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Critically Embracing Development and Pluralism: A Postfoundationalist Reading of Bernard Lonergan on the Hermeneutics of Doctrine

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ABSTRACT

In the postmodern era, the assumption that there can and should be firm, reasoned foundations for human knowledge and action – foundations demonstrable to any rational person – is questioned and often abandoned. This presents a profound challenge to a Catholic understanding of the truth and meaningfulness of doctrinal statements. This thesis presents a response based on the thought of Bernard Lonergan. The postmodern critique has both epistemological and hermeneutical implications and significant responses offered by Reformed theologians are examined. As a possible basis for a specifically Catholic response and as a preface to engaging with Lonergan, John Henry Newman's account of faith in his *Grammar of Assent* (which deeply influenced Lonergan) and his treatment of doctrinal development are considered. The development of Lonergan's thought is then examined in detail, with the aim of demonstrating that his understanding of truth and knowledge can underpin a hermeneutics of doctrine that does not repeat the shortcomings of foundationalist modes of thinking. The focus of Lonergan's early works is the authentic interpretation of St Thomas Aquinas and he remains a Thomist when he later elaborates his own proposal for theological method. I argue that, given that reading Aquinas as a 'classical foundationalist' has been found erroneous, the charge cannot be applied to Lonergan either. Proper attention to the Thomist character of his thought allows a reading of Lonergan's method as a postfoundationalist critical hermeneutics. Such a hermeneutics can give an 'account' of Christian hope (1 Peter 3:15) that is not foundationalist, holds in balance the demands of orthodoxy and legitimate pluralism, and does justice to the Catholic understanding of the act of faith as one that is ecclesial as well as individual. This is an original reading, drawing out themes underdeveloped in the secondary literature, and retrieving Lonergan as a resource for contemporary theology.

CRITICALLY EMBRACING DEVELOPMENT AND PLURALISM: A POSTFOUNDATIONALIST READING OF BERNARD LONERGAN ON THE HERMENEUTICS OF DOCTRINE

Andrew Joseph Downie

Contents

ABBREVIATIONS

(Full details of texts are given in the Bibliography)

Achievement	David Tracy, *The Achievement of Bernard Lonergan* (1970)
AI	David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination* (1981)
AL	*Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis (2016)
Arians	John Henry Newman, *The Arians of the Fourth Century* (1871)
BRO	David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order* (1975)
DF	Vatican I, *Dei Filius* (1870)
DV	Vatican II, *Dei Verbum* (1965)
Essay	John Henry Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (1878)
FR	Pope John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio* (1998)
GF	Bernard Lonergan, *Grace and Freedom* (1971)
Grammar	John Henry Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (1870)
Method	Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (1972)
OA	Pope Paul VI, *Octogesima Adveniens*, (1971)
PA	David Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity* (1987)
PMN	Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979)
RPC	Paul D Murray, *Rome's Postmodern Challenge* (2006)
RTT	Paul D Murray, *Reason, Truth and Theology in Pragmatist Perspective (2006)*
SSR	Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962)
ST	St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*
Through a Glass	R J Snell, *Through a Glass Darkly: Bernard Lonergan & Richard Rorty on knowing without a God's-eye view* (2006)
TTG: Doctrines	Bernard Lonergan, *The Triune God: Doctrines* (1964)
TTG: Systematics	Bernard Lonergan, *The Triune God: Systematics* (1964)

DECLARATION

This work has been submitted to the University of Durham in accordance with the regulations for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. It is my own work, and none of it has been previously submitted to the University of Durham or any other institution for a degree.

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INTRODUCTION

Catholic faith is committed to an understanding of revelation that takes seriously the idea of abiding truth. Vatican I describes the church's doctrine as a 'divine deposit' whose meaning, declared by the church, must be 'perpetually retained.'[1] However, a purely static understanding of doctrine is untenable. Newman remarks that, 'to live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often.'[2] Furthermore, from the beginning of its history, the church has had to meet the challenge of living, preaching and teaching the faith in different languages and cultural contexts. The emergence of what Rahner describes as a 'world Church' at Vatican II[3] sharpened this challenge. So too did the appearance, in the second half of the 20th century, of postmodernism, relativism and postfoundationalism. Postmodernism calls into question the validity of the all-embracing 'grand narrative.' Cognitive relativism asserts that truth claims cannot be held to be valid universally, but only within a given framework of assessment

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[1] Vatican I Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Filius* (hereafter *DF*), chapter 4 on Faith and Reason. Norman Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* vol II (London, Sheed & Ward/Washington DC, Georgetown University Press, 1990) Also available at http://inters.org/Vatican-Council-I-Dei-Filius [Accessed 12/12/24]

[2] John Henry Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (2nd edition, 1878), reprinted with a foreword by Ian Ker (University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 40. Hereafter *Essay*.

[3] This phrase was used by Karl Rahner, when speaking at the Weston School of Theology in 1979: see "Basic Theological Interpretation of the Second Vatican Council" in Rahner's *Theological Investigations* XX (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 77-89.

or interpretation.[4] The current of thought known as postfoundationalism, antifoundationalism or nonfoundationalism denies that there can be immediately justified beliefs that stand as indisputable first principles, such that all other beliefs and affirmations can be founded upon them.[5]

Postfoundationalist thought offers a profound challenge to Catholic theology. Catholic faith is committed to the idea that revealed truths can be known with 'firm certitude'[6] and that there is no conflict between faith and reason, properly understood.[7] Historically, even the members of disputing theological schools have assumed that there is a universally valid truth to be grasped and articulated. Postfoundationalist criticism, in contrast, '…assesses the logical viability of the most traditional assumptions about knowing and finds them wanting.'[8] One postfoundationalist charge against classical theological method would be that such a method sets up epistemological criteria external to theology as 'foundational,' and seeks to judge the credibility of the truths of revelation by such criteria. The idea that doctrines can be given a 'first-order ontological or metaphysical propositional interpretation,'[9] and can be 'first-order affirmations about the inner being of God or of Jesus Christ,'[10] is also called into question by postfoundationalist thought; indeed, the whole project of metaphysics is disputed.

The postfoundationalist critique appears hostile to principles close to the heart of Catholic theology. The theologian may be tempted to reject it out of hand and cling to some form of classical foundationalism, or else to retreat into fideism. I will propose that, instead, a response can be articulated to the postfoundationalist challenge which is intellectually credible, addresses the concerns of contemporary hermeneutical thought, and recognises the possibility of pluralism in the understanding of doctrine, while maintaining an orthodox

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[4] 'Relativism,' *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, 2nd edition, ed. R Audi (Cambridge University Press, 1999); cf 'Relativism,' *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/relativism/ [Accessed 27/10/24]

[5] I will, in general, refer to this whole current of thought as 'postfoundationalism,' unless the context requires otherwise.

[6] *DF*, chapter 2.

[7] *DF*, chapter 4.

[8] John E Thiel, *Nonfoundationalism* (Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1994), 2.

[9] George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 25th anniversary edition (Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, 2009), 90.

[10] Lindbeck, 80.

Catholic respect for its abiding truth. The principal resource for this attempt at a response is the work of Bernard Lonergan.

The Canadian Jesuit Bernard Lonergan is best known for his two major works, *Insight* and *Method in Theology*. In *Insight*,[11] subtitled *A Study of Human Understanding*, he sets out a theory of human cognition on which he founds an epistemology and a metaphysics. Lonergan's central claims are, epistemologically, that knowing is not the 'taking a look' of intuitionist or perceptualist theories but consists in experience, understanding and judgement; and metaphysically, that being is that which is intelligible. Thus he adopts a critical realist position in opposition to both materialism and idealism.[12] In *Method in Theology*,[13] Lonergan elaborates a theological method that embodies his theory. Here the notion of conversion comes to the fore, with the claim that 'Genuine objectivity is the fruit of authentic subjectivity.'[14] Lonergan's place in the canon of 20th-century theology is controversial. Some writers find in his work a 'generalized empirical method'[15] which is of value for guiding research across the whole field of knowledge, while others judge him as a foundationalist, or at least as a theologian whose thought is too much shaped by classicist assumptions.[16] I will suggest that Lonergan's method is not tied to classical foundationalism and that, adopted critically, it can be a valuable resource for theologians engaged in the hermeneutics of doctrine in a postfoundationalist world.

At the beginning of *Method*, Lonergan distinguishes classicist and empirical notions of culture.[17] In the classicist notion, there is one culture which is seen as normative, and to which others aspire. The empirical notion, in contrast, recognises culture as changeable, and theology as an ongoing process. It is this empirical notion of culture that underpins Lonergan's account of theological method – he defines the role of theology as '[mediating] between a cultural matrix and the significance and role of a religion in that matrix.'[18] Thus, Lonergan

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[11] Bernard J F Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, 5th edition, Vol 3 in the *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan* (University of Toronto Press, 1992) Hereafter *Insight*.
[12] *Insight*, 22.
[13] Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 2nd edition, Vol 14 in the *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan* (University of Toronto Press, 2017) Hereafter *Method*.
[14] *Method*, 273.
[15] *Insight*, 268.
[16] These issues are discussed in Chapters 8 and 9 below.
[17] *Method*, 3.
[18] *Method*, 3.

seems to offer the possibility of an account of doctrine that allows for legitimate pluralism, while holding to the idea of abiding truth and not conceding the field to either relativism or fideism.

Several authors have offered an analysis of Lonergan's thought in the light of postfoundationalist/nonfoundationalist concerns. Ulf Jonsson notes that Lonergan does believe that foundations can be identified for human knowing and specifically for our knowledge of God. However, such foundations are, as Jonsson says, 'not *propositional* but *operational* in character;'[19] that is, for Lonergan, 'First principles in philosophy are not just verbal propositions but the de facto invariants of human conscious intentionality.'[20] Thus, Jonsson concludes that Lonergan should not be read as a 'proper foundationalist.'[21] Nevertheless, Lonergan holds to ideas that form part of what Jonsson calls 'broad foundationalism:'

> …universal commensuration, omnitemporal and transcultural criteria for epistemic justification… adherence to the idea of a given common ground or common point of departure for all types of human knowing.[22]

Alicia Jaramillo argues 'for the viability of the Aristotelian ideal of *scientia* for our knowledge of God, an ideal transposed by Lonergan into modern terms by his focus on method.'[23] As we will see below,[24] A N Williams interprets this ideal of *scientia* in the thought of Thomas Aquinas in a way that precludes the characterisation of Aquinas as a classical foundationalist, and I will argue that the same is true of Lonergan's transposition of Thomist thought into modern terms. Jaramillo speaks of:

> …the peculiar character of Lonergan's 'foundationalism'. One must affirm the intelligibility of being, and as a consequence the existence of God as the ground of that intelligibility, since to do otherwise would eventually land one in a performative contradiction.[25]

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[19] Jonsson, *Foundations for Knowing God: Bernard Lonergan's Foundations for Knowledge of God and the Challenge from Antifoundationalism*, (Peter Lang, 1999), 311 (emphasis in original.)

[20] Lonergan, 'Unity and Plurality: The Coherence of Christian Truth,' in *A Third Collection*, vol 16 in *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan* (University of Toronto Press, 2017), 228-238, 235. Cited by Jonsson, *Foundations for Knowing God*, 311.

[21] Jonsson uses this term to describe the position sometimes referred to as 'classical foundationalism.'

[22] Jonsson, *Foundations for Knowing God*, 315.

[23] Alicia Jaramillo, 'The Necessity of Raising the Question of God: Aquinas and Lonergan on the Quest After Complete Intelligibility,' *The Thomist* Volume 71, Number 2, April 2007, 221-267, 227.

[24] Section 1.4.2.

[25] Jaramillo, 'The Necessity of Raising the Question of God,' 266.

Like Jonsson, Jaramillo's reading of Lonergan places the 'foundation' of metaphysics and theology on the individual's appropriation of his/her intellectual operations, and not on supposedly self-evident propositions, distinguishing Lonergan's view from that associated with classical or 'strong' foundationalism. Cyril Orji[26] suggests that Lonergan's language – speaking of 'foundations of knowledge' and naming one of his eight functional specialties 'foundations' – causes him to be wrongly labelled as a foundationalist, but that on the contrary his method is well adapted to the task of the inculturation of Christian faith and doctrine which is inescapable in the church of Vatican II. Jim Kanaris remarks:

> It is common knowledge that Lonergan does not sever all ties to what today passes as foundationalism, the view that knowledge requires some theoretical grounds for its justification. In that broad sense, I suppose, one could call him a foundationalist, although it is also common knowledge that his "foundationalism" is of a peculiar sort.[27]

Kanaris broadly agrees with Jonsson's analysis of Lonergan's thought on this issue, while situating Lonergan in an intermediate position between Anglo-American analytical thought and Continental philosophies of religion. Fred Lawrence finds that Lonergan shares and addresses many of the concerns of postmodern thought, while remaining firmly within the Catholic tradition and not capitulating to relativism or nihilism.[28] 'Lonergan makes good the postmodern decentering of the subject from its modern status as the lord and master of the universe,'[29] Lawrence affirms, but he does so in a theistic perspective that places the human subject in a relationship of love and dependence on God.

The philosopher Andrew Beards adopts Lonergan's critical realist position on epistemology and metaphysics, and – echoing the view of Kanaris – brings Lonergan into dialogue with both analytical and continental philosophy with a view to building a bridge between the two. Beards criticises analytical philosophers for overlooking the distinction between self-consciousness and self-knowledge.

> Since my knowledge of myself as a knower is a matter of experience, understanding, and judgment, what is fundamental [for Lonergan] is not 'self-

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[26] Cyril Orji, 'Using 'Foundation' as Inculturation Hermeneutic in a World Church: Did Rahner Validate Lonergan?' *Heythrop Journal* 54 (2): 287-300.

[27] Jim Kanaris, 'Lonergan and Contemporary Philosophy of Religion,' Chapter Five in *Explorations in Contemporary Continental Philosophy of Religion,* (Leiden, Brill) 2003, 68.

[28] Fred Lawrence, 'The Fragility of Consciousness: Lonergan and the Postmodern Concern for the Other.' *Theological Studies* 54 (1993) 33-94, 56.

[29] Lawrence, 'Fragility of Consciousness,' 68.

knowledge' as some 'self-presence' or self-intuiting, but my ability to know reality.[30]

Analytical philosophers, following Wittgenstein, deny that the human subject can have access to preconceptual or prelinguistic 'mental acts.' Beards points out that, for Lonergan, the affirmation of the self as knower is not such a 'mental act,' which would remain at the level of experience, but an instance of knowing as experience, understanding and judgement. It is on this affirmation that Lonergan bases his epistemology and metaphysics. The Wittgensteinian critique finds its mark in relation to naïve realism or intuitionism, but not to Lonergan's critical realism. Beards also notes that the Aristotelian-Thomist philosophical tradition plays 'a decisive role'[31] in Lonergan's thought. It is on the basis of the isomorphism of being with knowing affirmed in this tradition that Lonergan moves from epistemology to metaphysics.

All of these writers, then, resist any categorisation of Lonergan as a 'classical foundationalist;' though some of his language, particularly in his *Insight* period, can seem to point in that direction, they conclude that a deeper understanding of his thought negates such an interpretation. On the other hand, they recognise that Lonergan shares some of the concerns of foundationalism, such as a desire for transcultural criteria of truth and interpretation. All find valuable resources in Lonergan's thought for addressing legitimate concerns that postfoundationalism raises for theology: the nature of theological knowledge, the question of truth, the possibilities for pluralism in the expression of Christian doctrine across different eras and cultures. The argument of this thesis will sit within that broad consensus, suggesting that Lonergan's cognitional theory and theological method are not tied to classical foundationalist assumptions and can be drawn upon to address contemporary questions in the hermeneutics of doctrine, while also recognising the force of some of the criticisms made by commentators on Lonergan's thought.

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[30] Andrew Beards, *Method and Metaphysics: Lonergan and the Future of Analytical Philosophy*. (University of Toronto Press, 2008), 100.
[31] Beards, *Method and Metaphysics*, 105.

Lonergan himself spoke of 'spending years reaching up to the mind of Aquinas'[32] and his first two published works, *Grace and Freedom*[33] and *Verbum*[34], are in-depth studies of the thought of Thomas Aquinas. I will argue that this Thomist orientation continues to guide Lonergan's later thought, even when Aquinas is not explicitly cited. Following A N Williams, who argues persuasively that it is a misreading of the thought of Aquinas to characterise him as a classical foundationalist,[35] I will make the same claim in relation to Lonergan. His critical realist epistemology and metaphysics is an impressive, logically ordered structure but, as the commentators mentioned above have noted, its foundation is not incorrigible or self-evident propositions, but rather the subject's personal appropriation of one's rational self-consciousness. The world view that it embodies is a theocentric one in which, ultimately, reality is intelligible because it has been created and ordered by an omnipotent God. This Thomist orientation allows Lonergan, in his later work, to embrace an empirical notion of culture and the possibility of a pluralism in the expression of divinely revealed truth, while holding to both a metaphysical realism and a realist understanding of doctrines as true statements about the nature of God. I will argue also that, as a profoundly Catholic theologian and one strongly influenced by John Henry Newman, Lonergan shows a depth of attention to the ecclesial dimension of the believer's act of faith and to the significance of tradition in the transmission of doctrine that may be lacking in responses to the foundationalist debate from thinkers within the Reformed traditions. It is inevitable, given the depth and range of Lonergan's thought, that scholars adopt differing approaches to the interpretation of his work. As we have seen, Andrew Beards focuses on epistemology and metaphysics in bringing Lonergan into dialogue with contemporary philosophy, while a writer such as Robert Doran would prioritise the philosophy of history.[36] Nevertheless, I believe that this reading of Lonergan as a Thomist can be a fruitful one, bringing to the fore elements in his thought that are relevant to the postfoundationalist debate.

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[32] *Insight*, 769.

[33] *Grace and Freedom: Operative Grace in the Thought of St Thomas Aquinas*, Volume 1 in *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, eds. Frederick E Crowe & Robert M Doran (University of Toronto Press, 2000.) Hereafter *GF*.

[33] *Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas*, Volume 2 in the *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, eds. Frederick E Crowe and Robert M Doran (University of Toronto Press, 1997.) Hereafter *Verbum*.

[35] Section 1.4.2 below.

[36] Robert Doran, *Theology and the Dialectics of History* (University of Toronto Press, 1990.)

In Chapter 1 I will focus on responses to the nonfoundationalist/postfoundationalist critique from thinkers in the Reformed tradition, particularly Alvin Plantinga, Nicholas Wolterstorff and George Lindbeck. Chapter 2 draws John Henry Newman into the conversation as a starting point for a Catholic response, with particular attention to Newman's thought on the act of faith and on the development of doctrine. In Chapters 3, 4 and 5 I examine Lonergan's early writings (*Grace and Freedom*, *Verbum* and *Insight*) in detail and seek to show that a proper attention to the Thomist character of his developing thought is the key to a postfoundationalist reading. Chapter 6 analyses Lonergan's application of his cognitional theory to questions of Trinitarian theology in the two volumes of *De Deo Trino*, now translated into English as *The Triune God*. This work occupies an intermediate position, post-*Insight* and pre-*Method*. In it, Lonergan traces not only the development of Trinitarian doctrine in the early church, but also the development of the notion of dogma as part of the Church's self-understanding. It therefore sheds light on Lonergan's understanding of the nature of doctrine within his systematic theology. I will argue that *The Triune God* shows both the strengths and the limitations of the Vatican I model of theology within which Lonergan was then working and that his later work on theological method can be seen partly as an attempt to overcome such limitations. Chapter 7 considers Lonergan's final major book, *Method in Theology*, where he elaborates a theological method based on his earlier work. The absence in *Method* of a sufficiently developed theology of revelation and of the church is addressed by reference to the work of the Lonergan scholar Neil Ormerod. In Chapter 8 the 'nonfoundationalist neo-pragmatism' of Richard Rorty is brought into dialogue with Lonergan. This is a philosophical position radically at odds with the assumptions of Catholic theology and the analysis of R J Snell demonstrates it to be, in Lonerganian terms, a counterposition. However, I follow Paul D Murray in suggesting that the questions raised by a thinker such as Rorty cannot be ignored and that there can be space for fruitful dialogue, informed by Lonergan's thought. In Chapter 9 I engage with three contemporary theologians. Fergus Kerr, influenced by Wittgenstein, criticises the metaphysical structure of Lonergan's thought. Nicholas Lash questions whether Lonergan's theological method makes sufficient allowance for pluralism in the expression of Christian truth. David Tracy, who began his theological career as a student of Lonergan, has embraced a wide range of philosophical and theological currents in his later work. Each of these interlocutors raises cogent questions about Lonergan's method, but in each case I argue that a postfoundationalist reading of Lonergan's

work is possible, with proper attention to the Thomist character of his thought. For reasons of length I have not engaged substantially with thinkers such as Thomas Guarino or Robert Doran, whose thought is more explicitly in sympathy with that of Lonergan and who, in the case of Guarino, would enlist him in support of a form of foundationalism. Finally, Chapter 10 looks at the application of Lonergan's method as a hermeneutical tool to address contemporary theological issues – the question of judging authentic development and the interpretation of the magisterium of Pope Francis. Though space permits no more than a sketch of a response to these issues, I have tried to suggest ways in which Lonergan's thought remains a rich resource for the church of the 21st century.

1 The state of the question: the postfoundationalist critique, the development of doctrine and doctrinal pluralism

1.1 Introduction

Vatican II describes divine revelation as 'the message of salvation,' which leads the believer from hearing to faith, from faith to hope and from hope to love.[1] The truths of revelation are expressed in doctrinal formulae, in order that they can be confidently proclaimed.[2] Until modern times such truths were thought to be adequately expressed by doctrinal formulae at their various levels of authority. John Thiel summarises such an understanding as follows:

> …doctrines have been understood as propositions, as sentences whose truthfulness is established by their abiding correspondence to ontological realities.[3]

Or, in the words of Irenaeus:

> …though the languages throughout the world are dissimilar, nevertheless the meaning of the tradition is one and the same.[4]

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[1] Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum* on Divine Revelation, (hereafter DV), §1. In Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol II, 971-981. Also available at https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html [Accessed 14/12/24]

[2] *DV* §1.

[3] John E, Thiel, *Nonfoundationalism* (Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1994), 52. Thiel is here describing a view which is problematised by his own nonfoundationalist position.

[4] Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies.*, trans. D J Unger, rev J J Dillon (Paulist Press, New York/Mahwah, 1992), vol I, 10, 1-2, 49

However, the believer's act of faith is directed not to the doctrinal proposition itself, but to the truth which the proposition expresses.[5] Once an empirical notion of culture replaces a classicist notion,[6] the question of doctrinal pluralism arises. Rather than being conceived as a permanent achievement, a particular doctrinal formulation is now seen as contingent; culturally and historically conditioned, and subject to revision by historical processes of development or by expression in a new cultural context. Multiple challenges then arise for theology: scepticism denies the possibility of any certain knowledge, while cognitive relativism asserts that truth and falsehood cannot be judged absolutely, but only in relation to a given framework of assessment (such as a particular culture or religious tradition.)[7] The cluster of philosophical movements known variously as postfoundationalism, weak foundationalism and nonfoundationalism raises questions about the nature of both knowledge and truth, and so challenges the theologian to reconsider the nature of doctrinal statements and the truths that they are believed to express. However, such thinking does not have to be in opposition to Christian faith; there are many theologians who would describe themselves as nonfoundationalists or postfoundationalists, believing that the challenges can be meaningfully addressed and can in fact enrich theological reflection.

Below I will consider two significant theological responses to the challenge; the Reformed epistemology of Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff and the rule theory of doctrine advanced by George Lindbeck. Each of these thinkers is working within Reformed traditions of Christianity and I will argue that this shapes their thought in important ways, leaving further work for a Catholic theological account. In the next chapter I will discuss the thought of John Henry Newman, suggesting that Newman is an indispensable resource for such a Catholic response to this issue.

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[5] *Actus autem credentis non terminator ad enuntiabile, sed ad rem.* Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, (II-II, q. 1, a.2, ad 2)

[6] Lonergan, *Method*, 3.

[7] 'Relativism,' *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/relativism/ [Accessed 27/10/24]

1.2 The fall of foundationalism

Conventionally, foundationalism is traced back to Descartes and his method of 'universal doubt.' Descartes identifies the *Cogito, ergo sum* as the foundation on which the edifice of knowledge can be built. The individual's certain conviction of his/her own existence can be accepted as the first principle of philosophy.[8] Others have sought a foundation in individual sense experience or states of consciousness, or in self-evident propositions.[9] Once such foundational beliefs have been established, it is claimed, other, mediately justified beliefs can be based upon them.

Classical foundationalism, then, can be defined as the belief that:

> All knowledge and justified belief rest ultimately on a *foundation* of knowledge and justified belief that has not been inferred from other knowledge or belief.[10]

The principle of inferential justification states that to be justified in believing *P* on the basis of *E* one must be: (1) justified in believing *E*; and (2) justified in believing that *E* makes probable *P.* If this principle is accepted, then to avoid an infinite regress, one must also hold:

> …that some beliefs are justified without inference, and that these noninferentially justified beliefs ground the justification of all other justified beliefs.[11]

However, there is no consensus about what makes a belief foundational – that is, justified on its face, without inference. Nor is there agreement about the justification for the process of inference – the second step that allows us to conclude that *E* makes probable or certain *P.*[12] Thus, classical foundationalism in its strong form seems to lead inevitably to scepticism. Indeed, the sceptic and the classical foundationalist share the same world view: they agree about what is needed for justified knowledge, but the foundationalist believes that such requirements can be met, while the sceptic denies it.

The rejection of classical foundationalism by most philosophers is associated with the rise of several different theories of knowledge, truth and meaning. The terminology used in

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[8] René Descartes, *Discourse on the Method*, Part 4. In *Descartes: Selected Philosophical Writings*, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 36.
[9] Wolterstorff, 'Introduction,' in A Plantinga and N Wolterstorff, *Faith and Rationality*, (University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 2-3.
[10] Richard Fumerton, 'Classical Foundationalism,' in D M Borchert, Editor in Chief, *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol 2 (Macmillan, 2006), 275 (emphasis in original.)
[11] Fumerton, 275.
[12] Fumerton, 276.

this field is not always consistent and can be confusing. Those who reject altogether the foundationalist position would tend to describe themselves as 'nonfoundationalists' or 'antifoundationalists.' Such a position is often (though not inevitably) associated with a rejection of classical understandings of truth, in favour of a relativist or non-realist view. Those who identify their position as 'postfoundationalist' would recognise the significance of the questions of truth and valid knowledge which are addressed by foundationalism and might opt for a coherentist view of truth. A weaker, or 'non-classical' form of foundationalism, (so-called in contrast with 'strong' or 'classical' foundationalism) in effect, accepts the second requirement of the principle of inferential justification, that beliefs within a system of knowledge and belief must be founded on other beliefs, but abandons the attempt to demonstrate the 'foundational' beliefs to be self-evident or incorrigible. Instead, the foundational beliefs are simply adopted, and the credibility of the system is judged as a whole. Such a 'non-classical' foundationalist position is adopted by the philosopher of religion Alvin Plantinga.[13]

Nonfoundationalism or antifoundationalism, as advocated by a writer such as Richard Rorty, goes further.

> For Rorty, "objectivity" is not only unattainable, it is an unhelpful distraction from the particularity of cultural-linguistic practice. He consequently jettisons the notion of truth defined in terms of correspondence/accurate depiction and calls for its replacement by a looser notion of truth as a merely honorific title which communities bestow on their favoured ideas and courses of action. Truth is whatever is considered helpful in these parts, the only constraint being agreement on this in conversation.[14]

As Murray observes, the attempt to transpose a view such as Rorty's into the realm of theology leads to a theological non-realism which contradicts the claim of Christian doctrines to be expressions of truths that make a claim on humanity, and which seems in practice to be indistinguishable from atheism.[15]

A postfoundationalist approach to theology recognises the inadequacy of classical or strong foundationalism as a means to establish the truth of doctrines, but wishes to continue to engage with the questions of truth and meaning which modernity poses for theology. The

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[13] See below, section 1.4
[14] Paul D Murray, *Reason, Truth and Theology in Pragmatist Perspective,* (Peeters Publishers, 2005) (hereafter *RTT*), 10.
[15] Murray, 10-11. Rorty's position is discussed further below, Chapter 8.

postfoundationalist theologian will seek other ways to establish the credibility of faith and doctrine, for example in coherentist theories of knowledge.

1.3 The challenge for theology

Kathryn Tanner remarks that a rejection of foundationalism 'now functions in almost the role of a litmus test of intellectual respectability'[16] in many academic fields and therefore theology cannot escape engagement with nonfoundationalist currents of thought. Thiel, addressing the 'benefits and dangers of nonfoundationalism for theology,'[17] offers the following definition:

> Foundationalism could be defined from a logical perspective as the view that mediately justified beliefs require epistemic support for their validity in immediately justified beliefs, or from a disciplinary perspective as the view that systems of knowledge, in content and method, require first principles.[18]

However, as Thiel recognises, 'foundationalism' is almost always a pejorative label applied by nonfoundationalists to positions which they find unsatisfactory, and such definitions are therefore negative ones which express a critical judgment.

One point of contact between Christian faith and foundationalism is in natural theology, the branch of Christian thought that:

> …aims to use ordinary human cognitive faculties (reason, sense-perception, introspection) to establish positive truths about the existence and nature of God…[19]

It is often assumed that natural theology has to operate within a framework of classical foundationalism; that its task is to demonstrate the existence of God and the rationality of Christian faith from indubitable first principles without reference to revelation. This is one reason why Reformed thinkers such as Plantinga and Wolterstorff are suspicious of the whole project. However, Lonergan is among those Christian thinkers who would conceive of its task differently.[20]

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[16] Kathryn Tanner, 'Foreword,' in Thiel, *Nonfoundationalism*, ix.

[17] Tanner, 'Foreword,' in Thiel, *Nonfoundationalism*, x.

[18] Thiel, *Nonfoundationalism*, 2.

[19] 'Natural Theology and Natural Religion,' *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/natural-theology/ Accessed 31/08/24.

[26] Lonergan, *Method*, 119 footnote 37. There Lonergan's editors quote him as describing the task of natural theology as '…to conceive and affirm what it is that you are in love with,' that is to thematise the believer's experience of being in love with God.

Enlightenment thought gave rise to what Wolterstorff terms the 'evidentialist challenge' to Christian belief, formulated by Locke:

> In effect, what Locke did was take the classical foundationalist demands that Descartes had laid down for scientific belief and lay them down for rational belief in general.[21]

Locke asserts that the central claims of Christianity are neither self-evident to us, nor incorrigible, and therefore we need supporting evidence in order to be rational in holding them.[22] Some (including Locke himself) believe that sufficient evidence can be assembled; others assert that no such evidence in fact exists, or even could exist in principle. But Locke's evidentialist challenge, and the Christian response to it, both share what would now be regarded as foundationalist assumptions. Human knowledge is seen as a structure, built upon the foundations of immediately justified beliefs. If no such foundational beliefs can be established, or if other beliefs cannot be demonstrated to follow from them, then the structure falls. (In this respect a similar pattern can be seen in the otherwise contrasting systems of thought of Locke and Descartes.)

In the 19th century, the rationalist view that valid knowledge can be based only on reason and experience called into question the credibility and even the possibility of divine revelation. The response of the Catholic church's magisterium to the challenge of rationalism can be found in the Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Filius* of the First Vatican Council:

> Holy Mother Church holds and teaches that God, the beginning and end of all things, can be known with certitude by the natural light of human reason from created things.[23]

> …in order that the "obedience" of our faith should be "consonant with reason" [cf. Romans 12:1], God has willed that to the internal aids of the Holy Spirit there should be joined external proofs of His revelation, namely: divine facts, especially miracles and prophecies which, because they clearly show forth the omnipotence and infinite knowledge of God, are most certain signs of a divine revelation, and are suited to the intelligence of all.[24]

The aim of the Constitution was to uphold the credibility and reasonableness of Christian faith in the face of the rationalist critique. The Council condemned the propositions

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[21] Wolterstorff, 'Introduction,' 6.
[22] Wolterstorff, 'Introduction,' 6-7.
[23] *DF*, Chapter 2.
[24] *DF*, chapter 3.

that faith could be achieved without belief in divinely revealed truth,[25] and that the dogmas of faith could be understood from natural principles by reason alone;[26] thus rejecting what would today be identified as a classical foundationalist position. Nevertheless, particularly since Vatican II, DF has been criticised for attempting to defeat rationalism on its own ground – implicitly conceding to the rationalist view that Christian faith is only credible if it can be justified by arguments and demonstrations from outside itself – by 'external proofs.' This would be the strongest form of theological foundationalism, making faith answerable to the demands of human reason and claiming that the truth of Christianity can, in effect, be deduced from first principles.

Most contemporary commentators would deny that the teaching of Vatican I in fact commits the church dogmatically to that type of foundationalist position.[27] However, the effect of Vatican I's teaching, and the subsequent reaction of the magisterium to the Modernist crisis, was to lead Catholic theology down the road of a 'rationalistic apologetics'[28] that most would now see as a blind alley:

> Theology, in this typically modern configuration, formulates a method that justifies its disciplinary integrity before the Enlightenment's rigorous canons for legitimate knowledge, and specifies a content that answers the Enlightenment's attack on Christianity's most central doctrines.[29]

> …an intellectualism that tended to turn revelation into the communication of a system of ideas rather than the manifestation of one who is truth in person and goal of a history that has its culmination in Jesus Christ.[30]

At the Second Vatican Council, the church found a way out of the blind alley by adopting a richer and more nuanced understanding of divine revelation, which sees its fullness in the person of Jesus Christ.[31] Rather than understanding the body of Christian doctrine as a 'divine deposit,'[32] Vatican II speaks of a 'living tradition' which develops with the

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[25] *DF*, chapter 3, Canon 2.
[26] *DF,* chapter 4, Canon 1.
[27] See, for example, Karen E. Kilby, *Karl Rahner: Theology and Philosophy*, (Routledge, Abingdon and New York. 2004), 101-2: 'Vatican I does not… impose any kind of foundationalism on Catholic theology.' Also Fergus Kerr, *Theology after Wittgenstein*, 2nd edition (SPCK, London, 1997), 153-4.
[28] Kerr, 153.
[29] Thiel, *Nonfoundationalism*, 45.
[30] Rene Latourelle, 'Revelation,' in *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, eds. Rene Latourelle and Rino Fisichella, English edition (Herder & Herder, New York, 1994), 928.
[31] *DV* §4.
[32] *DF*, chapter 4.

help of the Holy Spirit.[33] Such an account of revelation both enables Catholic theology to leave behind a rationalistic apologetics, and allows for the possibility of pluralism in the doctrinal expression of the church's tradition:

> …faithful and perfect conformity to the authentic doctrine, which, however, should be studied and expounded through the methods of research and through the literary forms of modern thought. The substance of the ancient doctrine of the deposit of faith is one thing, and the way in which it is presented is another…[34]

However, philosophical debate has also moved on. The classical foundationalist position holds that, if the edifice of knowledge is built on a secure foundation and the superstructure constructed according to correct rules of inference, the knowledge that results is universally valid; firmly grounded and context-neutral, a 'view from nowhere.' Contemporary thinking in epistemology and hermeneutics counters that all human knowing is partial and contextual – there is no view from nowhere, only partial and particular views from somewhere.[35] Even when Catholic theology has left behind a 'rationalist apologetics' it remains committed to philosophically structured modes of reasoning in order to understand and articulate the truths of revelation. As Thiel observes, nonfoundationalist and postfoundationalist thought problematises this commitment:

> Nonfoundational philosophies are consistently critical of the epistemologies, metaphysics, and anthropologies that premodern and modern philosophers have offered as the defensible consequences of reasoning… Nonfoundational philosophies… undermine the classical and modern styles of philosophical reflection on which theology consistently has relied in its own constructive efforts.[36]

> Nonfoundational criticism and theology seem to represent completely incompatible modes of argumentation and stances on the possibilities, limitations, and authority of human knowing.[37]

As Wolterstorff remarks,[38] the evidentialist challenge of Locke shares common assumptions with his theological interlocutors: assumptions about evidence, about truth and

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[33] *DV* §8.

[34] Pope John XXIII, Opening Address of the Second Vatican Council, in Walter M. Abbott, *The Documents of Vatican II* (Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1966), 715. The distinction made here between 'the substance of the ancient doctrine' and 'the way in which it is presented' is discussed further below, section 10.2.

[35] Murray, *RTT*, 5-6.

[36] Thiel, *Nonfoundationalism*, 39-40.

[37] Thiel, *Nonfoundationalism*, 41.

[38] Wolterstorff, 'Introduction,' 6.

about the nature of the reasoning process that allows the human mind to arrive at truth. Believers and atheists lived in the same intellectual world: the atheist held that there was no room in such a world for God, while believers held that God was the condition of possibility of its existence. Nonfoundationalist criticism seems to remove the common ground on which theology can debate with unbelievers and 'give an account' of Christian hope.[39] Debate between different theological schools took it for granted that doctrinal statements were meaningful and could be judged to be true or false and also that such statements referred to ontological realities. However, once the foundations of the philosophical world are shaken, all such notions come into question.

The theologian cannot respond to the fall of foundationalism by retreating into fideism. It is the task of theology to give an account of faith, showing that Christian belief is consonant with reason, and investigating how doctrinal statements can be judged, at least provisionally, to be in accordance or not with the witness of Scripture and the church's tradition. It is a challenge which is particularly acute for the Catholic theologian. The Catholic church is committed to the position that the Word of God is transmitted by the church's living tradition, as well as by the Scriptures.[40] The content of the tradition is held to be one and the same throughout the universal church.[41] Nonfoundationalist and postfoundationalist thought calls into question the epistemological security which allows such assertions to be made, or indeed to be challenged.

I will discuss below two responses to this challenge: the Reformed epistemology of Plantinga and Wolterstorff and Lindbeck's rule theory of doctrine, considering the extent to which their solutions can be accepted by Catholic theology.

1.4 The 'Reformed epistemology' of Plantinga and Wolterstorff

The influential philosophers of religion, Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff, identify their own theological method as 'Reformed epistemology,' and describe it as bearing 'a close affinity to positions long held on the relation of faith to reason by the Continental

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[39] 1 Peter 3:15-16.
[40] *Dei Verbum* 9.
[41] Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies*.

