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Question-and-Answer Session 8

Question: The question concerns whether there is a confessional presupposition to your method, despite your denial of one. Protestant experience since the Enlightenment has been that the historical study of Christian origins has had a profound effect on earlier assumptions about the permanence of central Christian doctrines. Does not the possibility of different accounts of Christian origins give rise to another important source of diversity in fundamental Christian doctrines, especially Christology, which might never be overcome?

Lonergan: I am not saying that all differences will be overcome, but that the differences can be lined up dialectically, and the people who are converted can recognize one another.

With regard to the problems of Christian origins, I think things have been looking brighter recently than they have for some time, and especially with regard to Christology. There seems to be – at least to me, I am not a scripture scholar – some evidence of post-Bultmannian success in getting to the words of Jesus, distinguishing what was the earliest theology of the Church and what expressions would not pertain to that earliest theology of the Church, and, consequently, are attributed to Jesus.

Question: In your published paper on functional specialties you give first place in the section on communications to ‘interdisciplinary relations (of theology) with art, language, literature.’ Would you expand or offer any guidelines for study in this area?

Lonergan: Well, as an example, there is a man in the Divinity School Chicago who is working precisely in that area of literature and theology. His name is Nathan Scott. I think you have to go into concrete examples of people doing that sort of work to see what has been done and what can be done and what needs to be done. But that would be something in communications rather than method.

Question: The notion of communications implied in your lecture seems strangely at odds with your awareness of the problems posed by post-classical science, art, and scholarship. It appears to involve a mechanistic conception of the media of communication and of its effects on a technological level upon both the communicator, the communicated, and the community. What do you regard as the role of the theological methodologist in preparing the Christian for the formative effects of the media, particularly broadcasting media, upon the community of communicators and those communicated with, in a common task of discovery?

Lonergan: I think what is relevant there is a study of communications, such as you have in centers for it in the University of Chicago, or Loyola College, Montreal, where one of the best Czechs deserted in 1967. Really, that is something in the specialty of communications, not something in the methodology. I do not know if that is satisfactory, but it is all I know.

Question: Functional specialties seem to be for the theologian when he is doing theology. When the theologian has to teach theology to students, especially to those whose formal study of theology ends in the seminary, how should the functional specialties inform his teaching?

Lonergan: Functional specialties are in doing theology, in creative work in theology. The problems in teaching theology are of a quite different order. There are all sorts of levels to it, and so on, and vast programs being drawn up at the present time. I am not prepared to discuss them. Most places are having long committee meetings discussing this sort of thing.

Question: Would it be correct to describe *Method in Theology* as a philosophy of theology? And how would you guard against the danger that people might neglect the doing of theology for the sake of meta-theology?

Lonergan: I would not call it a philosophy of theology. Part of it is a philosophy; it is something you can do in doing philosophy, namely, transcendental method. But the other basic part to it, namely, the supposition of religious conversion, is not philosophy at all.

How do you guard against the danger that people might neglect the doing of theology for the sake of meta-theology? Well, it is a risk one has to take, and how one guards against it, of course, is by criticizing their books.

Question: Is it true that anyone who is in love with God experiences God, that is, his grace, but that to thematize this experience is another matter? To put this another way: is it not impossible to be in love with God and yet have no experience of this?

Lonergan: The distinction is correct, between the *vécu* and the *thématique*. You can be in love with God and have very little awareness of it. It is like Maslow says: people have peak experiences and do not know it.

Question: Yesterday Fr Tyrrell asked about the relationship between religious experience and its proper articulation and thematization. In the light of that question, is it not true that in view of your present stress on

value and conversion, an individual can only reflect accurately and adequately on the meaning of religious life and conversion to the extent that he is, in fact, converted? Would you please elaborate on this a bit?

Lonergan: Yes, it is just the same as with understanding. Unless you have experiences of understanding you are not going to find out in yourself what it is to understand, and *Insight* is presenting exercises in understanding in the earlier chapters, so that people will have the experience and come to identify their acts of understanding. Similarly, with regard to conversion; if you have simply a notional apprehension of conversion, you will be in difficulties.

Question: What is common to the three kinds of conversion, and what is the difference between the three? What are the data to which one would need to attend in order to understand religious conversion and moral conversion?

Lonergan: Religious conversion is, fundamentally, being in the state of grace, and you are in the state of grace if you are not forsaking fundamental options, as Boros, I think, puts it, basic options with regard to God.

For the relevant data on being in the state of grace, read Paul to the Galatians, 5.22: ‘The harvest of the spirit is charity, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, kindness, and self-control.’

