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Q&A session on day 5, Friday, August 6, 1971

Question: What is the new contemporary question or crisis to which this model points an answer? In other words, *Insight* demanded personal conversions of its readers; what new conversion would you like this book to cause?

Lonergan: The contemporary question is not of the minute. It is something which has been going on for fifty years, and it is not finished yet. Theology has been being transformed gradually, on all fronts. If you compare the earlier articles of the *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique* and the latest, the 1946-47 articles, you find that there is an entirely different approach. The use of modern historical and exegetical techniques was established in the church and accepted and practiced universally in patristics and medieval studies, before it started being accepted in scripture. That was where the resistance held, and it held up to 1943. The specialization involved in the new techniques just destroys the old method of doing doctrinal theology. The doctrinal theologian cannot get to his sources, without passing through thirty years of work on each one of them, and he does not live that long.

There is a whole nest of problems arising from the fact that the Aristotelian notion of science was mistaken, and consequently the notion of theology as analogically a science was mistaken. And you cannot have a method based on an analogical notion, because an analogical notion is partly the same and partly different. What do you do where the differences arise?

Then this whole business of scholarship, I say, has crept in and taken over. But there has not been sufficient advertence to the implications of that takeover. You have respected theologians denying that there was a divine

Person that became incarnate, Piet Schoonenberg. You can reconcile him, of course, with ante-Nicene theology.

Thirdly, modern philosophy: theologians are just deserting philosophy, not having any at all. They think it is an aberration, something pagan, setting up an idol instead of God, and so on. There is an awful lot of talk of that sort.

The problem is to accept all the new techniques, the new ideas, without falling into modernism, or infantilism or whatnot, or running off in all directions. There is an awful lot of that at the present time.

‘What new conversion would you like this book to cause?’ Well, the central emphasis is on God’s gift of his love: religious conversion as something distinct from moral conversion and intellectual conversion. That is the central emphasis in it. That is the major part in the foundations. But there is the whole idea of proof, you see, that exists is something that has to be liquidated and replaced. To have an academic discipline in which values are considered explicitly, and weighed, and so on, is something new: acknowledging the judgments of value and their supreme importance.

Question: Yesterday in the question period you said that even on the supernatural level there is a sense in which knowledge precedes love. In recent writings, however, you say that love need not always follow upon, but may precede knowledge. Could you explain the apparent contradiction?

Lonergan: The dynamic state of being in love precedes knowledge. Acts of loving follow knowledge.

Question: As a philosopher of religion, the next question says, I was troubled by your stress on the need to in some way reduce natural theology to systematic theology. Must not a certain distinction between philosophy

and theology be maintained? In a state university one must discuss God apart from Christian revelation. In this context do you see a natural theology as autonomous and distinct from theology?

Lonergan: I in no way would deny a distinction between natural theology and revealed theology, the theology of positive religion. And I would in no way reduce natural theology to systematic theology. What I was thinking of was the teaching of theology, of the discipline I am talking about, and I would say that the teaching of natural theology goes along inside that, not as something separate from it. In a secularist university, of course, one has to do as the secularists want, but I am talking about a subject: theology. Natural theology as autonomous and distinct from theology – yes . But it is not something that happens *per se* in an abstract subject; it occurs in a concrete existing man, and all the factors of his being are relevant to it. The Scholastic, the rationalist, the idealist notions of setting things up absolutely is, to my mind, mistaken.

Question: What, in your view, is the meaning of a Christian philosophy? Do you consider your work in *Insight* as Christian and more importantly would you speak of a Christian methodology?

Lonergan: On the question of Christian philosophy we had disputes, a lot of discussions in the 30s. Blondel said that there is a Christian philosophy insofar as there is a hollow there for the Christian religion to fit into. Others said that a Christian philosophy was a contradiction in terms. And Gilson said that as a historical matter of fact there is a philosophy which arose in a Christian context, and that is true of course. The Greek councils introduced concepts that are neither Platonic nor Aristotelian nor Gnostic nor Stoic nor Epicurean nor anything else. They come right out of Christian doctrine. And

a Christian philosophy, historically, has been a philosophy that had room for those concepts, and also for an attitude towards propositional truths. That is the main characteristic of a Christian philosophy. Respect for propositional truth is not something that is peculiar to Christians, but it is something that de facto Christians attend to.

In Tertullian the Son is divine because He is made of the right stuff; Tertullian's background is a Stoic materialism. In Origen the Son is divine by participation. He is truth itself and logos itself and redemption itself but He is not divinity itself and he is not goodness itself. Only the Father is divinity itself and goodness itself and the Son is these by participation. You have subordinationism there, although the Son, of course, is eternal.

