonergan: My present account of feeling as intentional response, and intentional response, among other things, to values, comes out of Max Scheler and Dietrich von Hildebrand. It is something that is not in *Insight*, as far as I know. I do not know just what I had to say about feelings in chapter 17 of *Insight* – it is a long time since I wrote that. It was an addition, and it is something quite different from what I have in chapter 18, on the possibility of ethics. In 1953 I was shipped off to Rome and I had to teach a class of 650 students, most of whom were greatly devoted to some personalist or existential

philosophy, and I learned a lot trying to deal with them. The difference between my present position and my position in *Insight* largely stems from that chore of teaching.

Question: Since the good of order cannot be reduced to any particular good or goods, is it therefore possible to make a judgment about the good of order which is not logically reducible to a judgment about a particular good or goods?
Lonergan: The whole is something more than all its parts. The good of order is the total set of particular goods that are being supplied at the present time. But it is not merely that sum. It is the order, the way people cooperate effectively to bring that about; and that is much more important, because without that order we would not be getting that supply. So I would say that the judgments about the good of order, while they presuppose judgments about particular goods and the totality of them, still add something further, namely, an order, an ordered society in which things are running. In a depression order is lacking, and in a boom, well, it is a little too good.

Question: You spoke of a symbol as an image which evokes a feeling or is evoked by a feeling. Does not a symbol evoke a cluster of meanings as well, feeling-laden meanings perhaps, but meaning as well as feelings, for example in the sacraments as forms of symbolic expression? Would you kindly comment on the connection of what you said about symbols and the field of sacramental theology?
Lonergan: Does not a symbol evoke a cluster of meanings? Feeling-laden meanings, perhaps. A symbol has its proper meaning in the fact that it evokes or is evoked by a feeling. It has its proper function in the internal communication between heart and mind and psyche and physical vitality. Symbols can be connected. There can be simple symbols and enormously complex symbols, such as St George and the Dragon and Jonah and the Whale, which have all sorts of affects to them.

I do not think that the meaning of symbols is something separate from what I have been saying. You can have further meanings that come to mind when you start thinking

under the influence of the symbol, but that is a further stage in the process. And insofar as symbols are means of effective communication, you'll have what Ricoeur said, 'The symbols gives rise to thought.'

Question: Are symbols only carriers of meaning, or are they somehow fountains of meaning? Do you get meaning through symbols, or do you find it in and from symbolic language, not through an allegorical interpretation but by a creative one?

Lonergan: The myth is not just a symbol. It's language as well, linguistic meaning. I'm talking about the meaning proper to the symbol itself, not the meanings that can come out of it in another order, a linguistic order, or that can be put into a linguistic order. Language can be symbolic, and as a matter of fact it fundamentally *is* symbolic.

'Do you get meaning through symbols or do you find it in and from symbolic language?' Symbols can be a means of communication. What the symbol means to me can mean the same to someone else when I present them to someone else. He'll get through the symbol, from the symbol, in the symbol, certainly not through an allegorical interpretation. It's a matter of empathy, of the thing having a meaning to me, and what has meaning for me depends on my development. What I'm trying to say is that there is a genus of embodying meaning that can be named a symbol. Symbols occur by themselves, but they can also occur in a narration, as in a myth. They can occur in several different ways. But then you're getting compound carriers of meaning, both language and symbol.

With regard to sacramental theology, I am not going to go into that. It is a field that has been very much alive in the last twenty years, and it cannot be handled adequately here. Anyway, I am not doing theology, I am doing method.

Question: Would you express what you have to say about feelings in terms of the metaphysical elements?

Lonergan: I have not tried to figure that one out. *Insight* is mostly about experiencing, understanding, and judging, with a bit about deliberation – chapter 18 on. Feelings are

what you add on to experiencing, understanding, and judging, to have a subject alive in a world mediated by meaning. It is that combination of feeling and on the other hand cognitional operations that present the questions for deliberation, the need for judgments of value and for decisions. That is where feelings fit into the picture. As I said, feelings are the mass and momentum of our lives; they make mere knowledge come alive and head somewhere. In Latin terminology, in the medieval setup, I suppose it would be a matter of the *affectus*, sensitive and spiritual, and so on.

Question: Does the notion of intersubjectivity refer to a peculiarly human social property, or can it extend to cover such questions as territoriality, dominance, hierarchy, etc., in non-human animals? If not, how is one to interpret the phrases 'simple prolongations of prehuman attainment,' 'more elementary processes,' 'primordial basis,' which are used in *Insight*?

Lonergan: I was talking about human intersubjectivity this morning, but obviously the two little girls who are out there playing with their dog are quite intersubjective with the dog, and the dog was with them. Other people are intersubjective with horses, and so on. Intersubjectivity is not confined to human beings, but when you want to talk about intersubjective meaning in a way that is relevant to a method in theology you talk about human beings.

