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**Thursday, August 12, 1971, part 2**

**23:45**

The sixth functional specialty was doctrines, what is so. The seventh is systematics: What does it mean? How do you understand it? Aquinas distinguished two operations of intellect. Understanding answers questions of the type, Quid sit? What is it? Cur ita sit? Why is it so? Judgment answers questions of the type, An sit? Utrum ita sit? Is it so? Whether it is so? By judgment there is known the existence of what has been defined.

And this distinction between the two operations is essential to an understanding of the Augustinian and also Anselmian precept *Crede ut intelligas*, believe that you may understand. It isn't 'believe that you may demonstrate'; you don't demonstrate what you believe. It is 'believe' as a first step towards coming to understand what you do believe.

This notion of understanding was retrieved by Cardinal Franzelin for the First Vatican Council from a terrific overlay of conceptualism that went on from the Middle ages right up to Vatican I. Vatican I affirmed this notion of understanding, that reason illumined by faith can attain a fruitful understanding of the mysteries of faith. And it is this promotion of understanding that is the principal function of systematics. Systematics is totally misconceived when it is thought of as *argumentum ex ratione theologica*, another proof of the truths of faith.

The function of systematics is to understand what one has believed, what has been taught by the church, what has been revealed by God. It is a promotion of human intelligence on to that level. It is not another proof of the truth, of

something that man cannot know unless it has been revealed by God. The whole tradition that conceived systematic theology as simply a matter of adding another proof on to the proofs from scripture and tradition and so on is ignoring the fact that human beings have intelligence and they can attain some understanding of the mysteries of faith, though they can't understand them completely.

In a celebrated question in the *Quodlibeta, Quodl.*, IV, q.9, a. 3 (18), Aquinas pointed out that a disputation can be directed to either of two ends. Its aim can be to remove doubts about some point of doctrine, and then one appeals to authorities, or it can be to instruct, and then one has to take one's stand on the reasons that bring to light the ground of that truth; one has to promote understanding. And promoting understanding is one thing, promoting knowledge of truth is another.

In recent centuries, Catholic theologians have tended to separate the philosophy of God and the theology of God and put them in two entirely different categories, one in philosophy and one in theology, in different courses of instruction and so on. And I find that separation – not distinction, the distinction is quite all right – but the separation is misleading because students tend (of the more negligent sort) to take it for granted that systematic theology is just more philosophy and, consequently, has no religious significance and can be set aside, neglected entirely.

Secondly, it weakens both systematic theology and natural theology; they can support one another. When you separate them you weaken both. And, finally, the separation seems to be based on a mistake. It assumes that the human mind has an objectivity that is totally independent of the mind that thinks, that there is no question of conversion, of personal development and so on. The issue is a transposition; our concern at the present time is a concern for a transposition from the abstract logic of a classicism in which what is basic is proof and you can demonstrate all sorts of things, which modern mathematicians know you can't

demonstrate at all, to the concreteness of method in which what is basic is not proof but conversion.

It may be objected that this transposition from proof to conversion is against the First Vatican Council's assertion that God can be known by the natural light of human reason. But first of all, that assertion at Vatican I seems to prescind from the actual order in which we live. In an earlier schema, Vatican I asserted that the existence of God can be proved by fallen man, but later versions of the same schema omitted the statement 'by fallen man,' so that the proof exists not in the actual order but in the *natura pura*, pure nature. Secondly, in the actual order, normally, religious conversion precedes rigorous proofs. As Pascal remarked, you would not seek me unless you had already found me. Finally, the the negation of separation is in no way any negation of distinction. Distinction is one thing, separation is another.

### **[The Function of Systematics]**

Our first topic, then, is the function of systematics. And the function of systematics is to obtain not more proofs of the truths revealed by God but some understanding of the truths revealed by God.

### **[Closed Options]**

We have made a large number of statements about theology in the first six functional specialties. And this limits the options that are available to us in this seventh. And we have to list these closed options, what we have been moving in on.

From a faculty psychology in terms of potencies, habits, and acts we have moved to an intentionality analysis that distinguishes four levels of conscious and

intentional operations. From this it follows, first of all, that the priority of intellect is just the priority of the first three levels which occur prior to the fourth but are sublated by the fourth. In other words, it is an affirmation, we are going along, our options take us along with the whole movement of 19th and 20th century thought that rejects the attempts of the German idealists to re-establish the domination of speculative intellect in Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel. It is more on the side of Kierkegaard, who affirmed the priority of faith, of Newman, who affirmed the priority of conscience, of Dilthey, the priority of life, of Blondel, a philosophy of action, and at the present time with Ricoeur, a priority of will, a philosophy of will. In other words, that fourth level of deliberation, evaluation, decision, is the top level of human operations.