What is common to the three kinds of conversion? Well, there is the notion of horizon, the notion of change of horizon, the notion of an about-face in a change of horizon, and that’s the notion of conversion. Schange of horizon involves a re-organization of one’s living. One can have that in the intellectual order. A man had read *Insight*, and he was a bit fascinated by it, but it did not mean very much to him. Then he read the *Verbum* articles which provided, as it were, a powder chain between what had been taught in *Insight*, and then everything started falling apart on him. He was due to do

his comprehensives at that time and had to put them off. He experienced an intellectual conversion. It need not be as startling as that; it can be a slow process that gradually matures, and becomes clear when a certain key judgment is made.

Moral conversion, in general, is the movement from being guided by satisfactions to being guided by values. What are your motives?

Religious conversion is a matter of being in love. It is comparable to the love of man and wife, parents and children, brothers and sisters, and the love of mankind, human welfare. But it is a love that orientates a person to the universe. It is not just relatives or mankind, but an orientation to the universe, to the all.

Question: In your '*Existenz and Aggiornamento*' you speak about a distinction between being 'substance' in Christ and being 'subject' in Christ, and that one can gradually move from one state to the other. How does this relate to your present stress on religious development and, in your present context, in what does the movement from substance to subject consist?

Lonergan: What was meant at that time by the change from substance to subject is not what is meant by religious conversion in the present context. In the present context, there is religious conversion when a person is in the state of grace; the movement from substance to subject is, in its simplest form, a change in one's mode of prayer. The symptom commonly agreed on is that vocal prayer ceases to be possible.

Question: In one of your articles on 'Gratia Operans,' you say about Aquinas: 'The base of all these operations lay in the commentaries on Holy Writ and on Aristotle where, I think more than elsewhere, the wealth of the theologian and the stature of the philosopher stand revealed.' Why do you

think that such wealth and such stature stand revealed in those works more than elsewhere?

Lonergan: Well, the wealth of the theologian is fundamentally scripture, I think. The stature of Thomas as a philosopher was in his penetration of Aristotle. I think he remarked once that one of the greatest graces he ever had was that he never read a page that he did not understand. To enter into someone else's mind, into another person's spirit, is quite a trick.

Question: I see that the meaning that a truth possesses in its own context can never be truthfully denied. I see that such a meaning can be grasped by men in another cultural context, insofar as they succeed in arriving at the primitive context. I would like you to expand on the continuity and relevance of an earlier dogma to a later and different context. One could say, for example, that the dogma of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist was true in the context of Trent, but that now we think of the Eucharist in another context, no more a 'cosmological' one; therefore the dogma of Trent is irrelevant for us, in spite of its absolute truth.

Lonergan: With regard to the permanence of dogma, what Vatican I defines as the dogma that is permanent is not simply something defined by the church; it also has to be revealed by God. If anyone wanted to reject Trent's definition and also wanted to stay in the church, he would say that what Trent defined was not revealed, and so it was not permanent. I am talking *ex hypothesi*.

Question: When the dogmatic definition is not just a heuristic one, but also a determinate content, determinate at the first level, e.g., Christ is Risen, Christ is '*vere, realiter et substantialiter*' present, how do you understand the continuity and relevance of this content with regard to a different and

later cultural context? Must the later and different context take over and appropriate this same defined content, or can it simply ignore it? If the first is the case, how?

Lonergan: Well, again, either it has been revealed or not. If it has been revealed, then it is permanent; if it has not been revealed, then you can move you will not retain it in a later context, perhaps.

Question: Fr. Crowe has argued against Professor Hamilton that we have to take over what was defined at Nicea and Chalcedon, however different our cultural context today is. Please comment.

Lonergan: Well, he would say so not because they were defined, but because they were defined *and revealed*. In Vatican I, it's always not just defined, but defined *and revealed*.

Questions from the floor

Question: Is the term 'intentionality' as used in *Insight* being employed in the same sense as used by Brentano?

Lonergan: I do not know; I do not know how it is used in *Insight*.

Question: (A question about Christology.)

Lonergan: The question is historical, and you cannot discuss historical questions properly without going into great detail. I am afraid we could spend a month on it.

Question: With reference to your clarification of the place of conversion, how might you now define education?

Lonergan: Education is the communication of the cultural achievement of the past to people in the present, to the next generation. And that

achievement, of course, goes over millennia. Education, socialization, acculturation, *Existenz*, are all different aspects of the same thing.

Question: You stressed that dogmas are not only defined, but always defined and also revealed. Can it be said that the dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption of Our Lady are definitely revealed?

Lonergan: Being revealed and being in the bible are not coincident. What to do about these dogmas I do not know. Rahner once asked me: ‘Do you think that what Pius XII defined about Our Lady is something that is true of every pious soul that dies?’

Question: (The questioner recalls that Lonergan has said that Marx was as involved with necessity as was Hegel. He also recalls, however, Lonergan’s distinction in *Insight* between Freud’s mechanistic determinism and his genuine scientific discoveries, and he asks whether Lonergan might make some similar distinctions with regard to Marx.)