Reformed (Calvinist) tradition.'[42] This tradition is typically suspicious or even hostile towards the project of natural theology in offering evidence for theism and Christianity. As Karen Kilby remarks:

> … the anxiety about foundationalism, it might be said, though dressed up in a new philosophical guise, fundamentally represents a recurrence of the Protestant worry over the pretensions of human reason to know God.[43]

Wolterstorff characterises their tradition as 'antievidentialist,'[44] and note also that it is quite at ease with the 'pluralism of the academy,' even to the extent of accepting that the findings of science may be in conflict with Christian conviction – in contrast to the 'dominant tradition in the West [which] has seen consensus as the appropriate goal and expectation of scientific inquiry.'[45] Therefore, they believe, the Continental Reformed tradition is not trapped by foundationalist presuppositions, and so can form the basis of a fruitful approach to the challenges raised by the collapse of classical foundationalism. If Plantinga and Wolterstorff are correct in their assessment, this brings into sharper focus the difficulties which nonfoundationalism presents for the Catholic tradition, which has traditionally valued the project of natural theology, and held that there can be no conflict between the truths of faith and the findings of science, properly understood.[46]

The response of Plantinga's version of Reformed epistemology to the collapse of classical foundationalism is to accept the view that beliefs require foundations to be justified, while rejecting the claim that only beliefs which are self-evident or incorrigible can be foundational. It can therefore be seen as a form of weak theological foundationalism.

1.4.1 Plantinga: the basicality of belief

Plantinga introduces the idea of noetic structure: 'the set of propositions that [a person] believes, together with certain epistemic relations that hold among him and these propositions.'[47] In these terms, says Plantinga, the classical foundationalist view can be seen as incorporating three theses:

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[42] Wolterstorff, 'Introduction,' 7.
[43] Kilby, *Karl Rahner*, 100.
[44] Wolterstorff, 'Introduction,' 8.
[45] Wolterstorff, 'Introduction,' 8-9.
[46] *DF*, chapter 4: contrast Wolterstorff, 'Introduction,' 8-9.
[47] Plantinga, 'Reason and Belief in God,' 48.

(1) In every rational noetic structure there is a set of beliefs taken as basic – that is, not accepted on the basis of any other beliefs,

(2) In a rational noetic structure nonbasic belief is proportional to support from the foundations,

(3) In a rational noetic structure basic beliefs will be self-evident or incorrigible or evident to the senses.[48]

Plantinga construes foundationalism as a thesis about what constitutes a rational noetic structure:

> According to the foundationalist a rational noetic structure will *have a foundation* – a set of beliefs not accepted on the basis of others; in a rational noetic structure some beliefs will be basic. [49]

The evidentialist objection to Christian faith claims that the foundationalist requirement cannot be met; sufficient evidence cannot be provided to found belief in God. Plantinga asks instead why belief in God cannot be a *basic* belief that founds one's noetic structure: 'Why is it not entirely acceptable, desirable, right, proper and rational to accept belief in God without any argument or evidence whatsoever?'[50]

Plantinga distinguishes belief *in* God from belief *that* God exists. Belief in the existence of God is acceptance of the proposition that 'there is such a being as God,' whereas belief in God is a commitment of one's life. Having drawn the distinction, Plantinga goes on to say that that he intends largely to ignore it, and to use 'belief in God' as a synonym for 'belief that there is such a person as God.' He calls attention to the distinction in order to differentiate his own position from that of writers such as Bultmann and Braithwaite, for whom, Plantinga claims, belief in God is not an existential or ontological assertion, but rather a kind of 'behavioural policy.'[51]

Plantinga is referring to Braithwaite's influential essay, 'An Empiricist's view of the Nature of Religious Belief.'[52] Braithwaite, an empiricist philosopher, takes as his starting point

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[48] Plantinga, 'Reason and Belief in God,' 72.
[49] Plantinga, 'Reason and Belief in God,' 52 (emphasis in original.)
[50] Plantinga, 'Reason and Belief in God,' 39.
[51] 'Reason and Belief in God,' 18-19.
[52] R B Braithwaite, 'An Empiricist's view of the Nature of Religious Belief,' in *The Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Basil Mitchell (Oxford University Press, 1971), 72-91.

the verification principle as advanced by the logical positivists, 'that the meaning of any statement is given by its method of verification.'[53] On a strict application of this principle, he claims, religious statements are simply meaningless, because they cannot be falsified by any empirical observation.[54] However, Braithwaite points out that moral statements also fall foul of the verification principle, and yet they are not nonsensical, because they have a use in guiding conduct.[55] The verification principle is therefore modified by Braithwaite into the use principle, influenced by Wittgenstein: 'the meaning of any statement is given by the way in which it is used.'[56] According to Braithwaite, a religious assertion is used as a moral assertion.[57] The criterion for the meaningfulness of a Christian's religious assertions is the believer's intention to follow a Christian way of life.[58] What gives such an assertion its specifically Christian character is that the believer's intention is associated with 'the Christian stories.' This is also what distinguishes the assertions of different religions:

> On the assumption that the ways of life advocated by Christianity and by Buddhism are essentially the same, it will be the fact that the intention to follow this way of life is associated in the mind of a Christian with thinking of one set of stories (the Christian stories) while it is associated in the mind of a Buddhist with thinking of another set of stories (the Buddhist stories) which enables a Christian assertion to be distinguished from a Buddhist one.[59]

In Braithwaite's account, the 'religious stories' need not be believed to be true, in order to serve their purpose:

> I have chosen the word 'story' as being the most neutral term, implying neither that the story is believed nor that it is disbelieved.[60]

As Murray puts it, Braithwaite tries to defend the meaningfulness of religious discourse while embracing a positivist perspective.

> He did this by evacuating religious assertions of any cognitive content concerning the nature of reality (i.e. of any claim to convey conceptual *knowledge* of reality)

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[53] Braithwaite, 73.
[54] Braithwaite, 75.
[55] Braithwaite, 77.
[56] Braithwaite, 77. Compare Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1953), §§ 340, 353, 559, 560.
[57] Braithwaite, 78.
[58] Braithwaite, 80.
[59] Braithwaite, 84.
[60] Braithwaite, 86.

and then treating them as statements of ethical intent embroidered with illustrative stories.[61]

Braithwaite's approach empties religious discourse of what most believers would consider its most essential feature – its claim to express truths about reality – and this is why Plantinga wishes to distinguish his own position clearly from Braithwaite's. It might be added that Braithwaite's account of what religious belief and practice amount to is startlingly broad and superficial – for example, assuming without argument that 'the ways of life advocated by Christianity and by Buddhism are essentially the same.'[62]

In relation to Bultmann, Plantinga asserts:

> Much of what [Bultmann] says… seems to suggest that to believe in God is not at all to believe that there exists a being of a certain sort. Instead, it is to adopt a certain attitude or policy, or to make a kind of resolve…[63]

This hardly does justice to Bultmann's thought, as John Macquarrie has shown.[64] Bultmann's project is one of 'demythologization;' his aim is to set free the essential *kerygma* of the New Testament, which, he believes, speaks to human existence.[65] Macquarrie points out that Bultmann, a distinguished Scripture scholar, lays emphasis on the 'concreteness of revelation.'[66] He does not regard the *kerygma* as simply a 'story' in the way that Braithwaite appears to do.

On the other hand, Plantinga speaks rather loosely in suggesting that belief in God amounts to belief that 'there exists a being of a certain sort.' In Macquarrie's words:

> …we have seen that God is most properly described as 'being', and since being is not another entity, a religious statement does not refer to any object comparable to the state of affairs to which a factual statement refers.[67]

The language of 'existence' and 'being' can, at most, be used analogously of God, and Bultmann is right to highlight this issue, even if his method raises concerns for the theologian

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[61] Paul D Murray, 'Truth and reason in science and theology: points of tension, correlation and compatibility,' in Christopher Southgate et al, *God, Humanity and the Cosmos*, 2nd edition (T & T Clark International, London/New York, 2005), 82-115, 84 (emphasis in original.)

[62] Braithwaite, 84.

[63] 'Reason and Belief in God,' 19.

[64] Macquarrie, John, *The Scope of Demythologizing: Bultmann and his Critics*, London, SCM Press Ltd, 1960.

[65] Macquarrie, *The Scope of Demythologizing*, 22-23.

[66] Macquarrie, *The Scope of Demythologizing*, 185.

[67] Macquarrie, *The Scope of Demythologizing*, 217.

who wishes to uphold the ontological reference of religious language. (Macquarrie finds Bultmann's approach similar to that of the Catholic modernists of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.[68]) On this issue, D Z Phillips has written that to try to show the rationality of religious beliefs, by establishing the existence of God by reference to external criteria, fails to recognise the absolute character of such beliefs.[69]

> Beliefs… are not testable hypotheses but absolutes for believers in so far as they predominate in and determine much of their thinking. The absolute beliefs are the criteria not the object of their assessment. To construe these beliefs as hypotheses which may or may not be true is to falsify their character.[70]

Phillips argues that 'philosophy is neither for nor against religious beliefs,' and that its work is simply to 'clarify the grammar of such beliefs.'[71] In this respect, Phillips' position seems similar to that of Lindbeck (see below.) Influenced by Wittgenstein, Phillips asserts that:

> The dispute between belief and unbelief is not one in which probabilities and evidence are weighed within a common system. The gap between what the believer wants to say and what the unbeliever denies is itself a grammatical gap.[72]

Phillips asks whether 'Reformed philosophers can say that those who exclude God from their noetic structures are mistaken,' and concludes that they cannot, because there exists no common ground or common criteria on which such a mistake could be established.[73] In Thiel's words, Phillips:

> …argues from a philosophical perspective for a fideistic understanding of foundationless belief in which theology is a self-contained enterprise preoccupied exclusively with the concerns of faith.[74]

However, Thiel disagrees with this interpretation and offers a 'view of theological integrity' compatible with the view of Plantinga and Wolterstorff:

> A nonfoundational theology would practice inferential reasoning in a manner faithful to the central beliefs of the tradition, deferring at every step in its logical

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[68] Macquarrie, *The Scope of Demythologizing,* 113-119.

[69] D Z Phillips, 'Religious Beliefs and Language Games,' in Basil Mitchell, ed., *The Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford University Press, 1971), 131.

[70] 'Religious Beliefs and Language Games,' 130.

[71] 'Religious Beliefs and Language Games,' 142.

[72] D Z Phillips, *Faith After Foundationalism* (Routledge, London and New York, 1988), 80.

[73] Phillips, 98.

[74] Thiel, *Nonfoundationalism*, 116 note 13.

path to the authority of those beliefs and by such deference enacting their claims.[75]

That is, theology should reason rigorously – inferentially – and should engage with the secular world, but:

> Loyalty… to Christian identity remains the first responsibility of theological interpretation and the reasoning by which it is accomplished.[76]

1.4.2 Aquinas: natural theologian or classical foundationalist? The interpretation of A N Williams

Plantinga rejects natural theology, because he judges that it accepts the assumptions of classical foundationalism and because he agrees with the view of Reformed thinkers such as Calvin and Barth, who claim that to put forward philosophical arguments for God's existence is to make human reason a judge over God.[77] For Plantinga, Thomas Aquinas is 'the natural theologian *par excellence*.'[78] He also regards Aquinas as a classical foundationalist, who holds that:

> …belief in God is rationally acceptable only if there is evidence for it – only if, that is, it is probable with respect to some body of propositions that constitutes the evidence.[79]

For Aquinas, as Plantinga reads him, such propositions must either be self-evident, or evident to the senses.[80] A N Williams, however, disputes the characterisation of Aquinas by Plantinga (and also by Wolterstorff and others) as a foundationalist.[81] This is a crucial issue for the argument of this thesis, given the influence of Aquinas on Lonergan, and I will consider Williams' interpretation in some detail.

Williams is sharply critical of the interpretation of Aquinas as a classical foundationalist, which she finds to be based on arguments that are 'fundamentally flawed'[82]

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[75] Thiel, 96-97.
[76] Thiel, 97.
[77] Plantinga, 'Reason and Belief in God,' 63-71.
[78] 'Reason and Belief in God,' 40.
[79] 'Reason and Belief in God,' 47-8.
[80] 'Reason and Belief in God,' 57.
[81] A N Williams, 'Is Aquinas a Foundationalist?' *New Blackfriars* Volume 91, Issue 1031, January 2010, 20-45.
[82] Williams, 20.

and on an insufficient reading of Aquinas' works. She suggests that Plantinga's 'need to find a representative for views he wished to argue against'[83] may have skewed his reading of Aquinas. Williams believes that an interpretation of Aquinas as a classical foundationalist is unsustainable in the light of an attentive reading of his relevant writings, especially the first question of the *Summa Theologiae*.[84] There, Aquinas is addressing the nature of sacred doctrine (*sacra doctrina*.) Is sacred doctrine a *scientia*? Yes, Aquinas replies, but there are two types of *scientia* and sacred doctrine is of the second type, which works from premises recognised in the light of a higher science. As optics receives its premises from geometry, sacred doctrine 'takes on faith its principles revealed by God.'[85] But these principles are not the self-evident or incorrigible propositions demanded by classical foundationalism:

> The starting point of the *scientia* that is sacred doctrine is therefore neither scripture not divine knowledge, but principles that echo or reflect divine knowledge, which we know via scripture and derive from scripture…[86]

For Williams, the resemblance between Aquinas' epistemology and foundationalist theories of knowledge is merely superficial:

> The case for Aquinas' foundationalism rests solely on the similarity between the structure of *Scientia* which he posits and the structure of justified belief or knowledge in the foundationalist's account, and structure by itself does not identify an epistemology as foundationalist.[87]

Williams shows that sacred doctrine for Aquinas is a form of *scientia* which takes as its postulates the articles of faith that summarise scripture and divine self-knowledge and goes on to demonstrate other truths by inference from them.[88]

> These postulates cannot count as foundational in the weak sense that they are immediately justified, since they are derived from another body of knowledge [i.e. divine knowledge], nor in the strong sense of providing justification, inasmuch as Aquinas acknowledges that they could be rejected outright.[89]

Williams reads Aquinas as claiming, not the certainty of a foundationalist account of knowledge, in which indubitable postulates lead to indisputable inferences, but rather a fragile form of knowledge based on imperfect human reasoning, which is adequate to this life

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[83] Williams, 22.
[84] Williams, 21-23 (in relation to Plantinga) and 23-26 (in relation to Wolterstorff.)
[85] *ST* q. 1 a. 2 resp.
[86] Williams, 37.
[87] Williams, 44.
[88] Williams, 37, citing *Summa Theologiae* q.1 a. 8 resp.
[89] Williams, 37.

and 'beckons us onward to the only certain knowledge there is, knowledge which we will have only in the next life.'[90] Plantinga wishes to distinguish between the approach of Reformed epistemology and the 'Thomistic conception of faith and reason' which he sees as 'rooted in classical foundationalism.'[91] However, as Williams observes:

> As has been pointed out by a number of commentators… Plantinga, apparently the first to apply the term 'properly basic' to belief in God, does not really reject foundationalism either; his contention that belief in God is properly basic serves merely to augment to the set of basic beliefs which could count as foundational, and if so, then Aquinas' holding belief in God is properly basic would make him, like Plantinga, a foundationalist of a particular kind.[92]

Williams' critique of classical foundationalist readings of Aquinas is persuasive and her interpretation of the *Summa Theologiae* is supported by Fergus Kerr.[93] This is an important point, since I will argue below that, for a postfoundationalist reading of Lonergan, it is important to keep in mind the Thomist character of his thought at every stage of his development. If, as I believe, Williams is correct in rejecting the interpretation of Aquinas as a classical foundationalist, then it becomes easier to exonerate Lonergan of the same charge.

1.4.3 Reformed epistemology: rational but not rationalist

In one corner, then, stands natural theology, which seeks to demonstrate, in the words of *Dei Filius*, that Christian faith is 'consonant with reason' because of the existence of 'external proofs' of God's existence and of the truths of revelation.[94] Plantinga judges that natural theology accepts, at least implicitly, the foundationalist criterion for judging the rationality of belief and the truth of doctrinal formulae; but Catholic authors such as Kilby dispute such a characterisation. In the second corner is the fideist view that no argument can or should be offered for the existence of God or the truths of Christian revelation; God is known by faith alone. In a third corner stands the non-realist view which Plantinga attributes to Bultmann and Braithwaite, which holds that statements of Christian belief are not, in fact, statements about the existence of a particular Being, but rather a declaration of the ethos by which one intends to live one's life. As we have seen, Bultmann and Braithwaite differ in the

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[90] Williams, 44.
[91] Williams, 90.
[92] Williams, 21, footnote 1.
[93] Kerr, *After Aquinas*, 156-161.
[94] *DF*, chapter 3.

significance that they attach to doctrinal statements; and other writers whose thought might be broadly classified as 'non-realist' differ from both, so that the picture is somewhat more complex than Plantinga's brief survey suggests.

Plantinga places himself in a fourth corner. He believes that the demand of classical foundationalism cannot be satisfied: belief in God and in the truths of faith cannot be shown to follow from propositions that are immediately justified, that is, either self-evident or evident to the senses. Instead, Plantinga wishes to show that it is rational to adopt belief in God's existence as a basic belief which stands at the foundation of the believer's noetic structure. The distinction between 'belief that' and 'belief in' is unimportant for Plantinga, because of the consequences that follow from belief that God exists. If one believes that the God of Jewish and Christian revelation exists, then such a belief requires an existential commitment of one's life: the content of the belief determines the strength with which it is held.[95]

Though Plantinga rejects the project of natural theology, he does have an 'apologetic' aim, to the extent that he hopes to establish that it is rational to believe in the existence of a personal God, against non-realist interpretations of Christian faith. He wishes to show the members of the Christian community that their faith is a rational choice, which it is, he believes, if the believer's noetic structure, founded on the basic belief in God, operates in a rational fashion. Plantinga believes that not only belief in God's existence, but also in the central truths of Christian revelation, can be shown to be justified, rational and warranted. His model draws on both Aquinas and Calvin. He claims that natural knowledge of God arises in the believer because of a *sensus divinitatis* – an innate awareness of the divinity, implanted in human beings by God.[96] Sin damages and deforms the *sensus divinitatis*, making us resistant to belief.[97] But, by the work of the Holy Spirit, the believer can accept the truths contained in Scripture, which are 'revealed to our minds' by the Holy Spirit.[98] Faith is God's gift, the work of the Holy Spirit; given this gift, Plantinga claims, the Christian is entirely

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[95] Mavrodes, 'Jerusalem and Athens Revisited,' in *Faith and Rationality*, 214-5.
[96] Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, (Oxford University Press, 2000), 167-177.
[97] *Warranted Christian Belief* 205.
[98] *Warranted Christian Belief* chapter 8.

justified, rational and warranted in holding to the truths of Christian faith. A rational noetic structure can be founded on basic belief in God's existence:

> Furthermore, belief in God, like other properly basic beliefs, is not groundless or arbitrary; it is grounded in justification-conferring conditions.[99]

1.4.4 Wolterstorff: the normative nature of rationality

Wolterstorff, though aligned with Plantinga's view, adopts a different approach to the question of the rationality of Christian belief. Plantinga accepts the need for basic beliefs on which to found one's noetic structure, and proposes that for the Christian believer, belief in God can be 'properly basic.'[100] Wolterstorff begins with what he terms the 'evidentialist challenge to theism.'[101] He explores in greater detail Locke's formulation of the question, and notes that, for Locke, there are duties and responsibilities pertaining to our believings.[102] Wolterstorff agrees with Locke that 'we have an obligation to govern our assent with the goal in mind of getting more amply in touch with reality.'[103] He focuses on the *process* by which we form and govern our beliefs, and draws on the work of the eighteenth-century Scottish philosopher Thomas Reid. He notes that, according to Reid, we have 'dispositions' to believe particular types of testimony. Some such dispositions are innate, others are acquired through experience. Wolterstorff agrees with Reid that in order to understand knowledge and rationality, we have to look at the 'mechanisms' involved in belief formation. 'Articulate epistemology requires articulate psychology.'[104] He goes further than Reid, in holding that 'we can and should govern the workings of our belief-forming mechanisms, in order to more amply get in touch with reality.' Rationality of belief can only be determined in context – rationality is always *situated* rationality[105] - but, for Wolterstorff, this is not a reason for becoming a historicist. For Wolterstorff, the rules of rationality are normative – we should give up our beliefs if we are faced with a sufficient reason for doing so, but in the absence of

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[99] *Reason and Belief in God*, 91.
[100] *Reason and Belief in God*, 90-91.
[101] Wolterstorff, 'Can Belief in God Be Rational If It has No Foundations?' in Plantinga and Wolterstorff, *Faith and Rationality*, 136.
[102] 'Can Belief in God Be Rational?' 143.
[103] 'Can Belief in God be Rational?' 145.
[104] 'Can Belief in God be Rational?' 149.
[105] 'Can Belief in God be Rational?' 155 (emphasis in original.)

such a reason, the theist is under no obligation to abandon his or her convictions, even if the nonbeliever shows such convictions to be nonrational:

> I conclude that any satisfactory criterion for rational belief will have to be not only a *noetic* criterion, making explicit or tacit reference to the beliefs of the person but also a *normative* noetic criterion, making explicit or tacit use of some such normative concept as that of justification or obligation. In recognition of these facts the criterion I have offered not only takes the phenomenon of *not having adequate reason to surrender one's belief* as the key phenomenon determining rationality; it adds to this an explicitly noetic-normative component.[106]

Wolterstorff describes the criterion which he offers as 'clearly not a foundationalist criterion.'[107] Foundationalism rests on the distinction between immediate and mediate beliefs within the structure of rational belief. Wolterstorff's criterion ignores this distinction and applies in the same way to both mediate and immediate beliefs.[108]

> Is it then a coherence criterion? Yes, perhaps so… However, in its incorporation of a normative component it goes beyond traditional coherence theories. Perhaps the time has come for us to discard the supposition that the foundationalist/coherentist dichotomy is an illuminating principle of classification.[109]

Wolterstorff believes that 'we can and do, and sometimes should' intervene in the natural flow of belief formation.[110] He proposes a 'hierarchy of forcefulness' of our belief dispositions.[111] What I perceive with my own senses will displace a belief based on the testimony of others. And, Wolterstorff claims, if I find among my own beliefs a reason to surrender a belief that I have accepted on testimony, this will oblige me to surrender it. Reasons have a special status in the process of evaluating my beliefs, because the contents of my own mind have a special accessibility to me. According to Wolterstorff, we have no choice but to follow our innate belief dispositions: they are 'facts of our nature.'[112] And he offers a further reason to trust our cognitive processes:

> The Christian, though, will have a reason… for accepting our native and naturally developed noetic dispositions as trustworthy. He believes that we have been made thus by a good Creator.[113]

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[106] 'Can Belief in God be Rational?' 170 (emphasis in original.)
[107] 'Can Belief in God be Rational?' 172.
[108] 'Can Belief in God be Rational?' 172.-
[109] 'Can Belief in God be Rational?' 172.
[110] 'Can Belief in God be Rational?' 175.
[111] 'Can Belief in God be Rational?' 173-4.
[112] 'Can Belief in God be Rational?' 174.
[113] 'Can Belief in God be Rational?' 174.

Some dispositions, on the other hand, are signs of our fallennesss, and therefore unreliable: 'But the Christian will trust that the unreliability of such as these will show up.'[114]

> There is in all of us a complex and natural flow of belief formation. In this natural flow we can and do, and sometimes should, deliberately intervene. The rules of rationality are in effect the rules of such intervention. They instruct us, in effect, to bring our other relevant beliefs into consciousness. Once we have done this, our created nature then once again does its trustworthy work of dispelling the original belief or confirming it (or neither) – provided that we do not culpably interfere.[115]

What Wolterstorff describes as his 'Reidian approach to epistemology,'[116] with its focus on the reliability of the process by which our beliefs is formed, has points of contact with the analysis developed by Lonergan in *Insight*. Lonergan's reply to those who dispute his analysis of human knowing as a compound of experience, understanding and judgement is that, in order to disagree with his account, they have to undertake exactly that process of experiencing, understanding and judging:

> It follows that there is a sense in which the objectification of the normative pattern of our conscious and intentional operations does not admit revision. The sense in question is that the activity of revising consists in such operations in accord with such a pattern, so that a revision rejecting the pattern would be rejecting itself.[117]

Lonergan would agree with Wolterstorff on the importance of understanding our cognitive processes in order to assess the validity of the beliefs that we form by them. He would agree with him, too, on the normative nature of the rules of rationality. The aim of *Insight* is to lead the reader to an understanding and appropriation of their own cognitive process, in order to be able to apply such a process in a way that meets the type of epistemological obligation that Wolterstorff identifies:

> Thoroughly understand what it is to understand, and not only will you understand the broad lines of all there is to be understood but also you will possess a fixed base, an invariant pattern, opening upon all further developments of understanding.[118]

Lonergan's claim is that 'Genuine objectivity is the fruit of authentic subjectivity.'[119] He would agree with Wolterstorff that our cognitive process, if not darkened by sin or bias, gives rise to

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[114] 'Can Belief in God be Rational?' 174.
[115] 'Can Belief in God be Rational?' 175.
[116] 'Can Belief in God be Rational?' 172
[117] Lonergan, *Method*, 22.
[118] Lonergan, *Insight*, 22.
[119] *Method*, 273.

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reliable beliefs and that false beliefs stem from a lack of conversion, though he would frame the idea in Thomist terms, speaking of the 'pure, detached, disinterested desire to know.'[120]

1.4.5 Lonergan and Reformed epistemology

In relation to the problem of plurality and abiding truth in doctrine, the Reformed epistemology of Plantinga and Wolterstorff and the methodological analysis of Lonergan have in common a focus on the cognitive process by which doctrinal formulations are arrived at. However, Plantinga and Wolterstorff, based in the Reformed tradition, concentrate on the individual believer's act of faith. The Christian believer, for them, is one who makes a personal, existential commitment to faith in Jesus Christ and, having done so, accepts the authority of the Scriptures and the truth of what he or she reads in them. A Catholic understanding sees both revelation and the believer's response of faith as occurring within, and mediated by, the church; and the church is conceived of not simply as a human community, but as a divine reality instituted by Christ. Any account of development and pluralism in doctrine has to analyse such processes as taking place in the mind of the church, as well as in the minds of individual Christians. Lonergan defines objectivity as the fruit of authentic subjectivity[121] and crucially, he sees such authenticity as a characteristic of cultural and societal processes, as well as those of the individual. Vatican II states that the apostolic tradition makes progress in the church with the help of the Holy Spirit, both through the preaching of the successors of the apostles, and also in the lives of believers.[122] This teaching reflects a holistic understanding of doctrinal development as an ongoing conversation between God and the church, in which the action of the Spirit guarantees the authenticity of development as 'a growth in insight into the realities and words that are being passed on.'[123] From a Catholic perspective, Reformed epistemology seems not to do justice to this ecclesial dimension of doctrinal development.

Reformed epistemology represents a relatively conservative response to the fall of foundationalism. The search for external proofs of the existence of God and the truth of

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[120] *Insight,* 97, 659.
[121] *Method,* 273.
[122] *DV* §8.
[123] *DV* §8.

revelation is rejected, for the classically Protestant reason that such a search makes human reason a judge over the Word of God. Instead, for Plantinga, belief in the God of revelation is adopted as a foundational principle, while for Wolterstorff the believer is justified in maintaining his or her belief in the absence of adequate reasons for giving it up. The structure of inference and entailment assumed by classical foundationalism remains largely untouched. A more radical response – a fifth corner in the contest – is represented by the Wittgensteinian theory of doctrine proposed by George Lindbeck.

1.5 George Lindbeck on doctrine

George Lindbeck's influential book *The Nature of Doctrine* was prompted partly by his work in ecumenical dialogue. He observed that theologians engaged in such dialogue, from Catholic, Orthodox or Protestant traditions, reported having found basic agreement on important theological topics, and having done so without compromising the integrity of their own convictions. Lindbeck seeks to address 'the comprehensibility of this strange combination of constancy and change, unity and diversity.'[124] He notes the key insight of postfoundationalism, that there is no 'higher neutral standpoint' from which competing theories of religion can be evaluated.[125]

Lindbeck identifies three types of theory of religion and doctrine. What he terms the cognitive view (though it might also be called the classical one), sees religion as a form of knowledge about objective realities, and doctrines as propositions which make truth claims about such realities, similar to the truth claims of science or philosophy, as classically conceived.[126] Such a view has difficulty in comprehending the claims of ecumenical consensus referred to above, or in accounting for development or pluralism in doctrine; since, if a doctrinal statement is a truthful proposition about objective reality, it is hard to see how a different statement about the same reality can also be true.

The second approach Lindbeck terms the 'experiential-expressivist;' it 'interprets doctrines as noninformative and nondiscursive symbols of inner feelings, attitudes or

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[124] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 1.
[125] *Nature of Doctrine*, xxxvi.
[126] *Nature of Doctrine*, 2.

existential orientations.'[127] The third type which Lindbeck identifies is one which attempts to combine both emphases:

> Both the cognitively propositional and the expressively symbolic dimensions of religion and doctrine are viewed, at least in the case of Christianity, as religiously significant and valid.[128]

Lindbeck cites Lonergan, along with Karl Rahner, as an influential exponent of this 'two-dimensional' outlook.[129] Their theories aim to account for the cultural and historical relativity of the expressions of Christian faith, together with its claim to enduring self-identity and unity. They see Christianity as having a 'transcendental' experiential and revelatory source, which it shares with all religions, and in addition, a 'categorial' revelatory source, which gives the faith its specific identity.[130] Lindbeck says of what he terms the two-dimensional outlook:

> Like many hybrids, this outlook has advantages over one-dimensional alternatives, but for our purposes it will generally be subsumed under the earlier approaches.[131]

In order to overcome the limitations of cognitive and experiential-expressive theories, as he sees them, Lindbeck offers instead what he terms a 'cultural-linguistic' explanation of religious phenomena and experience. This model

> …understands religions as idioms for dealing with whatever is most important – with ultimate questions of life and death, right and wrong, chaos and order, meaning and meaninglessness. These are the problems they treat in their stories, myths and doctrines.[132]

In such a theory, the most prominent function of church doctrines is 'their use, not as expressive symbols or as truth claims, but as communally authoritative rules of discourse, attitude and action.'[133]

1.5.1 Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic theory of religion

For Lindbeck, a religion is:

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[127] *Nature of Doctrine*, 2.
[128] *Nature of Doctrine*, 2.
[129] *Nature of Doctrine*, 2.
[130] *Nature of Doctrine*, 10-11.
[131] *Nature of Doctrine*, 2.
[132] *Nature of Doctrine*, 26.
[133] *Nature of Doctrine*, 4.

> …a comprehensive scheme or story used to structure all dimensions of existence…
> its vocabulary of symbols and its syntax may be used for many purposes, only one
> of which is the formulation of statements about reality.[134]

A religion is not a way of giving expression to a prior experience of the transcendent, but rather the structure or scheme which makes it possible to have such an experience and to describe it. Those who have lived within a religion, and been formed by it, possess the 'skill of the saint,' Newman's 'illative sense,' which enables them to discriminate intuitively between its authentic and inauthentic expressions.[135] The starting point for Lindbeck's theory is to consider expressive and communicative symbol systems as primary:

> On this view, the means of communication and expression are a precondition, a
> kind of quasi-transcendental (i.e. culturally formed) a priori for the possibility of
> experience. We cannot identify, describe or recognize experience qua experience
> without the use of signs and symbols.[136]

1.5.2 Lindbeck in dialogue with Lonergan

Lindbeck devotes considerable attention to Lonergan, and acknowledges his influence,[137] while criticising Lonergan's theory of doctrine in several respects. Lindbeck's first criticism concerns the attempt to combine 'variable and invariable' aspects of Christian tradition – to maintain the truth claims of doctrine, while allowing for development, pluralism and ecumenical agreement. Lindbeck finds Lonergan 'unpersuasive' in this area. He suggests that Lonergan's theory of doctrine is weak in criteria for distinguishing authentic from inauthentic development, and therefore, at least from a Reformed perspective, overly reliant on the church's magisterium.[138]

According to Lindbeck, the model of doctrine advocated by Lonergan (and by Karl Rahner) sees different religions as diverse ways of articulating a primary, universal, preverbal and preconceptual experience of what might be termed 'transcendent reality.' This claim of

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[134] *Nature of Doctrine,* 21.
[135] *Nature of Doctrine,* 22. Cf. John Henry Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, Notre Dame/London, University of Notre Dame Press, 1979 (hereafter *Grammar*), Chapter 9, 'The Illative Sense,' 270-299.
[136] *Nature of Doctrine,* 22
[137] *Nature of Doctrine*, 11.
[138] *Nature of Doctrine,* 3.

what Lindbeck terms a 'basic unity of religious experience,'[139] is, for him, the most problematic element of Lonergan's theory. If such an experience is common across all religions (and all cultures and languages), then its distinctive features cannot be specified, and in that case 'the assertion of commonality becomes logically and empirically vacuous.'[140] The 'religious experience' that is prior to conceptualisation or cognition is either too specifically defined to be universal, or too vaguely defined to be identifiable.

Lindbeck has a more fundamental criticism of Lonergan's model. Influenced by Wittgenstein, Lindbeck claims that '…it is necessary to have the means for expressing an experience in order to have it…'[141] If Wittgenstein is correct in his contention that a private language is logically impossible, then the claim for 'privacy in the origins of experience and language' that Lindbeck attributes to Lonergan is 'more than doubtful.'[142] Intriguingly, Lindbeck also seeks to use Aquinas against the Thomist Lonergan. He cites the medieval distinction between first and second intentions; the first intention is the act whereby we grasp objects and in the second intention we become aware of and reflect on our first intention. Modern philosophy would insist that even first-intentional experiences cannot be preverbal or linguistically unstructured. Similarly, Lindbeck claims, religious experiences are inescapably formed by the culture, language and form of life within which they occur.

> For the Aristotelians, affective experiences (in which would be included a sense of the holy or of absolute dependence) always depend on prior cognition of objects, and the objects available to us in this life are all in some fashion constructed out of (or, in medieval terminology, "abstracted from") conceptually or linguistically structured sense experience.[143]

Thus, Aquinas and other medieval Aristotelians, Lindbeck asserts, would agree with Wittgenstein against Lonergan. However, O'Neill takes issue with Lindbeck's interpretation of Aquinas on this point, suggesting that Lindbeck has not fully grasped the epistemological and metaphysical issues raised by his suggestion.[144]

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[139] *Nature of Doctrine,* 18.
[140] *Nature of Doctrine,* 18.
[141] *Nature of Doctrine,* 23.
[142] *Nature of Doctrine,* 24.
[143] *Nature of Doctrine,* 25.
[144] O'Neill, Colman E, OP, 'The Rule Theory of Doctrine and Propositional Truth,' *The Thomist* Volume 49, No 3, July 1985, 417-442, 423-426. O'Neill's criticisms of Lindbeck's theory are considered further below, section 1.5.7.

1.5.3 Religion and truth

Lindbeck distinguishes between the 'intrasystematic' and 'ontological' truth of statements. A statement is intrasystematically true if it is coherent with the system within which it is made, but it can be judged to be ontologically true – i.e. corresponding with reality – only if that system is itself categorically true or adequate.[145] In the case of religious statements, Lindbeck maintains that their correspondence to reality '…is only a function of their role in constituting a form of life, a way of being in the world…'[146] A statement such as 'Jesus is Lord' (1 Cor 12:3) is only asserted truthfully if it expresses a commitment to a particular way of life on the part of the person asserting it. He claims that this allows for a propositional truth of religious statements in the way that Aquinas formulates it: that we can make statements about God which we know to be meaningful and true, but whose meaning we cannot fully grasp, because human concepts and language do not fully correspond to anything in the divine being but rather point beyond themselves to a reality which they signify but cannot fully express.[147] Religious statements can only be made from within a particular religion, and the function of theology and doctrine is to assess the coherence of such statements with the system. The task of the Christian theologian is to determine what is authentically Christian.[148]

1.5.4 Lindbeck's rule theory of doctrine

Lindbeck offers what he terms a 'rule theory' of doctrines:

> Church doctrines are communally authoritative teachings regarding beliefs and practices that are considered essential to the identity or welfare of the group in question. They may be formally stated or informally operative, but in any case they indicate what constitutes faithful adherence to a community.[149]

In making his case for such an understanding of doctrine, Lindbeck disregards, on the one hand, 'symbolic' theories of doctrine which exclude *a priori* its traditional characteristics

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[145] *Nature of Doctrine,* 50.
[146] *Nature of Doctrine,* 51.
[147] *Nature of Doctrine,* 52.
[148] *Nature of Doctrine,* 55.
[149] *Nature of Doctrine,* 60.

– notably, the claim that a doctrinal formulation normatively expresses an ontological truth.[150] He adds:

> Similarly, what Lonergan calls "classical" propositional views of doctrine will be disregarded. These tend to take a particular formulation of a doctrine… as a truth claim with objective or ontological import, and thus have difficulty envisioning the possibility of markedly different formulations of the same doctrine.[151]

The interlocutor in whom Lindbeck is interested is the modern form of propositionalism, of which he regards Lonergan's theory as an example, and which distinguishes between the ontological truth which a doctrine expresses and the different formulations or conceptual schemes in which such a truth can be expressed.[152] Within a rule theory of doctrine, world views as different as those that underlie, on the one hand, a Babylonian creation myth, and on the other a modern scientific cosmology, can be 'redescribed within one and the same framework of biblical narratives.'[153]

> In the terminology of Aquinas… it is at most the *significatum* and not the *modus significati* which remains the same.[154]

Both the experiences of believers and the propositions in which faith is affirmed can change significantly, but the common and unchanging element is 'the framework and the medium within which Christians [or followers of any religion] know and experience.'[155]

Lindbeck tests his theory by reference to the classic Christological doctrines. He claims that:

> In order to argue successfully for the unconditionality and permanence of the ancient Trinitarian and Christological creeds, it is necessary to make a distinction between doctrines, on the one hand, and the terminology and conceptuality in which they are formulated, on the other.[156]

Either the truth of the creeds depends on the use of concepts and language drawn from Greek philosophy, in which case it is limited to the circumstances in which those are meaningful, or a distinction has to be made 'between doctrine and formulation, between content and

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[150] *Nature of Doctrine*, 65-6.
[151] *Nature of Doctrine,* 66. Lindbeck cites Lonergan's *Doctrinal Pluralism* (Marquette University Press, 1971.)
[152] *Nature of Doctrine,* 66.
[153] *Nature of Doctrine,* 68.
[154] *Nature of Doctrine,* 68.
[155] *Nature of Doctrine,* 70.
[156] *Nature of Doctrine,* 78.

form.'[157] This distinction can be maintained more easily, Lindbeck asserts, if doctrines are 'taken as expressing second-order guidelines for Christian discourse rather than first-order affirmations about the inner being of God or Jesus Christ.'[158] Yet this distinction between 'content and form' sits uneasily with Lindbeck's claim to be following Wittgenstein in his understanding of the nature of doctrinal statements. He argues for an approach to the interpretation of doctrinal statements similar to the method of 'dynamic equivalence' employed by Scripture translators:

> …the only way to show that the doctrines of Nicaea and Chalcedon are distinguishable from the concepts in which they are formulated is to state these doctrines in different terms that nevertheless have equivalent consequences.[159]

Lindbeck cites Lonergan's study of the development of trinitarian and Christological doctrines in support of his claim.[160] Lonergan does indeed note that, for example, the formulae of the Council of Chalcedon can be understood in different contexts[161] and that the 'fully metaphysical context' of understanding emerges only in the Scholastic period.[162] But Lonergan interprets this process as a development towards greater precision and coherence in the understanding of doctrine, which occurred partly in response to the rise of false understandings in the form of heresies. Lindbeck wishes instead to detach doctrines from their 'metaphysical import'[163] so that different formulations can have equivalent consequences for the believer who hears them. This, of course, raises the question of the criteria by which such equivalence could be established.