In Nicea, as understood by Athanasius, you have what is expressed in the trinitarian preface: 'Quod enim de tua gloria, revelante, te, credimus, hoc de Filio tuo, hoc de Spiritu Sancto, sine differentia discretionis sentimus': what we know by revelation about the Father, the same is true of the Son and the same is true of the Holy Ghost. The whole emphasis there is on propositional truth; it is not on concepts, as in Origen, and it is not on a material notion of reality, as in Tertullian. That is a Christian development, a development in Christian thought. And that same emphasis on propositional truth is characteristic of the Christian philosophies that have existed since that time.

Would I speak of a Christian methodology? I think that the methodology gets Christian results because the subject is a Christian.

Question: In your account of method there seems to be no mention of apologetical theology in its usual sense. Is this simply an outmoded thought

form, or is there still a need for a reasoned propaedeutic to conversion, which would precede and prepare for it?

Lonergan: Apologetical theology will be included in the method in two forms. First, as among theologians, it will occur in the dialectic and in the subsequent foundations. That's where differences are ironed out. As relevant to helping individual converts, it will occur in communications: you communicate to him what he needs to help him adjust to a new world.

A reasoned propaedeutic to conversion, which would precede and prepare for it? Pascal remarked, or has the Lord remark somewhere, You would not have sought me if you had not already found me. God's gift of his grace usually leads people who are seeking, who will read apologetic literature. The idea that it precedes, and so on, pertains, I think, to something perhaps that can be said to be outmoded. There is a little bit too much rationalism in it.

Question: This morning you said that the problem of hermeneutics arises from the nature of common sense. Would it not be more exact to say: the problem of hermeneutics arises from the historicity of human meaning, whether it is a question of commonsense meaning or scientific or philosophic meaning? As a matter of fact there is a problem of the interpreting of philosophers and scientists of the past. I agree that scientific meaning, insofar as it is a question of natural sciences, does not need, strictly speaking, interpretation, but human sciences of the past need interpretation no less than common senses of the past or of another culture. In general, we are involved in a problem of hermeneutics whenever we are to meet meaning as constitutive of human life, human reality, no matter whether it is

a common sense or a philosophic or a scientific meaning or a mixture of these.

Lonergan: I think that is a viable statement: constitutive of human reality. And it arises from the historicity of man. That's all quite true. Of course, the measure in which commonsense methods are employed in a philosophy and a science is another thing to be taken into account. And whether that measure is the cause of the historicity of the science and the philosophy, is a further question to be raised. In other words, one is not just a philosopher; one's philosophic thinking is largely commonsense procedures, or it can be. You can arrive at a system, but you arrive at a system by commonsense procedures, and you correct the system by proceeding from commonsense observations and moving back into the system. There is interaction along the line.

Question: Is it possible at one and the same time to hold that God is meaning and God is mystery? In what sense is it proper to speak of God as meaning, and in what sense of God as mystery? Is the God of meaning the God of philosophy and the God of mystery the God of theology?

B: There are two sense of the word "mystery." There is Rudolf Otto's *mysterium fascinans et tremendum*; this is what one is referred to by the state of being in love, through God's love flooding our hearts through the Holy Spirit given to us; that can be experienced without any apprehension of an object. We spoke about that in the chapter on religion. It can be interpreted as referring to God, because it is unlimited, because it is without restrictions or reservations or qualifications.

The second meaning of 'mystery' is the mysteries of faith. One talks about the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Redemption, and so on, as mysteries:

they are something which we would not know unless they had been revealed, and when they are revealed, we do not completely understand them and are not going to. And we have no means of changing the content because it is something that pertains to a realm that is beyond us. In that sense God also is mystery, mystery as revealed truth that transcends human understanding.

Meaning: Revealed truths are cases of meanings, and systematic theology explores the intelligibility of the revealed truths; again, you're in meaning, of a different sort: an explanatory type of meaning.

Is the God of meaning the God of philosophy? Or is the God of mystery the God of theology? I would say: No. The God of mystery is the God, first of all, of God's gift of his love. Secondly, God as revealed through Christ Jesus. The God of meaning is known through human reflection on religion, and in particular on the Christian religion.

Question: Do you think it is true to say that while knowledge is relatively easily transmitted from generation to generation, authenticity or sanctity is something that has to be achieved anew by each individual, and is inherited in a much more limited sense? For example, it is one thing to understand the conclusions of Kepler or Augustine and quite another to become the same kind of man.