It follows, secondly, that pure reason, speculative intellect is just an abstraction. It is what occurs when you have deliberation, evaluation, decision to seek the truth, and you are concerned simply with that. But to say that pure reason exists on its own without any deliberation, evaluation, and decision is just a mistake; it doesn't.

Again, the old adage, *Nihil amatum nisi praecognitum*, nothing can be loved unless it is already known: there can be an exception to that insofar as God can grant us a participation, can flood our hearts with his love through the Holy Spirit and make that the start in our knowledge of him, and not something consequent to our knowledge of him. That again becomes possible, that God's gift of his love is an orientation to the unknown, a transcending mystery that nevertheless reveals its goal by its absoluteness. And it is this orientation to God from God's gift of his grace that provides the primary and fundamental meaning of the name 'God.' It is this orientation that illuminates apophatic, negative theology, which is concerned to speak about a transcendent mystery, and to say what that mystery is not, not what it is.

However, if there is to be an affirmative theology, a kataphatic as well as an apophatic theology, there has to be confronted the question whether God is an object. People talk about this – God can't be an object and so on, without ever saying what they mean by an object. And there are all sorts of different meanings of the statement 'object.' And the first thing one has to do whenever anyone says, Is it an object or not? is to clarify just what you mean by 'object.'

There is object in the naive realist sense of the term. And for the naive realist, object is what he knows in the world mediated by meaning, but he thinks he knows it by taking a look. There is the empiricist meaning of the word 'object' in which the world mediated by meaning is emptied of everything that cannot be known by taking a look. There is the appropriate meaning of object as what is intended in questions and what is known through answers. There is the continental European meaning of the word 'object,' namely, what can be controlled and dominated and manipulated, as in natural science. All these different meanings of the word 'object.'

Is God an object? Well, he is not an object in the sense of the extroverted animal, what's already-out-there-now real, what I can put my paws on. God is not an object in that sense. God is not an object in the sense in which the continental European thinks of objects, as something that can be controlled and dominated and manipulated by the scientist. Is God an object in the sense of what is intended in questions and known through answers? Yes. But that's not the fundamental meaning of the word 'God.' The fundamental meaning of the word God is what one is related to through God's gift of his grace. As Karl Rahner says, that experience has a content but it has not got a known object. It is that experience that is fundamental in religion, in the Christian religion and in all other genuine religions. God gives sufficient grace to everyone. And the sufficient grace is this being in love with God. And in that fundamental sense God is not an object. It is an

intersubjective relationship quite different from human intersubjectivity, the intersubjectivity proper to worship, to prayer, to the after-communion feeling. And that is the fundamental meaning of the word God. But that meaning – as Pascal remarks, unless you had already found me, you would not seek me, and God is sought both by positive religion and by a natural theology. And in both, God becomes something that is intended in questions and known through answers. And in that secondary sense God is an object. The withdrawal is for return. Worship and prayer and so on withdraw us from ordinary living but that withdrawal is for a return in which we talk about God, speak together about God; and then God becomes an object, as something intended in questions and meant in answers.

There is the knowledge of God through revelation and that is the principal thing for the vast majority of humanity. But that knowledge of God through revelation is complemented and supplemented and made something that can be assimilated by human beings because there is also a natural knowledge of God. One can move from questions for intelligence to the ground of the intelligibility of the universe, from the facticity, the contingency of everything we know – it is just a virtually unconditioned, not absolutely unconditioned – to a necessary ground, from man's morality to the moral ground of the universe.

A further consequence in our closed options is the transition from the type of theology developed in the medieval period in which basic terms are metaphysical – what's first known is *ens*, what is, and all other terms are based upon that – to a contemporary set of basic terms in which what is basic are terms given in our experience, in our intentional consciousness, that what is first is what are you doing when you are knowing, and second, epistemology, why is doing that knowing? and only in third place a metaphysics, what do you know when you are doing it? So that one has a metaphysics that can be critically controlled; one isn't

throwing out metaphysics entirely, which we have in some of our Dutch theologians at the present time. But one has a metaphysics that can be critically controlled and, while it can be critically controlled, still, it is something that, while it is going to be continuous, the human mind isn't changing, still, it is without rigidity because one's knowledge of the human mind is something that can develop.