A few pages later, Lindbeck criticises 'that endless process of speculative reinterpretation which is the main stock-in-trade of much contemporary theology, both Protestant and Catholic.'[164] Such reinterpretation, according to Lindbeck, aims at discovering the truth enunciated by a doctrinal formulation, when the theologian is working from a viewpoint radically different from that within which the formula was originally expressed. For

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[157] *Nature of Doctrine,* 78.
[158] *Nature of Doctrine,* 80.
[159] *Nature of Doctrine*, 79.
[160] *Nature of Doctrine*, 80. Lindbeck refers to *Method*, 285-291; 'The Dehellenization of Dogma,' in *A Second Collection*, 2nd edition, vol 13 in the *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, (University of Toronto Press, 2016), 11-30; and *The Way to Nicea*, now *TTG: Doctrines*.
[161] *Method*, 287.
[162] *Method*, 288.
[163] *Nature of Doctrine*, 80.
[164] *Nature of Doctrine*, 93.

Wittgenstein, he says, this would be a case where 'language idles without doing any work,'[165] whereas if the doctrine is treated as a rule, theological reflection becomes relevant to the praxis of the church. But Lindbeck, in applying his own theory to the classic Christological doctrines, seems to fall foul of the Wittgensteinian critique.[166]

1.5.5 Implications of a rule theory of doctrine

On the basis of Lindbeck's rule theory of doctrine, doctrinal authority rests not in the ancient creedal formulae, but in the rules which they instantiate.

> …it is at least plausible to claim that Nicaea and Chalcedon represent historically conditioned formulations of doctrines that are unconditionally and permanently necessary to mainstream Christian identity. Rule theory, in short, allows (though it does not require) giving these creeds the status that the major Christian traditions have attributed to them, but with the understanding that they are permanently authoritative paradigms, not formulas to be slavishly repeated.[167]

Lindbeck claims that, historically, the ancient creeds had this regulatory function and only later came to be seen as having a normative ontological reference, as authoritatively true statements about the nature of God. Though he cites Lonergan's historical work on the development of Christological and Trinitarian doctrine in support of his view[168] Lindbeck, unlike Lonergan, wishes to set the creedal formulae, and doctrinal formulations generally, free from this normative ontological reference so that doctrines are seen instead as norms that regulate the theological language used about the subject matter of faith. Lindbeck claims that this understanding focuses theological attention on the present-day life of the church, and the circumstances in which a doctrine applies, and avoids the 'endless process of speculative reinterpretation'[169] into which the theologian is forced if doctrines are understood as first-order propositions. Thus, he believes that a rule theory of doctrine accounts better than a propositional one for the continuing 'normativeness' of doctrine.[170]

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[165] *Nature of Doctrine*, 93.
[166] See the criticism made by Giurlanda below, section 1.5.7.
[167] *Nature of Doctrine,* 82.
[168] *Nature of Doctrine,* 80 and 90-91.
[169] *Nature of Doctrine*, 93.
[170] *Nature of Doctrine,* 92-94.

1.5.6 The intratextuality of doctrine

Lindbeck criticises 'the liberal tendency to redescribe religion in extrascriptural frameworks,'[171] and this seems to be one of the major concerns of his work. He insists, instead, that theological language must be understood as 'intratextual' – it locates the meaning of theological language immanently within the 'language' of the religion and not externally in the realities to which the language refers.[172] A religion, like a culture, is a semiotic system that is potentially all-embracing – all of reality can be described within it. There is no neutral standpoint from which to judge the reasonableness of such a system – but this does not mean that "antifoundationalism" equals irrationalism:

> As T S Kuhn has argued in reference to science, and Wittgenstein in philosophy,
> the norms of reasonableness are too rich and subtle to be adequately specified in
> any general theory of reason or knowledge.[173]

In this perspective, the reasonableness of a religion is largely a function of its assimilative powers, its ability to provide an intelligible interpretation in its own terms of the varied situations and realities adherents encounter.[174] Lindbeck claims that foundationalism is a problem peculiar to the modern age (which does seem to be historically correct), and, what is more difficult to establish, that thinkers as diverse as Luther, Aquinas and Barth would be in sympathy with his approach.[175]

1.5.7 Criticisms of Lindbeck's approach

Some criticism of *The Nature of Doctrine* has centred on the issue that Lindbeck himself identifies in the work of other theologians; the relationship between the 'variable and invariable' aspects of tradition. Lindbeck presents doctrines as analogous to the rules of grammar of a language, which determine what a speaker can say while remaining within that language. The criterion for judging whether one is speaking English or French correctly is whether the speaker's words are recognized and understood by fluent speakers of the

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[171] *Nature of Doctrine,* 110.
[172] *Nature of Doctrine,* 100.
[173] *Nature of Doctrine,* 116.
[174] *Nature of Doctrine,* 118.
[175] *Nature of Doctrine,* 121.

language. The acceptability of doctrinal formula is judged by the consensus of fluent speakers of the language of Christian faith – that is, by believers:

> Confirmation or disconfirmation occurs through an accumulation of successes and failures in making practically and cognitively coherent sense of relevant data, and the process does not conclude, in the case of religions, until the disappearance of the last communities of believers…[176]

However, as Giurlanda points out, a language and its grammar are not fixed and invariant, but a living and constantly changing reality.[177] Lindbeck, Giurlanda claims, has to resort to a form of special pleading to exempt the Christian story from such changeability – he has to treat it as 'foundational.' Perhaps, suggests Giurlanda, fidelity to Christ and the Christian story 'should not be so linked with immutability.'[178]

J W Richards takes issue with Lindbeck's treatment of truth and meaning in relation to doctrinal statements,[179] making the cogent point that, for example, the bishops at the Council of Nicaea believed that, in formulating the Nicene Creed, they '*were* making *positive assertions* about God' which had an ontological reference.[180] However, Richards' critique seems to amount to little more than a re-assertion of what Lindbeck terms the cognitive theory of doctrine. He has nothing to say about the problems of pluralism, or of the inadequacy of human language in speaking about God, which prompted Lindbeck's project.

O'Neill offers a more nuanced critique of Lindbeck, from a classical Thomist standpoint.[181] He focuses on Lindbeck's description of his rule theory of doctrine as 'religiously and ecumenically neutral,' which O'Neill takes to mean that it is a purely formal theory, like mathematics or formal logic, which prescinds from the content of statements and their truth or falsity.[182] He reads Lindbeck as saying that doctrines are 'no more than formal rules,'[183] and of wishing to rid doctrine of its reference to objective reality.[184] Lindbeck might

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[176] *Nature of Doctrine*, 117.
[177] Giurlanda, 'Post-Liberal Theology,' book review, *CrossCurrents*, Vol. 35, No. 2/3 (Summer/Fall 1985), 321-323.
[178] Giurlanda, 323.
[179] Jay Wesley Richards, 'Truth and Meaning in George Lindbeck's "The Nature of Doctrine,"' *Religious Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (March 1997), 33-53.
[180] Richards, 47-8 (emphasis in original.)
[181] O'Neill, Colman E, OP, 'The Rule Theory of Doctrine and Propositional Truth,' *The Thomist* Volume 49, No 3, July 1985, 417-442.
[182] O'Neill, 420.
[183] O'Neill, 421.
[184] O'Neill, 422.

reply that his theory is 'neutral' between different Christian traditions, and is a theory about the role that doctrinal statements play within such traditions – which, for Lindbeck, amounts to a theory of what doctrinal statements are. While, in itself, the theory is a formal one, which does not address the question of the truth or falsity of doctrinal formulae, it is not fair to conclude from this that Lindbeck is not interested in such questions, still less to read him in a strictly non-realist way as holding that doctrine has no reference to objective reality.

Both Richards and O'Neill place considerable weight on Lindbeck's distinction between the 'intrasystematic' and the 'ontological' truth of statements.[185] Lindbeck cites the example of a crusader who cries '*Christus est Dominus*' while cleaving the skull of an 'infidel.' Here, claims Lindbeck, the statement is false, because it is contradicted by the believer's action, but it might be true when uttered in other circumstances. Intrasystematic coherence is a necessary (though not sufficient) condition for the truth of a statement.[186] In relation to the truth of a religion, Lindbeck states: 'As actually lived, a religion may be pictured as a single gigantic proposition.'[187] The proposition is true to the extent that the followers of a religion live it out authentically and false to the extent that this fails to happen.

Lindbeck is asserting that intrasystematic coherence is a necessary condition for truth, and that the truth of a religious system is to be judged as a whole, by reference to its impact on the life of believers. He does not exclude the possibility of judging doctrinal statements within a given religion to be ontologically true or false. His position is quite different from that of, for example, Rorty,[188] and it is somewhat unfair to characterise it as O'Neill does:

> A quite precise philosophical option has been made in favor of the moral or pragmatic definition of truth.[189]

Such a criticism seems more appropriately directed at an understanding such as that of Braithwaite.[190]

Lindbeck appeals several times to Aquinas in support of his argument, and O'Neill examines these claims in some detail:

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[185] *Nature of Doctrine*, 50.
[186] *Nature of Doctrine*, 50.
[187] *Nature of Doctrine*, 37.
[188] See chapter 8 below.
[189] O'Neill, 429.
[190] Section 1.4.1 above.

As regards knowledge, a Thomist would agree that the intellectual concepts formed of the object are "abstracted" from sensible images; and, if he were prudent, he would insist at this stage on the imperfect grasp of concrete reality that is afforded by such necessarily universal concepts… But he would not be at all happy with the proposition that the object is therefore "constructed" out of sense experience.[191]

For the Thomist, the objects of cognition are given and not constructed – a Thomist epistemology is implicitly realistic.

…the Thomist should find no difficulty about accepting the cultural-linguistic approach in so far as it posits that affective experiences always depend on prior cognition of objects.[192]

However, O'Neill insists, it is neither meaningless nor obviously false to suppose that there may be 'an inner experience of God common to all human beings and all religions.'[193]

…even on purely anthropological grounds, though not empirical ones, might not one suspect that ultimate questions concerning human values, to the degree that they are raised, would provoke answers bearing some similarities? Does the cultural-linguistic approach suppose that man [sic] is purely the creature of his environment?[194]

And from a Thomist perspective, seeing Christ as the divine creative Word, such similarities are a fortiori probable. O'Neill criticises Lindbeck for importing a methodology from the social-scientific study of religions and allowing it to govern his theological analysis of the nature of doctrine. But his most intriguing comment for our purposes relates to Lindbeck's categorisation of different types of theory of doctrine:

I very much doubt that any theory of religion or doctrine exists, at least within Christianity, which corresponds to the description given of cognitivism… I have already granted that anyone who shares the metaphysical epistemology of Aquinas is likely to be open to the cultural-linguistic approach; but that means that a Thomistic theory of religion and of doctrine cannot be simply intellectualist, much less simply propositionalist. The Catholic tradition has placed too much emphasis on symbolism, as much in the realm of doctrine as in that of sacraments, for that to be true. Evidently, within this, a place must be found for truth expressed in propositions; but the latter (apart from the explanations it calls for itself) will be understandable only in the context of the whole Christian life, viewed - as it is put in linguistics - both synchronically and diachronically.[195]

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[191] O'Neill, 425.

[192] O'Neill, 426.

[193] Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, 25-26, cited by O'Neill, 426.

[194] O'Neill, 426.

[195] O'Neill, 428.

If one has read Aquinas properly, O'Neill affirms, one cannot adopt a simply propositionalist theory of doctrine. Symbol and metaphor have their place in 'the realm of doctrine.'[196] O'Neill recognises 'affinities' between Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic theory of doctrine and the philosophy of Aquinas[197] but criticises Lindbeck's interpretation of him.[198] As we have seen, Williams criticises Plantinga and Wolterstorff's interpretation of him as a classical foundationalist.[199] Both writers are arguing against reading Aquinas anachronistically in terms of contemporary categories that are extrinsic to his thought. It was always one of Lonergan's priorities in his writing to enter authentically into the thought of Aquinas[200] and even theologians who disagreed with him on other issues praised his interpretative work on Aquinas.[201] I will argue below that this fidelity to the thought of Aquinas is a key to understanding Lonergan's thought on the hermeneutics of doctrine.

Kathryn Tanner's criticism of Lindbeck focuses on his approach to diversity in theological judgment. According to her, Lindbeck sees theological diversity as arising from the 'illicit' influence of a non-Christian cultural context on the believer's efforts to lead a Christian life.[202] Tanner's objection to Lindbeck's analysis is, firstly, that it presupposes a sharp boundary between Christian and non-Christian cultures, a claim that is untenable in a postmodern understanding. A Christian lives in many overlapping cultures: he or she is also a citizen of a particular country, a speaker of a particular language, born in a particular era, and so on. Christian understanding and judgment is far more multiple and contextual than would appear from some postliberal views of Christianity as an 'alternative culture.' For Tanner, 'Christian identity' is much more fluid than Lindbeck's theory allows, making it impossible to identify those disciples who will possess the 'skill of the saint' to distinguish authentic from inauthentic expressions of faith.[203]

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[196] O'Neill, 428. Compare Lonergan, *Method*, 70: 'With Giambattista Vico, then, we hold for the priority of poetry. Literal meaning literally expressed is a later ideal…'
[197] O'Neill, 440-441.
[198] See Bruce D Marshall, 'Introduction,' *Nature of Doctrine*, xviii.
[199] Above, section 1.4.2.
[200] See, for example, *Verbum* 226-227.
[201] For example, Fergus Kerr, *After Aquinas*, 29.
[202] Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, (Fortress Press, Minneapolis), 157.
[203] *Nature of Doctrine*, 22.

More fundamentally, Tanner contends that 'diversity of theological judgment is propelled by Christian practice itself,'[204] whereas:

> For Lindbeck the diversity of theological judgment seems to have its roots solely in external influences; without them, properly socialized Christians would, it seems, form the same judgments.[205]

Tanner believes that diversity cannot be 'rendered harmless, as Lindbeck does, by parcelling it out to different times and places,'[206] but rather that diversity is an inevitable feature of Christian discipleship. She agrees with Sykes that 'Christianity is to be understood as an essentially contested concept;'[207] that debate and even polemic is a normal part of the life of the church, while what is being debated is nevertheless a single reality. The Christian disciple is not passively socialised into 'Christian culture,' but actively appropriates a selection of the meanings, values and practices found within a Christian way of life into his or her own situation.[208] Tanner's account of the Christian experience, like Lindbeck's, seems strikingly individualistic from a Catholic perspective. She refers to:

> …institutions controlling the production and distribution of "the" Christian message and… a "police arm" of Christian practice with the power to exclude resisters from Christian fellowship…[209]

A Catholic theologian would see this as a somewhat tendentious description of the function of the church's magisterium.

1.6 Conclusion

Reformed epistemology and Lindbeck's rule theory of doctrine each offer a Christian response to the nonfoundationalist/postfoundationalist critique. Each has strengths and weaknesses; each, however, shares the assumptions of the Reformed tradition within which these writers work. The act of faith is conceived of as an act of the individual believer, with little attention to its ecclesial dimension. Tradition is understood as the interpretation of Scripture within the believing community. Catholic theology conceives of the church's tradition more broadly and has a more positive view of the role of philosophy in structuring

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[204] Tanner, 158.
[205] Tanner, 158.
[206] Tanner, 159.
[207] Stephen Sykes, *The Identity of Christianity*, (Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1984), 257.
[208] Tanner, 160-161.
[209] Tanner, 161.

the understanding of revealed truth. Plantinga and Wolterstorff set up the thought of Aquinas as an example of the natural theology which they distrust and the classical foundationalism that they oppose, while Lindbeck wishes to recruit Aquinas as a supporter of his rule theory of doctrine. I have suggested that neither interpretation does justice to the depth of Aquinas' thought and I will argue below that Lonergan's transposition of Thomism is a crucial resource for an authentically Catholic response to postfoundationalism. In the next chapter, however, I will suggest that an appropriate starting point for such a Catholic response can be found in the work of Lonergan's guide and mentor, John Henry Newman.

2 Nonfoundationalism and postfoundationalism, development and pluralism; looking to Newman for a Catholic response

2.1 Introduction: The challenge for Catholic theology

Nonfoundationalist and postfoundationalist thought presents a profound challenge for all Christian theology. To affirm the central claims of Christian faith seems to require, as a minimum, a realist understanding of truth and meaning and a rejection of scepticism. To proclaim Jesus Christ as the Saviour for all of humanity implies that such an assertion can be made meaningfully across all cultures and all periods of history. The nonfoundationalist and postfoundationalist critique calls into question the assumptions that have traditionally underpinned the work of theology.

The challenge seems particularly acute for Catholic theology, which considers tradition as well as Scripture to be a source of its data[1] and has traditionally seen philosophy as having an important role in providing a systematic substructure within which the internal coherence of doctrine can be verified.[2] Furthermore, Catholic theology sees faith as an ecclesial act, meaning that individualistic solutions to the foundationalist problem are inadmissible. However, the postfoundationalist/nonfoundationalist critique does not have to represent a threat to Catholic theology but, in Thiel's words, can '[serve] as a heuristic for the responsible practice of the theological task.'[3] This task is to seek genuinely Christian ways to represent the contextuality of the church's universal claims to the world, understanding and expressing the truths of Christian revelation in a way that is faithful to the Gospel message and 'rejects any effort to satisfy extra-ecclesial expectations that would run contrary to that faithfulness.'[4] Vatican II makes it clear that a Catholic understanding of the church's tradition

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[1] Lonergan, 'Theology in its New Context, *'Second Collection*, 51-52; cf. *Dei Verbum*, §9-10.
[2] Lonergan, *Method*, 288.
[3] Thiel, *Nonfoundationalism*, 107.
[4] Thiel, *Nonfoundationalism*, 108.

sees that tradition as consisting not only of doctrinal propositions but of all that the church believes and hands on in her teaching, life and worship.[5] Within such an understanding, positive dialogue with nonfoundationalist and postfoundationalist thought becomes possible. This chapter will reflect on the contribution of St John Henry Newman to such a dialogue. I will first consider Newman's account of faith in his *Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, arguing that he anticipates some of the issues raised by nonfoundationalism and postfoundationalism, before going on to analyse Newman's study of the development of doctrine as a resource for the question of doctrinal pluralism.

2.2 Newman's *Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*

Newman is the first Catholic theologian in the English-speaking world to address questions of doctrinal development and religious epistemology and he also writes deeply and perceptively about the believer's act of faith. He is therefore an important resource for a Catholic response to the nonfoundationalist and postfoundationalist challenge. His account of faith in his *Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*[6] is relevant to the nonfoundationalist/postfoundationalist issue. Newman later remarked:

> My main proposition, in my Essay is, that by the nature of the human mind we assent absolutely on reasons which taken separately are but probabilities.[7]

Newman aims to show that it is reasonable to believe – in his terms, to assent to – that which we cannot fully understand, and to assent to what cannot be demonstratively proved.[8] He does so by a detailed analysis of the processes of the mind which lead to such assent. Newman distinguishes the three mental acts of Doubt, Inference and Assent. Doubt is expressed by a question, inference by a conclusion and assent by an unconditional assertion.[9] To assent to a proposition requires some apprehension or understanding of it, but one can assent to the *truth* of a proposition on the strength of authority or testimony, without apprehending it.[10]

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[5] *DV* §8.

[6] *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, Notre Dame/London, University of Notre Dame Press, 1979. Hereafter *Grammar*.

[7] C S Dessain & Thomas Gornall, S.J., eds., *Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman*, vol 25 (Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1973), 266 (quoted in *Grammar* Introduction, 11.)

[8] *Grammar*, 12.

[9] *Grammar*, 26.

[10] *Grammar*, 33-4.

Newman distinguishes notional assents, which relate to propositions, from real assents, which relate to things.[11] Only real assents have the power to affect our actions:

> Many a man will live and die upon a dogma: no man will be a martyr for a conclusion.[12]

Therefore, religion depends on assent (though theology depends on inferences):

> Life is not long enough for a religion of inferences; we shall never have done beginning, if we determine to begin with proof.[13]

In relation to the content of faith – the 'matter of religion' – Newman states:

> A dogma is a proposition; it stands for a notion or for a thing; and to believe it is to give the assent of the mind to it, as it stands for the one or for the other. To give a real assent to it is an act of religion; to give a notional, is a theological act. It is discerned, rested in, and appropriated as a reality, by the religious imagination; it is held as a truth, by the theological intellect.[14]

Is it reasonable to assent to the whole body of dogma taught by the Catholic church? Yes, Newman replies, because doctrine represents the church's ordering and systematisation of the deposit of faith: 'the exercise of the intellect upon the *credenda* of revelation.'[15] For believers who cannot apprehend dogmatic statements, assent is nevertheless reasonable, because they have assented to the infallibility of the 'One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church:'

> Even what [the Catholic believer] cannot understand, at least he can believe to be true; and he believes it to be true because he believes in the Church.[16]

In the second part of the *Grammar*, Newman contrasts assent and inference. Inference reasons from premises to conclusions, but it can never achieve certainty when dealing with concrete facts.[17] The gap is closed by the illative sense, the power of judging and concluding, which is the counterpart in Newman's thought to Aristotle's *phronesis* in the realm of morality.[18] Whereas inference is restricted to verbal reasoning, the illative sense can

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[11] *Grammar*, chapter 4, 49-92.
[12] *Grammar*, 89.
[13] *Grammar*, 90-91.
[14] *Grammar*, 93.
[15] *Grammar*, 127.
[16] *Grammar*, 129.
[17] *Grammar*, 217.
[18] *Grammar*, 276-7.

range across the whole field of human experience, and can see and synthesise converging probabilities so as to produce certainty.

> …in no class of concrete reasonings… is there any ultimate test of truth and error in our inferences besides the trustworthiness of the Illative Sense that gives them its sanction…[19]

Newman believes that the fact of Christian revelation is demonstrably true, but not irresistibly so:

> I cannot convert men, when I ask for assumptions which they refuse to grant to me; and without assumptions no one can prove anything about anything.[20]

Like Aquinas,[21] Newman recognises that Christian faith cannot be proved from first principles, but only demonstrated to be rational given certain presuppositions. However, Christianity can be proved 'in the same informal way in which I can prove for certain that I have been born into this world, and that I shall die out of it.'[22] From an accumulation of probabilities can be constructed 'legitimate proof, sufficient for certitude.'[23]

Newman anticipated some aspects of the postfoundationalist critique, a century before it arose. He explicitly rejects what we would now term the 'strong' foundationalist position that would seek to justify Christian faith by 'external proofs.' His analysis, distinguishing inference from assent and notional assent from real, brings into focus the nature of the act of faith as an act of the whole person, in which the intellect plays a necessary but not a sufficient part. His description of the illative sense seems to point towards coherentist theories of knowledge; those which see knowledge as a 'web' in which each belief is held firm by those surrounding it, rather than a structure erected on incorrigible foundations. His focus on the believer's personal appropriation of the content of faith chimes with the ideas of the Reformed thinkers discussed above.

In other respects, Newman remains a man of his time. His 'most basic assumptions remain classical.'[24] His understanding of doctrine is, in Lindbeck's terms, a cognitively

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[19] *Grammar*, 281.
[20] *Grammar*, 319.
[21] See above, section 1.4.2
[22] *Grammar*, 319.
[23] *Grammar*, 320.
[24] Thiel, *Senses of Tradition*, 70.

propositional one that sees doctrines as truth claims about objective realities;[25] as such it is subject to Lindbeck's critique of this type of account. However, Newman's description of the act of faith differs in emphasis from Reformed accounts in being expressly ecclesial.[26] The believer's act of faith is made within the church and Newman sees the illative sense operating at the ecclesial level as well as that of the individual believer:

> What the Illative Sense achieves on the natural plane in the individual, the supernatural Illative Sense, or the "phronesis" of the Holy Ghost, does in the supernaturally higher context of the Spirit-filled Christian community.[27]

However, the believer's assent to the church's infallibility seems to function for Newman as a kind of 'black box' which legitimates, in principle, belief in any doctrine at all, provided that it has the magisterial stamp of approval. A contemporary account of faith must engage with the more critical and nuanced approach to the relationship between the individual believer and the church's teaching authority which is exemplified by the work of Tanner[28] and also envisaged by Lonergan.[29]

2.3 Foundationalism and the Catholic magisterium: *Fides et Ratio*

The most recent official pronouncement dealing specifically with the foundationalist question is found in John Paul II's encyclical *Fides et Ratio*.[30] The encyclical is concerned not only with the relationship of faith and reason but with the search for truth and meaning, conceived of as a universal human question.[31] John Paul II criticises, in turn, eclecticism,[32] historicism,[33] scientism,[34] pragmatism[35] and nihilism,[36] and calls for a philosophy of 'genuinely

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[25] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 2.
[26] 'Thus the heart of every Christian ought to represent in miniature the Catholic Church, since one Spirit makes both the whole Church and every member of it to be His Temple.' Newman, 'Connection Between Personal and Public Improvement,' in *Sermons Bearing on Subjects of the Day,* X (London, Longmans, Green & Co.), 1909, 132.
[27] Thomas J Norris, *Newman and His Theological Method*, (Leiden, E J Brill, 1977), 151. Cf. Philip Egan, *Newman, Lonergan and Doctrinal Development* (PhD thesis, University of Birmingham, 2004), 71.
[28] Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 160-161.
[29] Lonergan, *Method*, 114-116.
[30] *Fides et Ratio*: Encyclical letter of Pope John Paul II on the relationship between faith and reason, 1998. Hereafter *FR*. Available at https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091998_fides-et-ratio.html [accessed 21/09/24]
[31] *FR* §1.
[32] *FR* §86.
[33] *FR* §87.
[34] *FR* §88.
[35] *FR* §89.
[36] *FR* §90.

metaphysical range'[37] to support the human search for absolute and transcendent truth. While recognising the importance of the currents of thought identified by the label 'postmodern,' John Paul II criticises the 'destructive critique of every certitude.'[38] Guarino describes the encyclical (with approval) as a 'foundationalist' document: not in the strong sense of holding the truths of revelation accountable to an epistemological standard external to theology, but in the broader sense that it calls for a philosophical structure of support for doctrine, avoiding the traps of fideism or deconstructive historicism.[39]

> While *Fides et Ratio* hardly defends foundationalism in the (basic) evidentialist sense, or in the sense that epistemic primacy is accorded to some criterion other than revelation itself, it does defend, precisely within the parameters of revelation, the importance of philosophical warrants for the truth of the Christian faith. As such, the encyclical holds that the Catholic view of revelation requires a certain metaphysical structure or range to support logically doctrinal teaching, as well as the traditional hallmarks associated with this teaching such as its universality and historical identity.[40]

John Paul II is not calling for the reinstatement of Thomism as the church's *philosophia perennis*, but he is seeking a philosophy capable of supporting an 'account of faith' which he sees as the task of fundamental theology.[41] He praises Newman as a thinker whose work embodies a 'fruitful relationship between philosophy and the word of God.'[42]

Lonergan claimed to have read the *Grammar* five times[43] and named Newman as an important influence on his own account of human knowing. Newman's thought forms an essential backdrop to the task of bringing to bear Lonergan's cognitional theory on the postfoundationalist challenge and on the questions raised by *FR*.

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[37] *FR* §83.
[38] *FR* §91.
[39] Thomas Guarino, '*Fides et Ratio*: Theology and Contemporary Pluralism,' *Theological Studies* 62 (2001), 675-700, 684-686.
[40] Guarino, 685-686.
[41] *FR* §67: cf 1 Peter 3:15. I discuss *Fides et Ratio* in more detail below, section 8.2.2.1.
[42] *FR*, §74.
[43] 'My fundamental mentor and guide has been John Henry Newman's *Grammar of Assent*.' Lonergan, 'Reality, Myth, Symbol,' in *Philosophical and Theological Papers, 1965–1980*, eds. Robert C. Croken and Robert M. Doran, *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan* vol 17 (University of Toronto Press, 2004), 388.

2.4 Doctrinal development and the magisterium

The Catholic church was compelled to address issues of pluralism and diversity by what Lonergan would term the replacement of a classicist notion of culture with an empirical one[44] and by the rise of historical and cultural consciousness.[45] The question of the development of doctrine is one area of theology where such issues are inescapable. Newman is the first theologian writing in English to engage with these questions and his *Essay on the Development of Doctrine* remains an essential resource for consideration of the topic. Below I will sketch some recent magisterial documents relevant to the question of doctrinal development, before considering Newman's account and the contemporary critique of his thought by John Thiel and Nicholas Lash.

Vatican I affirms:

> Hence also that meaning of the sacred dogmas is perpetually to be retained which our Holy Mother Church has once declared, and there must never be a deviation from that meaning on the specious ground and title of a more profound understanding. 'Therefore, let there be growth and abundant progress in understanding, knowledge and wisdom, in each and all, in individuals and in the whole Church, at all times and in the succession of the ages, but only in its proper kind, i.e. in the same dogma, the same meaning, the same understanding.'[46]

As Thiel has noted,[47] the church's teaching authority remained ambivalent about the idea of doctrinal development throughout the 20th century, but the principle has been formally recognised at Vatican II[48] and in subsequent magisterial teaching. Pope Paul VI, in the social document *Octogesima Adveniens*[49] affirms that:

> The Gospel is not out-of-date because it was proclaimed, written and lived in a different sociocultural context. Its inspiration, enriched by the living experience of Christian tradition over the centuries, remains ever new for converting men and women, and for advancing the life of society.[50]

And that the church's social teaching:

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[44] *Method*, 3.

[45] R. Fisichella, 'Historical Consciousness,' 433-435; J. O'Donnell, 'Historicity of Revelation,' 442-446 in *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*.

[46] *DF*, chapter 4, quoting Vincent of Lerins, *Commonitorium primum*, 23.

[47] John E Thiel, *Senses of Tradition*, (Oxford University Press, 2000) 25-6.

[48] *Dei Verbum* §8.

[49] *Octogesima Adveniens*, Apostolic Letter of Pope Paul VI (1971), hereafter *OA*. Available at www.vatican.va [Accessed 24/08/24.]

[50] *OA* § 4.

…develops through reflection applied to the changing situations of this world, under the driving force of the Gospel as the source of renewal…[51]

Such statements can be seen as an application of the principle found in *Dei Verbum* that '[The] tradition which comes from the Apostles develops in the Church with the help of the Holy Spirit.'[52] The church's magisterium has accepted the idea of doctrinal development to this extent but has been more cautious about the idea of a synchronic pluralism of doctrine across different cultures. However, Pope Francis said in his Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*[53] (2016):

> Unity of teaching and practice is certainly necessary in the Church, but this does not preclude various ways of interpreting some aspects of that teaching or drawing certain consequences from it… Each country or region, moreover, can seek solutions better suited to its culture and sensitive to its traditions and local needs. For "cultures are in fact quite diverse and every general principle… needs to be inculturated, if it is to be respected and applied."[54]

Yet such endorsements of the principles of development and inculturation represent only a cautious magisterial opening to the idea of doctrinal pluralism. The question of coherently combining what Lindbeck terms the 'variable and invariable aspects of [a] religious tradition'[55] remains contested.

2.5 Newman on the development of doctrine

Newman was the first theologian in the English language to engage with those questions of tradition, development and continuity which are now seen as fundamental to the understanding of the history of doctrine[56] and he provided language and conceptual tools for the magisterial recognition of the idea of doctrinal development. Vatican II's description of the Tradition that 'makes progress in the church,' compared to the 'deposit of faith' envisaged by Vatican I, seems marked by Newman's thinking.[57] Newman's thought has been

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[51] *OA* § 42.

[52] *DV* §8.

[53] *Amoris Laetitia*, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis (2016), hereafter *AL*. Available at www.vatican.va [Accessed 24/08/24.]

[54] *AL* §3, citing Concluding Address of the Fourteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (24 October 2015.)

[55] Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, 3.

[56] Nicholas Lash, *Newman on Development: The Search for an Explanation in History*, (Sheed & Ward, London, 1975), 2.

[57] Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum* on Divine Revelation, §8: cf Lash, *Newman on Development* 204 (endnote 25.)

influential but his legacy, and the question of development of doctrine, remain contested. An author such as Thiel wishes to use the official recognition of legitimate development as a springboard for a thoroughly hermeneutical approach to the plurality of the church's tradition,[58] while others would emphasise 'the identity of faith in all developments.'[59]

Here my focus will be on Newman's account of doctrinal development, as elaborated particularly (though not only) in his *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*[60] (hereafter *Essay*.) I will draw on the detailed study of Newman's thought on development by Aidan Nichols OP[61] and particularly on the critiques of Nicholas Lash and John Thiel, who each bring Newman into dialogue with contemporary questions of development and pluralism. Lash describes his *Newman on Development* as a 'methodological exploration of the *Essay*.'[62] Newman's thought on development can be seen as the beginning of a theological approach to wider issues of pluralism and hermeneutics. Lash believes that, by bringing a historian's sensibility to the question of doctrinal development, Newman offers a more satisfactory understanding of the church's tradition, and a greater (though still insufficient) degree of historical consciousness than had previously been achieved.[63] Thiel, too, is concerned with development in history, and asks whether Newman does full justice to the true historicity, and hence the contingency, of the process.

2.5.1 Newman's *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*

Newman was impelled to write the *Essay* by a crisis in his own life of faith. As an Anglican, he had put forward the theory of the *Via Media*, seeing the Church of England as the contemporary embodiment of the church of the Fathers, in contrast to the excesses of both Protestantism and Romanism.[64] His study of the history of the church, and particularly of the Arian crisis, led him to conclude that the *Via Media* was untenable. However, before he could become a Roman Catholic, he had to arrive at a position that could justify the

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[58] Thiel, *Senses of Tradition*, 26.

[59] Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, *Presentation on the 1st Centenary of the Death of Cardinal John Henry Newman*, Rome, 28 April 1990.

[60] John Henry Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, 6th edition, with a foreword by Ian Ker (University of Notre Dame Press, 1989.) Hereafter *Essay*.

[61] Aidan Nichols OP, *From Newman to Congar: The Idea of Doctrinal Development from the Victorians to the Second Vatican Council* (T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1990)

[62] Lash, *Newman on Development*, ix.

[63] Lash, *Newman on Development*, 78.

[64] Nichols, *From Newman to Congar*, 20.

practices of the Roman church of his time – practices that, as an Anglican, he had denounced as 'corruptions.' Newman needed, in his own terms, a new 'view.'[65] It was in order to develop such a 'view' that he undertook the writing of the *Essay*, and before it was published, his reflections had led him to enter the Roman Catholic church. A second, extensively revised edition of the *Essay* was published in 1878 and is regarded as the definitive text.

Newman first considers questions relevant to the development of doctrine in *The Arians of the Fourth Century.*[66] He opposes what he terms 'Liberalism,' i.e. the idea that Christianity is a religiosity or moral sense without doctrinal content,[67] and also the evangelical Protestant view that Christian revelation is communicated directly by the biblical text.[68] The church teaches the truth, but Newman believes that:

> …freedom from symbols and articles is abstractedly the highest state of Christian communion, and the peculiar privilege of the primitive Church… when confessions do not exist, the mysteries of divine truth… are kept hidden in the bosom of the Church…[69]

For Newman, the church resorts to creedal formulations in order to oppose heresy, or for the purposes of teaching the faith to 'pagans;' but ideally the content of revelation is kept in 'the bosom of the Church' as a seemingly preconceptual 'inner tradition.'[70] Over subsequent years, he came to describe this content as the 'idea' of Christianity, impressed on the mind of the church, and coming to explicit propositional formulation in creeds or other dogmatic definitions. This process of 'explicitation' continues after the patristic era.[71] But it is unclear, before the *Essay*, how Newman conceives of this 'idea' of Christianity, and what criteria are to be applied to distinguish legitimate developments from corruptions.

Newman begins the *Essay* by asserting that Christianity is a historical reality, appropriately studied in historical terms.[72] He goes on, in Chapter 1, to consider the 'development of ideas in various subject matters,'[73] such as the political or philosophical. Here, he is seeking to establish that, if an idea is 'living,' then it has the potential for

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[65] Lash, *Newman on Development*, 13.
[66] J H Newman, *The Arians of the Fourth Century*, London, 1833; 3rd edition, 1871. Hereafter *Arians*.
[67] Nichols, *From Newman to Congar*, 28
[68] *Arians*, 55-6, cited in Nichols, 28-9.
[69] *Arians*, 41, cited in Nichols, 28.
[70] Nichols, 29.
[71] Nichols, 42-5.
[72] *Essay*, 4-6.
[73] *Essay*, 53.

development and elaboration, and that such development is to be expected. Newman is speaking of 'ideas' in general, but he sees the 'idea' of Christianity as, *par excellence*, an idea that will be 'multiform, prolific and ever resourceful.'[74]

Newman identifies five kinds of development as relevant to Christian doctrine, and cites an example of each kind – one which he believes to be uncontroversial – from the history of the church:

Political development occurs 'when society and its various classes are the subject matter of the ideas which are in operation.'[75] Newman's example of political development in the field of doctrine is the episcopate, as taught by St Ignatius of Antioch.[76]

Logical development[77] consists in the intellectual working out of the consequences of an idea – for example, the doctrine of the *Theotokos*.[78]

Historical development is '… the gradual formation of opinion concerning persons, facts and events.'[79] The example given here is the determination of the date of the birth of Christ.[80]

Ethical development substitutes 'what is congruous, desirable, pious, appropriate, generous, for strictly logical inference.'[81] Developments of doctrine into worship, as in the case of the Eucharist, are examples of this type.[82]

Metaphysical developments[83] seem to be seen by Newman as simply the analysis and precise formulation of the idea in question. This is the process by which the content of revelation comes to propositional expression in creeds and dogmatic definitions: Newman's example in the history of the church is the formulation of the Athanasian Creed.[84]

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[74] *Essay*, 56.
[75] *Essay*, 42.
[76] *Essay*, 54.
[77] *Essay,* 45.
[78] *Essay*, 54.
[79] *Essay*, 46.
[80] *Essay*, 54.
[81] *Essay*, 47.
[82] *Essay*, 54.
[83] *Essay*, 52
[84] *Essay*, 54.