Lonergan: Knowledge is not transmitted too easily. We have an awful lot of dropouts, people who do not get very far at learning much. As a matter of fact it is fabulous how little people learn. However, it is true that the pursuit of truth is something that can be carried out without the same radical transformations as occur in the pursuit of the good and in becoming religious. But the pursuit of truth can be carried on in a way that really is not

too much concerned with truth; it is a matter of carrying out the conventions and obeying the pressures of a scientific community. It can be compatible with blunders. For centuries scientists taught mechanist determinism as a scientific fact. Now they do not do it anymore because they have learnt better from quantum theory. But that was not due to the pursuit of truth. It's because the pursuit of truth is difficult. There are the extra-scientific opinions of scientists, and they are not due to the pursuit of truth.

In other words, there is the triple conversion needed, and the most fundamental is the religious one; from it will follow the other two. The intellectual conversion occurred in the church after three centuries, with the move to propositional truth in Nicea.

And, of course, it is one thing to understand the conclusions of Kepler or Augustine and quite another to become the same kind of man. What kind of man you are to become is the existential question. It is finding out for yourself that you have to decide for yourself what you are going to make of yourself. And that is the meaning of your existence.

Question: Do you think that Teilhard's notion of progress involves something like the Socratic error, progress in authenticity and sanctity going parallel to progress in knowledge?

Lonergan: I don't know Teilhard well enough to pronounce on that, whether he has that error

Question: In your articles on 'The Form of Inference' and 'The Isomorphism of Thomist and Scientific Thought' you make the point that Newman worked out the 'permanent structure of method ... the same general process of experience, of hypothesis, and of verification, because the structure of scientific knowledge is a constant and that constant squares with

the Thomist metaphysical constant of potency, form, and act.’ Please (a) comment on this statement; (b) indicate the similarity and difference between your view of method and that of Newman; and finally (c) state if your ‘consciousness’ is the same as Newman’s ‘conscience.’

Lonergan: First, the structure of scientific knowledge is a constant, and that constant squares with the basic structure, especially if you take it simply in terms of experience, hypothesis, and verification.

Is my ‘consciousness’ the same as Newman’s ‘conscience.’ I’d be inclined to say – I don’t mean to say that Newman thought these things out in my categories, but – my fourth level of consciousness, the level on which one deliberates, evaluates, decides, is called conscience by me, and it is probably the same as what Newman calls conscience.

The similarity and difference between your view of method and that of Newman: Well, I don’t know just what I was drawing on when I said that Newman worked out the permanent structure of method – that’s something I wrote, I suppose, fifteen years ago, and I have not read it since, and I can’t recall at the moment must what I was drawing on -- but I do not think that Newman studied the question of method to the same extent that I have.

Question: *Insight* is concerned mostly with the process by which correct affirmations are made at the rational level of consciousness. I feel the significance of that book would be greatly broadened if this activity of rational affirmation could be related back to its roots in man’s primary experiential presence to Being.

Thus correct judgments could be seen as what they are: the explicit, incremental carrying out of that implicit, total judgment which is man’s presence to Being as authentically lived.

A philosophy, however valid, which does not constantly refer itself back to its roots in primary consciousness and thus reveal itself as that consciousness's reflexive, immanent self-illumination, cannot satisfy the demands for comprehensiveness and integration which Hegel and Heidegger teach us to make on philosophy.

Such a philosophy can be a source of consciousness's alienation from itself and of *Seinsvergessenheit*, since it is inattentive to the quality of our basic conscious presence-to-Being. Is this a valid criticism?

Lonergan: Well, this is a highly complex matter. We are asked about man's primary experiential presence to Being and later it is referred to as 'that implicit total judgment which is man's presence to Being as authentically lived.' If it is a judgment it is something on the level of rational consciousness, and it is not something that is primary and experiential. There is no doubt at all that Heidegger talks an awful lot about the presence to Being and *Seinsvergessenheit*. The question is whether he has got a correct notion of being, and the fact that he wants to go back to the pre-Socratics suggests that he has not.

Question (same questioner from floor): hard to hear.

Question: In Marxism you have an orthodoxy, a left, a right, and a dialectic between these. It would seem that a Marxist could employ your eight functional specialties in studying his past with a concern for the future. In what sense is your method in theology specifically Christian and theological, and in what sense is it ideologically neutral?

Lonergan: As a methodology it is relevant to any study of the past that is concerned to illuminate and direct the future. It is specifically Christian insofar as the subject is a Christian, a genuine authentic Christian, and

insofar as the materials he is working on are Christian sources, and derivations from the sources.

