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Part Two

FOREGROUND

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CHAPTER SIX  
R E S E A R C H

In the preceding chapter there were outlined some of the chief characteristics of the first functional specialty, research. In this chapter the reader may be expecting to find a set of precise instructions on the way to do research. But, perhaps unfortunately, research is an enormously diversified category and doing research is much more a matter of practice than of theory. If one's intention is general research, then one should find out who and where are the masters in the area in which one wishes to work. To them one must go and with them one must work until one is familiar with all the tools they employ and has come to understand precisely why they make their each and every move. On the other hand, if one's intention is special research, one has to select the further functional specialty one's research is to serve. Again, one has to find out who and where there is a master that works in that further specialty on the basis of his research. To him one must go, join in his seminar, do a doctoral dissertation under his direction. For doing research, whether general or special, is always a concrete task that is guided not by abstract generalities but by the practical intelligence generated by the self-correcting process of learning by which also we acquire what we call common sense.

But if we do not propose to give instruction on the procedures of research, we may be expected to indicate the areas

that theological research is to investigate. Such an indication we are prepared to offer, but it will settle not theological but only methodical issues.

Let us begin by distinguishing human studies, religious studies, Christian studies, Roman Catholic studies. All four are concerned with man. Each of the four differs from the others inasmuch as it recognizes a broader or narrower field of data as relevant to its research. Now the areas proper to human studies and to religious studies need not occupy us here.<sup>1</sup> Our concern is to find a way of dealing with the varying views of Christians on the data relevant to Christian theology.

The issue is not new. Is theology to be based on scripture alone, or on scripture and tradition? Is the tradition just the explicit teaching of the apostles, or is it the ongoing teaching of the church? Is it the ongoing teaching of the church up to Nicea, or up to A.D. 1054, or up to the reception of Scholastic doctrines, or up to the council of Trent, or up to the days of Pius IX, or forever?

Not all answers can be correct. But to ascertain the correct answer will not occur until the sixth functional specialty, doctrines, is reached. But how can the sixth specialty be reached, if one does not know which are the areas

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1) In the final chapter on Communications something will be said on the relation of theology to religious studies and to human studies.

relevant to theological research, and how each area is to be weighted?

My answer is to let Christian theologians begin from where they already stand. Each will consider one or more areas relevant to theological research. Let him work there. He will find that the method is designed to take care of the matter.

After all, Christian theologians disagree not only on the areas relevant to theological research but also on the interpretation of texts, on the occurrence of events, on the significance of movements. Such differences can have quite different grounds. Some may be eliminated by further progress in research, interpretation, history, and they can be left to the healing office of time. Some may result from developmental pluralism: there exist disparate cultures and diverse differentiations of consciousness; and such differences are to be bridged by working out the suitable transposition from one culture to another or from one differentiation of consciousness to another. Others, finally, arise because intellectual or moral or religious conversion has not occurred, and our chapters on Dialectic and on Foundations will attempt to indicate how these differences can be brought out into the open so that men of good will can discover one another.

Finally, of course, the method is not just a one-way street. The various specialties interact. If in doctrines a theologian changes his mind about the areas relevant to theological research, he will be led also to change his practice of research.