Newman considers the process of doctrinal development as the natural outworking of the living 'idea' of Christianity within a living church. He understands divine revelation as occurring within human history, and the church as a human (though also divine) society and a historical reality. In such an understanding, development is to be expected – it is, in Newman's terms, antecedently probable – and it is reasonable, as Newman does, to illustrate the process of doctrinal development by analogy with the development of ideas in the secular world. As Lash has observed,[85] such an understanding of the church's life is uncontroversial in Catholic theology after Vatican II, but Newman was speaking a different theological language to his Catholic contemporaries. Nichols charts the differences between Newman and the Roman theologian Giovanni Perrone,[86] who rejected the idea of a real historical development of doctrine. The approach of Perrone, shaped by his neo-scholastic theological training, seems simply incommensurable with that of Newman.[87]

Newman goes further, in arguing for the antecedent probability that God will provide the church with an infallible authority, capable of discerning true and false developments of her doctrine.[88] For him, this follows as a corollary to his description of the process of development within the life of the church, but it is a departure from his earlier thought that reflects his own acceptance of the claims of Catholicism.

There remains the question of the criteria by which true and false developments are to be distinguished. As an Anglican, Newman held to the Canon of Vincent of Lerins: 'we hold that faith which has been believed everywhere, always, by all.' However, even while criticising Catholic doctrine on the basis of the Vincentian Canon, Newman had to acknowledge that the canon could not be applied in a 'mathematical' manner, but rather had to be used as a tool of discernment – seeking a consensus view across time and space to distinguish true from false developments of doctrine.[89] In the *Essay*, Newman sets out seven 'Tests' (in the 1845 edition) or 'Notes' (in 1878) of authentic development. These are summarised by Nichols as follows:

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[85] Lash, *Newman on Development*, 56.
[86] Nichols, *From Newman to Congar*, 59-62.
[87] Egan, *Newman, Lonergan and Doctrinal Development*, 44.
[88] *Essay*, Chapter 2, Section II, 76-98.
[89] Nichols, *From Newman to Congar*, 43-44.

1. Preservation of the original type: in effect, preserving the quality of the original impact of some known thing.

2. Continuity of known principles.

3. Power to assimilate alien matter to the original idea.

4. Logical connectedness.

5. Being anticipated early in a partial way here and there.

6. A conserving attitude to the past: taking steps to preserve the old idea in a new form.

7. Chronic vigour: i.e. lasting in a healthy state for a long time.[90]

It is important to recall that Newman's aim in the *Essay* is apologetic. He wishes to defend the legitimacy of the developments seen in the Roman Catholic church of his time. The Notes are, by implication, the criteria which he expects the church's infallible teaching authority to apply in discerning doctrinal development. Newman describes the Notes as 'instruments, rather than warrants, of right decisions,'[91] but he clearly believes that contemporary Catholic developments in doctrine can be justified in those terms. But can Newman's Notes be pushed further? Thiel wishes to do so, suggesting that:

> On the face of it, the notes provide a heuristic for distinguishing legitimate doctrinal development from its corruption or falsity. And yet, if one assumes with Newman that the Holy Spirit is the source of all genuine development, then the notes offer something like criteria for discerning the Spirit at work in the Church.[92]

In other words, the Notes could be applied not only apologetically, to justify the church's current teaching, but also constructively, as criteria for the discernment of authentic developments underway in the contemporary tradition.

2.5.2 Thiel on Newman: the question of historical contingency

In his *Senses of Tradition*, Thiel characterises Newman's account of development as an example of a 'noetic' model, which conceives the process of development of doctrine as analogous to the development of understanding in an individual human mind. The original faith, taught by Christ and handed on by the apostles, is seen, in Newman's understanding,

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[90] Nichols, *From Newman to Congar*, 51.
[91] *Essay*, 78.
[92] Thiel, *Senses of Tradition*, 168.

to come to greater clarity and precision in history, in the collective mind of the church.[93] For Thiel, if the process of development is seen to be truly historically conditioned, then its outcomes are contingent and hence could legitimately diverge in different times and places. Thiel's criticism of a 'noetic' model such as Newman's is that it is 'prospective:' it envisages 'a pristine past in which the truth is not yet subject to corruption,' and implicitly assumes a privileged viewpoint outside history, from which a particular development can be judged to be contained, or not, within the original pristine truth.[94] Such a model, Thiel believes, fails to do justice to the real historicity and contingency of the process of development. The assumption of a neutral, transhistorical viewpoint is a classic postfoundationalist charge against foundationalist thought. A 'retrospective' conception of tradition, Thiel claims, approaches the question more modestly: it assesses the process of development from a contemporary viewpoint, and seeks to identify the activity of the Holy Spirit within it.[95]

Behind this categorisation lies the larger question of continuity and change in the process of development. In his opening address to the Second Vatican Council, Pope John XXIII affirmed that:

> The substance of the ancient doctrine of the deposit of faith is one thing, and the way in which it is presented is another.[96]

As Thiel notes,[97] this distinction of substance and presentation, or form and content, was seized upon by influential 20th-century theologians as a way to explain how continuity can abide within historicity in the development of doctrine. It is also reflected, at least to some extent, in the pronouncements of Popes Paul VI and Francis, cited above.[98] However, Thiel believes such a formulation to be hermeneutically indefensible because it envisages a hypostatised 'content' of tradition transcending its historical expression – something

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[93] Thiel, *Senses of Tradition*, 67-71. As Egan notes, Newman conceives of the faith of the church as analogous to the faith of the individual believer – see Egan, *Newman, Lonergan and Doctrinal Development*, 43 and note 26 above.

[94] Thiel, *Senses of Tradition*, 80.

[95] Thiel, *Senses of Tradition*, 84.

[96] In W. Abbott SJ, ed., *The Documents of Vatican II* (America Press, New York, 1966), 715.

[97] Thiel, *Senses of Tradition*, 225, endnote 60. See also Guarino, '*Fides et Ratio*,' 695-698.

[98] Above, section 2.4.

unknown to experience and reflecting the 19th-century Christian Platonism by which Newman was influenced.[99]

2.5.3 Lash on Newman: an episodic idea of development

The subtitle of Nicholas Lash's *Newman on Development* is *The Search for an Explanation in History*. Lash, writing in 1975, believes that the Catholic church, in her official teaching, remains resistant to addressing the challenge posed by historical consciousness, and reluctant to acknowledge the historicity of Christian truth. Lash recognises the constitution *Dei Verbum* as a step forward, but notes that it fails to address the issue of criteriology.[100] Lash's reason for turning to Newman is that Newman is the first writer in the English language to seek to establish 'the *fact* of 'development' as an alternative to 'immutability', on the one hand, and 'corruption' on the other.'[101]

Lash recognises that it is anachronistic to seek a 'theory of development' in Newman's work. Newman's aim in the *Essay* is the apologetic one of demonstrating that the doctrines of the Roman Catholic church of his time are legitimate developments, and not (as Newman himself argued as an Anglican) corruptions of the original faith of the church. To the extent that Newman does have a 'theory' of development, it is one that he has to develop to account theologically for the visible differences between the church of the Fathers and the church of the nineteenth century.[102] It is 'an hypothesis to account for a difficulty.'[103]

Lash believes that, in fact, there are two views of the process of doctrinal development present in the *Essay*, though not always clearly distinguished. Each is founded on a conception of an original 'idea' of Christianity. One view, focused on doctrinal statements and propositions, sees the process of development of the idea as linear and cumulative – a gradual growth in understanding, through a process analogous to logical deduction.[104] This 'linear' view, Lash suggests, approximates to the accounts of doctrinal development which existed in Newman's time[105] – though it is doubtful whether Newman was familiar with such

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[99] Thiel, *Senses of Tradition*, 88. The distinction of form and content and its problems are discussed further below, section 10.2.
[100] Lash, *Newman on Development*, 1.
[101] Lash, *Newman on Development*, 56 (emphasis in original.)
[102] Lash, *Newman on Development*, 13.
[103] Newman, *Essay*, 30.
[104] Lash, *Newman on Development*, 57-8.
[105] Lash, *Newman on Development*, 58 and 172 endnote 16.

accounts, at least until after his reception into the Catholic church and his acquaintance with the Catholic theology of the time.[106] The other view of development which Lash detects in the *Essay* is an 'episodic' one, in which the same 'idea' is realised and expressed in the life and teaching of the church at a given point in her history. Lash believes that such an account does more justice to the contingent and historically conditioned nature of religious 'forms,' liturgical and institutional, as well as creedal.[107] It recognises that the history of doctrines is the history of the whole life of the church, and that:

> ...the truth or adequacy of doctrinal statements depends not only, or even primarily, on the extent to which they have been correctly argued to from previous statements, but also on the use to which they are put in the life, worship and witness of the church.[108]

Such an 'episodic' understanding of doctrinal development also allows for the necessarily inadequate nature of any particular expression of the church's faith at any given historical period.[109] Lash does not claim that these two 'theories of development' can be found, fully formed and clearly distinguished, in the *Essay*; rather, he sees the episodic view as an indication of the historical awareness which Newman brings to the question of doctrinal development, and which Lash regards as one of his main achievements in the *Essay*[110].

Lash observes that, according to Newman, the historian requires a 'view' to structure his/her examination of the evidence.[111] Such a view is arrived at, not by logical deduction or mathematical proof, but in a synthetic manner by the 'cumulation of probabilities.'[112] This approach is characteristic of Newman's thought, as developed particularly in his *Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*. As Lash notes, it would be anachronistic to describe Newman as an 'existentialist,'[113] but his epistemological approach is possibly more congenial to the postfoundationalist era than the style that characterises much of the theology of his time, which has been described as 'extrinsicist, atemporal and notional:'[114]

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[106] Thiel, *Senses of Tradition*, 67-8.
[107] Lash, *Newman on Development*, 59-60.
[108] Lash, 42.
[109] Lash, 59.
[110] Lash, 155.
[111] Lash, 33-38
[112] Lash, 35.
[113] Lash, 38.
[114] R. Latourelle, '*Dei Verbum* II' in *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, 218.

> Newman is less concerned with 'demonstration' or 'proof' than with coaxing the reader to 'see' the (ambiguous) evidence in the way in which he himself has come to see it.[115]

In relation to the role of the church's magisterium, Newman's ecclesiology is sufficiently sophisticated to avoid ascribing exclusive normative significance to the doctrinal decisions of magisterial authority – an extreme position to which some of his Catholic contemporaries come close.[116] Like Thiel, however, Lash identifies a 'Platonist' conception of the 'idea' of Christianity in the *Essay*[117] which is problematic from a hermeneutical point of view. He also points out the narrowness of the historical sources on which Newman draws in practice,[118] and his inability to recognise 'ecclesial reality' in any denomination other than the Roman Catholic church.[119] Nevertheless, on Lash's reading of the *Essay*, Newman's method, more than any specific conclusions, offers the possibility of a historically conscious and hermeneutically credible approach to the issue of development, and hence to wider questions of doctrinal pluralism. Gallagher suggests that Lonergan saw the possibilities in Newman's thought and appropriated elements of what he received.[120] Norris[121] traces in detail the affinities between Lonergan's method and the thought of Newman.

2.5.4 Newman's achievement in the *Essay*

In some respects, Newman's understanding of doctrinal development seems remarkably contemporary. He conceives of development as inevitable; as the fruit of the life and growth of the church; and as happening in a process of dialogue between believers, pastors, 'doctors' (theologians), and the church's teaching office as embodied in the college of bishops in communion with the successor of Peter. In relation to Thiel's concern that Newman's approach is a 'prospective' one that assumes a privileged, ahistorical viewpoint, the following passage from the *Essay* is striking:

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[115] Lash, *Newman on Development*, 106.

[116] Lash, 133; and see Nichols, *From Newman to Congar*, 38-39.

[117] Lash, *Newman on Development*, 51.

[118] Lash, 44-45.

[119] Lash, 15.

[120] See Michael Paul Gallagher SJ: 'Lonergan's Newman: Appropriated Affinities,' *Gregorianum*, 2004, Vol. 85, No. 4 (2004), 735-756. Gallagher argues that, while Newman is not cited frequently in Lonergan's later works, Lonergan 'assimilated and transformed' (740) what he inherited from Newman. The influence on Lonergan of Newman's thought on the development of doctrine is discussed at 753-754.

[121] Norris, *Newman and His Theological Method*.

> Considering that Christians, from the nature of the case, live under the bias of the doctrines, and in the very midst of the facts, and during the process of the controversies, which are to be the subject of criticism … it can hardly be maintained that in matter of fact a true development carries with it its own certainty even to the learned, or that history, past or present, is secure from the possibility of a variety of interpretations.[122]

Therefore, Newman believes, an infallible interpretative authority is needed by the church, and divine providence has established such an authority. Thiel would, of course, wish to critique both the nature and exercise of the church's teaching authority.

Lash gives Newman credit for his awareness in the *Essay* of the significance of the process of history, but believes that this 'central insight' is 'methodologically subordinated to the attempt to set up a comparison between primitive Christianity and the contemporary church.'[123] When considering the first Note, preservation of type, in Chapter VI of the *Essay*, Newman ends the chapter's three sections with a graphic description of, in turn, the church of the first three centuries, of the fourth-century Arian crisis, and of the fifth and sixth centuries, in each case drawing a parallel with the Roman Catholic church of his own time. Nichols regards these 'church-historical tableaux' as the real centre of gravity of the *Essay*, 'showing that the changes brought about by the Tridentine reformation are insubstantial compared with the overwhelming sameness between the earlier Christians and the modern Catholics."[124] The historical evidence for the authenticity of the church is not a simplistic claim of identity of doctrine, but a comparison of the entirety of the church's life, then and now. This reflects the 'episodic' view of the process of development which Lash identifies in the *Essay* (see previous section.) Before concluding this chapter I will consider a recent example of development in magisterial teaching that offers an example of such an episodic process.

2.5.4.1 'Episodic' development in action: the decree In Missa in Cena Domini

As an example of an 'episodic' understanding of doctrinal development – or at least, of the development of liturgical practice and the theological understanding that underpins it – it is interesting to consider the 2016 Commentary of the then Congregation for Divine

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[122] *Essay*, 76.
[123] Lash, *Newman on Development*, 54.
[124] Nichols, *From Newman to Congar*, 51.

Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments on its own decree *In Missa in Cena Domini*. The decree changed the rubrics of the Roman Missal so that the washing of the feet of members of the congregation at the Holy Thursday Mass of the Lord's Supper was no longer restricted to men.[125] The Commentary notes:

> Illuminated by the gospel of John the rite carries a double significance: an imitation of what Christ did in the Upper Room washing the feet of the Apostles and an expression of the self-gift signified by this gesture of service.[126]

The Commentary considers different manifestations of the rite found in the 7th, 12th, 13th and 17th centuries. It notes that the rite was 'applied differently in various dioceses and abbeys' and that 'local customs' were not excluded.[127] With the reform of Pius XII, the emphasis shifts from 'putting the exemplary value of what Jesus did into practice' to 'more explicitly an imitative sign, almost a sacred representation, that facilitates what Jesus did and had in mind on the first Holy Thursday.'[128] The following explanation is given for the change to allow the washing of the feet of members of the congregation other than men:

> The current change foresees that individuals may be chosen from amongst all the members of the people of God. The significance does not now relate so much to the exterior imitation of what Jesus has done, rather as to the meaning of what he has accomplished which has a universal importance, namely the giving of himself «to the end» for the salvation of the human race, his charity which embraces all people and which makes all people brothers and sisters by following his example.[129]

Such reasoning in a magisterial document seems to represent an application of the episodic understanding of development which Lash discerns in the thought of Newman. The same rite, derived from the witness of the New Testament, has been enacted in different ways at several points in the church's history and has been understood with different emphases in various historical situations. The rite is described as a moment of '…*anamnesis* of the "new commandment" heard in the gospel which is the life of every disciple of the Lord,'[130]

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[125] *In Missa in Cena Domini* and *Commentary Concerning the Decree* In Missa in Cena Domini. Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, 6th January 2016; both available at www.vatican.va (accessed 24/08/24)
[126] *Commentary Concerning the Decree* In Missa in Cena Domini.
[127] *Commentary.*
[128] *Commentary*.
[129] *Commentary*.
[130] *Commentary*.

while a legitimate diversity and development in its expression is upheld. The recommendation to pastors:

> …to choose a small group of persons who are representative of the entire people of God – lay, ordained ministers, married, single, religious, healthy, sick, children, young people and the elderly…[131]

…reflects an application of Vatican II's characterisation of the church as the People of God'[132] The truth to which the rite has historically witnessed is preserved, while at the same time the contemporary understanding that sees the equal dignity of every member of the Church and the representation of all members in the liturgy as normative principles is recognised. It is an example of the church's living tradition developing under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, as envisaged by *Dei Verbum*.[133]

2.5.4.2 Newman, development and pluralism

Lash and Nichols agree in interpreting Newman as saying that the church at every period of her history is animated by the same 'idea;' this idea is expressed differently at different points in the church's life, but her identity as the church of Christ is unchanged. Such a view allows the contemporary theologian, rather than assuming a privileged, ahistorical viewpoint, to engage with earlier periods in the church's history on equal terms and with a full consciousness of his/her own historically conditioned perspective. The appropriate criteria for judging authentic development of doctrine are those which allow the discernment of the action of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church, in all the forms in which that life is incarnated. Such criteria would include, but not be limited to, Newman's seven Notes. This approach to the question of doctrinal development seems to have the potential of, at least, addressing seriously the postfoundationalist critique, in a way that a strictly linear and logical account could not.

Both Lash and Thiel discern Newman's conception of the 'idea' of Christianity as influenced by the Neoplatonism of his time. As we have seen, such a conception persists in the form/content distinction adopted by John XXIII and maintained by post-Vatican II Catholic theologians (and in some magisterial pronouncements), but it is problematic from a

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[131] *Commentary*.
[132] *Lumen Gentium*, chapter II.
[133] *DV* §8.

contemporary hermeneutical perspective. However, an episodic view of doctrinal development does not necessarily have to be tied to a Neoplatonist conception of the 'idea' of Christianity. Ultimately, the 'Idea' of Christianity is Jesus Christ,[134] and it seems at least plausible to suggest that the episodic view of development can be underpinned by a fully developed understanding of the personalist model of revelation articulated by Vatican II.

Among the resources that Newman brings to the question of doctrinal pluralism are: a broader and richer understanding of 'doctrine' or 'tradition' as encompassing the whole of the church's life, and not simply creeds and dogmatic definitions; an awareness of the historically and sociologically conditioned nature of the life of the church; a recognition of the fact of doctrinal development; an account of the dialectical nature of the process of development, involving the pastoral magisterium, the theologians and the People of God; in his 'Notes,' a signpost towards appropriate criteria for discerning authentic development; and an epistemological approach to doctrine that seems at least potentially capable of responding to postfoundationalist concerns. The question remains as to whether Newman's approach to development can allow for a real historical contingency in the process, for which both Lash and Thiel would wish to argue. The possibility of a true pluralism of doctrine depends on the recognition of such contingency. As already noted and as discussed further below,[135] the magisterial distinction of form and content in doctrine is also problematic in this context.

2.6 Conclusion: A Catholic response to nonfoundationalism and postfoundationalism

The church's understanding of tradition developed significantly between Vatican I and Vatican II, not least under the influence of Newman, whose ideas are present, though not explicitly acknowledged, in *Dei Verbum*. However, in this process of development, certain principles remained unchallenged. The church has continued to hold that belief in God is rational; that dogmatic formulae express abiding truths; that doctrinal statements can be placed in a hierarchy of authority which, in pre-Vatican II theology, was indicated by the 'theological note' attached to a given statement; that development occurs and diversity exists within an overall unity of belief. The critique of nonfoundationalism and postfoundationalism

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[134] *Dei Verbum* §2.
[135] Section 7.6.1 below.

calls into question the philosophical structure within which each of these principles is formulated. As I have outlined above, Plantinga, Wolterstorff and Lindbeck offer different responses to this challenge: however, each is, in different ways, problematic from a Catholic perspective. I hope, by a detailed examination of Lonergan's approach to these questions, to identify a response which addresses satisfactorily the postfoundationalist challenge while remaining true to Catholic tradition. Although the approach of these writers differs significantly from one another, it is striking that, working within Reformed traditions, each focuses primarily on the experience and the act of faith of the individual believer. Newman, on the other hand, offers an account of the believer's act of faith which combines psychological depth with an awareness of the ecclesial nature of such an act. While Lonergan bases his theological method on his account of the individual's cognitional structure and process, he is always aware of the social and ecclesial dimension of such processes. The individual disciple is called to conversion: but so is a society, a culture and, at least by implication, the church.[136] This distinctively Catholic focus on the ecclesial dimension of faith is an important element in a postfoundationalist reading of Lonergan's work and will be explored in the following chapters.

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[136] *Method*, chapter 10.

3 *Vetera novis augere et perficere*: Lonergan's *Gratia Operans* and *Grace and Freedom*

3.1 Introduction

In the Epilogue to *Insight*, Lonergan remarks:

> …my detailed investigations into the thought of Aquinas on *gratia operans* and *verbum* have been followed by the present essay in aid of a personal appropriation of one's own rational self-consciousness.[1]

Gratia Operans,[2] Lonergan's doctoral dissertation, together with *Verbum* and *Insight*, form a single project, guided by the maxim of Pope Leo XIII: *vetera novis augere et perficere*.[3] In *Gratia Operans* and in *Verbum*, Lonergan was seeking to determine 'what the *vetera* really were'[4] – recovering the authentic thought of St Thomas Aquinas from the obscurity of decadent neoscholasticism. In *Insight*, after having spent years 'reaching up to the mind of Aquinas'[5] he was ready to import the 'compelling genius' of St Thomas to address contemporary problems.[6] Questions of knowing and of theological method come to the fore throughout. *Gratia Operans* is described as a study of 'speculative development;' Lonergan sets up a method by which he believes the historical data can be dealt with in an objective manner, so as to determine the thought of Aquinas on the issue in question. In *Verbum*, Lonergan's aim is to guide the reader in reaching an understanding of metaphysics by an introspective appropriation of one's own psychology – specifically the psychology of knowing – in order to grasp the psychological analogy of the Trinity. In *Insight* the results of the

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[1] *Insight*, 769

[2] In *GF*, Volume 1 of the *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, the later published version of the work, *Grace and Freedom: Operative grace in the thought of St Thomas Aquinas*, forms Part One of the volume, while the original doctoral dissertation, Gratia Operans: *A study of the speculative development in the writings of St Thomas Aquin*, is Part Two.

[3] 'To strengthen and complete the old by means of the new.' Pope Leo XIII, Encyclical Letter Aeterni *Patris* (1879), § 24. Available at https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_04081879_aeterni-patris.html [Accessed 16/09/24]

[4] *Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas*. Volume 2 in the *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, eds. Frederick E Crowe and Robert M Doran, (University of Toronto Press, 1997.) (hereafter *Verbum*), 227.

[5] *Insight*, 769.

[6] *Insight*, 770.

historical investigations are generalised to provide a method for theology or, Lonergan believes, for research in any subject.

An examination of these works reveals the assumptions that underpin Lonergan's work at this stage in his development. The task of theology is to order and systematise the revealed truths of Scripture and Tradition within a metaphysical structure which is provided by Aquinas. Confusion arises when the thought of Aquinas is misunderstood, and such confusion is resolved by a dialectical process of exposing the philosophical misunderstanding that is present. In speculative theology there can be both decline and development, but in dogma there is only orderly progress towards ever greater understanding and clarity. Nevertheless I will argue that even in these early works Lonergan should not be labelled as a classical foundationalist, primarily because of the authentically Thomist character of his thought. He learns from Aquinas the sense of God as mystery and of theology as the work of understanding and ordering the mysteries which are revealed by God and accepted in faith. He never falls into the classical foundationalist error of making human reason the judge of revealed truth. The theory of knowledge that he develops through his first two major works and elaborates in *Insight* is flexible enough to accommodate his move, in *Method*, to an empirical notion of culture and a critical embrace of development and pluralism.

In this chapter I consider Lonergan's doctoral dissertation, *Gratia Operans*, and the version later published as *Grace and Freedom*. It is a historical study of the development of the thought of Aquinas on a specific issue, but Lonergan is also concerned to draw out the implications of such an exercise for theological method and cognitional theory.

3.2 *Gratia Operans* and *Grace and Freedom*

Lonergan arrived in Rome in 1938, to begin doctoral studies in theology at the Gregorian University. Crowe recounts[7] how Lonergan had encountered the thought of Aquinas from 1933 onwards, but was not yet a disciple. Nor did he arrive in Rome with a clear idea of a theme for his doctoral dissertation. The topic suggested by his supervisor, Charles Boyer SJ, was a question on the development of Thomas's thought on grace. The title of the thesis as ultimately submitted was, '*Gratia Operans*: A Study of the Speculative Development

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[7] Frederick E Crowe SJ, *Lonergan*, in 'Outstanding Christian Thinkers Series,' (Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1992) (hereafter *Lonergan*), 39-40.

in the Writings of St Thomas Aquinas.'[8] The dissertation was subsequently published, condensed and abbreviated, in four articles in *Theological Studies* (1941-42), and in 1971 these articles were published in book form as *Grace and Freedom: Operative Grace in the Thought of St Thomas Aquinas*.[9] The dissertation *Gratia Operans* and the book *Grace and Freedom* have now been published together in the series *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*.

3.2.1 Constructing a historical method

In his Preface to the doctoral thesis, Lonergan states:

> By an analysis of the idea of speculative development, the present work systematises the movement in the theory of grace from St Augustine to St Thomas…[10]

The substantive theological issue with which the thesis is concerned is that of operative grace, but it is Lonergan's 'analysis of the idea of speculative development' which is of interest for our purposes. In his Introduction, Lonergan makes it clear that his project is a historical one; he wishes to establish what Aquinas said on the subject. He believes that he can do so in a way that is theologically objective, setting aside the presuppositions with which previous writers have approached Aquinas (specifically, the two Scholastic schools of Molinists and Bannezians[11]), and:

> …constructing an a priori scheme that is capable of synthesizing any possible set of historical data irrespective of their place and time, just as the science of mathematics constructs a generic scheme capable of synthesizing any possible set of quantitative phenomena.[12]

The next paragraph in the Introduction is striking:

> The procedure provides a true middle course. On the one hand, it does not deny, as does positivism, the exigence of the human mind for some scheme or matrix within which data are assembled and given their initial correlation. On the other hand, it does not provide a scheme or matrix that prejudices the objectivity of the inquiry. The quantitative sciences are objective simply because they are given by mathematics an a priori scheme of such generality that there can be no tendency

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[8] See note 2 above.

[9] *Grace and Freedom: Operative Grace in the Thought of St Thomas Aquinas*, ed. J Patout Burns (Darton, Longman & Todd, London and Herder and Herder, New York, 1971.) Now Part One of *GF*, as per note 2. See *GF*, xvii.

[10] *GF*, 153.

[11] *GF*, 155.

[12] *GF*, 156.

to do violence to the data for the sake of maintaining the scheme. But the same benefit is obtained for the history of speculative theology by an analysis of the idea of its development, for the analysis does yield a general scheme but it does so, not from a consideration of particular historical facts, but solely from a consideration of the nature of human speculation on a given subject.[13]

Themes that will be prominent in Lonergan's later thought are already apparent here. He rejects the positivist view that knowledge consists purely in the raw data of experience, affirming instead that data can be understood only within a 'scheme or matrix.' He believes that a suitable scheme will allow objective conclusions to be drawn from historical data, in a manner analogous to the procedures of the quantitative sciences, though only analogous because of the different nature of the subject matter; he acknowledges a couple of paragraphs later that theology is 'a science that does not proceed by demonstration.'[14] Nevertheless his aim to construct 'an a priori scheme that is capable of synthesizing any possible set of historical data'[15] is an ambitious one. The scheme is derived from 'a consideration of the nature of human speculation,' or:

It is possible to construct a priori a general scheme of the historical process because the human mind is always the human mind.[16]

This is the principle that will underpin Lonergan's whole theological project. On the basis of his study of the human mind and human cognition in *Insight*, he will, in *Method*, construct an *a priori* and general scheme for theology, including historical study as one of his functional specialties. As he says in *Method*:

The precise nature of historical inquiry and the precise nature of historical investigation are matters of not a little obscurity… [This] is mainly because historical knowledge is an instance of knowledge, and few people are in possession of a satisfactory cognitional theory.[17]

Lonergan made it his life's work to overcome the obscurity by providing a satisfactory cognitional theory. Crowe describes the doctoral thesis as Lonergan's 'apprenticeship' to Aquinas and the means by which he entered into Aquinas' way of thinking and writing.[18]

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[13] *GF*, 157.

[14] *GF*, 157.

[15] *GF*, 156.

[16] *GF*, 157. Cf Newman, *Grammar of Assent*, 275: '…the laws of the mind are the expression, not of mere constituted order, but of [God's] will.'

[17] *Method*, 164.

[18] Crowe, *Lonergan*, 42-48.

3.2.2 Speculation and dogma

In *Gratia Operans*, Lonergan distinguishes speculation and dogma in a way that shows how much, at this stage, he is a theologian shaped by the teaching of Vatican I:

> Dogmatic truths are one thing; their speculative correlation and unification is quite another… The two are really distinct, and this work presupposes that distinction.[19]

Therefore, Lonergan affirms, 'speculative development and dogmatic development are quite different,' and there can be speculative decline, but not dogmatic decline.[20] What Lonergan here describes as the 'speculative correlation and unification' of dogmatic truths he will later refer to as the 'systematic way' in relation to trinitarian theology[21] and in *Method* it becomes the functional specialty of systematics.[22]

The first substantive chapter of *Gratia Operans* is entitled 'The Form of the Development.' Lonergan identifies his task as follows:

> …to determine scientifically the unity and coherence of a vast body of historical data...What is required is a point of vantage outside the temporal dialectic; a matrix or system of thought that at once is as pertinent and as indifferent to historical events as is the science of mathematics to quantitative phenomena.[23]

Lonergan's reference to 'a point of vantage outside the temporal dialectic' may lead us to wonder if he is seeking a foundationalist 'view from nowhere.' His suggestion that an *a priori* and general scheme can be derived for speculative theology comparable to that provided for the natural sciences by mathematics[24] could seem to point in the same direction. However, the foundation of Lonergan's scheme is not allegedly incorrigible human knowledge, but the revealed truths of faith. The 'matrix or system of thought' that he prescribes is a structure within which the theologian can authentically analyse the data of revelation and of history; not a 'view from nowhere' but an authentic 'view from somewhere.'

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[19] *GF*, 160; cf. Vatican I, *DF*, chapter 4: 'And, indeed, reason illustrated by faith, when it zealously, piously, and soberly seeks, attains with the help of God some understanding of the mysteries, and that a most profitable one, not only from the analogy of those things which it knows naturally, but also from the connection of the mysteries among themselves and with the last end of man.'
[20] *GF*, 160.
[21] *TTG: Systematics*, 63; see chapter 4, below.
[22] 'Systematics,' *Method*, chapter 13, 310-326.
[23] *GF*, 162.
[24] *GF*, 157.

Lonergan begins his attempt to construct such a system by giving a definition of speculative theology:

> It is the work of the human intellect; but what it works upon is the Word of God.[25]

> It is not something by itself but the intelligible arrangement of something else. It is not systematic theology but the system in systematic theology.[26]

Lonergan goes on to describe the method of speculative theology. It is scientific; like the natural sciences, it has its theorems and its technical terminology.[27] It is dialectical; the theologian sets out apparently incompatible truths of faith, and proceeds to correlate and unify them, while always recognising that theology has to do with mysteries that are beyond complete explanation by the human intellect.[28] It derives its technique from philosophy – *philosophia ancilla theologiae.*[29] Because the supernatural is known by analogy with the natural, there is an analogy between the field of philosophy and that of theology, and therefore 'philosophic analysis reveals distinctions and relations which may be transposed in some fashion into theological theorems.'[30]

The move from the initial to the final dialectical position is brought about by philosophical development, and by the development and clarification of the theologian's theorems.[31] Lonergan is clear as to the crucial role played by philosophy in the advance of theological understanding:

> A distinction has to be drawn between the endless variety of philosophic schools that succeed one another in ever growing confusion and, on the other hand, the development of the philosophy that is the *philosophia perennis*.

> Philosophy as *philosophia perennis* is man's apprehension of the eternal and immutable.[32]

The influence of *Dei Filius* and of Leo XIII's encyclical *Aeterni Patris* on Lonergan's understanding of theological process is apparent here. Nine years after Vatican I, Leo XIII

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[25] *GF*, 163.

[26] *GF*, 163.

[27] *GF*, 164-6.

[28] *GF*, 166.

[29] 'Philosophy is the handmaid of theology.' *GF*, 167. The axiom is attributed to St Peter Damian, though often cited by Aquinas. See J Maritain, *An Essay on Christian Philosophy*, chapter IV, available at https://www3.nd.edu/~maritain//jmc/etext/aeocp15.htm [accessed 07.09.24.]

[30] *GF*, 167.

[31] *GF*, 172-181.

[32] *GF*, 172.

called for a revival of Scholastic philosophy according to the mind of Thomas Aquinas and affirmed that the truths attained by human reason cannot contradict the truths of revelation known by faith.[33] The Pope criticised:

> …certain Catholic philosophers, who, throwing aside the patrimony of ancient wisdom, chose rather to build up a new edifice than to strengthen and complete the old by aid of the new [*vetera novis augere et perficere*]…[34]

Leo XIII wished to establish Scholastic philosophy as the system that 'should always and everywhere remain'[35] in a privileged place within Catholic thought (though the encyclical does not use the term *philosophia perennis*.) The maxim *vetera novis augere et perficere* was programmatic for Lonergan in *Grace and Freedom*,[36] in *Verbum*[37] and in *Insight*.[38] As Tracy remarks:

> This "Leonine adage" …is an important hermeneutical principle for recognizing the continuity between Lonergan's earlier work (on the *vetera* of the Catholic theological tradition, more specifically on St Thomas Aquinas) and his later work (on the *nova* of the modern and contemporary periods, i.e. from the critical work of *Insight* on.)[39]

3.2.3 *Philosophia perennis* or grand narrative?

The substantive theological issue that Lonergan intends to address in the doctoral dissertation is that of *gratia operans* or operative grace – the necessity of grace and the existence of human free will – as treated by St Thomas. He illustrates his theory of speculative development by sketching the prior development of the problem from Augustine to Aquinas, before beginning his detailed examination of the thought of St Thomas.[40] Though he describes his project as a historical one, Lonergan is also interested in analysing the theological questions with which St Thomas and his predecessors are grappling, both in themselves and as an example of the way in which speculative theology makes progress. For instance, in the

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[33] Pope Leo XIII, Encyclical Letter Aeterni *Patris.* (1879)
[34] *Aeterni Patris*, § 24.
[35] *Aeterni Patris*, § 24.
[36] David Tracy, *The Achievement of Bernard Lonergan*, (Herder and Herder, New York, 1970) (hereafter *Achievement*), 22, and Lonergan, *Insight*, 769.
[37] *Verbum*, 222 and 226.
[38] *Insight*, 768-770.
[39] Tracy, *Achievement*, 22
[40] *GF*, 181-191.

dissertation and also in *Grace and Freedom*, he examines the emergence of a 'scientific theorem' of the supernatural.[41] Without such a scientific theorem, Lonergan asserts, 'there can be no satisfactory definition of grace.'[42] The solution was arrived at by Philip the Chancellor in the 13th century; it consisted, not in the addition of new data, but in the 'creation of a mental perspective;' the formulation of a theorem that allowed theologians to account for the data.[43] The task of speculative theology is to get the concepts and categories clear, in order to correlate and unify revealed truths. Augustine, as Lonergan characterises him, marshalled the texts of Scripture to respond to the controversies of his day;[44] the task of Aquinas is different:

> …to the interpretation of Augustinian texts, St Thomas brings a technique of metaphysical analysis that is adapted and evolved to embrace the whole range of scriptural teaching and Catholic doctrine.[45]

Metaphysical analysis of the truths of Scripture and dogma, structured by the *philosophia perennis*; this is how Lonergan sees the task of speculative theology. Other examples can be found in both the doctoral dissertation and the book. For example, Lonergan offers a theological solution to the problem of contingence[46] and to reconciling the fact of sin with divine goodness, omniscience and omnipotence.[47] In each case, speculative theology solves its problems by logically analysing the truths of revelation within the structure of Aristotelian metaphysics, and the solution to the problem is found in a correct reading of Aquinas. Although Lonergan will later adopt an empirical notion of culture, his thought will continue to be fundamentally shaped by his study of Aquinas, and this, I argue, is what he brings to the hermeneutics of doctrine.

Crowe sees Lonergan's study of grace in Aquinas as highly significant, both for an understanding of the development of Lonergan's own thought, and as a contribution to wider theological understanding.[48] Crowe identifies Lonergan's account of Thomist psychology as

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[41] *GF*, 14-20; and see *GF*, 176.
[42] *GF*, 15.
[43] *GF*, 16.
[44] *GF*, 4-7.
[45] *GF*, 142.
[46] *GF*, 104 and 346.
[47] *GF*, 330-333; cf. *Summa theologiae*, 1, q. 19. a. 9.
[48] Crowe, *Lonergan*, 43.

an important theme which will also loom large in *Verbum* and *De Deo Trino*; and in *Insight* he will guide the reader in psychological introspection after the example of Aquinas. Crowe adds:

> There is the notion that joins divine transcendence and human activity, the elusive and fascinating idea of universal instrumentality, the link between the Hebrew sense of God at work in all events, and the Greek philosophy of forms and forces at work in nature.[49]

In *De Deo Trino* Lonergan will speak of theology moving from the 'historical Hebraic particularity' of revelation to 'generally known and well-defined reasons.'[50] Again he assumes the universal validity of a philosophically structured interpretation of the data of revelation, an assumption which postfoundationalist thought will question.

Crowe's comments on Lonergan's theological style and approach, as seen in *Gratia Operans*, are equally interesting. The doctrine of divine grace, and the solution that it provided to the theological problem of grace and freedom had, Crowe says, 'taken possession' of Lonergan.[51] His thought at this stage was shaped and structured by Thomist metaphysics and Thomist psychology. The metaphysics 'gave solidity' to his thought, and the experiential side 'brings the metaphysics to life.[52]' Crowe adds:

> Though he will later make metaphysics derivative, that is, give it a critical foundation in cognitional theory, he will not discard it: it retains its function 30 years later in his *Method in Theology*.[53]

Crowe believes that the real value of Lonergan's doctoral dissertation lies in the methodological direction that it gave to his thought: his discovery of 'the way Aquinas worked and questioned and thought and understood and thought again and judged and wrote.'[54]

Crowe's view is supported by Lonergan's own words in *Insight*:

> After spending years reaching up to the mind of Aquinas, I came to a twofold conclusion. On the one hand, that reaching had changed me profoundly. On the other hand, that change was the essential benefit.[55]

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[49] Crowe, 43.