Question: Do you assign any theoretic importance to the sequence in which you develop the first four chapters in *Method in Theology*? In the light of *Insight*, it would seem that the chapter on meaning should precede rather than follow the chapter on the human good.

Lonergan: I do not assign any great theoretic importance to the sequence. The order in which those chapters were arranged was changed several times, and the motives for the successive changes, and exactly what those changes were, I could not recall at the present time. But the purpose of the first five chapters is background: to provide the materials that will have to be understood if the discussions that follow are to be intelligible and not cumbersome.

Question: The eight functional specialties seem justified as an a posteriori account of how theologians work. But some people have suggested to me that they are a little artificial as exactly according to the heuristic structure of consciousness. Do they genuinely come from that structure? I want to make a few specific questions about that, particularly on this level of values. It seems that conversion is certainly on that level of values, and decisions about what to do and what to make of yourself. But dialectic seems to me to be definitely on the level of judgment. It is through dialectic that you arrive at what is true or false among the various systems. And similarly, history, I think, has to be included as a different sub-level on the level of understanding, because you get many people giving accounts of history that have to be judged according to the dialectic; some will be true, some false. So it seems there are various understandings. Just as another instance, it

seems that foundations is also concerned with judgments. It's an explicitation of the horizon within which you are going to determine your doctrines. And while doctrines fits judgment well, so does foundations.

Lonergan: There is a famous phrase from Leopold von Ranke: *wie es eigentlich gewesen*, what really happened. And von Ranke is the fundamental model of modern historiography. Besides factual history, the history that says how it happened, how it came about, there is evaluative history. Von Meinecke remarks somewhere that evaluative history gives us the wisdom, the signposts, and something else, of our lives. And Carl Becker, an American historian, says that history is not a science that predicts the future; it enables us to face it. There is history on the fourth level, and we will mention that in discussing dialectic; there is evaluative history, there is appreciative interpretation, and they are on the fourth level, they are part of dialectic. Again, dialectic is not to tell you what is true, it is to exhibit conflicts and to reduce them to their origins, and particularly to the origins that are the presence or absence of intellectual, moral, and religious conversion.

You use dialectic, combine that with the triple conversion, and you get foundations. You are taking sides when you arrive at foundations, and it's taking sides; it's picking up a horizon. You arrive at precise conclusions in doctrines. There is a difference between the blik and the statements that have a meaning within that blik, and foundations is to establish the blik, the horizon. I think that by the end of the next week you will be able to see that there is perhaps a little more to be said for my divisions than you grant.

Question: There is one thing I would like to push, the question of dialectic not being something to enable you to arrive at the truth.

Lonergan: Well, it is in that direction, but the question there is the question of values. There are techniques involved. You ask everyone to say what a position is, and what is a counterposition. And one who is unconverted will pick the counterposition as the position. Then he will be asked to develop it. It is a way of making people reveal themselves; it is personal confrontation of a certain sort.

Question: But the counterpositions when developed reverse themselves. Does that mean that they are on the level of judgment?

Lonergan: If they really were developed; but the man is not converted.

Question: In your treatment of hermeneutics and interpretation in *Insight*, the universal viewpoint is a key concept, while in relation to the functional specialty of interpretation it goes unmentioned. Why is this?

Lonergan: Interpretation is a functional specialty. Attention is drawn to understanding yourself, as a key element: the existential point in interpretation. On that level you cannot decide who are the people who are understanding themselves properly, and who are not. You are going to get different interpretations simply because of that existential dimension. It is only on the fourth level that this sort of thing can be brought out. The equivalent of the universal viewpoint is found in dialectic: Dialectic is a more concrete way of working out the aspiration towards the universal viewpoint.

Question: In the philosophical discussion on the a priori anthropological constants of structuralism and the social structures of meaning in Luckmann's sociology, there are objections raised in Germany that such an a priori approach sublates the particularity of history. Do you regard the

methodological thematization of the related and recurrent operations of experiencing, understanding, judging, and deciding as meta-historical, or as revealing the concrete conditions of the possibility of historicity?

Lonergan: The answer, to put it very simply, is: the four levels of consciousness, as parts of consciousness, are not products of culture, but what produce cultures, and change them, and consequently, it is meta-historical.

Question: How do you use the word 'person'?

Lonergan: The authentic human being. You can use that word 'person' in several ways. I don't think it's difficult. I could give you a history of the different senses in which the word 'person' is used. I use it now to refer to the subject with special reference to self-transcendence and authenticity, the subject as involved in a problem of self-transcendence and authenticity.