This reunion, the negation of the separation of natural theology and systematic theology, is simply a return to the unity that you have in Thomas's *Contra Gentiles* and his *Summa Theologiae*. You haven't got any separation there. Thomas moved from one to the other without any problem whatever.

### **[Mystery and Problem]**

Our third problem is mystery and problem. It's Marcel. Mystery is one thing; problem is something entirely different. Now that is more or less a negation of systematic theology, because systematic theology is an attempt to understand mystery.

Now man's response to transcendent mystery is adoration. But it is not an adoration that excludes words, least of all, when men worship together. Again, the words have meaning within some cultural context, and contexts are ongoing, derived from one another, interacting. Thus while mystery is very different from the problems of common sense, of science, of scholarship, of philosophy, still the worship of God is within a social, a cultural context, and it is that involvement in social and cultural contexts that generates problems with which theologians attempt to deal. Theologians are not out to eliminate the mystery that God is, but they are out to deal with the problems that arise when that mystery exists within a social and cultural context.

Our reflections on the differentiation of human consciousness have brought to light some of the general types of context within religious and theological discourse occur. Man's expression of his apprehension of God can be largely symbolic. Inadequacies of expression can be corrected by reinterpretation and modification of the symbols in such a way that undesired meanings are excluded. The same occurs in the pre-Socratic world of a Xenophanes or the post-systematic world of Clement of Alexandria. The God that sits and stands, has a right hand and a left, grows angry and repents, of the Bible, is not taken literally by Clement of Alexandria; you move into a different context. This rethinking of God the Father entails the rethinking of God the Son, and so you have the Christological problems that arose with Arianism and Nestorianism. There follows -- the minimal use of the technical expressions of the Greek councils prepared the way for the medieval rethinking of Christian doctrines in Scholastic terms. You are moving into an entirely different context. In the wake of this legacy are the further shifts manifested in modern science, modern scholarship, modern philosophy. The one manifestation of God occurs in totally different cultural and social contexts.

Mystery is not to be identified with the contexts in which mystery is adored, but these contexts are not at all free from problems. And the problems today are so many that very many do not know what to believe. There is a very profound problem of understanding at the present time. People are not believing, not because they don't want to believe, but because they don't know what believing means. And it is that that is the problem for systematic theology, to explain to people just what their beliefs mean, what they are to believe. There are people that are emptying the Catholic faith of its meaning at the present time. And that is a very fundamental problem. And it is the problem for the systematic theologian not simply to affirm what the doctrine is but to tell people what it means.

The answer to these questions is a gradual increase of understanding. Clues, answers, new questions succeed one another. The vein of questions in one area seems to die out but successive thinkers may tackle the whole problem over again. Eventually, perhaps, a master arrives on the scene capable of envisaging all these views and treating them in their proper order.

Now the order in which questions are treated is not the order in which the answers, the solutions, are discovered. The course of discovery is roundabout. Distinct from the order of discovery is the order of teaching. A teacher postpones solutions that presuppose other solutions and begins with issues whose solution does not presuppose the solution of other issues.

Such is the *ordo disciplinae*, the *ordo doctrinae*, that Aquinas aimed at in his *Summa Theologiae*. In the first book of the *Scriptum super Sententias* questions on the Trinity and questions on God as one are all mixed up; there is no separation between them whatever. One recurs after the other, it is just following the order of Peter Lombard. In the *Contra Gentiles*, questions on God as one are in the first book and questions on the Trinity are in the fourth book; they are entirely separate. In the *Summa Theologiae*, questions on God as one are questions from, in the *Prima Pars*, from question 2 to 26, questions on God and the Trinity, question 27 to question 43. They are separated but they are continuous and you move from one to the other. Questions 27-29 are still talking about God as one but setting up the elements necessary for a conception of God as Trinity.

Not only does the order of teaching or exposition differ from the order of discovery; the terms and relations of systematic thought express a development of understanding over and above the understanding had either from a simple inspection or from an erudite exegesis of the original doctrinal sources. In Thomist trinitarian theory such terms as person, relation, procession have a technical meaning that just is not found in patristic writings. It is that movement, just as

mass and temperature and electro-magnetic field are terms that have no meaning in ordinary commonsense language, so technical terms in Aquinas, in a systematic theology, are not just simply transpositions of things that are revealed; they are understanding, and that understanding goes beyond the understanding in which the revelation is expressed. And if you want to have just what has been revealed in your systematic theology, you are going to have no systematic theology whatever. Just as if you want to have terms in physics that simply narrate experiences that you can feel or see and so on, you are going to have no physics whatever. The systematic presentation is an understanding of something else. And that understanding has a new construction. 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, that is being understood, still that understanding grows and advances down the ages.