[50] *TTG: Systematics*, 63. See section 6.4 below.

[51] Crowe, *Lonergan*, 43.

[52] Crowe, *Lonergan*, 44.

[54] Crowe, *Lonergan*, 44. Crowe references *Method* 343 [317 in volume 14 of the *Collected Works*], where Lonergan affirms that 'The point to making metaphysical terms and relations not basic but derived is that a critical metaphysics results.'

[54] Crowe, *Lonergan*, 47.

[55] *Insight*, 769.

It is indeed striking that, in his doctoral dissertation, Lonergan's thought is already taking a shape that will remain consistent for the next quarter of a century. His concern with theological method and his belief that an objectively valid method can be derived from examination of the structure of the human mind; his clear distinction between, on the one hand, the revealed data that are obtained from dogmatic sources and, on the other, speculative theology which is the fruit of the investigation of such data by the human intellect; the importance of metaphysics in giving foundation and structure to speculative theology and the necessity therefore of a correct metaphysics; his understanding of the theologian's task as defined by Vatican I and Leo XIII; all of these will remain as pillars of the theological edifice that Lonergan is constructing, at least as far as the publication of *De Deo Trino* in the early 1960s. The development of his thought in these years will be driven primarily by the elaboration of his theory of human cognition.

Crowe, however, does not examine – perhaps because he shares it – the world view that underpins Lonergan's thought at an even more fundamental level. Thomist metaphysics, at this stage, is for Lonergan the normative and unquestioned structure within which theology operates. The *philosophia perennis* is 'man's apprehension of the eternal and immutable'[56] in contrast to 'the endless variety of philosophic schools'[57] and the 'febrile modern mind demanding perpetual change.'[58] Lonergan's account of the development of the speculative theological understanding of grace, from Augustine to Aquinas, and the subsequent development of Aquinas' own thought, is an account of the gradual application of the concepts and language of Thomist metaphysics to the data of revelation, and of their clarification and rendering precise by means of dialectic. The contemporary reader, while admiring the order and beauty of the structure, the elegance of the concepts and the precision of the language, will wonder whether, in the operation of such a theological method, the *philosophia perennis* is functioning as a grand narrative and has become normative in itself. If so, it is subject to the postmodern critique of all such grand narratives; that it fails to allow for the provisional and historically conditioned nature of *any* expression of Christian faith. Lonergan's account of the development of speculative theology in *Grace and Freedom* is, in Thiel's terms, a noetic and prospective one, in which, over time, the

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[56] *GF*, 172.
[57] *GF*, 172.
[58] *GF*, 173.

revealed truths of Christian faith gradually come to be more fully understood and precisely expressed:

> Like an idea that possesses an undefined givenness in mental experience from its first inception and then grows slowly in its definition and clarity with the passing of time, the development of doctrine [in the noetic model of development] brings to conceptual and expressive completion what was present, or at least latent, within the original givenness of the earliest faith of the Church.[59]

If speculative theology is not developing in this fashion, then for Lonergan we are witnessing 'speculative decline, as in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.'[60] There seems no allowance, at this stage in Lonergan's thought, for a legitimate pluralism of expression. And yet Crowe affirms that '…the greatest single benefit Lonergan derived from his encounter with Thomas [is] his sense of God as mystery.'[61] Lonergan never forgot the lesson he learned from Thomas; that theology's understanding of divine mysteries and its conceptual expression of them is always analogical and limited and that we can only hope to '[grasp] properly *quid sit Deus* in the beatific vision.'[62] The *philosophia perennis* is not a grand narrative but rather a framework for understanding and systematising the truths of faith.

3.3 Conclusion

Lonergan concludes *Grace and Freedom* with the hope that he has 'thrown some light on the principles, the method, and the doctrine of the *Communis Doctor*.'[63] He has conducted a close exposition of the thought of Aquinas on a specific theological issue but he is equally interested in questions of theological method; in this instance, a method appropriate to the analysis of the relevant historical data. His immersion in the thought of Aquinas would lead him to make it the paradigm for his own theological method. Along with Aquinas, the determinants of Lonergan's understanding of the task of theology at this stage are the teaching of Vatican I and the maxim *vetera novis augere et perficere* of Leo XIII. I have argued that, while Lonergan is trying to establish a theological method that is objectively valid and universally applicable, he should not be read as a classical foundationalist. Rather, following

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[59] Thiel, *Senses of Tradition*, 69. See chapter 1.
[60] *GF*, 160.
[61] Crowe, *Lonergan*, 48; and see *Verbum*, 215.
[62] *Verbum*, 215; *Summa theologiae*, 1, q. 12, a. 1 c.; 1-2, q. 3, a. 8 c.
[63] *GF*, 149.

Aquinas, his method is founded on revealed truths accepted in faith and structured by the appropriation of the process of human knowing.

The following chapter will consider the next stage of Lonergan's development of his method, in *Verbum.*

4 *Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas*

4.1 Introduction

The work that became *Verbum* was first published as five articles in *Theological Studies* between 1946 and 1949.[1] It is presented as a historical, philosophical and theological investigation into the concept of *verbum* in the writings of Aquinas. The *verbum* with which Lonergan is concerned is the interior word which he identifies as an essential element in Aquinas' account of human cognition.[2] Lonergan's interest in Aquinas' psychology is twofold. First, he wishes to recover an authentic understanding of Thomas' account, in the face of what he believes to be misinterpretation of his writing by contemporary Catholic theologians, in order to help the reader understand the process of cognition. Secondly, he wishes to retrieve and advance the psychological analogy for understanding trinitarian processions and relations, which originated with Augustine and was developed by Aquinas.[3] For Lonergan's own thought, the work has foundational significance. In *Insight*, he would elaborate his own cognitional theory, following the same method which he discerns in Aquinas – inviting the reader to advert to his/her own inner experience in order to come to an understanding of what knowledge is. Lonergan describes *Verbum* as the 'parallel historical investigation' to *Insight*.[4] And in *De Deo Trino*, he would develop the psychological analogy of the Trinity in the light of the cognitional theory set out in *Insight*. In each of those later works, Lonergan was building on foundations that he had laid down in *Verbum* and updating the thought of Aquinas for the 20th century.

The five journal articles become the five chapters of the book. The first two, Lonergan says, are 'concerned with the core of psychological fact.'[5] The third chapter attempts to clarify the metaphysical terminology and concepts which are at work in Thomas' psychology, while the fourth deals with what Lonergan terms 'matters between metaphysics and psychology.'[6]

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[2] Chapter 1: *Theological Studies* VII (1946), 349-92; Chapter 2: VIII (1947), 35-79; Chapter 3: VIII (1947), 404-44; Chapter 4: X (1949), 3-40; Chapter V: X (1949), 359-93.

[2] *Verbum*, 3.

[3] *Verbum*, 10-11.

[4] *Insight*, 9.

[5] *Verbum*, 10.

[6] *Verbum*, 10.

The final chapter is entitled *Imago Dei*; for Lonergan, Aquinas' thought on *verbum* 'was, in the main, a statement for his technically minded age of the psychological analogy of the trinitarian processions.'[7] Lonergan is leading his reader from psychology through metaphysics to trinitarian theology.

4.2 The 'core of psychological fact'

Lonergan believes that one can come to a proper understanding of what it is to know only by an appropriation of one's own process of knowing – by reflective introspection. In *Verbum*, he claims that such introspection is the method both of Augustine and Aquinas – and of Aristotle, too:

> Moreover, for Augustine, the mind's self-knowledge was basic; it was the rock of certitude which shattered Academic doubt; it provided the ground from which one could argue to the validity both of the senses of one's own body and, with the mediation of testimony, of the senses of the bodies of others.[8]

> As we shall see, Aquinas explicitly appealed to inner experience and, I submit, Aristotle's account of intelligence, of insight into phantasm, and of the fact that intellect knows itself, not by a *species* of itself, but by a *species* of its object, has too uncanny an accuracy to be possible without the greatest introspective skill.[9]

Lonergan's aim in *Verbum* is to guide the reader in gaining, by introspection, an understanding of the Thomist[10] theory of rational consciousness, in order to verify that such an understanding provides a sound basis for a psychological analogy of the processions in the Trinity. He states his thesis as follows:

> …that we must begin by grasping the nature of the act of understanding, that thence we shall come to a grasp of the nature of inner words, their relation to language, and their role in our knowledge of reality.[11]

To elucidate the nature of the act of understanding as Thomas sees it, Lonergan draws together texts on the subject from various different works – as he puts it, examining 'a

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[7] *Verbum*, 11.
[8] *Verbum*, 9.
[9] *Verbum*, 5.
[10] Lonergan employs the distinction whereby 'Thomist' means 'of St Thomas' and 'Thomistic' means 'of his school' – see *Verbum*, 153, note 5.
[11] *Verbum*, 25.

fragment of the complicated evidence on the thought of Aquinas.'[12] In Aquinas' account, as Lonergan reads him, there are two kinds of understanding; direct understanding, which leads to definition, and reflective understanding, leading to judgment.[13] Lonergan is concerned first with the former. The process moves from sense through understanding to essential definition.[14] The action of a sensible object on our senses produces a phantasm. Phantasm is the object of intellect;[15] the phantasm is illuminated by the light of agent intellect:

> In a word, one cannot understand without understanding something; and the something understood, the something whose intelligibility is actuated, is in the phantasm.[16]

> …human understanding, though it has its object in the phantasm and knows it in the phantasm, yet is not content with an object in this state. It pivots on itself to produce for itself another object which is the inner word as *ratio, intentio, definition, quod quid est*. And this pivoting and production… is an operation of rational consciousness.[17]

The inner word or *verbum* is a product of the act of understanding;[18] understanding and inner word are simultaneous, because the former is the ground and cause of the latter.[19] When understanding abstracts from all particulars and sensible qualities it can arrive at 'metaphysical theorems [that] are valid independently of any sensible matter of fact and of any condition of imagination.'[20]

When Lonergan speaks of grasping the 'role [of inner words] in our knowledge of reality,'[21] he is describing the fundamental nature of his project in *Verbum*, and subsequently, in *Insight*; to reach an understanding of metaphysics by an introspective appropriation of our own psychology, specifically the psychology of knowing, in order that such a metaphysics can provide a framework for theological method. The concept of *ens* – being – is at the heart of metaphysics, and for Lonergan, it has its origin in the act of understanding:

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[12] *Verbum*, 59.
[13] *Verbum*, 59.
[14] *Verbum*, 38.
[15] *Verbum*, 41.
[16] *Verbum*, 43.
[17] *Verbum*, 47-48.
[18] *Verbum*, 50.
[19] *Verbum*, 51.
[20] *Verbum*, 55.
[21] *Verbum*, 25.

Intelligibility is the ground of possibility, and possibility is the possibility of being; equally, unintelligibility is the ground of impossibility, and impossibility means impossibility of being.[22]

Experience 'is the condition of the transition from the affirmation of the possibility to the affirmation of the actuality of being;'[23] that which is intelligible can possibly exist, but only experience can tell us that it does in fact exist.

Lonergan concludes:

In brief, we may not claim to have investigated the Thomist concept of being; but at least it is not plausible that the concept of being has to be ascribed to some metaphysical mechanism and must lie outside the field of introspective and analytic psychology.[24]

This contention that the concept of being is to be understood through introspective psychology will be a crucial principle of Lonergan's thought. In *Verbum*, he is following the investigation in the thought of Aquinas; in *Insight*, he will carry out the process himself, transposing the Thomist system in the light of the discoveries of modern science.

In the second chapter of *Verbum*, Lonergan turns his attention to the second type of inner word; judgement.

…in the present chapter the contention will be that the *intelligere* from which the judgment proceeds is a reflective and critical act of understanding not unlike the act of Newman's illative sense.[25]

…while the direct act of understanding generates in definition the expression of the intelligibility of a phantasm, the reflective act generates in judgment the expression of a consciously possessed truth through which reality is both known and known to be known.[26]

Truth is the correspondence between mental and real synthesis, in a statement such as 'Socrates is a man,' and knowledge of truth is knowledge of such a correspondence.[27] This chapter includes important indicators of Lonergan's thought at this stage of his work. He asserts that '…concepts remain eternally and immutably distinct;' later, he would develop an understanding of the historically conditioned nature of concepts as they exist in the human

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[22] *Verbum*, 57.
[23] *Verbum*, 57.
[24] *Verbum*, 59.
[25] *Verbum*, 60. See Newman, *Grammar*, Chapter 9, 'The Illative Sense,' 270-299.
[26] *Verbum*, 61.
[27] *Verbum*, 63.

mind.[28] 'The specific drive of our nature is to understand, and indeed to understand everything…'[29] a drive that will only be satisfied when we enjoy the beatific vision – Lonergan is describing Thomas' position, but the 'unrestricted desire to know' is a central pillar of his own thought, particularly in *Insight*.[30]

At this point in his account, Lonergan gives an interpretation of Aquinas' account of human knowing that could sound classically foundationalist:

> There are truths that naturally are known; they form the touchstones of other truth; and judging is a matter of reducing other issues to the naturally known first principles.[31]

Lonergan is referring here to a question in the *Summa Theologiae* that deals with reason and understanding.[32] The Blackfriars translation of the *Summa* renders the relevant text as follows:

> …human reasoning in the order of inquiry and discovery starts from certain truths quite simply understood, namely first principles, and then in the order of judgment by analysis returns to first principles, in the light of which it studies what has been found.[33]

The phrase 'truths that naturally are known' refers to truths that are known – 'simply understood' – by the natural operations of reason; Lonergan is not envisaging a foundationalist structure of knowledge built upon 'incorrigible beliefs.'

Aquinas applies this general analysis to the specific science of Christian theology at the beginning of the *Summa Theologiae*.[34] He divides the sciences into those which proceed from principles known by the natural light of intelligence, and those which obtain their first principles from a higher science.[35] Christian theology is a science of the second type; it derives its principles from a higher science, namely God's own knowledge, which God shares with the blessed.[36] As we have seen, A N Williams argues that, while such a structure resembles

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[28] *Verbum*, 64, and editorial note b, 258.
[29] *Verbum*, 66.
[30] See, for example, *Insight*, 28-29.
[31] *Verbum*, 74.
[32] *ST* 1, q. 79, a. 8.
[33] *ST* 1, q. 79, a. 8. *Summa Theologiae*, Volume 11, Blackfriars/Eyre & Spottiswoode/McGraw-Hill, 1970, 175.
[34] *ST* 1, q. 1.
[35] *ST* 1, q.1 a. 2.
[36] *ST* 1, q.1 a. 2.

foundationalist accounts in the sense that theological claims are inferred from accepted starting principles, it is incorrect to interpret Aquinas' account of theological knowledge as a classically foundationalist one. For Aquinas, the starting principles of theology are taken on faith as revealed by God.[37] They cannot be demonstrated to those who deny them, and Aquinas is not concerned to justify religious claims at the bar of reason.[38] Williams asserts:

> The model of *scientia* outlined in the *Summa Theologiae* …has both fragility and provisionality built into it.[39]

The starting principles of theology are certain because they are derived from God's self-knowledge; but human understanding of such principles in this life is imperfect and clouded by sin, and the process of human reasoning from the starting principles to theological conclusions is also prone to error. As Williams reads him, Thomas sees perfect knowledge of God as belonging only to God himself and to the blessed who enjoy the beatific vision.

> The fragility of knowledge in this life is not a permanent state, but an adequate one, meet for the moment.[40]

The foundationalist issue was not yet a live one in theology at the time when Lonergan was writing *Verbum*. His aim in the book is not to address such questions but to interpret correctly the thought of Aquinas.[41] It would, I believe, be incorrect to read back a foundationalist interpretation into a passage such as that cited above. On the other hand, Lonergan has not yet addressed the question of historical consciousness. At this stage in his thought, 'concepts remain eternally and immutably distinct,'[42] but truth – except in the mind of God – involves a temporal qualification, for truth in the human mind consists in the application of abstract universals to sensible things.[43] Sense is the beginning of knowledge, and what is known by sense determines judgment.[44]

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[37] A N Williams, 'Is Aquinas a Foundationalist?', 34; see *ST* 1, q.1 a. 2. See section 1.4.2 above.
[38] Williams, 36.
[39] Williams, 43.
[40] Williams, 43.
[41] *Verbum*, 227.
[42] *Verbum*, 64
[43] *Verbum*, 76.
[44] *Verbum*, 76.

At the end of chapter 2, Lonergan summarises what he has sought to establish thus far; that Aquinas' theory of the human intellect is based on 'psychological facts' arrived at by psychological introspection.[45]

> No doubt, as expressed by Aquinas, these psychological facts are embedded in metaphysical categories and theorems.[46]

It is this 'Thomist application of metaphysics to the tasks of psychological analysis'[47] that is the concern of the next two chapters of *Verbum*.

4.3 From psychology to metaphysics

Chapter 3 of *Verbum* begins as follows:

> Just as a modern exact science is generically mathematics and only specifically mechanics or physics or chemistry, so also the Thomist analysis of the *verbum* or inner word is generically metaphysics and only specifically psychology.[48]

Lonergan proceeds to formulate the psychological analysis of in terms of Thomist/Aristotelian metaphysics, with a particular focus on the notion of procession, since this is how he characterises metaphysically the production of the inner word or *verbum*. He remarks casually that 'in general it will be possible to assume that the reader is familiar with Thomist metaphysics,'[49] which may have been true for readers of his own time but is scarcely the case today. What is more significant for our purposes than the details of Lonergan's metaphysical analysis, however, is the worldview which such an analysis reveals. Psychology is a subset of metaphysics, because metaphysics – the analysis in terms of cause and effect, act and potency, which Aquinas receives from Aristotle and develops as an instrument for Christian theology – is a general description of how things happen in the world. And Lonergan will go on to draw what he believes to be theologically valid conclusions from the psychological analogy for trinitarian doctrine.

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[45] *Verbum*, 104-105.
[46] *Verbum*, 105.
[47] *Verbum*, 105.
[48] *Verbum*, 106.
[49] *Verbum*, 106.

In chapter 4, Lonergan takes the next step, considering the abstraction of concepts by the intellect. He states that the inspiration for his enquiry into the concept of *verbum* is the wish to understand the procession of the divine Word by analogy with human rational consciousness, and the procession of the Holy Spirit by analogy with the act of love.[50] He wishes to make the case for what he terms an intellectualist, as opposed to a conceptualist interpretation of Thomist thought:[51]

> All that has been said so far and all that remains to be said can be reduced to a single proposition that, when Aquinas used the term *intelligibile*, his primary meaning was not whatever can be conceived, such as matter, nothing, and sin, but whatever can be known by understanding.[52]

The most interesting aspect of the discussion for our question is Lonergan's realist understanding of metaphysical statements:

> As the sensible is the object of sense, so the intelligible is the object of intellect. The sensible is confined to material reality, but the intelligible is coextensive with the universe: whatever can be can be understood.[53]

Lonergan is quoting Aquinas in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*,[54] but he is stating a principle that will be a driving force of his own argument in *Insight*; the intrinsic intelligibility of being.[55]

4.4 Imago Dei

In the final chapter of *Verbum*, Lonergan is ready to deal with the trinitarian meaning of *Imago Dei*. He contrasts two radically opposed views of knowing. One, influenced by Plato, sees knowing as a 'confrontation' between knower and known; it corresponds to what Lonergan terms a 'conceptualist' view of human intellect.

> To cut a long story short, contemporary dogmatic realists escape the critical problem by asserting a confrontation of intellect with concrete reality.[56]

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[50] *Verbum*, 152.
[51] *Verbum*, 153.
[52] *Verbum*, 190.
[53] *Verbum*, 179.
[54] *SCG* 2. C. 98, §9.
[55] *Insight*, 523-526.
[56] *Verbum*, 192.

This is the view of knowing as 'taking a look,' which Lonergan will refute at length in *Insight*.[57] For the Aristotelian, however, knowing consists in the identity of knower and known; this is the 'intellectualist' understanding. Lonergan believes that conceptualists err because they fail to advert to their own acts of understanding. The intellectualist knows and analyses not only what intelligence does, but also what it is.[58] Having traced the development of this view of intellect through Aquinas' writings, Lonergan is ready to demonstrate his conclusion: that for Thomas, God is *ipsum intelligere*, a pure act of understanding:

> It remains that *ipsum intelligere* is analogous to understanding, that God is an infinite and substantial act of understanding, that as the Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Spirit is God, so also each is one and the same infinite and substantial act of understanding, finally that, though each is the pure act of understanding, still only the Father understands as uttering the Word.[59]

Lonergan goes on to claim that, while the inner word or *verbum* is a necessary component of human knowing, it cannot be demonstrated by natural reason that the same is true of God.

> Psychological trinitarian theory is not a conclusion that can be demonstrated but a hypothesis that squares with divine revelation without excluding the possibility of alternative hypotheses.[60]

Lonergan then qualifies the analogy. In human knowing, the inner word or *verbum* is 'produced' by the intelligence. Is this true in the procession of the divine Word? No, Lonergan replies, because of divine simplicity.

> But in God intellect is substance, and act of understanding is act of existence; it follows that the Word that proceeds in him is of the same nature and substance as its principle, that his thought of himself is himself… That Word is thought, definition, judgment, and yet of the same nature as God, whose substance is intellect.[61]

This is the first theological question that the psychological analogy is meant to answer; how can the Son, the Word of God, be generated and not created; how can the Son proceed from the Father, be of the same divine nature as the Father, and yet be Son and not Father? Aquinas, and Lonergan with him, reply: by analogy with the generation of a *verbum* by the human intellect.

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[57] See, e.g., *Insight*, 344.
[58] *Verbum*, 191-195.
[59] *Verbum*, 198-199; citing *ST* I, q. 34, a.1, ad 3m; a. 2, ad 4m.
[60] *Verbum*, 204.
[61] *Verbum*, 208.

The second trinitarian question concerns the procession of the Holy Spirit from Father and Son. The analogy here is with the act of love:

> …first [Aquinas] argued that in everyone who understands there must also be a will; secondly, he showed that the basic act, to which all other acts of will are to be reduced, is love; thirdly, he pointed out the difference between the presence of the beloved in the intellect and his presence in the will of the lover; in the intellect he is present 'per similitudinem speciei'; in the will he is present dynamically, as the term of a movement in the movement's proportionate principle.[62]

> In us there is a procession of love from the inner word and, as Aquinas very frequently repeated, that is the procession that is relevant to trinitarian theory.[63]

Lonergan goes on to describe Aquinas' treatment of trinitarian doctrine in the *Summa Theologiae*. Thomas begins by considering God as one, then considers the processions and relations within God, before raising the question of persons.[64] For Lonergan, Thomas' key insight is to establish a clear systematic order of the concepts by which theology understands the Trinity, while recognising that such concepts do not and cannot penetrate to the essence of God. The order and structure which Lonergan admires in Thomas' trinitarian theory is an ordering and structuring of the *concepts* by which we attain an imperfect understanding of the Trinity. As Lonergan reads him, Aquinas does not claim that such a conceptual order and structure is a description of the inner life of God, because God is pure perfection and perfect simplicity.

> We desire to know *quid sit Deus*, but in this life the only understanding we can attain is through analogy.[65]

> By natural reason we know that God is absolute being, absolute understanding, absolute truth, absolute love. But natural reason cannot establish that there are in God *processiones intelligibiles*, that the divine Word is because of divine understanding as uttering, that divine Love as proceeding is because of divine goodness and understanding and Word as spirating. Such further analogical knowledge of *quid sit Deus* pertains to the limited but most fruitful understanding that can be attained when reason operates in the light of faith. Thus, the Augustinian psychological analogy makes trinitarian theology a prolongation of natural theology, a deeper insight into what God is.[66]

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[62] *Verbum*, 209.
[63] *Verbum*, 212.
[64] *Verbum*, 213: cf *Summa Theologiae*, 1, qq. 2-29.
[65] *Verbum*, 214-215.
[66] *Verbum*, 215; cf. *DF*, Chapter 4.

The conclusion of *Verbum* reveals, not only Lonergan's understanding of Aquinas' trinitarian doctrine, but his understanding of the nature of doctrine and of the theologian's task. In line with the teaching of Vatican I, Lonergan affirms that reason operating in the light of faith can attain a limited but fruitful understanding of divine mysteries:

> … the theologian with no proper grasp of *quid sit Deus* but under the direction of divine revelation really operates in virtue of and towards an understanding that he personally in this life cannot possess.[67]

For Lonergan, 'the psychological analogy truly gives a deeper insight into what God is,'[68] but the full understanding of the essence of God will be granted to us only in the beatific vision. Nevertheless, he believes that the propositions of trinitarian doctrine are metaphysical statements about the triune God which can be true or false. A good part of his effort in *Verbum* aims at correcting what he believes to be mistaken interpretations of Aquinas, and therefore misunderstandings of what God is. He does not hesitate to make bold statements about the divine processions, relations and essence; such statements belong to the limited but fruitful understanding that reason can achieve under the guidance of revelation.

Lonergan describes Aquinas' exposition of trinitarian doctrine in the *Summa Theologiae* as a 'masterpiece.' Thomas 'begins where natural theology leaves off,'[69] and draws on the Augustinian psychological analogy, and on 'the sum of previous trinitarian and philosophic achievement,' to say what human reason assisted by revelation can say about the Trinity. The psychological analogy yields real understanding, Lonergan says, but it is 'just the side door through which we enter for an imperfect look.'[70] However, in *Verbum*, the analogy bears a considerable metaphysical weight.

In a short Epilogue, Lonergan sets out to explain the purpose and the method of his work. His purpose is that articulated by Pope Leo XIII: *vetera novis augere et perficere* – to strengthen and complete the old by means of the new.[71] By 'the old,' Leo XIII meant specifically the thought of Thomas Aquinas. Strikingly, Lonergan asserts:

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[67] *Verbum*, 215: cf. *Summa Theologiae*, 1, q. 1, aa. 2, 7.
[68] *Verbum*, 215.
[69] *Verbum*, 220.
[70] *Verbum*, 216.
[71] Leo XIII, Encyclical Letter *Aeterni Patris* (1879), §24.

> Now to understand what Aquinas meant and to understand as Aquinas understood are one and the same thing; for acts of meaning are inner words, and inner words proceed intelligibly from acts of understanding.[72]

And:

> The significance of this method is that it unites the ideals of the old-style manual written *ad mentem Divi Thomae* and, on the other hand, the ideal of contemporary historical study.[73]

That is, Lonergan's aim is to enter into the mind of Aquinas in order to understand his thought – in this case, Aquinas' thought on the act of understanding and the procession of the inner word – in a way that accords with both the concern of the modern historian for historical empathy and the desire of Leo XIII that theology be studied and taught according to the mind of St Thomas. He describes the process of aligning one's own understanding to that of Aquinas in a way that anticipates his account of cognitive process in *Insight*,[74] while his description of his method highlights the concerns that would come to the fore in *Method in Theology*:

> Method is a means to an end; it sets forth two sets of rules – rules that facilitate collaboration and continuity of effort, and rules that guide the effort itself.[75]

Lonergan alludes to the task of '…the development that aims at effecting [Leo XIII's] *vetera novis augere et perficere*' – a transposition of the thought of Thomas to meet contemporary issues.[76] This is the task that he would undertake in *Insight*. And he concludes:

> … my purpose has been limited to determining on a restricted but, I believe, significant point what the *vetera* really were.[77]

4.5 Mongeau: Lonergan as an interpreter of Aquinas

Mongeau[78] analyses *Verbum* as an instance of the first of four 'moments' in Lonergan's relation to Aquinas. In *Verbum*, he claims, there is being developed a 'basic interpretive

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[72] *Verbum*, 222. See the discussion of 'mental acts' in relation to linguistic analysis, section 7.5.3 below.
[73] *Verbum*, 223.
[74] *Verbum*, 223.
[75] *Verbum*, 223. Compare *Method*, 3: '[Method] is a framework for collaborative creativity.'
[76] *Verbum*, 226-227.
[77] *Verbum*, 227.
[78] Mongeau, Gilles, 'Bernard Lonergan as Interpreter of Aquinas: A Complex Relation,' Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia, T. 63, Fasc. 4, Os Domínios da Inteligência: Bernard Lonergan e a Filosofia./The Realms of Insight: Bernard Lonergan and Philosophy (Oct-Dec 2007), 1049-1069.

stance… that enables Lonergan to advert to the whole range of methods Aquinas employs in his theology.'[79] Mongeau traces subsequent historical research on Aquinas which verifies Lonergan's 'fundamental interpretive stance.'[80] The second moment is the use of this stance to address problems in the interpretation of Aquinas; this is seen in the exposition of Thomas' psychology and trinitarian doctrine in *Verbum*, and also in the published texts for Lonergan's theology courses, including *De Deo Trino*.[81] The third moment will come when Lonergan transposes Aquinas' thought for a new audience in *Insight*,[82] and the fourth moment is the call in his late essays for a renewed Thomism for the 20th century.[83] Mongeau wishes to make the case for Lonergan as an important 20th-century commentator on Aquinas, and to uphold the validity of Lonergan's interpretation of Aquinas' thought, against any notion that his reading introduces misinterpretation or distortion,[84] or that a turn to the subject such as that adopted in *Insight* represents 'an uncritical acceptance of Kantian definitions of epistemological problems.'[85] He acknowledges that subsequent historical research on Thomas and his era has in some cases verified Lonergan's reading and in others allowed it to be refined; and he affirms that Lonergan's work on Aquinas offers

> a set of sophisticated methodological reflections and tools that can correct mistaken notions of history and augment [the] repertoire of approaches to the text.[86]

It is notable that Mongeau emphasises the methodological value of Lonergan's work.

4.6 Conclusion

In *Verbum*, as in *Grace and Freedom*, Lonergan is engaged in a detailed interpretation of the thought of St Thomas Aquinas: establishing 'what the *vetera* really were.'[87] But, as in the earlier work, he also reveals in *Verbum* his understanding of the nature of doctrine and of

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[79] Mongeau, 1056.
[80] Mongeau, 1056-1064.
[81] Mongeau, 1064.
[82] Mongeau, 1065-1067.
[83] Mongeau, 1068; cf. Lonergan 'The Future of Thomism,' in *Second Collection*, 44-47.
[84] Mongeau, 1064.
[85] Mongeau attributes this view to Alasdair MacIntyre and cites the work of Giovanni Sala in support of his own rejection of it. Mongeau, 1066-7; Giovanni Sala, *Lonergan and Kant: Five Essays on Human Knowledge*. (University of Toronto Press, 1994). Wilkins also rejects the categorisation of Lonergan as a 'transcendental Thomist:' Jeremy Wilkins, *Before Truth: Lonergan, Aquinas and the Problem of Wisdom* (The Catholic University of America Press, Washington DC, 2018), 165-166.
[86] Mongeau, 1069.
[87] *Verbum*, 227.

theological method. By following the technique of introspection practised by Aristotle, Augustine and Aquinas, one can arrive at a 'core of psychological fact'[88] from which metaphysical principles can be discerned: and the metaphysics provides a structure for the understanding and exposition of doctrine – in this case, the psychological analogy of trinitarian processions. Lonergan is a metaphysical and doctrinal realist; as we shall see in considering *De Deo Trino*, he does not hesitate to make bold and precise statements about the inner life of God on the basis of his metaphysical analysis. But the world view within which he makes such assertions is one which is Thomist and therefore theocentric. The guarantor of the validity of human knowing is the omnipotent Creator who has established our cognitive process as part of the order of the created world. Metaphysics describes our understanding of the divinely created order as we discern it and, for Lonergan, psychological introspection is the key method for such discernment. Such a Thomist world view preserves a sense of the mystery of the God who is always beyond our understanding and, as Williams insists,[89] of the fragile and provisional nature of our knowledge of God. As we will see,[90] theologians such as Nicholas Lash and David Tracy recognise that Lonergan's work can be a valuable methodological and hermeneutical resource for a theology that is critical and historically conscious, without wishing to adopt the whole apparatus of his Thomist epistemology and metaphysics.

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[88] *Verbum*, 10.

[89] Williams, 'Is Aquinas a Foundationalist?', 43.

[90] Chapter 9 below.

5 *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*

5.1 Introduction: *Insight*: The project

Having investigated in detail the thought of Aquinas, Lonergan was ready to put forward an 'independently elaborated system of thought.'[1] While, in *Grace and Freedom* and in *Verbum*, Aquinas is cited on almost every page, he appears less frequently in *Insight*: however, his influence is unmistakable. Lonergan's approach is the same one that, in *Verbum*, he identifies in Aquinas; the conscious appropriation of one's own process of knowing, in order to gain an understanding of the invariant structure of knowledge, and thence an understanding of the structure of being itself. For Lonergan such an understanding of being is an essential element of theological method and *Insight* was always intended to lead to what would become *Method in Theology*.[2] However, theological concerns appear explicitly only towards the end of *Insight*. Lonergan is developing a theory of cognition which, he believes, has general validity.

> *Thoroughly understand what it is to know, and not only will you understand the*
> *broad lines of all there is to be understood but also you will possess a fixed base,*
> *an invariant pattern, opening upon all further developments of understanding*.[3]

This is Lonergan's summary of the 'positive content' of *Insight*.[4] His aim is to lead the reader to a thorough understanding of what it is to know, following the same method of psychological introspection that he discerns in Aquinas, Augustine and Aristotle. However, the modern reader does not undertake such an appropriation in the thought-world of the Middle Ages. Rather, the context is shaped by Kant's critique of knowledge and by the rise of modern science, in both its classical and statistical forms. These, Crowe claims, are Lonergan's two 'partners in dialogue' in *Insight*.[5] It is Lonergan's detailed treatment of these issues that makes *Insight* such a lengthy and, at times, challenging read. He aims to overcome scepticism and relativism, Kantian idealism and the naïve or dogmatic realism that sees knowledge as

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[1] *Insight*, 769.
[2] Lonergan, 'Insight Revisited,' in *Second Collection*, 225-226.
[3] *Insight*, 22 (italics in original.)
[4] *Insight*, 22,
[5] Crowe SJ, *Lonergan*, 62.

simply 'taking a look.' Lonergan insists that his account is not a 'halfway house' between materialism and idealism; rather:

> …there is an intelligent and reasonable realism between which and materialism the halfway house is idealism.[6]

> If to convince oneself that knowing is understanding, one ascertains that knowing mathematics is understanding and knowing science is understanding and the knowledge of common sense is understanding, one ends up not only with a detailed account of understanding but also with a plan of what there is to be known…; the structure of the universe proportionate to man's intellect is revealed; and as that revealed structure provides an object for a metaphysics, so the initial self-criticism provides a method for explaining how metaphysical and antimetaphysical affirmations arise, for selecting those that are correct, and for eliminating those that patently spring from a lack of accurate self-knowledge.[7]

The affirmation that knowing consists not in the 'taking a look' of naïve realism, but in a process of experience, understanding and judgement is Lonergan's version of Aquinas' cognitional theory, transposed into the language and concepts of the modern world. He aims to demonstrate that modern science not only allows but requires a critical realist theory of knowledge, a correspondence theory of truth and a metaphysics, because he believes that all are essential for theology. Within this Thomist structure, we can identify the elements of Lonergan's thought which are relevant to the hermeneutics of doctrine. He addresses the question of meaning under the heading of 'The Notion of Being.'[8] Being is 'the core of meaning'[9] because what is meant is always being. Objectivity depends on the self-appropriation of the knower.[10] Truth and interpretation are topics within metaphysics[11] and Lonergan's 'Canons for a Methodical Hermeneutics'[12] reflect his own approach to the interpretation of Aquinas in *Grace and Freedom* and *Verbum*. His demonstration of the existence of God[13] is similar in its approach to Aquinas' Five Ways. I will argue that it is Lonergan's Thomistic approach which makes *Insight* a valuable resource for a critical hermeneutics of doctrine, while pointing out the limitations of his theory at this stage of its development.

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[6] *Insight*, 22.
[7] *Insight*, 23.
[8] 'The Notion of Being,' *Insight*, Chapter 12, 372-398.
[9] *Insight*, 381-383.
[10] 'The Notion of Objectivity,' *Insight*, Chapter 13, 399-409.
[11] 'Metaphysics as Dialectic,' *Insight*, Chapter 17, 553-617.
[12] *Insight*, 608-616.
[13] 'General Transcendent Knowledge,' *Insight*, Chapter 19, 657-708.

5.2 The key element: the act of insight

Lonergan's first illustrative instance of insight is the story of Archimedes running naked from the baths of Syracuse, crying 'Eureka!', having hit upon a solution to the problem of determining the composition of King Hiero's crown.[14] The story illustrates the nature of the act of insight, in Lonergan's theory:

> What we have to grasp is that insight (1) comes as a release to the tension of inquiry, (2) comes suddenly and unexpectedly, (3) is a function not of outer circumstances but of inner conditions, (4) pivots between the concrete and the abstract, and (5) passes into the habitual texture of one's mind.[15]

Insight 'pivots between the concrete and the abstract,' in the sense that 'It is insight *into* the concrete world of sense and imagination,'[16] but once the insight has occurred, the knower can abstract from the concrete data of sense, and the insight can be appropriated – it 'passes into the habitual texture of one's mind.' Lonergan's account parallels Aquinas' structure of phantasm-understanding-*verbum*.[17] Insight is pre-conceptual and pre-verbal – it 'lies behind the conceptual scene.'[18] Insight is into the intelligibility of the data of sense – though there is also the inverse insight that discerns the non-intelligibility of empirical elements.[19] This concept of the 'empirical residue' is also an important element in Lonergan's development of his theory.[20]

5.3 Insight and science

In Chapters 2 to 5 of Insight, Lonergan elaborates the concept of insight by tracing the procedures of mathematics and experimental science. As Frederick Crowe puts it: 'Science provided him with the most exact, accessible and clear-cut illustration of what human knowing is.'[21] In Lonergan's own words:

> Our concern has been the methodical genesis of insight. Scientists achieve understanding, but they do so only at the end of an inquiry. Moreover, their inquiry is methodical, and method consists in ordering means to achieve an end. But how can means be ordered to an end when the end is knowledge and the knowledge is

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[14] *Insight*, 27-28.
[15] *Insight*, 28.
[16] *Insight*, 30 (emphasis in original.)
[17] *Verbum*, 47-48; see above, section 4.2
[18] *Insight*, 44.
[19] *Insight*, 43-50.
[20] *Insight*, 50-56.
[21] Crowe, *Lonergan*, 63.

not yet acquired? The answer to this puzzle is the heuristic structure. Name the unknown. Work out its properties. Use the properties to direct, order, guide the inquiry.[22]

The guiding orientation of the scientist is the 'pure, detached desire simply to know… the eros of the mind.'[23] Science progresses by a process of observation and enquiry, which leads to insights; the insights raise further questions, which prompt further enquiry and, in turn, new insights.