Question: Against the idea that there could be a transcendental method which holds good for every case of human knowing, a sort of commonsense objection might be put as follows: Bearing in mind the immense variety and sophistication of philosophical and theological discussion of this topic of knowledge, is it not much more likely that a person claiming to offer an account of such a transcendental method would be wrong in his claim that it holds good for all knowing than that he would be right? Put directly to the text of your lecture, the question could run: If you are offering us an account of this method which is in principle revisable, then any revision of it would necessarily be by

means of the revised method. If, on the other hand, you are offering us an account which is only revisable by your method, then in fact what you are offering is not an account at all, but the method itself. It is this latter position which would be open, then, to the implausibility objection offered by the commonsense objector.

Lonergan: It is most unlikely – in fact, it is impossible – that anybody is going to give a definitive account of human knowledge in all its aspects. *Insight* did not attempt to do that. Moreover, when I was dealing with the question whether this is something that is going to be revised, I said that there is room for endless improvements in an account of knowledge; all sorts of further details can be added on. However, the question was, 'Is this something that is going to be revised radically or is it something that is going to be enriched indefinitely?' Well, either you have some notion of what revision means, or you have not. Unless you presuppose some notion of revision you cannot very well discuss whether my account is going to be revised or not. If you have some notion of revision, are you satisfied with what is meant by revision in science? Data crop up which do not fit in with the accepted views. New views are developed that account for these data and all previous data, and include all that was good in the previous theory, and now you have a revision of the theory. I say, If that is what you mean by revision, then you have the central features of the account of knowledge and the account of transcendental method that we have been offering. But unless you presuppose knowledge of what revision is, you cannot very well discuss whether this account is going to be revised radically or merely enriched indefinitely.

Question: You mentioned this morning that the unity of the sciences cannot be grounded in the object, because the object is changing. I have two difficulties about this. First, since there is an isomorphism between the subject and the object, will not the unity have to be similar on both sides? I recall your argument in *Divinarum personarum* that paralleling experience, understanding, and judgment in the subject are matter, form, and existence in

the object. Second, is the object changing all that radically? Has it not got a central form? You may prefer to deal with this later, if you are dealing with the difference between classical and modern science.

Lonergan: With regard to the first: there is the isomorphism between the subject and the object, but whether things like plasma have a central form or not, I not prepared to say, and I do not know whether the physicists are prepared to say. It is more or less matter that has become energy. My point is, if you are using the isomorphism, you are using my starting out from the subject in his cognitional operations and moving from that through epistemology to metaphysics. The metaphysics so set up is fine for me; it is my way of doing it. However, if you want to start, as Coreth wants to start, from being, you are not going to have a way of unifying the sciences. You can say they're all taking about being, but you cannot go on and add on to being the determinations that Aristotle used, because modern science is not Aristotelian. You have to let modern science develop its own basic concepts. What you can do, though, to unify science and philosophy is to discern what is common to all methods, and through the methods bring about the unification of science.

Is the object changing all that radically? Well, later we will be talking about the difference between classical and modern science, so for the moment we can move on.

Question: Would you care to add anything to what you have said about the beautiful as a transcendental?

Lonergan: It is a transcendental, but of a different kind. The transcendentals that we have been discussing arise from the differentiations of consciousness. For the Hebrews, truth was fidelity; it was on the fourth level. The Greeks, with their notion of wisdom and *epistēmē*, *nous*, and so on, worked out a search for truth as such; that was their *philosophia*. So truth ceased to be fidelity and became something intellectualist. Modern science is concerned with an ongoing process of increasing understanding. The transcendentals I am talking about become clear insofar as that process occurs. You move

from the whole man, with truth just part of his goodness – 'doing the truth' – to truth as something intellectual, cognitional. Modern science does not know the truth: it approximates to the truth by an ever increasing supply of insights. So you have your distinction between intelligibility, truth and reality, and moral goodness, as transcendental notions, as stepping up the process.

The response of the aesthete to beauty is a response of the total person, without any analysis of his subjectivity. So it is in a different order. If you want to give it the name 'transcendental,' all right, but it is not the same sort of thing as the transcendentals that we have been talking about.

Question from audience: What is your relation to Ernst Cassirer?

Lonergan: A tall order! Cassirer is a magnificent writer. He will take a circle of thinkers and start out from the one he least agrees with. He will use the next to show the shortcomings of the first, and the third to show the shortcomings of the second, and so on around the circle. When he finally arrives at the last you have his position. It is an extremely erudite way of going about things.

My approach is much more analytic. I am setting up models: sets of terms and relations that do not purport, in the first instance, to be descriptions of reality or hypotheses about reality, but a set, a nucleus, of terms and relations that that it will be useful to have around when it comes to describing reality or forming hypotheses about reality, when it comes to doing theology.

Descriptions of reality and hypotheses will occur in theology; in method you set up models and, of course, as Marrou remarks, the model can be very useful even though it is entirely wrong, because it draws attention to points that otherwise would be overlooked. He takes as an example of a model Fustel de Coulanges' *La Cité Antique*. The place it least of all applies to is Sparta, but it expresses so many differences between Sparta and that model that it reveals an awful lot about Sparta that otherwise would not

be noticed. The models I am offering are, I think, more fundamental, insofar as they are based upon elements that anyone can verify in his own subjectivity and that also are structured.