

Natural Theology and the Functional Specialty, Systematics

In Easter week, 1970, at St. Leo's near Tampa, Florida, there was a congress of some thirty people interested in my book, Insight, and some thirty more interested in the people interested in the book. As Fr Bernard Tyrrell was one of the three main promoters of the congress, I wish to take advantage of this occasion to thank him for his interest in my work and for his implementation of that interest. But I have a further motive for mentioning the congress. For on that occasion there was voiced by very many a thorough-going objection to chapter nineteen of Insight, the chapter you will recall that sets forth something in the way of a natural theology. The objection, as I recall, was to the effect that that chapter had none of the freshness and originality of earlier chapters, that it simply was a repetition of old-style thinking and not at all the outcome of what had preceded it.

My answer, on that occasion, occurred in an interview that since has been published in the Clergy Review. It was an account of the genesis of the book, Insight. My original intention had been to write on method in theology and to begin this work by an exploration of methods generally. This intention had to be modified in 1952 when I was told that I was to be sent to the Gregorian University in Rome to teach theology in 1953. I knew that there was little opportunity for a professor of theology at the Gregorian to do much in the way of writing, and so I modified my plans. My main thrust had been to replace the sausage machine that turned out abstract, ~~xxx~~ universal concepts by living human intelligence that grasped forms in phantasm and expressed them in intelligible terms and relations. Having driven home this point with illustrations from mathematics, physics, common sense, and our knowledge of things, it was necessary to go on to an account of judgement, of being -- i. e., the world mediated by meaning -- and of objectivity. Having gone so far, I could hear the objection that I could go no further, that I could not on the basis I had set up go on to doing a metaphysics, an ethics, a natural theology. Now/the only solid proof of a possibility is its actual occurrence, my only answer to that objection was ~~to do~~

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to write on metaphysics, ethics, natural theology. My concern for method in theology had to be postponed.¹

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- 1) Philip McShane, "An Interview with Fr. Bernard Lonergan, S. J.," Clergy Review, 56(1971), 423 f.
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This year, however, my book on Method in Theology is in the bookshops, and it assigns natural theology a context in the functional specialty, systematics

Natural Theology and the Functional Specialty, Systematics

In the high middle ages it was thought quite proper for theologians to distinguish, indeed, between natural knowledge and knowledge based on faith but, so far from separating the two, to combine both in their theological treatises. Such for example was the practice of such divergent masters as Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus.¹ But in recent centuries it has become customary for natural theology to be omitted in books on theology and to be treated in philosophy departments by professors of philosophy.

The occasion of the present lectures is the fact that in my recent book on Method in Theology I proposed that those that shared my views on method should revert from recent to medieval practice.² At the very outset, however, I must insist that those that do not share my rather complicated views on method are not to be expected to accept my proposal. For my views on method depend, not only on the research involved in writing the book on method, but also on the research I did on the thought of Aquinas,³ on my study of human understanding in mathematics, natural science, common sense, cognitional theory, and metaphysics,⁴ on my many years as a professor of theology and on the written treatises entailed by my teaching.⁵

- 1) Aquinas, C. Gent., I, 13; Sum. theol., I, q. 2; Scotus, Ordinatio I, dist. 2, pars 1, qq. 1 & 2.
- 2) B. Lonergan, Method in Theology, London: Darton, Longman & Todd, and New York, Herder and Herder (McGraw-Hill), 1972, pp. 337-340.
- 3) Verbum, Word and Idea in Aquinas, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, and London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1967
Grace and Freedom, Operative Grace in the Thought of St. Thomas Aquinas, London: Darton, Longman & Todd, and New York: Herder and Herder, 1971.
- 4) Insight, New York: Philosophical Library, 1970, and London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1972.
- 5) De Deo Trino, Rome: Gregorian Press, I, ²1964, II, ³1964.
De Verbo Incarnato (mimeographed) ³1964.

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The occasion of the present series of lectures is a proposal I made in a recent book, Method in Theology. For some centuries now it has been customary for natural theology to be treated in a philosophy department by professors of philosophy. But in the high middle ages it was thought quite proper for theologians to distinguish indeed natural knowledge and knowledge based on faith but to combine both in their theological treatises. Such, for example, was the practice of such divergent masters as Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus.¹ Such I suggested would also be the proper course of those that accepted my views on the proper method of doing theology today.²

1) Aquinas, C. Gent., I, 13; Sum. theol., I, q. 2; Duns Scotus, Ordinatio I, dist. 2, pars 1, qq. 1 & 2.

2) B. Lonergan, Method in Theology, London: Darton, Longman & Todd and New York: Herder and Herder (McGraw-Hill) 1972, pp. 337-340

My proposal, then, I must insist, is not some isolated proposition. Rather it is a conclusion that follows from a whole series of distinctive positions and that will not be accepted unless the positions, on which it depends, also are accepted. Specifically, it will not be accepted by those that deny human understanding to be insight into phantasm and claim that human understanding results from a comparison of concepts. It will not be accepted by those that deny any distinction between analytic propositions and analytic principles³ and claim that the predication of one concept by another is, not just a hypothesis, but by that very fact a true judgement. It will not be accepted by the humanists that consider it evident that philosophy and theology are, not disciplines to be understood, but quarries to be exploited by orators.

metaphysics, an ethics, a natural theology. In brief, my answer was that in the later chapters of Insight I was doing what I could in the unfavorable circumstances under which I worked.¹

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- 1) Philip McShane, "An Interview with Fr. Bernard Lonergan, S. J.," Clergy Review, 56 (1971) 423 f.
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The occasion for the present lectures is that, in my recent book, Method in Theology, an appropriate context has been found for natural theology, namely, the functional specialty, systematics.

Natural Theology and the Functional Specialty, Systematics

For some centuries natural theology has been considered a philosophic discipline. But in the high middle ages proofs of God's existence from natural reason were considered proper topics for theologians to treat. So Aquinas in the second question of the first part of his Summa theologiae denied that God's existence was per se notum quoad nos, explained in what sense it was demonstrable and in what sense it was ~~impossible to establish~~ not, and offered to establish God's existence in five differing ways. Similarly Scotus, in the first book of his Ordinatio, distinction 2, part 1, questions 1 and 2, wished to establish the existence of one and only one actually infinite being.

Now in a recent book I proposed that contemporary theologians might well revert to the medieval practice, and that proposal is the occasion for the present lectures. Perhaps the most expeditious manner of coming to grips with the issues will be to begin by a brief account of various contexts. For the issue before is whether natural theology belongs to a philosophic context or, on the other hand, to a theological context. So I propose to say something about logical context, psychological context, social context, and historical context.

Logical context is the context of a statement. It sets forth what the statement means and what it does not mean, what it presupposes and what it does not presuppose, what it implies and what it does not imply. I may at once not that as far as logical context is concerned a natural theology can be natural theology only if it can fit entirely within a philosophic context.

Psychological context is the context of a mind and a character. Besides the statement made by the person there also is the person that made the statement. Behind his present statement there is his whole past development. Our knowledge grows out of earlier knowledge. What one can assimilate at a later stage of growth, one may be unable

to assimilate at an earlier stage. Similarly character develops to make easy what once was difficult. Nor is one to overlook in discussing the appropriate context for natural theology the fact of man's need for God's grace, and the occurrence or non-occurrence of intellectual, moral, and religious conversion.