The success of the empirical scientific method, and the transformation of the world which it has brought about, set the context for Lonergan's project of developing a theory of human knowing and, from it, a metaphysics. While Aquinas' theory of cognition was developed against the background of an Aristotelian metaphysics and Kant philosophised in the deterministic world of Newtonian physics, Lonergan has to reckon with the discoveries of relativity and quantum mechanics. His account allows for the statistical laws to which the latter gives rise:

> … heuristic structures fall into two groups, namely, the classical and the statistical. A classical heuristic structure is intelligent anticipation of the systematic-and-abstract on which the concrete converges. A statistical heuristic structure is intelligent anticipation of the systematic-and-abstract setting a boundary or norm from which the concrete cannot systematically diverge.[24]

For Lonergan, the heuristic structure describes the process by which knowledge increases in all fields, and not only in the natural sciences – though each field of knowledge has its own proper method, appropriate to the nature of the data with which it deals. The heuristic structure is a universal structure, because it reflects the 'dynamic structure of inquiring intelligence.'[25] But Lonergan goes further.

> Whether one likes it or not, heuristic structures and canons of method constitute an a priori. They settle in advance the general determinations, not merely of the activities of knowing, but also of the content to be known. Just as Aristotle's notions on science and method resulted in his cosmic hierarchy, just as the Galilean reduction of secondary to primary qualities necessitated a mechanist determinism, so too our simultaneous affirmation of both classical and statistical investigations involves a world view. What is that view?[26]

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[22] *Insight*, 67-68.
[23] *Insight*, 97.
[24] *Insight*, 126-127.
[25] *Insight*, 139.
[26] *Insight*, 128.

Lonergan affirms that, since 'the known is reached only through knowing,' the structure of that which is known, namely being, must be reflected in the structures of knowing.[27] By determining the structure of knowing, one can determine 'the immanent design or order characteristic of a universe in which both classical and statistical laws obtain.'[28] And, since Lonergan believes the structure on which his account of knowing is premised to be invariant, '…the design of the universe to which we shall conclude will enjoy the invariance of the premise which we shall invoke.'[29]

This is only relative invariance; Lonergan envisages the possibility of revisions to his account of the structure of the human mind, which would necessitate revisions to the metaphysics derived from the account.[30] Fundamentally, however, Lonergan believes the structure of the mind, and the structure of being which we discern from it, to be invariant. It is a given, which we do not construct, but rather discover and appropriate.

> …Galileo, Newton and Kant were all looking for some sort of absolute, but they were looking in the wrong places… the real, objective, true consists of what is known by formulating and verifying invariant principles and laws.[31]

By the end of Chapter 5 of *Insight*, Lonergan believes that he has demonstrated that mathematics and empirical science provide examples of the 'essential dynamism of human intelligence'[32] in action; that the structure of empirical method corresponds to the structure of knowing as he has described it, and that the success of science in making intelligible the data of experience goes towards validating the 'design of the universe' to which he concludes from that structure. In Crowe's words:

> The structure he had discovered in Thomas Aquinas emerged with new clarity and wider implications in modern science.[33]

Science works; it makes the data of experience intelligible; therefore, the universe is intelligible. Since being is that which is knowable and intelligible, the structure of being corresponds to the structure of knowing which can be discovered by introspection. This structure provides an *a priori* for understanding and systematising, not only the data of

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[27] *Insight*, 138.

[28] *Insight*, 139.

[29] *Insight*, 140.

[30] *Insight*, 140.

[31] *Insight*, 178.

[32] *Insight*, 57

[33] Crowe, *Lonergan*, 63; cf 'Isomorphism of Thomist and Scientific Thought' in *Collection*, 133-141.

experience or of scientific investigation, but also the data of revelation which are the concern of theology.

5.4 Insight and common sense

In Chapters 6 and 7 of *Insight*, Lonergan broadens his enquiry to consider common sense; the intelligence of the non-specialist. He affirms that '…one meets intelligence in every walk of life.'[34] The human mind spontaneously inquires, and spontaneously accumulates insights.[35] The structure of knowing by which the mind acquires common sense is the same as that which operates in the sciences. However:

> Common sense, unlike the sciences, is a specialization of intelligence in the particular and the concrete.[36]

Empirical science progresses methodically, while common sense develops spontaneously through reflection on the experiences of life.[37]And, unlike the sciences, common sense does not aspire to universality:

> For every difference of geography, for every difference of occupation, for every difference of social arrangements, there is an appropriate variation of common sense.[38]

Common sense is the common sense *of* a particular profession, place or social group. While common sense develops through experience – through trial and error – its development can also be distorted by the individual's bias. Lonergan devotes considerable attention to this issue of bias, drawing on the findings of psychoanalysis.[39]

In Chapter 7, 'Common Sense as Object,' Lonergan explores the way that the common sense of a community both shapes the community and is shaped by it.The common sense of an individual both is a product of his/her experience and reflection on it and also shapes the way that the individual approaches and understands subsequent experiences. For Lonergan, the same process operates at the level of a community. Shared experience gives rise to a shared common sense, and this common sense shapes the way that the members of the

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[34] *Insight*, 196.
[35] *Insight*, 197.
[36] *Insight*, 198-199.
[37] *Insight*, 198.
[38] *Insight*, 203.
[39] *Insight*, 214-227.

community understand and describe their common experience. [40] Lonergan has already described how bias 'arising from the psychological depths'[41] can distort the common sense of an individual, and now he adds three sources of bias that can operate at the level of the community. Individual bias arises from egoism; a member of the community knowingly seeks selfish ends, rather than the common good.[42] Group bias comes about when the ethos or spirit of a particular group is such that insights and the progress that would result from them are resisted.[43] General bias results from the nature of common sense itself; because it is concerned with the concrete and the particular, it fails to see 'the big picture' and to recognise broader and longer-term issues.[44] Lonergan's account is, perhaps, shaped by the 20th century's history of totalitarianism; he refers to the 'all-inclusive state' whose 'ends justify all means.'[45] His response is the idea of 'cosmopolis:'

> What is necessary is a cosmopolis that is neither class nor state, that stands above all their claims, that cuts them down to size, that is founded on the native detachment and disinterestedness of every intelligence, that commands man's first allegiance, that implements itself primarily through that allegiance, that is too universal to be bribed, too impalpable to be forced, too effective to be ignored.[46]

Lonergan's description of the 'X' which he has labelled as 'cosmopolis' is, at this stage, merely a sketch:

> It is a withdrawal from practicality to save practicality. It is a dimension of consciousness, a heightened grasp of historical origins, a discovery of historical responsibilities.[47]

Lonergan is envisaging a higher viewpoint that can overcome the bias which operates at the level of community, society or state. As the individual has to appropriate his or her own process of knowing – to 'thoroughly understand what it is to know'[48] – in order to achieve objective knowledge, so the community must understand its collective process of understanding in order to overcome the potentially destructive bias at work in common sense.

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[40] *Insight*, 239-240.
[41] *Insight*, 243-4.
[42] *Insight*, 244-247.
[43] *Insight*, 247-250.
[44] *Insight*, 250-267.
[45] *Insight*, 257.
[46] *Insight*, 263.
[47] *Insight*, 266.
[48] *Insight*, 22: see note 3 above.

At this stage in *Insight*, Lonergan is speaking in purely philosophical terms. He is describing the operation of common sense in secular society. His vision of 'cosmopolis' seems strikingly relevant to the divided and polarised state of contemporary European and North American societies.[49] However, if we see the church as a community of believers, and Christian doctrines as formulations of the common sense of such a community, it seems reasonable to suggest that Lonergan would also see his analysis as applicable to the process of formulating doctrine.[50]

By the end of Chapter 8, 'Things,' Lonergan believes that he has shown the reader how to 'achieve a critical position:'[51]

> …it is the failure to reach the full critical position that accounts for the endless variety of philosophic positions so rightly lamented by Kant; and it is by a dialectical analysis, based on the full critical position, that one can hope to set up a philosophy of philosophies in the fully reflective manner that at least imperfectly was initiated by Hegel and still is demanded by modern needs.[52]

Is Lonergan's account of insight correct? He believes that it is, in effect, a self-verifying account that can be shown to be correct, simply by following through the process of reflection, while conflicting accounts will show themselves to be self-contradictory.

> …just as an account of insight is an account of method and so an account of what method cannot but yield at the term of inquiry, so also an account of critical reflection and the possibility of judgment will reveal unavoidable judgments. Those unavoidable judgments will be our answer to the question whether we are indulging in airy speculation or not.[53]

In Chapter 9, on 'The Notion of Judgment,' Lonergan describes knowing as a dynamic and incremental process. Past judgements and insights 'remain with us,' and form the context in which new insights and judgements occur. Existing judgements have to be considered in relation to one another, to maintain the coherence of our view of the world. And existing knowledge provides the drive to add further knowledge:

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[49] See Dennis Gunn, 'Teaching for Cosmopolis: Bernard Lonergan's Hopeful Vision for Education in a Globalized World,' *Religious Education* Vol. 113 No. 1 (2018), 26-37.

[52] See Neil Ormerod, *Method, Meaning and Revelation* (University Press of America, Lanham/New York/Oxford, 2000.) 'Doctrines, as historical events in the life of the Christian community… [establish] a community of common meanings and values,' 154.

[51] *Insight*, 293.

[52] *Insight*, 293.

[53] *Insight*, 295.

All we know is somehow with us…The business of the human mind in this life seems to be, not contemplation of what we know, but relentless devotion to the task of adding increments to a merely habitual knowledge.[54]

In *De Deo Trino*, Lonergan would analyse the development of christological and trinitarian doctrine in the early church in these terms, seeing it as a dialectical process by which the church reached 'the full critical position' and overcame the variety of philosophical and theological positions that gave rise to the many heresies of that era. Heresies threw up contradictions; the drive for a coherent understanding of the truths of revelation led to new judgements, and ultimately to dogmatic pronouncements, each of which represented an incremental increase in the understanding of divinely revealed truth in the mind of the church. The understanding of dogmatic development underpinned by Lonergan's theory of cognition remains, at this stage, a linear and progressive one.

5.4.1 Insight and (theological) judgement: the dogma of the Assumption

In Chapter 10 of *Insight*, Lonergan addresses the next step in the process of knowing; the act of reflective understanding, the insight that leads to a judgement.[55] Reflective understanding recognises a prospective judgement as 'virtually unconditioned;' that is, the conditions for the judgement to be correct are known, and if they are fulfilled, the judgement is affirmed.[56] Acts of reflective understanding can lead to concrete judgements of fact,[57] to insight into concrete situations,[58] to commonsense judgements[59] or to the judgements of mathematics and empirical science.[60]

> There is sufficient evidence for a prospective judgment when it may be grasped by reflective understanding as virtually unconditioned. Hence sufficient evidence involves (1) a link of the conditioned to its conditions, and (2) the fulfilment of the conditions.[61]

Lonergan is still speaking in philosophical terms. But a few years earlier, in a 1948 article entitled 'The Assumption and Theology,'[62] he addressed the question of how the

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[54] *Insight*, 302.
[55] *Insight*, 304-340.
[56] *Insight*, 305.
[57] *Insight*, 306-308.
[58] *Insight*, 308-312.
[59] *Insight*, 314-324.
[60] *Insight*, 334-339.
[61] *Insight*, 339-340.
[62] 'The Assumption and Theology,' *Collection*, 66-80.

church, in the exercise of its teaching authority, might arrive at a judgement regarding a question of doctrine. The bodily assumption into heaven of the Blessed Virgin Mary was defined as a dogma of the church by Pope Pius XII in 1950. At the time of Lonergan's article, the Holy See was receiving 'vast numbers of petitions' for the definition.[63] Lonergan asks how the church could arrive at certitude sufficient for a dogmatic definition.

Firstly, he states:

> …the development of Christian doctrine is not subject to the revolutions that are part and parcel of the development of science; the reason for this is ultimately that the development of understanding in science regards sensible data while the development of understanding in Christian doctrine regards, not sensible presentations which intellect has to raise to the order of truths, but a divine revelation which already is in the order of truth.[64]

Secondly:

> …in the present instance, at least, not only the truths to be understood but also the general lines of the understanding itself are revealed…[65]

That is, the truths of incarnation and redemption have been divinely revealed, and the judgement to be made concerns the place of the Assumption within the economy of salvation; 'all that we have to do is to determine from the shape of the whole the place to be assigned to a part.'[66]

Thirdly, Lonergan affirms:

> …the implication of the assumption [that is, its implication in the teaching of scripture] is not the fruit of individual human understanding; the understanding that is relevant is the understanding of man illumined by faith and moved by the grace of the Holy Spirit; it is not the understanding of this or that man, nor of this or that age, but of the church; and ultimately, certitude rests not upon judgment proceeding from merely human understanding but upon the judgment of the church to whom God has promised infallibility in matters of faith and morals.[67]

Crowe describes this account as:

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[63] 'The Assumption and Theology,' 69.
[64] 'The Assumption and Theology,' 76.
[65] 'The Assumption and Theology,' 76.
[66] 'The Assumption and Theology,' 76.
[67] 'The Assumption and Theology,' 76.

…the classical type of theology, but brought forward by Newman's notion of development, and further refined by Lonergan's view of the act of understanding.[68]

Arguably Crowe is being too kind to Lonergan here. Lonergan's notion of development at this stage in his thought is more linear and less comprehensive than that set out by Newman in the *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* and he has not yet thought through the implications of his cognitional theory for the operation of the church's magisterium. He has given a nuanced account of the way that human understanding and judgement operate, allowing for the possibility of bias at the level of the individual and the group; but when he considers the church as a subject, the 'judgment of the church to whom God has promised infallibility'[69] is seen to lend an atemporal and acultural certitude to a dogmatic pronouncement such as that of the Assumption.

Chapter 10 completes the first part of the book, 'Insight as Activity.' Having addressed the question 'What is happening when we are knowing?' Lonergan is ready to move on to the question, 'What is known when that is happening?'[70]

5.5 'What is known?' Insight as knowledge

Chapter 11, 'Self-affirmation of the Knower,' is the centre point of *Insight*. Here, Lonergan addresses the question referred to in epistemology as the 'critical problem.'

> It is time to turn from theory to practice. Judgment has been analyzed. Its grounds in reflective understanding have been explored. Clearly the next question is whether correct judgments occur, and the answer to it is the act of making one.[71]

The judgement that can be made and seen to be correct is the 'self-affirmation of the knower.' An individual can affirm him/herself as conscious and knowing; this is a judgement; therefore, correct judgements can occur. To answer 'no' to the question 'Am I a knower?' is incoherent, and the answer 'I do not know' equally so.[72] Lonergan believes that the human person cannot escape the requirement of rationality:

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[68] Crowe, 'Lonergan's Search for Foundations: The Early Years, 1940-1959,' in Frederick E Crowe, *Developing the Lonergan Legacy*, (University of Toronto Press 2004), 164-193, 172.
[69] 'The Assumption and Theology,' 76.
[70] *Insight*, 16.
[71] *Insight*, 343.
[72] *Insight*, 353.

> Rationality is my very dignity, and so closely do I cling to it that I would want the best of reasons for abandoning it.[73]

For Lonergan, this is the foundation of knowledge, but not in the strict 'foundationalist' sense.

> Self-affirmation has been considered as a concrete judgment of fact. The contradiction of self-negation has been indicated. Behind that contradiction there have been discerned natural inevitabilities and spontaneities that constitute the possibility of knowing, not by demonstrating that one can know, but by pragmatically engaging one in the process. Nor in the last resort can one reach a deeper foundation than that pragmatic engagement. Even to seek it involves a vicious circle; for if one seeks such a foundation, one employs one's cognitional process; and the foundation to be reached will be no more secure or solid than the inquiry utilized to reach it.[74]

Crowe describes this as giving 'rather quick riddance' to the critical problem.[75] Lonergan offers a negative solution in the shape of the traditional retorsion argument, 'the contradiction of self-negation;'[76] and a positive solution in the appropriation of one's own knowing, 'not by demonstrating that one can know, but by pragmatically engaging one in the process.'[77]

Lonergan moves on to what Doran calls 'the one major claim that is unique to this book.'[78] This is the claim that his account of cognitional process is not subject to radical revision. The account is based on the data of consciousness, and so:

> What is excluded is the radical revision that involves a shift in the fundamental terms and relations of the explanatory account of human knowledge underlying existing common sense, mathematics and empirical science.[79]

Such a revision is excluded because, in order to propose it, one would have to go through the stages of cognitive process precisely as Lonergan has described them: '…if one definitively knows invariant features of human knowledge, then one knows what is not subject to revision,'[80] and:

> …cognitional theory reaches its thing-in-itself by understanding itself and affirming itself as concrete unity in a process that is conscious empirically, intelligently and rationally. Moreover, since every other known becomes known through this

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[73] *Insight*, 356.
[74] *Insight*, 356.
[75] Crowe, 'Lonergan's Search for Foundations,' 176.
[76] *Insight*, 356.
[77] *Insight*, 356.
[78] Robert Doran, *Course on Insight*, Regius College, University of Toronto, 2003-4, 12. https://lonerganresource.com/pdf/courses/1/Insight_Notes.pdf [Accessed 09/09/2024.]
[79] *Insight*, 359.
[80] *Insight*, 360.

process, no known could impugn the process without simultaneously impugning its own status as a known.'[81]

Lonergan goes on to contrast his own analysis with that of Kant. He has prescinded from the problem of objectivity and focused on the possibility of making a judgment of fact.[82] He believes that by appropriating one's own cognitive process, the individual subject can affirm oneself as a knower and thereby make a judgment of fact:[83]

> Further, though self-affirmation is no more than a judgment of mere fact, still it is a privileged judgment. Self-negation is incoherent.[84]

The differences between Kant's approach and Lonergan's are:

> …differences in the problem under consideration, in the viewpoint from which it is considered, in the method by which it is solved.[85]

Kant seeks to establish the *a priori* conditions for knowledge. Lonergan begins with the fact of knowledge and aims to establish, by self-appropriation, how it is that knowledge comes about. And once again:

> …since [cognitional theory] contains no merely hypothetical element, it is not subject to radical revision.[86]

Lonergan claims that his cognitional theory and the metaphysics that he derives from it rest on a firm foundation of 'psychological fact'[87] which the reader can recognise by the appropriation of one's own experience of oneself as a knowing subject. Nevertheless, I maintain that Lonergan's position is not a classically foundationalist one. He wishes to refute the scepticism which is fatal to doctrine, but the structure that he wishes to build – or rather, to re-establish – is a Thomist view of the world with the built-in fragility and provisionality identified by Williams.[88] His 'foundation' is not some supposedly incorrigible knowledge but the divinely ordered dynamism of the process of knowing itself.

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[81] *Insight*, 362.
[82] *Insight*, 363.
[83] *Insight*, 365.
[84] *Insight*, 365.
[85] *Insight*, 365.
[86] *Insight*, 366.
[87] *Verbum*, 10 and 104-105.
[88] See section 1.4.2.

5.6 From epistemology to metaphysics

Chapter 12 of *Insight* is entitled 'The Notion of Being.' Lonergan begins:

> Being, then, is the objective of the pure desire to know.[89]

The pure desire to know is the 'dynamic orientation' that drives human cognitional process.[90] Lonergan states that this definition of being is 'of the second order:'

> …it assigns, not what is meant by being, but how that meaning is to be determined. It asserts that if you know, you know being; it asserts that if you wish to know, then you wish to know being; but it does not settle whether you know or what you know, whether your wish will be fulfilled or what you will know when it is fulfilled.[91]

The desire to know is the notion of being, that is, the intelligently and reasonably conscious anticipation of all that is to be known.[92] The notion of being is all-inclusive and all-pervasive.[93] Here Lonergan is preparing the ground for his move from epistemology to metaphysics. He overcomes the critical problem by defining being as that which is knowable. There is a proportionality between the act of knowing and the content that is known – what Lonergan characterises as 'the isomorphism that obtains between the structure of knowing and the structure of the known,'[94] where 'the known' is being.

> Experience is for inquiring into being. Intelligence is for thinking out being. But by judgment being is known, and in judgment what is known is known as being. Hence knowing is knowing being, yet the known is never mere being, just as judgment is never a mere yes apart from any question that "yes" answers.[95]

The notion of being is the core of meaning, for a meaningful statement describes a state of affairs; if the statement is true, it affirms what is; if false, it affirms what is not.[96] Lonergan will expand his account of meaning in *Method*.[97]

Doran describes Lonergan's position as being in harmony with that of Aquinas, but original to him and having been developed by him in the course of writing *Insight*.[98] Lonergan

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[89] *Insight*, 372.
[90] *Insight*, 372.
[91] *Insight*, 374.
[92] *Insight*, 377.
[93] *Insight*, 377-380.
[94] *Insight*, 424.
[95] *Insight*, 381.
[96] *Insight*, 381-3.
[97] Doran, *Course on Insight*, 85; cf. *Method* Chapter 3, 'Meaning,' 45-95.
[98] Doran, *Course on Insight*, 81.

gives a historical survey of 'Theories of the Notion of Being,'[99] in which he asserts that Aquinas' answer to the question of the ground of being would be:

> …that God is the ground of being; God's own being is self-explanatory and necessary; by the Aristotelian theorem of the identity of knower and known, God's being is identical with God's understanding; by that single act of understanding, God understands himself, and so he understands his own power, and so he understands all that by that power could be produced. God, then, is the act of understanding that grasps everything about everything. The content of the divine act of intellect is the divine act of being, and so, precisely because our intellects are potential, they can define being only at a second remove as whatever is to be known by intelligent grasp and reasonable affirmation.[100]

Here, Lonergan is indeed describing and interpreting the thought of Aquinas – in fact, going back to Aquinas to complete what he sees as the shortcomings in the work of Scotus and Cajetan.[101] In his development of his own position in *Insight*, God has not so far been mentioned; Lonergan has been pursuing philosophical questions of epistemology and metaphysics. However, reading *Insight* in the light of *Verbum*, it is clear that Lonergan believes he is putting forward an interpretation of the Thomist understanding of being,[102] updated to meet the challenge of contemporary science and post-Kantian philosophy; and Aquinas' understanding of being is a profoundly theocentric one.

Lonergan summarises his position thus far at the end of the chapter:

> For this reason, we placed the discussion of self-affirmation prior to the discussion of the notion of being. Self-affirmation is the affirmation of the knower, conscious empirically, intelligently, rationally. The pure desire to know is a constituent element both of the affirming and of the self that is affirmed. But the pure desire to know is the notion of being as it is spontaneously operative in cognitional process, and being itself is the to-be-known towards which that process heads.[103]

By knowing oneself to be a knower one can affirm the possibility of knowing being. This allows the possibility of knowing God and of making true affirmations about God – that is, the possibility of doctrine.

Chapter 13 of *Insight* addresses the notion of objectivity.

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[99] *Insight*, 388-398.
[100] *Insight*, 395.
[101] *Insight*, 393-6.
[102] *Insight*, 396.
[103] *Insight*, 398.

> Principally the notion of objectivity is contained within a patterned context of judgments which serve as implicit definitions of the terms 'object,' 'subject.'[104]

The notion is closely related to the notion of being:

> In brief, there is objectivity if there are distinct beings, some of which both know themselves and know others as others.[105]

> …apart from being there is nothing; it follows that there cannot be a subject that stands outside being and looks at it; the subject has to be before he can look; and once he is, then he is not outside being but either the whole of it or some part.[106]

If knowing is 'taking a look' at being, then objectivity requires the knowing subject to 'stand outside being and take a look at it.' But this is impossible. Lonergan again asserts that being is that which is known by experience, understanding and judgement. There is no possibility of standing outside being, but by appropriating the process of knowing, the subject can know oneself as an object, and from there, can achieve the patterned set of judgements that makes it possible both to achieve objectivity, and to know that one has done so. In *Method*, Lonergan will summarise this account in the affirmation that 'Genuine objectivity is the fruit of authentic subjectivity.'[107]

This principal notion of objectivity, Lonergan claims, also solves the problem of transcendence. How does the knower get beyond him/herself to a known? Lonergan sees the question as misleading. The knower cannot know oneself without making the affirmation 'I am,' and then one knows oneself both as being and as object. But the same process that allows this affirmation also gives rise to knowledge of other objects both as beings and as being other than the knower.

> Hence we place transcendence, not in going beyond a known knower, but in heading for being, within which there are positive differences and, among such differences, the difference between object and subject. Inasmuch as such judgments occur, there are in fact objectivity and transcendence; and whether or not such judgments are correct is a distinct question to be resolved along the lines reached in the analysis of judgment.[108]

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[104] *Insight*, 399.
[105] *Insight*, 401.
[106] *Insight*, 401.
[107] *Method*, 273.
[108] *Insight*, 401-402.

Lonergan claims that his notion of objectivity is absolute in the sense that, once judgement has recognised a virtually unconditioned, it is public and accessible to any knower.[109] The notion is normative; its normativity lies in the unfolding of the unrestricted, detached, disinterested desire to know. Objectivity will be achieved so long as the requirements of the desire are respected, and emotional factors are not allowed to interfere.[110] The notion is experiential; its materials are 'the given,' drawn from empirical consciousness. [111] It is the notion of objectivity that is presupposed by common sense, a minimal notion that begs no questions.[112]

In Chapters 12 and 13, Lonergan is beginning to work out the implications of what was done in the first part of *Insight*. His account of 'Insight as Activity' leads to the 'self-affirmation of the knower' in Chapter 11. By becoming aware of oneself as a knowing subject, one can verify Lonergan's account of knowing as constituted by experience, understanding and judgement. This account, Lonergan claims, is not subject to revision, because the subject who attempts to revise it finds themselves engaged in the process of knowing, exactly as Lonergan has described it. Everything subsequent in *Insight*, as Doran notes, follows from this affirmation.[113] Lonergan's notions of being and objectivity flow necessarily from his account of knowing. His next move, in Chapter 14 – 'The Method of Metaphysics' – Is to put forward a philosophical method based on his enquiry into the nature and fact of insight.[114] Lonergan:

> …proposes that the basis of any philosophy lies in its implicit or explicit cognitional theory, which itself necessarily includes some stand on the basic philosophical issues of the real, the subject, and objectivity.[115]

And:

> …the inevitable philosophic component immanent in the formulation of cognitional theory will be either a basic position or a basic counterposition.[116]

A philosophy is founded on a 'basic position' if its explicit or implicit cognitional theory is in accordance with that set out in *Insight*; otherwise, the philosophy is founded on a 'basic

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[109] *Insight*, 402-404.
[110] *Insight*, 404-405.
[111] *Insight*, 405-407.
[112] *Insight*, 407-409.
[113] Doran, *Course on Insight*, 11.
[114] *Insight*, 412.
[115] Doran, *Course on Insight*, 91; cf *Insight*, 412-413.
[116] *Insight*, 413.

counterposition.' Counterpositions invite reversal; that is, they are shown to be incoherent by the activity of grasping them and working out their implications. Positions, on the other hand, invite development.[117] Lonergan believes that philosophy can progress through this dialectical process.

> However, the dialectic itself has a notable presupposition, for it supposes that cognitional theory exercises a fundamental influence in metaphysics, in ethics, and in theological pronouncements.[118]

The formulation reflects Lonergan's assumption that metaphysics, ethics and theology are all essentially the same kind of discourse and that each is determined by the cognitional theory that underpins it.

> Lonergan explores the presupposition first in relation to metaphysics.

> Just as the notion of being underlies and penetrates and goes beyond all other notions, so also metaphysics is the department of human knowledge that underlies, penetrates, transforms and unifies all other departments.[119]

There is a latent metaphysics that is immanent in all human knowing; it becomes explicit when the implications and techniques of such a latent metaphysics come to be understood. Here, Lonergan introduces the important notion of proportionate being:

> …proportionate being may be defined as whatever is to be known by human experience, intelligent grasp, and reasonable affirmation.

> Now let us say that explicit metaphysics is the conception, affirmation and implementation of the integral heuristic structure of proportionate being.[120]

The unfolding of the human desire to know constitutes a notion of being, and also imposes a normative structure on human cognitional acts.[121] And since knowing is knowing being:

> …the integral heuristic structure of proportionate being… is knowledge of the organizing structure of proportionate being.[122]

Being is that which is known, and so the structure of human knowing reflects the structure of being. By becoming aware of, and appropriating, one's own cognitive process, one recognises the structure of knowing and so arrives at an explicit metaphysics. If the cognitional theory is

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[117] *Insight*, 413.
[118] *Insight*, 414.
[119] *Insight*, 415.
[120] *Insight*, 416.
[121] *Insight*, 420.
[122] *Insight*, 421.

correct, then so is the metaphysics. Lonergan claims that such a metaphysics is also stable, for it is founded in the unchanging facts of human cognition.[123] This is Lonergan's formulation of the thesis of the isomorphism of being and knowing, found also in Aristotelian and Thomist thought.[124] Method in metaphysics, for Lonergan, consists in verifying the facts of cognitive process and thereby making explicit the latent metaphysics which underpins all knowledge:

> To recapitulate, the goal of the method is the emergence of explicit metaphysics in the minds of particular men and women.[125]

The method can then be applied to evaluate differences in metaphysical positions, and Lonergan does so in a summary way in the remainder of chapter 14. He briefly describes the decay that can arise in human society when an uncritical 'commonsense eclecticism' takes the place of critical thought,[126] but at this point in *Insight* he does not apply the same analysis to the society that is the church, or consider how different metaphysical assumptions could shape theological thought.

At the end of chapter 14. Lonergan compares philosophy and scientific method. He claims that the fall of 'scientific monism,' with the rise of the probabilistic and non-deterministic theories of Darwin, Freud, Einstein and quantum mechanics, has effected 'a salutary liberation,' and compelled scientists to understand knowledge, objectivity and reality in the way described in *Insight*.[127] Science differs from philosophy in that there is a single scientific method, applicable to all branches of science, while each philosophical school has its own method.[128] Further Lonergan, like Newman, affirms that belief is an essential element of science; the scientist accepts as a matter of belief the discoveries of those who have gone before, without having to repeat their research.[129] The philosopher, on the other hand, has to appropriate a philosophical position for him/herself:

> Philosophic evidence is within the philosopher himself. It is his own inability to avoid experience, to renounce intelligence in inquiry, to desert reasonableness in reflection. It is his own detached, disinterested desire to know... Philosophy is the

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[123] *Insight*, 418-9.
[124] *Insight*, 424-6.
[125] *Insight*, 426.
[126] *Insight*, 445.
[127] *Insight*, 449-50.
[128] *Insight*, 450.
[129] *Insight*, 452-453.

flowering of the individual's rational consciousness in its coming to know and take possession of itself.[130]

Lonergan concludes:

> The contribution of science and of scientific method to philosophy lies in a unique ability to supply philosophy with instances of the heuristic structures which a metaphysics integrates into a single view of the concrete universe.[131]

Lonergan is describing his own project in *Insight*: to establish a metaphysics that integrates all branches of knowledge into 'a single view of the concrete universe.' Within such a metaphysical structure, pluralism is not a problem for hermeneutics: differences in expression and interpretation can be resolved by the dialectical process that exposes the underlying philosophical positions or counterpositions. A later generation of theologians such as Tracy, Lash and Kerr would argue for a pluralism in doctrinal expression that is not so easily resolved and perhaps is irreducible.

In Chapter 15, 'Elements of Metaphysics,' Lonergan works out explicitly the metaphysics derived from his account of human knowing. He does so in terms of the Aristotelian/Thomist categories of potency, form and act. This leads to the notion of finality:

> We have worked out a notion of finality that attributes to the universe of proportionate being a directed dynamism that parallels the heuristic structure of inquiry and reflection. It is a view that squares with our conception of metaphysics… our affirmation of finality rests not simply on an a priori parallel [i.e. the parallel between the structures of being and of knowing] but on that parallel as supported by vast ranges of fact.[132]

The chapter is summarised as follows:

> Metaphysics has been conceived as the integral heuristic structure of proportionate being. Proportionate being is what is to be known by experience, intelligent grasp, and reasonable affirmation. Integral heuristic structure is the anticipatory outline of what would be known by affirming a complete explanation of experience.[133]

The evidence for a metaphysics, Lonergan affirms, is obtained by adverting to one's own cognitional process, and affirming oneself as empirically, intelligently and rationally

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[130] *Insight*, 454.
[131] *Insight*, 455.
[132] *Insight*, 475.
[133] *Insight*, 507-8.

conscious.[134] Scientific method and its findings, as Lonergan describes them, substantiate the 'integral heuristic structure of proportionate being' that he wishes to erect. He concludes:

> Finally, the contents of cognitional acts either refer to the known or are identical with the known, and so the dynamic structure of knowing is also the structure of proportionate being. This was grasped by Aristotle and more fully by Aquinas, and while the present account of the matter does differ in details from their position, the difference lies in the fact that modern science has made it possible to distinguish very sharply between preliminary description and scientific explanation.[135]

For Lonergan, scientific method can be described in terms of Thomist metaphysics, and the success of science validates the metaphysics:

> …the structure of scientific knowledge is a constant, and that methodical constant squares with the Thomist metaphysical constant of potency, form and act.[136]

In Chapter 16 of *Insight*, 'Metaphysics as Science,' Lonergan illustrates his metaphysical method by considering the relation of metaphysics to the natural sciences:

> If the metaphysician must leave to the physicist the understanding of physics and to the chemist the understanding of chemistry, he has the task of working out for the physicist and chemist, for the biologist and the psychologist, the dynamic structure that initiates and controls their respective inquiries and, no less, the general characteristics of the goal towards which they head.[137]

He asks whether the metaphysical elements

> …constitute an extrinsic or an intrinsic structure of proportionate being. Are they merely the structure in which proportionate being is known? Or are they the structure immanent in the reality of proportionate being?[138]

And he replies:

> …the simplest reason why our knowing has its peculiar structure would be that proportionate being has a parallel structure.[139]

Lonergan's claim is that 'intelligibility is not extrinsic but intrinsic to being.'[140]

His position:

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134 *Insight*, 508-9.
135 *Insight*, 511.
136 Lonergan, 'Isomorphism of Thomist and Scientific Thought,' in *Collection*, 133-141, 140.
137 *Insight*, 522.
138 *Insight*, 522-3.
139 *Insight*, 523.
140 *Insight*, 523.

> …affirms the intrinsic intelligibility of being, and it identifies this affirmation with the affirmation of the possibility of knowledge.[141]

This is Lonergan's answer to the Kantian critical problem, characterised by Sala as 'the rational conception of the real.'[142] Sala (quoting Heidegger) claims that, for Kant, knowledge is primarily intuition.[143] If knowledge is intuition through the senses, or, as Lonergan puts it, 'taking a look,' then human thought can never achieve knowledge of the *noumenon* or thing in itself; its object is merely the *phenomenon*. Lonergan, on the other hand, understands knowledge as a structure, in which the 'a priori' is the pure desire to know, which is our intention of being.[144] This is what gives our cognitional activities their relation to reality. Sala gives credit to Kant for opening to philosophical study the problem of the role of the subject in human knowledge, but he finds Kant's epistemology 'highly obscure, fragmentary and even contradictory.'[145] Lonergan, in *Insight*, has advanced the transcendental analysis begun by Kant in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, and has brought to light the conditions for the possibility of objective knowledge.[146]

Lonergan believes he has shown that classical Thomist metaphysics, with some modifications, is vindicated by the achievements of modern science.[147] In the Thomist worldview, the intelligibility of being, and hence the possibility of valid knowledge of the world, is guaranteed by God's creation, ordering and sustaining of the universe. Lonergan has not yet made explicit the theistic implications of his metaphysics; he will do so in Chapter 19 of *Insight*. However, theological themes are beginning to emerge even at this stage:

> Our study of human intelligence revealed the necessity of distinguishing sharply between ordinary concepts, that express and result from insights, and the notion of being, that has to have quite a different origin and ground. For if the notion of being expressed and resulted from an insight, that insight would have to be an understanding not merely of the whole of the actual universe but also of the total range of possible universes. Such an understanding would be identical with Aquinas's *actus totius entis*, that is, with God. [*Summa theologiae*, 1, q. 79, a. 2 c.] Since man possesses a notion of being yet obviously fails to satisfy Aquinas's concept of God, man's notion cannot result from an act of understanding. Accordingly, we were led to the discovery that the notion of being has its origin

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[141] *Insight*, 524.

[142] Giovanni Sala, 'The A Priori in Human Knowledge,' Chapter 1 in *Lonergan and Kant: Five Essays in Human Knowledge*, 8.

[143] Sala, 9.

[144] Sala, 11.

[145] Sala, 30.

[146] Sala, 32.

[147] *Insight*, 545.

and ground in an anticipative desire to understand, in a capacity to inquire and reflect.[148]

Lonergan follows Aquinas in conceiving metaphysics as a description of a world that is ordered and sustained in being by an omnipotent Creator. Thomist metaphysics describes the world as it is – proportionate being, in Lonergan's terms. Only the adoption of critical method – 'detached inquiry and disinterested reflection,'[149] he believes, can overcome the confusion and violence that he observes in the contemporary world.

5.7 Hermeneutics: the notion of the universal viewpoint

In Chapter 17, 'Metaphysics as Dialectic,' Lonergan considers issues particularly relevant to hermeneutics. In Chapter 14, he claimed that the basis of any philosophy lies in its cognitional theory – explicit or implicit – and that differing theories can be judged, in the light of his account of the structure of human cognitional activity, to be founded on basic positions or on basic counterpositions.[150] At the beginning of Chapter 17, he states:

> …there is available a general theorem to the effect that any philosophy, whether actual or possible, will rest upon the dynamic structure of cognitional activity either as correctly conceived or as distorted by oversights and by mistaken orientations.[151]

> And:

> …we propose to ask whether there exists a single base of operations from which any philosophy can be interpreted correctly, and we propose to show that our cognitional analysis provides such a base.[152]

In the first part of the chapter, Lonergan is concerned with the relations of metaphysics to myth and to mystery. Each of these has its roots in the sense of the unknown, and the experience of the 'known unknown:'

> …in fact our questions outnumber our answers, so that we know of an unknown through our unanswered questions.[153]

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[148] *Insight*, 544.
[149] *Insight*, 552.
[150] *Insight*, 413-415.
[151] *Insight,* 553.
[152] *Insight*, 554.
[153] *Insight*, 555.