I have stressed in my chapter on doctrines that it is always the same meaning, the same truth that is being understood, but in systematics you have to stress the fact that that understanding grows and develops down the ages. And consequently, it is a fuller understanding, and it expresses itself in a better way.

You can have that understanding in a Byzantine context, in a medieval context, in a modern context, and it will be a fuller understanding as you move on. Because it is not only that you can have a fuller understanding, you can also have a more perverse misunderstanding. Just as you can have an ongoing process of developing understanding, you can have an ongoing process of misunderstanding. And as the people who are intelligent are few and the people who are unintelligent are many, the misunderstanding can be much more common than the understanding. And consequently, you are confronted again with the problem of

dialectic: what is the manifestation of intellectual, moral, and religious conversion, and what is the misunderstanding that proceeds from the opposites?

### **[Understanding and Truth]**

A fourth section: We have spoken of the function of systematics, namely, its concern with understanding; we have spoken of closed options, what follows from the positions already assumed; of mystery and problem, that while the mystery we adore is one thing, still the context in which a social group does the adoration is something that changes over time and is subject to problems. Finally, understanding and truth.

Data are given to sense or consciousness. They are hardly noticed unless they fit in with one's understanding and have a name in one's language. But while data are just a component in human knowledge, facts are what are known from the conjunction of three levels of cognitional activity: from experience, understanding, and judgment.

Understanding can be of data, and it can be of facts. One can seek the understanding of data, of what one perceives, what one is conscious of, but one can also know that such and such is a matter of fact and try to understand it. The understanding of data is expressed in hypotheses, and the verification of hypotheses leads to probable assertions. The understanding of facts is more complicated, for it presupposes the existence of two orders or types of knowledge, where the facts of the first type supply the data for the second type. We've had this already in our consideration of critical history. One proceeds from the data on our sources to a discovery of what kind of people they were, how accurate they were, what sort of use they made of their sources of information, how reliable they are, where they can be trusted, where they are going to be suspected. And this study of

our sources and the authors of our sources provides us with information of historical experience, the fragments of historical knowledge represented by these people. And from those fragments one moves on to history properly so called, what was going forward in a given milieu.

So one proceeds from a first set of data to facts about persons. And the facts about persons reveal elements of historical experience which one proceeds to put together to arrive at historical knowledge. There is a double process.

Now there are, then, two sets of truths. There are truths about one's sources: so and so is reliable and so and so is not reliable in this respect and that other respect. And there is a second order of truths: this is what happened; this is what really was going on.

When you have eight functional specialties, each one of which is a matter of experiencing, understanding, judging, and deciding, you have eight sets of movements from data to truths. And the truth arrived at in one functional specialty will provide the data for a second functional specialty and so on; you have a very complex business of understanding and truth.

In our present concern of doctrines and systematics, doctrines supply us with the truths of faith. Systematics aims at an understanding of the truths of faith. The truth of that understanding is one thing, the truth of faith is another. You can have a whole series of notions of what you mean by a person, from the merely heuristic meaning of person you have in Augustine: person means what there are three of in God, in the Trinity, through Boethius, Richard of St. Victor, Aquinas, definitions of person; and metaphysical accounts of person in Scotus and Capreolus and Tiphanius and Suarez and Cajetan and so on, metaphysical accounts of the person; person in terms of the subject from Descartes on; person in terms of contemporary phenomenology. All these different accounts of the person pertain to differences in systematic theology. And to get these two mixed up, to confuse one meaning with

another, is to confuse systematics with doctrines. And if you get the two confused, you start rejecting the existence of the three persons in the Trinity because you haven't got a satisfactory systematics on the person. That sort of thing can go on. And it is going on at the present time.

In general, what systematic theology arrives at is no more than probable; it is something that is going to be developed over time; it is something that is going to be gone beyond by further development of systematic theology. On the other hand, the truths of faith can be permanent, as already stated, but to grasp their permanence you have to present that permanence in terms that can themselves be permanent and, consequently, are going to be based, formulated in terms of transcendental method and the transcultural gift of God's grace.

**59:50 (leaves the room)**