Lonergan: I would, for example, with regard to ‘surplus value.’ It is saying, in terms of marginal analysis, something that is very true if you go into macroeconomics; there is surplus income. But ‘surplus value,’ to my mind, is just a confusion.

Question: You use the term ‘ideology.’ I would like you to clarify, from your context, what ‘ideology’ means.

Lonergan: By ‘ideology,’ I mean the self-justification of sin, as the most fundamental. Sin is the radical form of human alienation, and the justification of that alienation is ideology.

Question: Do we know what is revealed, and if so, how do we know what is revealed?

Lonergan: Well, it is not a question that can be answered in two words. You have a whole course on a topic like that.

Question: (The questioner asks to what extent Lonergan's method might successfully be employed by one who did not share his religious faith and religious commitment.)

Lonergan: I think the method as I have proposed it, apart from my personal presuppositions and their implications, and all that sort of thing, is the sort of thing that most people can go along with to a great extent; I do not think they could use it in the same way. I deliberately refrain from determining whether the materials of theology are just scripture, or scripture and tradition, or how long the tradition runs, and so on. I left all those questions open. I can let theologians start where they please; people will have different ideas on privileged areas. I think a Muslim could use this method on his religion. But I think the method, while it can be employed that way, is not going to give identical results from everybody. You are going to get identical results insofar as they have the same privileged areas, insofar as they pursue dialectic successfully, and have the basic foundations in the threefold conversion. Does that answer your question?

Question: (The questioner asks whether there is not required at least a minimal religious orientation.)

Lonergan: Without being religiously orientated you cannot do the last four specialties. On the other hand, religious orientation is, I think, sufficient. There was a meeting when Notre Dame University set up its doctoral course in theology and among the people present was Dean Young of Princeton (Religious Studies), and the question came up whether the professors at Notre Dame had to be Catholics. Some people were of the opinion, Yes,

because they would not otherwise understand the religion properly. Young objected, and said, 'I have a man that teaches my Catholic students their religion better than any Catholic they had teaching them.' So, while you have to be religious, you can enter sympathetically into another's point of view, and teach from that point of view, though probably you will not be able to solve problems so well.

Question: (A question about how one is to determine what is revealed.)

Lonergan: Determining what is revealed is part of doctrines. You do the six first specialties to get that far. That is how you determine what is revealed.

Question: (The questioner recalls what Lonergan has said about the need to counteract ideology by communications. Then he asks whether one must not also counteract the mechanistic and materialistic assumptions that find expression, for instance, in advertising.)

Lonergan: Yes. There is no doubt that the advertising is manipulative.

Question: (A question about religious conversion, moral conversion, and operative grace: if religious conversion can be understood in terms of operative grace, what about moral conversion.)

Lonergan: I have about 150 pages on operative grace. It is, fundamentally, what Augustine means when he quotes Ezekiel: 'I will pluck out the heart of stone and put in a heart of flesh.' You get the heart of flesh, not because the heart of stone wanted it; it is precisely what the heart of stone did not want. It is the transformation of the subject, and it is in terms of love.

Moral conversion is a fruit of that; the love reveals the values that you convert to in moral conversion. Moral conversion is in terms of motivations. The gift of God's love is something distinct; it gives you a new type of

motive. The conversions are distinct. Moral development is a process that goes on; people can be in the state of grace and be developing morally at the same time.

Question: In the light of what you just said, would you say that the *Prima secundae* of Aquinas is a thematization of moral conversion?

Lonergan: The *Secunda secundae*, rather. The *Prima secundae* is about end, law, grace, and so on.

Question 211: I mean the section of the *Prima secundae* that deals with liberty, good and bad acts, virtues and vices.

Lonergan: Yes, that part.

Question: (The questioner asks whether Lonergan's discussion of feelings is in the same area as Aquinas's discussion of 'passiones.')

Lonergan: I agree. Feelings that are intentional responses.

Question: (The questioner refers to a movement away from fundamentalism in interpretation of Scripture and asks whether this is not a doctrinal problem too, as well as a problem in systematics.)

Lonergan: Yes. Just as there was philosophic demythologization done by the Alexandrines, so there can be a historical or an exegetical demythologization at the present time.

Question: (The questioner follows up, asking whether, because of the doctrinal element involved, there is not a continuing role for the magisterium here.)

Lonergan: Well, to take a concrete example, the Virgin Birth can be interpreted today as another Christology. Is it to be interpreted that way?

That is a further question. But that is the sort of question that does arise in the contemporary context. How is it going to be settled? It is not to be settled in a hurry; that is all I have to say.

Conn O'Donovan thanks Lonergan for the Institute.