The primary field of mystery and myth is the sphere of reality that is unknown, unexplored and strange.[154] Since, in Lonergan's theory, metaphysics is a 'corollary to self-knowledge' – it is the fruit of the appropriation of one's own cognitional process – it cannot ignore the historical phenomena of mysteries and myths.[155] Mythic consciousness, as Lonergan defines it, arises in the absence of an explicit and adequate metaphysics that provides universally applicable criteria of reality.[156]

> In the absence of reliable criteria of reality, human intelligence makes myths, and mythic consciousness distorts interpretation.[157]

So we misinterpret texts coming to us from other cultures, or from the past; each interpreter works from their own viewpoint, without any means of determining one viewpoint to be more adequate than another; and there is no escape from such relativism until we move from the descriptive to the explanatory viewpoint, and thereby arrive at an adequate metaphysics.

> Myth, then, and metaphysics are opposites. For myth recedes and metaphysics advances in the measure that the counterpositions are rejected, that the attempt to understand things as related to us gives way to the effort to understand them as related to one another, that effective criteria become available for determining the occurrence and the adequacy of understanding.[158]

Lonergan distinguishes myth from allegory, which arises when the speaker wishes to express an understanding that cannot be formulated in ordinary language.[159] A speaker turns to allegory when he/she 'has reached a viewpoint that current modes of expression cannot convey.'[160] As examples, Lonergan quotes the parables of the Gospels and the use of myth in Plato's dialogues. The allegorical aspect of myth 'emerges when myth is conceived as a solution to a problem of expression.'[161] Thus myth is not simply a 'primitive' form of expression but also has a function within a highly developed culture.[162]

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[154] *Insight*, 556.
[155] *Insight*, 560.
[156] *Insight*, 561.
[157] *Insight*, 563.
[158] *Insight*, 566.
[159] *Insight*, 567-568.
[160] *Insight*, 569.
[161] *Insight*, 569.
[162] *Insight*, 567. Lonergan cites the work of Susanne K Langer, *Feeling and Form* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1953), 236-257.

Myth is also distinguished from mystery. Unanswered questions confront us with a 'known unknown;' its field is reduced by the advance of knowledge, but it cannot be eliminated.[163]

> The achievement, then, of full understanding and the attainment even of the totality of correct judgments would not free man from the necessity of dynamic images that partly are symbols and partly are signs… To such images, then, let us give the name of mysteries.[164]

In considering these questions of expression, Lonergan seems to maintain the understanding of the spoken or written word as an expression of the 'inner word' which, as we have seen, runs through *Verbum* but which would be criticised by writers such as Kerr in the light of the thought of Wittgenstein.[165]

In the second section of Chapter 17, Lonergan considers the notion of truth. The proximate criterion of truth is reflective grasp of the virtually unconditioned. The remote criterion is the proper unfolding of the detached and disinterested desire to know.[166] That is, if human cognition is operating properly, without the interference of other desires, a judgement of truth can be made. The definition of truth, Lonergan says, has already been introduced implicitly in the account of the notion of being. Truth is a relation of knowing to being; if the knowing is identical with the known, truth consists in that identity; in the more general case, truth is the conformity of the correspondence of the subject's affirmations and negations to what is and what is not.[167] The ontological aspect of truth also follows:

> Ontological truth, then, is the intrinsic intelligibility of being. It is the conformity of being to the conditions of its being known through intelligent inquiry and critical reflection.[168]

In relation to the expression of truth, Lonergan asserts that, between knowledge and expression, there is an isomorphism and an interpenetration, but not an identity. 'While knowing and stating are distinct, still they run so much together that they are inseparable.'[169] A gulf arises, however, when communication is attempted between people with different

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[163] *Insight*, 569-570.
[164] *Insight*, 570-1.
[165] Section 9.2, below.
[166] *Insight*, 573.
[167] *Insight*, 575.
[168] *Insight*, 576.
[169] *Insight*, 579.

'common sense' – different accumulations of insights – between, for example, teachers and pupils or between original thinkers and their contemporaries. In this situation, expression can fail because the speaker or writer fails to estimate correctly the understanding of the hearer or reader.[170]

> It follows, then, that properly speaking expression is not true or false. Truth pertains to the judgment inasmuch as it proceeds from a grasp of the virtually unconditioned, inasmuch as it conforms to the being it affirms, and inasmuch as it demands an extrinsic intelligibility in being a condition of the possibility of knowing. Expressions are instrumental. They are related to the truth of knowledge. Similarly, they are related to the moral truth of the will that communicates knowledge. But in themselves expressions are merely adequate or inadequate.[171]

Different views are possible, Lonergan concedes, but they are based on the counterpositions.[172]

On the appropriation of truth, Lonergan states:

> To appropriate a truth is to make it one's own. The essential appropriation of truth is cognitional. However, our reasonableness demands consistency between what we know and what we do; and so there is a volitional appropriation of truth that consists in our willingness to live up to it, and a sensitive appropriation of truth that consists in an adaptation of our sensibility to the requirements of our knowledge and our decisions.[173]

The moral dimension alluded to here – the 'willingness to live up to' the truth – hints at the fourth level of consciousness, that of responsibility and judgment, that Lonergan will add to his scheme in *Method*.

For the remainder of Chapter 17, Lonergan is concerned with the truth of interpretation. An expression communicates an insight. An interpretation is a second expression of the same insight, addressed to a different audience, which therefore requires the speaker to grasp the level of understanding of the anticipated audience.[174] Such a 'level of understanding' or of 'habitual intellectual development' is the only variable that Lonergan alludes to in relation to the problem of interpretation. There is no reference to what might

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[170] *Insight*, 579.
[171] *Insight*, 579-580.
[172] *Insight*, 580-581.
[173] *Insight*, 581-582.
[174] *Insight*, 585.

be termed a 'horizontal' pluralism of cultures, as distinct from a 'vertical' pluralism in which differences reflect differing levels of development.

But, Lonergan asks, is such a 'reflective interpretation' a practical possibility? He believes that the scholar can 'arrive at a participation of the common sense of another period,'[175] and so give a correct interpretation of a text dating from that period.

> But if interpretation is to be scientific, then the grounds for the interpretation have to be assignable; if interpretation is to be scientific, then there will not be a range of different interpretations due to the individual, group, and general bias of the historical sense of different experts; if interpretation is to be scientific, then it has to discover some method of conceiving and determining the habitual development of all audiences, and it has to invent some technique by which its expression escapes relativity to particular and incidental audiences.[176]

To describe the task of 'scientific interpretation' in this way could seem a *reductio ad absurdam*, aimed at demonstrating its impossibility. What would be the 'technique by which its expression escapes relativity' to particular audiences? However, at this stage in his thought, Lonergan believes such a scientific interpretation possible. It depends on the notion of a 'universal viewpoint' and on the levels and sequences of expression.[177]

> By a universal viewpoint will be meant a potential totality of genetically and dialectically ordered viewpoints.[178]

The universal viewpoint has its base in an adequate self-knowledge and in the consequent metaphysics. It is a heuristic structure.[179] Lonergan claims that his own philosophy can ground such a universal viewpoint, because it is based on the dynamic structure of human cognitional activity.[180] He repeats the claim made earlier in *Insight*[181] that, while the account of the elements of cognitional activity may be improved upon, such improvements will not involve any radical change in the philosophy, because it rests upon the pattern of relations that bring the elements into a single dynamic structure.[182]

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[175] *Insight*, 587
[176] *Insight*, 587.
[177] Doran, *Course on Insight*, 131.
[178] *Insight*, 587.
[179] *Insight*, 588-589.
[180] *Insight*, 591.
[181] *Insight*, 359.
[182] *Insight*, 591.

As regards levels and sequences of expression, Lonergan wishes 'to classify modes of expression, not in terms of language or of style, but in terms of meanings.'[183] The expression may originate from one or more sources of meaning in the speaker or writer, and it may be intended to evoke a response from one or more sources of meaning in the hearer or reader. Literary writing, advertising copy, propaganda and scientific or philosophical writing each aim at a different response from the reader. The recognition of the existence of levels of expression makes it possible for the interpreter to classify different types of expression. Lonergan says of his account:

> It envisages the expression as a flow of sensible events that (1) originates in the cognitional and volitional sources of meaning of a speaker or writer, and (2) terminates in a reproduction of sources of meaning in hearer or reader.[184]

Science, philosophy and other fields of thought each have their own appropriate modes of expression. The first task of the interpreter is to recognise the type of text with which he/she is dealing, and the level of expression at which it is operating.[185] Lonergan assumes that meaning is an expression of mental acts.[186]

To describe the method of interpretation, Lonergan has recourse to the analogy that he has previously used to describe classical empirical method: that of a pair of scissors in which the upper blade consists of the 'heuristic structure' – the set of assumptions that determine the question to be answered – and the lower blade refers to the data which are to be interpreted.[187].

A correct interpretation of a document is possible if (1) the interpreter can proceed from his/her own experience, understanding and judgement to determine the possible range of meanings of the document and (2) they can determine which of the possible meanings should be assigned.[188]

> But the possibility of envisaging the full range of possible meaning lies in the universal viewpoint, and the possibility of connecting possible meanings with

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[183] *Insight*, 592.
[184] *Insight*, 594.
[185] *Insight*, 594-595.
[186] See section 9.2, below
[187] *Insight*, 600-601.
[188] *Insight*, 601.

particular documents lies in the genetic sequence that extrapolates from present to past correlations between meaning and mode of expression.[189]

The 'proximate sources of every interpretation are immanent in the interpreter,'[190] and bias is negated, according to Lonergan, by self-appropriation; that is, by adopting a critical viewpoint that adverts to one's own presuppositions and assumptions.[191]

Lonergan concludes by offering some canons for a methodical hermeneutics.

> An interpretation is the expression of the meaning of another expression. It may be literary or scientific. A literary interpretation offers the images and associations from which a reader can reach the insights and form the judgments that the interpreter believes to correspond to the content of the original expression. A scientific interpretation is concerned to formulate the relevant insights and judgments, and to do so in a manner that is consonant with scientific collaboration and scientific control.[192]

A methodical hermeneutics, Lonergan states, is limited to scientific interpretation, and the canons merely summarise what has already been said about the 'upper blade' of hermeneutical method. The canons are:

1. Relevance. The interpreter must begin from the universal viewpoint, thereby eliminating relativity to a particular audience and to particular 'places and times, schools and sects.' [193]

2. Explanation. The interpretation 'will aim at relating, not to us, but to one another, the contents and contexts of the totality of documents and interpretations.'[194]

3. Successive approximations. 'The totality of documents cannot be interpreted satisfactorily by a single interpreter or even by a single generation of interpreters.'[195] The labour of interpretation is cumulative.

4. Parsimony. This canon excludes from consideration the unverifiable and allows for partial and provisional interpretation before full data are available.[196]

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[189] *Insight*, 601.
[190] *Insight*, 606.
[191] *Insight*, 606-607; cf. Ivan Coelho, *Hermeneutics and Method* (University of Toronto Press, 2001), 75.
[192] *Insight*, 608.
[193] *Insight*, 609.
[194] *Insight*, 609.
[195] *Insight*, 610.
[196] *Insight*, 612.

5. The canon of residues. The interpreter 'has to acknowledge a residue of mere matters of fact.' [197]

Lonergan summarises what he has been doing in Chapter 17 as 'outlin[ing] the possibility of a general heuristic structure for a methodical hermeneutics,'[198] and the chapter ends as follows:

> Metaphysics has been defined as the integral heuristic structure of proportionate being, and so the existence of a heuristic structure for interpretation brings under metaphysics the interpretation not only of less general utterances but also of every possible philosophy and metaphysics. A similar claim would be made, of course, by Hegelianism, but between the Hegelian view and our own there exists the important difference that the idealist position with its alleged dialectical necessity has to pretend to be complete independently of nonsystematic matters of fact, while our realism permits us not only to respect but also to include every valid conclusion of empirical human science.[199]

The reference to Hegel – also alluded to at the beginning of Chapter 17 – indicates the scope of Lonergan's ambition. He believes that his cognitional analysis provides a base from which all philosophical theories can be evaluated and shown to be either in accordance with his positions (and therefore inviting development) or dependent on the counterpositions (and inviting reversal.) By appropriation of one's cognitional process, the interpreter can attain the notion of the universal viewpoint:

> By a universal viewpoint will be meant a potential totality of genetically and dialectically ordered viewpoints.[200]

Coelho comments:

> This is a question of taking advantage of the invariant elements of human consciousness, for if human meaning is a product of human consciousness, then grasp of that consciousness is a key to the universe of human meaning and the totality of viewpoints.[201]

The notion of the universal viewpoint, Lonergan believes, overcomes both the potential bias of the interpreter, and the relativity of interpretation to the audience to which it is addressed.[202] A scientific interpretation of a text can be achieved – not necessarily all at once,

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[197] *Insight*, 613.
[198] *Insight*, 616.
[199] *Insight*, 616-7.
[200] *Insight*, 587.
[201] Coelho, *Hermeneutics and Method*, 4.
[202] Coelho, 3.

by the work of a single interpreter, but by the cumulative labours of successive interpreters, or even successive generations.[203]

Doran expresses the view that 'the chapter is a landmark statement in hermeneutics whose importance and meaning has yet to be appreciated even by most Lonergan students.'[204] But Lonergan's theory of hermeneutics is unmistakably shaped by the assumptions that underpin his thought at this stage in its development. The form/content distinction is taken for granted. Language 'has a purely cognitive and communicative function.'[205] Meaning seems to be hypostasised; an interpretation of a text is a re-expression of its meaning for a different audience.[206] In order to formulate such a re-expression, the interpreter must grasp the 'intellectual development' of the intended audience – such development being seen as a linear process. An interpreter who has achieved the notion of the universal viewpoint can identify all possible interpretations of a document and select the correct one.

In Chapter 17 of *Insight,* Lonergan appears to see hermeneutics as a linear and cumulative process, analogous to empirical science. By successive insights, the 'correct' interpretation is arrived at, and once established, it is not relative to a particular interpreter, a particular culture or a particular stage in history. We should remember that Lonergan's two major works before *Insight – Grace and Freedom* and *Verbum* – were both interpretative studies of the thought of Thomas Aquinas. In each of those studies, Lonergan's scholarship follows the model that he outlines here. He enters into the mind of perhaps the most systematic thinker in the Christian tradition in order to establish, clearly and objectively, his thought on a particular aspect of his system. We will see in the next chapter that, in his trinitarian theology, Lonergan applies a similar model to the interpretation of doctrine. Only later, and particularly in *Method*, does he begin to elaborate an approach to hermeneutics that is more historically and culturally conscious; and even then, some critics will judge that he has not gone far enough. But in Chapter 17 of *Insight*, Lonergan feels confident that his philosophy can ground a universal viewpoint from which:

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[203] *Insight*, 587-591.
[204] Doran, *Course on Insight*, 124.
[205] Coelho, *Hermeneutics and Method*, 237-238 note 8.
[206] *Insight*, 585.

…one becomes capable, when provided with the appropriate data, of approximating to the content and context of the meaning of any given expression.[207]

5.8 From metaphysics to ethics to God

Chapter 18 of *Insight* is entitled 'The Possibility of Ethics.'

> First, an attempt is made to work out such notions as the good, will, value, obligation. From this effort there follow a method of ethics that parallels the method of metaphysics and, at the same time, a cosmic or ontological account of the good.[208]

Lonergan is concerned, not with the content of ethical obligations, but with working out a method by which such obligations can be determined, on the basis that, 'As being is intelligible and one, so also it is good.'[209] By this method, he believes, a rational morality can be established. However, there arises the problem of evil or, as Lonergan terms it, moral impotence, which Lonergan sees as resulting from 'incomplete intellectual and volitional development.[210]'

Moral impotence can only be overcome by 'a higher integration of human living,'[211] and this leads on to Chapter 19, 'General Transcendent Knowledge:'

> …this chapter is concerned with the knowledge of God that, according to St Thomas Aquinas, consists in knowing that he is but not what he is.[212]

Lonergan believes that such knowledge of God's existence can be achieved by the method that he has worked out in *Insight*. The human desire to understand is unrestricted; but it does not follow that unrestricted understanding can be achieved – there are more questions than answers.[213] Apart from being there is nothing – this is an analytic proposition, since its negation is self-contradictory.[214] Lonergan recaps the argument of the book thus far, by means of which he has set up a metaphysics of proportionate being and a consequent ethics.

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[207] *Insight*, 590.
[208] *Insight*, 618.
[209] *Insight*, 619.
[210] *Insight*, 650.
[211] *Insight*, 655.
[212] *Insight*, 657.
[213] *Insight*, 660.
[214] *Insight*, 661-2.

The [next] stage of the argument is concerned with human knowledge of transcendent being. The bare bones of the procedure are simple enough. Being is whatever can be grasped intelligently and affirmed reasonably. Being is proportionate or transcendent according as it lies within or without the domain of man's outer and inner experience. The possibility of transcendent knowledge, then, is the possibility of grasping intelligently and affirming reasonably a transcendent being. And the proof of the possibility lies in the fact that such intelligent grasp and reasonable affirmation occur.[215]

We can achieve knowledge of transcendent being by asking what being is. This leads us to conceive an unrestricted act of understanding; and the consideration of causality leads to the conclusion that there is such an unrestricted act.[216]

For what is the universe and its ground but the objective of man's detached, disinterested, unrestricted desire to know?[217]

In the next section, 'The Notion of God,' Lonergan aims to show that 'it is one and the same thing to understand what being is and to understand what God is.'[218] He goes through the attributes of the 'unrestricted act of understanding,' demonstrating that they correspond to the attributes of God: spiritual, perfect, good, etc. The procedure here is reminiscent of Aquinas' five ways of demonstrating the existence of God,[219] in the sense that Lonergan, like Thomas, proceeds from empirical fact to 'what everyone understands as God.' Whereas Thomas can take metaphysical realities such as causation, contingency and teleology as axiomatic, Lonergan has had to demonstrate the very possibility of metaphysics by his detailed analysis of human cognition – in that sense, chapter 19 of *Insight* could be said to correspond to the second question of the *Summa Theologiae*. Like Thomas, Lonergan does not believe that the existence of God can be demonstrated *a priori* – he is not a 'strong foundationalist' in that sense. Indeed, he distinguishes between grasping the notion of God and affirming God's existence.[220] He rejects all forms of the ontological argument for the existence of God as fallacious, because they argue from the conception of God to God's existence.[221]

Lonergan is almost ready to proceed to his proof:

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[215] *Insight*, 663.
[216] *Insight*, 674.
[217] *Insight*, 680.
[218] *Insight*, 680.
[219] *Summa Theologiae,* 1a, 2, 3.
[220] *Insight*, 692.
[221] *Insight*, 693.

> Affirming is an intrinsically rational act; it proceeds with rational necessity from grasp of the unconditioned; and the unconditioned to be grasped is, not the formally unconditioned that God is and that unrestricted understanding grasps, but the virtually unconditioned that consists in inferring God's existence from premises that are true.[222]

There remains one preliminary. Lonergan's proof is not an automatic process leading inescapably to a judgement:

> All that can be set down in these pages is a set of signs. The signs can represent a relevant virtually unconditioned. But grasping it and making the consequent judgment is an immanent act of rational consciousness that each has to perform for himself and no one else can perform for him.[223]

This is in line with what Lonergan has said throughout *Insight*; that he can only describe and signpost the process of self-appropriation, which each reader must then carry out for themselves. That, in turn, supports Mongeau's view that 'there is a lot of Thomas' in *Insight*,[224] and that Lonergan's turn to the subject is a transposition and not an abandonment of the thought of Aquinas.[225] Rather than offering a rationalist *a priori* proof of the existence of God, Lonergan, like Aquinas, seeks to demonstrate the rationality of the act of faith which the believer must make for him or herself.

> The existence of God, then, is known as the conclusion to an argument, and while such arguments are many, all of them, I believe, are included in the following general form.
>
> If the real is completely intelligible, God exists. But the real is completely intelligible. Therefore, God exists.[226]

In the remainder of Chapter 19, Lonergan seeks to demonstrate the validity of his syllogism. He argues that the existence of God is a necessary conclusion from following through his method, while mistaken understandings of God result from the counterpositions.

> …the critical thinker does not allow developments in the notion of God to generate any doubt that it is one and the same being to which all men refer whether they are more or less successful in conceiving him, whether correctly they affirm his existence or mistakenly they deny it.[227]

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[222] *Insight*, 695.
[223] *Insight*, 695.
[224] Mongeau, 'Bernard Lonergan,' 1066.
[225] Mongeau, 'Bernard Lonergan,' 1067.
[226] *Insight*, 695.
[227] *Insight*, 708.

Lonergan himself would later criticise the argument of chapter 19 because it 'It treated God's existence and attributes in a purely objective fashion' and made the classicist assumption that 'there is one right culture.' [228] St Amour comments:

> Chapter nineteen's appeal to logic, its objectivist intent, and its inadequate appreciation of historicity, cultural pluralism, and the significance of differences in the existential and religious horizons of subjects all suggest that quasi-classicist assumptions permeate that chapter.[229]

Nevertheless, St Amour believes the argument to be logically sound, as Lonergan himself does. It is Lonergan's transition from logical to methodical control of meaning that allows him to leave behind the 'quasi-classicist assumptions' of Chapter 19 and thus to overcome its shortcomings. Logic yields a static viewpoint, concerned to ensure the clarity, coherence and rigour of what is currently known, while method drives discovery.[230] This transition was brought about by the shift from a classicist to an empirical notion of culture.[231]

In Chapter 20, 'Special Transcendent Knowledge,' Lonergan addresses the philosophical and theological problems raised by the fact of evil, and also the notion of belief, which he believes to be closely related. For Lonergan, evil is fundamentally irrational; 'Will is good by its conformity to intelligence.'[232] The problem of evil is the problem raised by the existence of evil in a world created by a God who is omniscient, omnipotent and good.[233] The existence of a good God also offers a solution to the problem,[234] and Lonergan sets out at length the heuristic structure of the solution.[235] The solution depends on the 'possibility of conceiving belief as an intelligent and reasonable procedure,'[236] the demonstration of which occupies the next section of the chapter. Lonergan analyses the phenomenon of belief in

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[228] Lonergan, *Philosophy of God, and Theology* (Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1974), 13.
[229] Paul St Amour, 'Bernard Lonergan on Affirmation of the Existence of God,' *Analecta Hermeneutica* Vol 2 (2010), 10.
[230] St Amour, 10-12.
[231] Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 3.
[232] *Insight*, 714.
[233] *Insight*, 716.
[234] *Insight*, 716.
[235] *Insight*, 718-725.
[236] *Insight*, 725.

terms of his own cognitional theory, drawing on (though not citing) Newman's *Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*.[237]

> The general context of belief, then, is a sustained collaboration of many instances of rational self-consciousness in the attainment and the dissemination of knowledge.[238]

A proposition is judged to be true when it is grasped as virtually unconditioned; however, the unconditioned is independent of the particular mind that grasps it as such:

> Accordingly, there is to any truth an essential detachability from the mind in which it happened to be generated, and an essential communicability, for the unconditioned cannot but be independent of the processes of transmission from one place and time to another and from one mind to another.[239]

Belief, for Lonergan, rests on a collective process analogous to the individual's process of experience, understanding and judgement that he has elaborated in *Insight*. Mistaken beliefs arise as a result of bias or defects in the process and are rectified by its correct application.[240]

In relation to the problem of evil, Lonergan states:

> …the realization of the solution and its development in each of us is principally the work of God, who illuminates our intellects to understand what we had not understood and to grasp as unconditioned what we had reputed error, who breaks the bonds of our habitual unwillingness to be utterly genuine in intelligent inquiry and critical reflection by inspiring the hope that reinforces the detached, disinterested, unrestricted desire to know and by infusing the charity, the love, that bestows on intelligence the fulness of life.[241]

Conversion is the work of God in each individual and, for Lonergan, intellectual, moral and religious conversion are intimately linked. Although God is not mentioned in *Insight* until the twelfth chapter, Lonergan's vision is fundamentally a theocentric one.

5.9 The project

In the Epilogue to *Insight*, Lonergan summarises the project of the book as follows:

> The self-appropriation of one's own intellectual and rational self-consciousness begins as cognitional theory, expands into a metaphysics and an ethics, mounts to

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[237] For instance, Lonergan illustrates his argument with a reference to the belief that 'England is an island,' *Insight* 728; cf. Newman, *Essay*, 6.2, 158. (Newman states, more correctly, that 'Great Britain is an island.' See *Insight*, 805, editorial note f.)
[238] *Insight*, 728.
[239] *Insight*, 729.
[240] *Insight*, 728-738.
[241] *Insight*, 751.

> a conception and an affirmation of God, only to be confronted with a problem of evil that demands the transformation of self-reliant intelligence into an *intellectus quaerens fidem*.[242]

Insight thus far has been written from a 'moving viewpoint' as each stage of the argument was established, but, Lonergan says, he will conclude from his own viewpoint as 'a believer, a Catholic and, as it happens, a professor of dogmatic theology.'[243] He believes that his work in *Insight* can make a contribution to 'the introduction to theology or, as more commonly it is named, to apologetics.'[244] The Catholic believer has to avoid both rationalism and fideism and, therefore, has to seek a synthesis of faith and reason. Such a synthesis requires a '[sufficiently] supple and detailed cognitional theory,'[245] and this is what Lonergan is aiming to provide.

Lonergan goes on to explain in detail what he believes *Insight* can contribute to theological method. He recalls the teaching of Vatican I on the role of understanding in faith, and affirms that:

> … a firm grasp of what it is to understand can hardly fail to promote the limited but most fruitful understanding of the Christian mysteries that results both from the analogy of nature and from the inner coherence of the mysteries themselves.[246]

Significantly, Lonergan affirms that his work has provided '…a reasoned answer… for the question whether there can be more than one metaphysics.'[247] Because his metaphysics is based on invariant structures of human cognition, Lonergan claims, it is universally valid, irrespective of cultural and historical differences:

> …when an Easterner experiences, understands and judges, he performs the same operations as a Westerner.[248]

Thus, to the extent that disputed theological questions reflect differing understandings of metaphysics, Lonergan believes that has provided the means of resolving them. He goes on to consider the closely related question of changeless concepts. Here again, Lonergan

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[242] *Insight*, 753.
[243] *Insight*, 753.
[244] *Insight*, 753.
[245] *Insight*, 755.
[246] *Insight*, 756. Cf. *DF*, chapter 4.
[247] *Insight*, 756.
[248] *Insight*, 758.

believes that a correct account of the unchanging structures of human knowing allows a resolution of this problem:

> In brief, concepts change inasmuch as things change, inasmuch as human understanding develops, and inasmuch as that development is formulated coherently or incoherently. But behind every change there is an underlying unity, and that unity may be formulated explicitly on the level of heuristic anticipation or of unconsciously adopted method or of a dialectical metaphysics… behind any conceptual variation there is a conceptual constant that can be formulated from a universal viewpoint.[249]

Lonergan's next point is even more significant for the hermeneutics of doctrine. Recalling the teaching of Vatican I that divine revelation is a permanent deposit confided to the church, and that the church's understanding, knowledge and wisdom develops over time,[250] he claims that his own account of the interpretative process, as developed in Chapter 17 of *Insight*, is isomorphic with the development of the church's understanding of revelation:

> But isomorphic with this interpretative process, there is the Catholic fact of (1) an initial divine revelation, (2) the work of teachers and preachers communicating and applying the initial message to a succession of different audiences, (3) the work of the speculative theologian seeking a universal formulation of the truths of faith, and (4) the work of the historical theologian revealing the doctrinal identity in the verbal and conceptual differences of (1), (2), and (3).[251]

He concludes:

> … so it is that in a preeminent and unique manner the dogmatic decision is, and the technical thesis of the dogmatic theologian can be, the true interpretation of scriptural texts, patristic teaching and traditional utterances.[252]

The underlying assumption here is that there exists a 'true interpretation' to be distilled from the various theological sources, which can be discerned from the universal viewpoint and declared in language and concepts that are universally valid. Lonergan goes on to offer what he describes as a 'sketch' of a theory of doctrinal development, which, he says:

> …can envisage not only natural and intelligent progress but also sinful decline, and not only progress and decline but also supernatural recovery.[253]

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[249] *Insight*, 760-761.
[250] *DF*, chapter 4.
[251] *Insight*, 761.
[252] *Insight*, 762.
[253] *Insight*, 764.

What does not appear to be envisaged, at this stage in the development of Lonergan's own thought, is legitimate pluralism in the development of doctrine.

Finally, Lonergan considers the relations of theology to other sciences:

> It was to give concrete expression to the sincerity of Catholic thought in affirming the essential independence of other fields that our first eighteen chapters were written solely in the light of human intelligence and reasonableness and without any presupposition of God's existence, without any appeal to the authority of the church, and without any explicit deference to the genius of St Thomas Aquinas. At the same time, our first eighteen chapters were followed by a nineteenth and twentieth that revealed the inevitability with which the affirmation of God and the search of intellect for faith arise out of a sincere acceptance of scientific presuppositions and precepts.[254]

Lonergan shows himself here to be working within the parameters of the teaching of Vatican I that no contradiction can exist between reason, properly directed, and faith, and that reason, if it seeks sincerely, will come to an understanding, albeit limited, of God.[255]

Lonergan concludes:

> … I believe this work to contribute to the program *vetera novis augere et perficere* initiated by the encyclical *Aeterni Patris* of His Holiness Pope Leo XIII.[256]

> After spending years reaching up to the mind of Aquinas, I came to a twofold conclusion. On the one hand, that reaching had changed me profoundly. On the other hand, that change was the essential benefit. For not only did it make me capable of grasping what, in the light of my conclusions, the *vetera* really were, but it also opened challenging vistas on what the *nova* could be.[257]

> …I would say that it is only through a personal appropriation of one's own rational self-consciousness that one can hope to reach the mind of Aquinas, and once that mind is reached, then it is difficult not to import his compelling genius to the problems of this later day.[258]

5.10 Conclusion

Lonergan's aim in *Insight* has been to lead the reader to an appropriation of their own knowing in order to arrive at a cognitional theory that is 'not subject to radical revision'[259] because it is based on the invariant structures of human knowing. For the same reason the

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[254] *Insight*, 765.
[255] *DF*, chapter 4.
[256] *Insight*, 768.
[257] *Insight*, 769.
[258] *Insight*, 770.
[259] *Insight*, 366.

theory is invariant across different cultures and periods of history. The metaphysics derived from the cognitional theory is likewise universally valid and corresponds to the Aristotelian-Thomist picture of the world. This provides the framework within which doctrine can be understood, interpreted and developed. Hermeneutics consists in arriving at the correct interpretation by getting the metaphysics right. The model of doctrinal development which Lonergan sketches is, in Thiel's terms, a noetic one in which development is seen to consist in the church's growth in understanding and clarification of expression of a divinely revealed deposit of faith.[260] Within this framework, the theologian can work according to the model put forward in *Dei Filius* and *Aeterni Patris*.

The reader of *Insight* could be forgiven for concluding that, impressive as the edifice is that Lonergan has constructed, it is a static structure leaving no space for development or for real pluralism in the understanding of doctrine; it is marked by the 'quasi-classicist assumptions' identified by St Amour.[261] Crowe would disagree:

> *Insight*, though a monumental piece of work, is not a finished product. I would go further, and say that it never will be finished, and indeed never should be finished. In approach it is a long dialogue with readers inviting them to self-appropriation… Part Two [of *Insight*] is wide open to all the possibilities of emergent probability in the material universe, developing intelligence in the human, and divine intervention in the total scheme of things.[262]

In the next chapter I will consider Lonergan's application of his cognitional theory to Trinitarian theology.

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[260] Thiel, *Senses of Tradition*, 67-72.
[261] St Amour, 'Bernard Lonergan on Affirmation,' 10.
[262] Crowe, *Lonergan*, 73.

6 Applying the theory: *The Triune God*

6.1 Introduction[1]

Previous chapters have traced the development of Lonergan's thought as far as the publication of *Insight*. The project of his early writings is defined by the Leonine maxim *vetera nova augere et perficere*; to transpose the thought of St Thomas Aquinas to meet the demands of contemporary theology. We have seen that, in his first published works, Lonergan accepts without question the paradigm set for theology by Vatican I and by Leo XIII's encyclical *Aeterni Patris*. The task of theology is to understand and systematise revealed truths within the structure of Thomist metaphysics; Lonergan's aim is to establish a clear and correct understanding of the thought of Aquinas in order to facilitate such an understanding. In *Insight* he develops a theory of knowledge which he believes to have general application, but he is still working within the same paradigm. Nevertheless, I argued that the 'early Lonergan' should not be read as a classical foundationalist. Agreeing with A N Williams in her rejection of a foundationalist interpretation of Aquinas, I suggested that such an interpretation of Lonergan can also be discounted because of the authentically Thomist character of his thought. Like Aquinas, the foundation of theological knowledge for Lonergan consists in divinely revealed truths which are accepted in faith. His concern is to establish a rigorous and credible method for systematising such truths but not to try to justify the claims of faith before the bar of human reason. His method remains open to the development that will be required by the emergence of a pluralistic understanding of the nature of doctrine.

In this chapter I will consider Lonergan's two-volume work on trinitarian theology, *De Deo Trino*. It can be seen as a sort of halfway house: post-*Insight* but pre-*Method*, still working within Vatican I's model for theology. He is concerned not only with the historical process by which Trinitarian doctrine developed, but also with the theological development of the notion of dogma itself. He sees dogmatic formulae as statements of divinely revealed truth in terms

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which are valid across all cultures and eras of history, requiring no more hermeneutical work than do the theorems of Euclid.[2] The process of doctrinal development is seen as a gradual growth in the clarity and precision of the church's understanding of revealed truth. Lonergan allows for a 'vertical' pluralism of communication, in that the truths of faith have to be expressed in a way appropriate to the differentiation of consciousness of individuals and societies, but he does not envisage a 'horizontal' pluralism which would recognise the legitimacy of different cultural expressions of faith. He applies to Trinitarian theology the cognitional theory, epistemology and metaphysics that he has elaborated in *Insight*, believing this to be the basis of a sound theological method within the paradigm of Vatican I. I will argue that Lonergan's Trinitarian treatise reflects both the strengths and the limitations of such a theological paradigm; it is exemplary in its clarity and precision but has little room for historical or cultural consciousness. At Vatican II the church would take a step forward in her understanding of revelation and in *Method* Lonergan would embrace this new understanding.

6.2 Lonergan's Trinitarian theology: *De Deo Trino*

Throughout his career, questions of theological method were central in Lonergan's thought. A 'prominent American theologian' is said to have complained that 'Lonergan is always sharpening his knife but never cutting anything with it'[3] – never coming to grips with substantive theological issues. However, as Crowe points out, such a comment disregards the quarter century that Lonergan spent teaching theology.[4] His method was not developed *a priori*, without direct engagement in theological questions. For twelve years (1953-65) he taught Trinity and Christology at both undergraduate and graduate levels at the Gregorian University in Rome, and his two-volume work on Trinitarian theology, *De Deo Trino*,[5] comes

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[2] See section 6.3.1 below.

[3] Quoted by Patrick Byrne, 'The Fabric of Lonergan's Thought,' *Lonergan Workshop*, vol. 6 (1986), ed. Frederick G. Lawrence 1–84, 69. Available online at https://loneranresource.com/media/pdf/journals/Lonergan_Workshop_Vol_6.pdf [accessed 15/09/24.] The comment refers to Karl Rahner's dictum in relation to theological method: '… if we confine ourselves to sharpening the knife alone then we have not yet done any good cutting.' See Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, vol. 11, trans. David Bourke (Seabury, New York, 1974), 84.

[4] Crowe, *Lonergan*, 80.

[5] *De Deo Trino: Pars Dogmatica*, Gregorian University Press, Rome, 1964, translated into English as *The Triune God: Doctrines*, Volume 11 in The Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan, trans. Michael G. Shields, eds. Robert M. Doran & H. Daniel Monsour, Toronto/Buffalo/London, University of Toronto Press, 2009. Hereafter *TTG: Doctrines*. *De Deo Trino: Pars systematica*, Gregorian University Press, Rome, 1964, translated into English as *The Triune God: Systematics* by Michael G Shields, eds. Robert M Doran and H Daniel Monsour, Volume 12 in the Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan,

from this period. It is of interest because it falls between Lonergan's two major works; his account of trinitarian theology is underpinned by the cognitional theory and metaphysics elaborated in *Insight*, but he has not yet fully thought through what will become *Method in Theology*. Indeed his experience of teaching in Rome was part of the process of working out his theological method.

De Deo Trino is described by Crowe as:

> …his swan-song in traditional scholastic theology… a curious combination of old and new.[6]

It is essentially an undergraduate textbook, systematic and didactic in its presentation. It is written in the style of a scholastic theological manual, though with considerable depth and subtlety, but in it some of Lonergan's developing ideas on method can be seen emerging.

Lonergan identifies as the goal of his trinitarian theology:

> …that imperfect understanding of the mysteries that the First Vatican Council did not hesitate to acclaim as "most fruitful".[7]

He is carrying out the task of the theologian as defined by Vatican I while applying to the subject the cognitional theory and metaphysics which he has received from Aquinas and, in *Insight*, transposed for the 20th century. His concern with theological method can be clearly seen in his consideration of the theologian's task.[8] Here too, he follows the teaching of Vatican I in his approach, but the concerns that will come to the fore in *Method* are already discernible in Lonergan's trinitarian volumes. Indeed, the division of the two volumes reflects a methodological option. Lonergan distinguishes the 'dogmatic way' and the 'systematic way' in theology.[9] The dogmatic way begins with the data of Scripture and tradition and proceeds by analysis in the direction of precision and certitude. The systematic way moves in the opposite direction, starting from fundamental truths and proceeding by synthesis to an understanding of those truths as they are related to us. Lonergan draws an analogy with the

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Toronto/Buffalo/London, University of Toronto Press, 2007. Hereafter *TTG: Systematics*. In relation to both volumes, references are to the English translation, which is printed on the odd-numbered pages, with the original Latin text on the facing pages.

[6] Crowe, *Lonergan*, 94.

[7] *TTG: Systematics,* 3. Cf. *DF*, chapter 4; '…reason illustrated by faith… attains with the help of God some understanding of the mysteries, and that a most profitable one, not only from the analogy of those things which it knows naturally, but also from the connection of the mysteries among themselves…'

[8] *TTG: Dogmatics*, Introduction, 7-25.