Question: A systematic theologian cannot command the whole field of scripture, and so he is likely to read into scripture meanings that are not there at all. Is there any way of controlling this? Secondly, how can you build a system of theology when the ground is likely to be taken from under you by exegetes, who say that you misinterpreted scripture?

Lonergan: Insofar as your systematic theology is based on scripture you have to read the scripture scholars and pick out the ones that are good. If you pick out really good ones you pick out people who endure; good work is not easily superseded. But you have to have a nose for the good fellow.

Question: Can you say something about value judgments and religious studies?

Lonergan: If you are going to do theology you have to have a method which will deal explicitly with values. 'Religious Studies,' in general, means experience, understanding, judging, without talking about values. However, you have Wilfrid Cantwell Smith at the present time writing a book asking just what it is that makes religion come alive, what is faith or whatever it is that makes religion mean something, something of fundamental importance in human living. So there is a concern to move away from the rather positivistic and secularist conception of religious studies.

Question: Pursues the problem of interpretation – hard to hear.

Lonergan: You start out from your own presuppositions, but the more you move in on the author the more you begin to discover that he had his interests, his concerns, his problems, and you find out what they were. Then your questions become a different sort of thing.

Question (same person): Can you say something on Christian and non-Christian interpretation?

Lonergan: This business of priority is irrelevant when you are talking about understanding. Priority is a matter that concerns propositions. As a matter of fact, any set of propositions can be arranged in different orders. Aristotle can have an arrangement from the *priora quoad se* to the *priora quoad nos*, or vice versa. There is the problem that the Christian is going to understand this one way and the non-Christian is going to understand it in another. As far as the first four specialties go, anyone can come into the game and do his interpreting. But if you read a good book on interpretation – take van Iersel *Der Sohn in den Synoptischen Jesusworten*, He does a magnificent job of picking out the statements that are attributed to Jesus, which ones come out of the theology of the early church and which ones seem to be of an entirely

different stamp, so that it is very difficult to attribute them to the early church. That is a matter of studying the texts, understanding them, and comparing them. The fact that he is a Christian is not a factor in what he discovered there; what you need is a good man getting things done. He wrote his book prior to the post-Bultmannian trend of getting back to the *ipsissima verba*, but it came out while he was working at it, and he said this was the kind of thing he was trying to do. Solving these problems is a matter of solving them *in concreto* on the basis of evidence. The order: understanding the thing, the words, the author, is just setting out in detail the elements in the understanding that the interpreter has to arrive at. He may misunderstand the text, but he can learn later then later on.

Question: Do you mean that a man with the horizon of faith, following the method, would reach the same results as the man without the horizon of faith?

Lonergan: People without the horizon of faith will say that Christianity was invented after the destruction of Jerusalem – Brandon, for example – and so they will not do the close scrutiny that you have in Van Iersel, because it is obviously a problem that does not exist. So there is a point in talking about the horizon of faith, and people that you are going to listen to are the people who turn out, from dialectic and foundations, to be in the horizon of faith. But you do not set up barriers to stop people from doing work.

Question: What is the distinction between legend and fact?

Lonergan: The question involves both New Testament exegesis and a theory of history. The exegetes have to work out techniques by which one can distinguish between legend and fact. On the question in general, see the sixth chapter of Alan Richardson's *History, Sacred and Profane*, where he

deals with the miracle of the Resurrection and does a rather nice job on it. With regard to the question, whether miracles are possible, Carl Becker, an American historian who was not a Christian, in one of his papers -- I think it comes up in Charlotte Smith's *Carl Becker, On History and the Climate of Opinion* -- discusses in detail Bernheim's rule, namely, that you can accept historical evidence if you have two independent witnesses not self-deceived. Becker puts the question: If something is impossible for a historian, will he pronounce the witnesses self-deceived, whether there are two or 200, when they say that something happened that he is convinced could not happen? In other words, it's not a question of the people having poor memories, it's not a question of them being emotionally unstable or excited, it's not a question of them being deceiving -- well yes, it could be a question of them being deceiving -- but the point is that the ordinary reasons for saying these people are self-deceived, are irrelevant; these people are not going to be listened to, no matter how many witnesses they are, it it's something that is unintelligible to this historian. In other words, what does doing history, writing history, consist in? It's searching within one's horizon, the horizon one has, making the past intelligible within a horizon, and the historian would have to change his own horizon if he were to admit something he considered impossible.

Becker goes on to point out, of course, that the climate of opinion changes. He refers to the big debate going on at the time between Andrew Lang, who considered spiritism something objective, a possible object of science, and someone else who did not. And he says that, of course, when scientists discovered that miracles are possible, historians will find room for them too.