[9] *TTG: Systematics*, 59-73.

study of the natural sciences. A history of chemistry will describe how scientists moved from the observation of data in the natural world to the formulation of an abstract theory; a textbook of chemistry will start with the periodic table and explain how fundamental causes bring about observable phenomena. The dogmatic way in theology is analogous to the first, the systematic way to the second.[10] Accordingly, Lonergan divides his trinitarian treatise into a *Pars Dogmatica* and a *Pars Systematica*. According to Crowe, it was in 1965 that he arrived at the system of functional specialties in theology that he elaborates in *Method*[11] and that system is foreshadowed in the way that Lonergan sets about the task of explaining trinitarian theology.

6.3 *The Triune God: Doctrines*

De Deo Trino: Pars Dogmatica was published by the Gregorian University Press in 1964, following an earlier edition in 1961. It was written for the use of students attending Lonergan's lectures at the Gregorian University and, like the lectures, in Latin. It was only with the publication of an English translation of the systematic and dogmatic parts in the *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan* in 2007 and 2009 respectively that this important stage in his thought became fully available for study, though Part 1 of the *Pars Dogmatica* was published in English translation in 1976 as *The Way to Nicea*.[12]

Lonergan begins the *Pars Dogmatica* of his work by quoting Pius XII and Pius IX, to the effect that the noblest task of theology is to show how a doctrine defined by the church is contained in the sources of revelation.[13] In the second part of the dogmatic volume, Lonergan sets out to do exactly that. He proposes five theses on trinitarian doctrine; for each thesis, terms are defined, a theological note is assigned, adversaries are identified and arguments are put forward, drawn from scripture and from the Greek and Latin Fathers. The structure of exposition is that of a pre-Vatican II theological manual. In the first part of the book, however,

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[10]*TTG: Systematics*, 61-62.

[11] Crowe, *Lonergan*, 95; cf. *Method* chapter 5, 121-138.

[12] *The Way to Nicea: the dialectical development of trinitarian theology. A translation by Conn O'Donovan from the first part of De Deo Trino by Bernard Lonergan*. London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1976. The editor of the new edition explains that a new English translation of the first part of the book was made for the Collected Works (*TTG: Doctrines*, xix.)

[13]*TTG: Doctrines* 7: Pius XII, Encyclical Letter *Humani Generis* (1950), §21. Available at https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_12081950_humani-generis.html [Accessed 14/12/24]

Lonergan sets the scene with a series of prolegomena, analysing the development of trinitarian and christological doctrine up to the Council of Nicea. (It is this first part that was published as *The Way to Nicea*.)

In this first, historical part of *TTG: Doctrines*, Lonergan identifies two processes occurring in the early church:

> In the ante-Nicene doctrinal movement there were not one but two developments that were going forward. During those early Christian centuries both the trinitarian and christological doctrines were being developed; but this doctrinal movement itself enfolded a second and more profound development in which the idea of a dogma itself was developing – developing not in the explicit and formal manner as we have described it above, but developing implicitly in the ongoing doctrinal controversies that brought about what we have been describing. For those ancient writers directly or indirectly prepared the way for defining dogmas without knowing that that was what they were doing.[14]

The church's understanding of Christology and of the Trinity was developing, largely as a result of controversy and the need to refute heresy, leading to the formulation of doctrinal statements. At the same time, implicitly, the need for such authoritative statements of doctrine – for dogmas – was beginning to be recognized. Lonergan's analysis of these two processes of development is informed by the theory that he set out in *Insight*. He describes the development of dogma as 'a universalizing process':

> For that which has come from one person, our Lord, to reach all peoples through the preaching of the apostles and the tradition of the church is one particular reality that has certainly become common to many; and this one that is common to many must be said to be a universal in some way, and that is a universal in reality. But those things in which this one reality was present to many in common were surely the minds of the faithful professing in common what they believed in common. And it was impossible for this common profession of faith not to abstract from all personal opinion or singular meaning; hence, besides the universal in reality there must be acknowledged a universal in the mind, and this a direct universal.[15]

He adds:

> For what was previously believed directly, experientially, and implicitly is subsequently defined reflectively, explicitly and thematically as that which is to be believed by all the faithful.[16]

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[14] *TTG: Doctrines*, 47-49.
[15] *TTG: Doctrines*, 21.
[16] *TTG: Doctrines*, 21.

Thus, for Lonergan at this stage in his thought, the formulation of a dogma is a process whereby that which has been revealed and transmitted is defined explicitly and thematically for belief by the whole church. He describes the work of the dogmatic theologian in these terms:

> They examine each document not for itself but in order to grasp those connections, consequences, and implications that reveal the common faith in the documents, however disparate and diverse those documents may be… dogmatic theologians seek a meaning that at present may be minimal but ought to be clear and certain.[17]

Such an account assumes that there is such a thing as a 'common faith' that can be extracted from the documents of scripture and tradition; a common profession of faith that has a clear and certain meaning, and 'abstract[s] from all personal opinion or singular meaning.' It is assumed, too, that the philosophy of Aquinas provides the concepts and language to structure such a universal expression of faith.

This somewhat static understanding of doctrine as a 'divine deposit' was adopted by the First Vatican Council[18] in response to the perceived threats of rationalism and liberalism. Among the propositions condemned in *Dei Filius* is that:

> As science progresses, at times a sense is to be given to dogmas proposed by the Church, different from the one which the Church has understood and understands.[19]

At this stage in the development of Lonergan's thought, he does not appear to find such a static view problematic. Indeed, as we shall see in the next section, he compares dogmatic formulae to the geometrical demonstrations of Euclid.

6.3.1 Dogmatic development

According to Lonergan, the process of dogmatic development has four aspects: objective, subjective, evaluative and hermeneutical.[20]

Objective: For Lonergan, while the gospels speak to the whole person, the decrees of the councils 'nourish the intellect alone.' By a synthetic process, the councils 'reduce the many

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[17] *TTG: Doctrines*, 23.
[18] *DF*, Chapter 4.
[19] *DF*, chapter 4 canon 3.
[20] *TTG: Doctrines*, 31.

scriptural words to one basic proposition often couched in technical terminology.'[21] This single basic proposition is the 'principle or foundation'[22] of the many truths expressed in Scripture and, by implication, is invariant across different times and cultures.

Subjective: In Lonergan's view, the change in literary genre from scripture to conciliar decrees requires a corresponding change in the human subject.

> The gospels correspond to undifferentiated consciousness and the dogmas to differentiated consciousness. For the gospels speak to the whole person, that is, to those who are using all their powers equally and simultaneously. The dogmas, however, call for subjects who can be so absorbed in the pursuit of truth that all their other powers are either subservient to the intellect or stilled.
>
> Accordingly, dogmatic development not only presents an objective aspect, which is to be seen in comparing various documents, but also requires a change in the subject that consists of a transition from the most common and most frequent pattern of undifferentiated consciousness to another pattern that is acquired only by the development of intellectual skills with discipline and practice.[23]

This differentiation of consciousness, in Lonergan's cognitive theory, comes about both in the individual, through the process of education, and in a society as it progresses from 'primitive' to 'advanced'.[24] Only one who has acquired the necessary intellectual skills can fully understand the truth expressed in a dogma.

Evaluative: Under this heading, Lonergan considers the claim that dogmas are 'obscure' or that they are 'not very religious'.[25] His response to both charges is given in terms of the differentiation of consciousness. He compares dogmas to the geometrical theorems of Euclid's *Elements*:

> So clear and exact are the *Elements* to mathematicians and dogmas to theologians that they have given rise to virtually no hermeneutical problems, no disputes among commentators, and no never-ending labors for exegetes.[26]

A theologian who has undergone the necessary differentiation of consciousness will have no difficulty in understanding dogmas in their clarity and exactness. One might wonder whether this idealised picture of consensus among theologians was accurate even in 1964.

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[21] *TTG: Doctrines*, 31.
[22] *TTG: Doctrines*, 33.
[23] *TTG: Doctrines*, 35.
[24] *Insight*, 204-31, especially 209-10, 'The Intellectual Pattern of Experience.'
[25] *TTG: Doctrines*, 35-7.
[26] *TTG: Doctrines*, 37.

But it reflects the approach and the assumptions of the classical theological method in which Lonergan himself had been trained, and in which he was then training his own students at the Gregorian University. In the early 1960s the overwhelming majority of those students would have been seminarians or candidates in formation for religious life. They came from all over the world to be formed in a Roman culture and theological method which they would then take back to their own local churches. It was therefore plausible to suggest that dogmas would give rise to 'no hermeneutical problems'[27] for theologians, as all Catholic theologians had been trained in the same system of thought and shared the same understanding. Theology did indeed resemble mathematics in its precision and transcultural universality. In time Lonergan came to realise that such a system was not just classical but classicist and unsustainable:

> On classicist assumptions there is just one culture… Within this setup the unity of faith is a matter of everyone subscribing to the correct formulae.[28]

On the 'religious' nature of dogmas, Lonergan states:

> One may easily conclude that dogmas are especially pertinent to religion because they render religious a differentiated consciousness that is already intellectually developed or to be developed… those who would want the intellect to have nothing to do with religion are actually furthering the cause of secularism rather than that of true religion.[29]

And, tellingly:

> For religion is not an unchangeable and eternal Platonic form so that it is found as one and the same and in the same way in children as in adults, or in primitive people as in the highly educated. Rather, religion develops along with the development of consciousness, and so it is wrong to judge all religion according to the way it is found in children or in primitive people.[30]

Here, Lonergan recognises a pluralism in the expression of Christian faith. However, his understanding of such pluralism seems to be purely linear and progressive; it corresponds to the development of a differentiated consciousness, in the individual and in a society, which is a key idea in the cognitional theory that he has developed in *Insight*.[31] At this stage in his thought, Lonergan seems not to allow for a more radical pluralism, in which differing

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[27] *TTG: Doctrines*, 37.
[28] *Method*, 303.
[29] *TTG: Doctrines*, 39.
[30] *TTG: Doctrines*. 39.
[31] *Insight*, 346-348.

expressions of faith might be seen to be equally valid (and equally incomplete), and even dogmatic formulae could be understood to be culturally and historically conditioned. In *Method* Lonergan expresses a broader understanding of the process of doctrinal development, which recognises its historically conditioned nature.[32]

Hermeneutical: For Lonergan, 'whatever is received is received according to the capacity of the receiver'.[33] The human mind is a unity which selects and orders what it apprehends:

> The result of this is not only that there are as many opinions as there are human beings, but also that in more fundamental matters people have to undergo a kind of conversion before their way of apprehending reality can be corrected.[34]

> For those who have an erroneous cognitional theory, epistemology, or metaphysics will have little or no understanding of defined dogmas (hence the importance of studying philosophy before theology)....[35]

> A dogma emerges from the word of God revealed and handed down insofar as it considers this word *as true*, insofar, therefore, as it prescinds from all the other riches contained in the word of God.[36]

In Lonergan's account, a dogma is a true statement about God, emerging or extracted by the church from the 'other riches contained in the word of God' – parable, symbol, poetry and so forth, which are valuable for other reasons but are a distraction from the formulation of dogma as propositions precisely expressing truth. Historically, the emergence of dogmas was resisted by heretics, and today dogmas are resisted or misunderstood by those whose way of apprehending reality has not been corrected – they 'have an erroneous cognitional theory, epistemology or metaphysics.'[37] The correct cognitional theory, epistemology and metaphysics – the 'correct conception of the relation between truth and reality'[38] – have been elaborated by Lonergan in *Insight*, as opposed to the intuitionist theory that sees knowing as 'taking a look,' against which Lonergan struggled for his whole career. For a fuller explanation of this point, Lonergan refers the reader to 'Metaphysics as Horizon', a 1963 review of a book

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[32] *Method*, 296-8.
[33] *TTG: Doctrines*, 41.
[34] *TTG: Doctrines*, 41.
[35] *TTG: Doctrines*, 41.
[36] *TTG: Doctrines*, 41 (emphasis in original.)
[37] *TTG: Doctrines*, 41
[38] *TTG: Doctrines*, 43; cf. *Insight,* 575.

by the transcendental Thomist Emerich Coreth. There, Lonergan describes Coreth's position, apparently with approval, as follows:

> There exists a latent metaphysics, present and operative in all our knowing; it is the metaphysical *Ureinsicht* (primitive insight) in its immediacy; but it has to be thematized and made explicit, to be brought out into the open in accurately defined concepts and certain judgments. The main task of the metaphysician is not to reveal or prove what is new and unknown; it is to give scientific expression to what already is implicitly acknowledged without being explicitly recognised.The proper tool in this mediation of the immediate is the rejection of the counterposition. Explicit judgments can contradict the latent metaphysics that they presuppose; but one has only to bring this contradiction to light, for the explicit judgment to be evident nonsense, and for its opposite to be established.[39]

For Lonergan, a proper understanding of knowing leads to a proper understanding of being, that is, a correct metaphysics; and, since dogmas are metaphysical statements about the being of God, those who lack a correct metaphysics will either fail to understand dogmas correctly or will resist the whole idea of the church formulating dogmas. In 1976, Lonergan would describe this volume as an exercise in the functional specialty of dialectic, whose task is 'like an X-ray' to bring to view the philosophical underpinnings of opposing views in order to expose them as positions or counterpositions.[40] In *Method*, Lonergan adopted an empirical notion of culture, historically and culturally conscious,[41] but he never abandoned this metaphysically realistic understanding of the nature of dogma and doctrine. As we will see below, much of the later criticism of Lonergan's method – including that from theologians who admire other aspects of his work – centres on this issue.

6.4 *The Triune God: Systematics*

Lonergan begins the systematic volume of his Trinitarian theology as follows:

> We are going to investigate that imperfect understanding of the mysteries that the First Vatican Council did not hesitate to acclaim as 'most fruitful'.[42]

6.4.1 The systematic way

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[39] 'Metaphysics as Horizon,' in *Collection*, 188-204, 189-190.
[40] Lonergan, 'Foreword to *The Way to Nicea*,' *TTG: Doctrines* Appendix 5, 735-736.
[41] *Method*, 3.
[42] *TTG: Systematics*, 3; cf. *DF*, chapter 4.

In *TTG: Dogmatics*, Lonegan follows the 'dogmatic way', analysing the revealed truths known by faith to arrive at certitude. In *TTG: Systematics* he follows the 'systematic way' which proceeds in the opposite direction to the dogmatic; it is synthetic rather than analytic. In theology, the systematic way takes doctrines as its starting point, and proceeds to demonstrate connections between them, so that it 'composes the whole of a divine mystery from a series of aspects and a multiplicity of reasons'.[43] Lonergan makes it clear that the two ways are intimately linked, and one is incomplete without the other.[44] The influence of Vatican I on Lonergan's description of theological method is unmistakable:

> And, indeed, reason illustrated by faith, when it zealously, piously, and soberly seeks, attains with the help of God some understanding of the mysteries, and that a most profitable one, not only from the analogy of those things which it knows naturally, but also from the connection of the mysteries among themselves and with the last end of man.[45]

In *TTG: Systematics*, the 'systematic way' is applied to the mysteries of the Trinity. Lonergan begins by asking 'what that understanding [46] is in itself and how it relates to the rest of theology'.[47] The object that moves us to theological understanding is the intelligibility of God, and it moves us through God's revelation, accepted in faith.[48] The theological understanding of divine mysteries at which the human intellect can arrive is imperfect, analogical and obscure; it develops gradually; it is synthetic, because the human mind perceives connections between the various mysteries as they come to be understood; and, following Vatican I, Lonergan asserts that such an understanding is fruitful and beneficial, for the individual believer and for the church.[49] He goes on to argue for the necessity of a system for understanding divinely revealed mysteries; but not any system – intelligence and reasonableness are required to ensure that the system is properly understood and grows in a healthy fashion.[50] The influence of Newman on Lonergan's thinking can be discerned here.[51]

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[43] *TTG: Systematics*, 63.
[44] *TTG: Systematics*, 65-67.
[45] *DF*, chapter 4.
[46] That is, the imperfect understanding of divine mysteries referred to by Vatican I.
[47] *TTG: Systematics*, 3.
[48] *TTG: Systematics*, 15.
[49] *TTG: Systematics*, 15-19.
[50] *TTG: Systematics*, 21-31.
[51] *TTG: Systematics*, 29, note 17. Lonergan alludes to Newman's third discourse, 'Bearing of Theology on Other Branches of Knowledge,' in John Henry Newman, *The Idea of a University* (Baronius Press, London, 2006), 60-82.

As to the truth of theological understanding, Lonergan believes that this is guaranteed by the fact of divine revelation: theological understanding 'consists in understanding the truth that God has revealed'.[52] The task of the systematic theologian is to express the truths of revelation – to 'speak of divine reality in itself'[53] – in what Lonergan describes as 'catholic categories', which he sees as transcultural and universal.[54] This understanding of the theologian's task is very much that of Vatican I, and of Pius XII's encyclical *Humani Generis*, where theology is described as:

> The age-old work of men endowed with no common talent and holiness, working under the vigilant supervision of the holy magisterium and with the light and leadership of the Holy Ghost in order to state the truths of the faith ever more accurately.[55]

Lonergan gives an extended heuristic sketch of what he believes the truth of a theological understanding to consist in, and how it is to be judged in a particular case.[56] The 'deposit of faith' does not change, for it consists of divinely revealed truth, but:

> … understanding, knowledge, and wisdom in regard to the doctrine of faith grow and advance, in single individuals and in all, in each person and in the entire church, according to the degree proper to each age and time.[57]

6.4.2 The process of doctrinal development

At this stage in his thought, Lonergan sees the church's understanding of the truth revealed by God as gradually growing and deepening over time, in a manner analogous to an individual's growth in wisdom and knowledge with greater maturity. We have already seen that Lonergan acknowledged the influence of Newman on his thinking[58] and, though not cited here, his account of doctrinal development is somewhat similar to Newman's. As we saw above,[59] John Thiel in his *Senses of Tradition* characterises Newman's account of development as an example of a 'noetic' model, which conceives the process of development of doctrine as analogous to the development of understanding in an individual human mind. The original

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[52] *TTG: Systematics*, 33.
[53] *TTG: Systematics*, 35.
[54] *TTG: Systematics*, 35.
[55] Pius XII, *Humani Generis* (1950), §17.
[56] *TTG: Systematics*, 39-59.
[57] *TTG: Systematics*, 41.
[58] Lonergan, 'Reality, Myth, Symbol,' in *Philosophical and Theological Papers, 1965–1980*, Volume 17 in the *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, eds. Robert Croker and Robert Doran, SJ, University of Toronto Press, 2004, 388.
[59] Section 2.5.2.

faith, taught by Christ and handed on by the apostles, is seen, in such an account, to come to greater clarity and precision in history, in the collective mind of the church.[60] Thiel's criticism of such a 'noetic' model is that it is 'prospective': that is, it envisages 'a pristine past in which the truth is not yet subject to corruption',[61] and implicitly assumes a privileged viewpoint outside history, from which a particular development can be judged to be contained within the original, pristine truth – or not.[62] Such a model, Thiel believes, while having some strengths, fails to do justice to the real historicity and contingency of the process by which doctrine develops.[63]

Students of Newman may judge that Thiel's critique of his account of doctrinal development itself does not do justice to the expansive nature of Newman's thought, shaped as it is by his historical approach and patristic perspective. However, I believe that Thiel's analysis can fairly be applied to the rather flat account of development offered by Lonergan in *TTG: Systematics* (as opposed to the more nuanced account that appears in his later work.) Development is conceived as 'continual growth and improvement' in the church's collective understanding of an unchanging 'deposit of faith'.[64] In *Insight*, Lonergan reflects on the way in which group bias can distort development in secular society.[65] But at this stage in his thinking, he does not apply such an analysis to the church; there, he sees only authentic development under the guidance of divine providence or else heresy.[66]

Lonergan is clear as to the role of the church's magisterium in the process of doctrinal development:

> Since here on earth God has entrusted divine revelation to none other than the church to guard it faithfully and declare it infallibly, it is clear that theologians cannot rely ultimately on their own wisdom but ought to acknowledge that the church's teaching alone is determinative of the meaning of revealed truth and of sacred dogmas.[67]

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[60] Thiel, *Senses of Tradition*, 67-71. Thiel makes specific reference to Lonergan's work elsewhere in the book (197-199), but he is referring there to *Method*.
[61] Thiel, *Senses of Tradition*, 81.
[62] Thiel, *Senses of Tradition*, 80.
[63] Thiel, *Senses of Tradition*, 82.
[64] *TTG: Systematics*, 41; cf. *DF*, chapter 4.
[65] *Insight*, 247-267.
[66] *TTG: Systematics*, 89.
[67] *TTG: Systematics*, 59.

Failure to recognise the nature of theological truth, Lonergan believes, reflects a lack of intellectual conversion; it is a consequence of original sin.[68] Again, such a view stands firmly in line with the teaching of Vatican I.

Lonergan undertakes a lengthy comparison of the 'dogmatic way', which aims at certitude, and the 'systematic way', whose aim is understanding of that which is believed; believed with certitude, because it is divinely revealed.[69] The two ways are the fruit of two different mental operations:

> There is one operation of the mind that attains intelligible truth as true, and a really distinct operation that affirms intelligible truth as intelligible.[70]

Unless the two ways are kept clearly distinct in theological thought, Lonergan affirms, the result is confusion.[71] Evident here is the concern for a sound theological method, firmly grounded in a correct epistemology and metaphysics, that would lead Lonergan to write *Method in Theology*.

6.4.3 The 'transcultural problem'

Lonergan observes:

> There are as many remarkable and deep differences in what are spontaneously counted as prior, better known, and more obvious in human affairs as there are periods, ages, cultures, nations and social classes – in fact, almost as many as there are individual human beings.

> These differences, which we may for brevity's sake designate as 'cultural,' give rise at once to a fundamental problem: the problem of finding a transcultural principle that would enable us to pass systematically from what is prior for one person to what is prior for another.[72]

He identifies three elements in a possible solution to the transcultural problem. First, relying on the findings of psychology, he asserts:

> Human beings are alike not just in their senses but also in those spontaneous symbols in which sensibility both manifests its own finality to spirit and conversely discloses to itself and, as it were, interprets the spirit's own demands.[73]

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[68] *TTG: Systematics*, 59.
[69] *TTG: Systematics*, 67-77.
[70] *TTG: Systematics*, 75.
[71] *TTG: Systematics*, 77.
[72] *TTG: Systematics*, 79.
[73] *TTG: Systematics*, 79.

Secondly, scholars can, by diligent study, 'manage gradually to acquire the culture and almost the mentality of another place and time'. And thirdly, knowledge drawn from all of the sciences can contribute to a fuller understanding of the thinking of another era.[74]

The transcultural problem is acute in Christian theology, because divine revelation is given at a particular historical moment but is directed to the whole of humanity.[75] Lonergan's response is to distinguish transcultural, theological and dogmatic movements. A transcultural movement occurs when the truths of faith come to be expressed in a new historical or cultural context; for example, when Christian faith began to be preached to the Gentiles.[76] A theological movement occurs when those truths are expressed in systematic, theological language; for example, conceiving the divine persons as consubstantial. And a dogmatic movement occurs when such a formulation is adopted by the church's teaching authority, as, for example, when the Council of Nicea defined that the Son is consubstantial with the Father.[77] The guarantee of the transcultural validity of dogmatic formulations is the church's divinely granted teaching authority. Historians can pass 'from one relative view to another relative view:'[78]

> Yet the church of God not only accomplishes such transcultural movements, but also in one and the same voice it can speak to all cultures and at all times. For it does ascend to what is prior in itself and, moreover, passes an infallible judgment on its own ascent.[79]

To contemporary ears, the claim that the church can speak 'in one and the same voice' to 'all cultures' and all periods of history seems a startlingly confident one. Lonergan justifies his account in terms of God's guidance of the church:

> The God who founded a universal church through a revelation accommodated to a particular culture has not only grasped the transcultural problem but also has prepared, inspired and guided its solution.[80]

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[74] *TTG: Systematics*, 79.
[75] *TTG: Systematics*, 83.
[76] *TTG: Systematics*, 85.
[77] *TTG: Systematics*, 85.
[78] *TTG: Systematics*, 87.
[79] *TTG: Systematics*, 87.
[80] *TTG: Systematics*, 89.

However, the vast diversity of human cultures seems to require, as a minimum, that while always preaching the same faith, the church should do so in terms appropriate to each particular place and time. The church's magisterium recognised as much at Vatican II:

> For God, revealing himself to his people to the extent of a full manifestation of himself in his Incarnate Son, has spoken according to the culture proper to each epoch.
>
> Likewise the Church, living in various circumstances in the course of time, has used the discoveries of different cultures so that in her preaching she might spread and explain the message of Christ to all nations, that she might examine it and more deeply understand it, that she might give it better expression in liturgical celebration and in the varied life of the community of the faithful.
>
> But at the same time, the Church, sent to all peoples of every time and place, is not bound exclusively and indissolubly to any race or nation, any particular way of life or any customary way of life recent or ancient. Faithful to her own tradition and at the same time conscious of her universal mission, she can enter into communion with the various civilizations, to their enrichment and the enrichment of the Church herself.[81]

Contemporary Catholic theology, while recognising the unity of faith and the indispensable role of the church's teaching authority, would also insist on the necessity of inculturation – of articulating and preaching the faith of the church in language and concepts that are intelligible in a particular culture.[82] At this point in his thought, Lonergan does not seem to have arrived at a truly historically conscious understanding of doctrinal development. The language used here by Lonergan to describe the role of the church's magisterium is reminiscent of Newman's claim that, given that God has founded the church, it is 'antecedently probable' that God will provide her with an infallible authority, capable of discerning true and false developments of her doctrine.[83] However, despite the linguistic similarity, Newman arguably shows a greater historical consciousness than Lonergan does, and a fuller awareness of the contingency of the process of development:

> Considering that Christians, from the nature of the case, live under the bias of the doctrines, and in the very midst of the facts, and during the process of the controversies, which are to be the subject of criticism … it can hardly be maintained that in matter of fact a true development carries with it its own certainty even to

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[81] Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* on the Church in the Modern World, § 58.

[86] See, for example, Michael Paul Gallagher SJ, *Clashing Symbols: An Introduction to Faith and Culture*, 2nd edition (Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 2003), chapters 3 and 9.

[83] Newman, *Essay*, Chapter 2, Section II (76-98.)

the learned, or that history, past or present, is secure from the possibility of a variety of interpretations.[84]

Lonergan, in contrast, sees the church's teaching office as the 'solution' to the transcultural problem. For Lonergan, theologians, popes and even ecumenical councils, while bringing about development in doctrine, do not explicitly intend to do so, but rather aim at resolving specific doctrinal issues. The process as a whole is guided by God's providence:

> Still, a development of dogma was brought about, especially in the ecumenical councils from Nicea to Vatican I. But it is one thing to intend the individual definitions, one at a time, as each of the councils undoubtedly did, and it is quite another thing to intend the entire series of definitions and declarations in which the development of dogma can be seen. To intend that entire series surpasses human powers; nevertheless, it was brought about by God's intention, will, governance and infallible assistance. And the reason why it was brought about is not obscure: it was necessary if the Catholic and universal church of God is to be able to express God's revelation in a Catholic and universal way.[85]

Lonergan believes that God's action in the church inevitably brings about a growth in understanding, knowledge and wisdom, though such a growth can be slowed and distorted by human failings, and that such growth is a necessity: 'so that revelation, adapted to a particular mentality, might receive a universal and Catholic expression'.[86] He recognises other factors that can bring about a growth in theological understanding, such as the pressure of practical and pastoral problems.[87]

Lonergan adds:

> Nevertheless, two kinds of problems have to be acknowledged. Some problems can be solved by augmenting and by perfecting the old with the new… But there are other problems of a far more serious nature, where people dispute about whether there are really problems at all, where there is no agreement about the nature of the problem, where what seems to some to be a solution seems to others to be an increase of evil… Where there is complete disagreement about the existence and nature of the problem and about its remedy, the judgments that are being made are based on conflicting principles; and where those principles lead to opposed conclusions, the issue is not one of finding some new improvement that can be added to the old substance; rather, the issue has to do with the substance itself and the correct understanding of the old.[88]

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[84] Newman, *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, 76. See section 2.5.4 above.
[85] *TTG: Systematics*, 99.
[86] *TTG: Systematics*, 99-101.
[87] *TTG: Systematics*, 111.
[88] *TTG: Systematics*, 111.

This seems a prescient description of the fragmented state of theological debate in a postmodern world, and an acknowledgement that the development at least of theological understanding – if not of the church's dogmas – will not always follow a linear path of progressively increasing understanding and clarity. Lonergan does not pursue the question further at this point; but in Chapter 9 I will trace how writers such as Nicholas Lash and David Tracy have drawn on his ideas to address such issues.

In Chapters 2 to 6 of *TTG: Systematics*, Lonergan sets out his systematics of the Trinity. He does so in accordance with the psychological analogy that, in *Verbum*, he analysed and interpreted in the writings of Aquinas, and which he now articulates in terms of the cognitional theory that he has set out in *Insight.* His contention is that only on the basis of a correct understanding of human intellectual process can one achieve, via the psychological analogy, some understanding of the divine processions in the Trinity.[89] In the Epilogue to the book, Lonergan recapitulates the procedure that he has followed. He begins with the order discerned by introspection within our intellectual and rational consciousness; he transfers such an order by analogy to God; he discovers that the analogy leads to an understanding of the two processions and the four real relations that classical Trinitarian doctrine describes within God, and to the affirmation of three divine persons, each person conscious of himself and of each of the others.[90] The working out of the systematic procedure occupies some 200 pages of text, in the course of which Lonergan establishes 18 Assertions on Trinitarian doctrine, and answers 32 Questions. He affirms, 'We are seeking nothing else in this process than an ordered and pedagogically guided growth in understanding'.[91] For Lonergan, the psychological analogy is verified indirectly to the extent that it illuminates the truths that are known by faith, and such illumination, leading to a 'growth in understanding,'[92] is the justification for the exercise.[93]

In a review of the Trinitarian volumes, Wilkins praises Lonergan's 'Thomistic clarity about principles', while acknowledging that the book serves as 'a salutary reminder that

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[89] *TTG: Systematics*, 133-135.
[90] *TTG: Systematics*, 523-525. Lonergan is said to have begun a lecture with the words, 'In the most Blessed Trinity, there are five notions, four relations, three persons, two processions, one nature and, some would say, no problem,' but the source of this quote is obscure.
[91] *TTG: Systematics*, 119.
[92] *TTG: Systematics*, 119.
[93] See 'Theology and Understanding,' *Collection*, 114-128, 121-122.

serious Trinitarian theory is difficult'.[94] The exposition of Trinitarian doctrine is indeed a lengthy, technical and sometimes demanding read, and it stands as an example of Lonergan's understanding of the task of speculative theology at this stage in his thought: to establish a system, founded on the data of Scripture and magisterial teaching, and structured by Thomist categories, within which the truths of revelation can be seen in their relation to one another and thereby understood more fully. Such a growth in understanding, Lonergan believes, is of value not only for the speculative work of theologians, but for the life of the church and the individual believer. Lonergan is in no doubt that the exercise leads to a real, though limited understanding of the inner life of God; Latin is the language of the Trinity.[95] At this point, Lonergan regards the systematic structure as universally and transculturally valid. Development consists in the increasing clarity that results from a progressive growth in the church's understanding of doctrine, and there is no allowance for a more radical pluralism resulting from cultural differences.

6.4.4 Theology of revelation

The Second Vatican Council revisited the question of revelation in the Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum*. René Latourelle has remarked:

> After the period of panic, deceleration, and stagnation resulting from the modernist crisis, the Constitution Dei Verbum seems like a breath of fresh sea air dispersing a heavy fog. The transition to a personalist, historical, and christocentric concept of revelation amounts to a kind of Copernican revolution, compared with the extrinsicist, atemporal and notional approach that prevailed until the 1950s.[96]

Is it fair to categorise Lonergan's Trinitarian theology as an example of the 'extrinsicist, atemporal and notional approach' that Latourelle criticizes? Lonergan describes his own viewpoint in *Insight* as that of 'A believer, a Catholic and, it happens, a professor of dogmatic theology.'[97] By his training, by his understanding of his ministry, and by intellectual conviction, he was a theologian in the mould of Vatican I and following Leo XIII's programme *vetera novis augere et perficere*. It should be remembered, too, that *De Deo Trino* was written for the use

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[94] Jeremy D. Wilkins, 'Review of Lonergan, Triune God (2 vols.), Collected Works 11 & 12,' *The Thomist* 5/3 (2011), 488-492, 490

[95] I am grateful to Karen Kilby for this expression of Lonergan's strongly realist and metaphysical understanding of Trinitarian doctrine.

[99] René Latourelle, 'Dei Verbum II: Commentary,' in *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, 218

[97] *Insight*, 754.

of undergraduate students of theology in a core subject. As Lawrence has pointed out, at that level, 'One didn't stray too far from well-trod paths – that was a price you paid for teaching seminarians, especially in Rome'.[98] Lonergan took seriously his responsibility as a teacher of future clergy and religious, and in his Trinitarian theology he sticks closely to Vatican I's description of the theologian's task.

6.5 Conclusion

It is instructive to identify the assumptions that underlie Lonergan's description of the dogmatic way. He affirms that it is a way of certitude; a doctrinal formula can express 'the same truth with the same meaning as what was revealed by God'.[99] A theologian of the 21st century would hesitate to claim such certitude. For Lonergan, the dogmatic way is, further, a way of discovery, capable of finding an expression for a revealed truth that is 'appropriate to the needs of a universal church that is to endure until the end of time,'[100] with the implication that such an expression can remain valid for all cultures and all periods of history. Again, such a claim seems startlingly ambitious to the contemporary mind. The dogmatic way is a way of analysis, which can move from the 'historical Hebraic particularity' of revelation to 'generally known and well-defined reasons.'[101] This seems to reflect the 'classicist notion of culture'[102] from which the later Lonergan would distance himself. The dogmatic way is a way of resolution, in that it 'discerns the divine mysteries in the multiplicity of what has been revealed'[103] – the diverse accounts and literary forms found in Scripture, and 'gives expression to those mysteries.'[104] And, Lonergan believes, a universal expression of the mysteries can be attained in the course of time.[105] The assumption here is that the process of doctrinal development is a linear one, which consists in the gradual clarification and refinement of the church's understanding and expression of divinely revealed truth.

Such assumptions seem questionable in the light of contemporary hermeneutical thought. Lonergan envisages a process that boils down the wealth and diversity of Scripture

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[98] Crowe, *Lonergan*, 80.
[99] *TTG: Systematics*, 63.
[100] *TTG: Systematics*, 63.
[101] *TTG: Systematics*, 63.
[102] *Method*, 3.
[103] *TTG: Systematics*, 63.
[104] *TTG: Systematics*, 63.
[105] *TTG: Systematics*, 63.

to an essence that is minimal, precise and universally comprehensible. In this sense, Latourelle's criticism seems to be applicable to Lonergan's thought at least in part; his theology may not be 'extrinsicist' but it could be characterised as 'atemporal' and 'notional.' His trinitarian thesis lacks a developed theology of revelation, which will remain lacking in *Method*.[106] Scripture is treated as a source of data, on which theological reasoning operates to extract a minimal meaning which can be clearly and precisely expressed. The 'deposit of faith' is conceived in static, almost Platonic terms, as an idealised and unchanging truth. The development of doctrine consists in the gradual precision and clarification of the terms in which the truths of the deposit are expressed, and the church's magisterium operates as a kind of 'black box', preserving the church from error in a way that remains mysterious and unexamined. In the clarity of its concepts and the precision of its language, Lonergan's trinitarian theology illustrates the strengths of the Vatican I model for theology. In his thorough immersion in the thought of Aquinas, he carries out the project of Leo XIII. But, by 1964, he was bumping up against the limits of this theological paradigm.

Lonergan's time of teaching in Rome was cut short by illness and he returned to a research position in Canada. While he was teaching Trinitarian theology to his students at the Gregorian, the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council had already assembled in the city. The church had begun what Karl Rahner would term her emergence as a 'world Church,'[107] making questions of diversity of practice and doctrinal pluralism inescapable. Vatican II's Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, adopts a more dynamic concept of the church's tradition, widely believed (though not explicitly stated) to have been influenced by the work of John Henry Newman:

> What was handed on by the apostles comprises everything that serves to make the People of God live their lives in holiness and increase their faith. In this way the Church, in her doctrine, life and worship, perpetuates and transmits to every generation all that she herself is, all that she believes. The Tradition that comes from the apostles makes progress in the Church, with the help of the Holy Spirit.[108]

At the same time, Lonergan's thought was developing. The work that would become *Method* was already taking shape. The empirical notion of culture and the historical and cultural

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[106] See section 7.6 below.
[107] Karl Rahner, 'Towards a Fundamental Theological Interpretation of Vatican II,' *Theological Studies* 40 (1979), 716-727, 717.
[108] Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum*, § 8.

consciousness that it implied would come to the fore. This will be the subject of our next chapter.

7 'God's love flooding our hearts:' *Method in Theology*

7.1 Introduction

With *Method in Theology* Lonergan, in Crowe's words, 'rounds off his life's work itself.'[1] It is the culmination of the project that can be traced back to Lonergan's doctoral dissertation, through *Verbum* and *Insight* and which he summarised in Leo XIII's phrase *vetera novis augere et perficere.* At the same time, *Method* is a response to the situation of the post-conciliar church. Lonergan elaborates a method for theology that embodies the cognitional theory set out in *Insight*. He addresses the deficiencies in theological method that have given rise to a 'heap of disputed questions,'[2] and the shortcomings in theological education that he experienced while teaching at the Gregorian University and writing his Trinitarian manuals.[3] But he is also speaking to a church and a world dramatically changed from the time of Leo XIII. The vast expansion of knowledge in the natural and human sciences in the 19th and 20th centuries raised new theological issues and fundamental questions about the nature of knowledge itself. The emergence of a 'world Church'[4] at Vatican II made questions of diversity of practice and doctrinal pluralism inescapable. In such a church, the classicist notion of culture was displaced by the empirical and as Lonergan recognised:

> When culture is conceived empirically, theology is known to be an ongoing process, and then one writes on its method.[5]

Lonergan's project led him to see the necessity of a response to this challenge and in *Method*, he offers such a response. He recognises the need for theology to be historically and culturally conscious, while continuing to believe that the 'dynamic structure of… cognition

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[1] Crowe, *Lonergan*, 104.

[2] Lonergan, '*Insight*: Preface to a Discussion,' *Collection*, 142-152, 145.

[3] Crowe, *Lonergan*, 80. See also 'An Interview with Fr Bernard Lonergan, SJ,' *Second Collection*, 177-194, 178-179.

[4] Karl Rahner, 'Towards a Fundamental Theological Interpretation of Vatican II,' *Theological Studies* 40 (1979), 716-727, at 717.

[5] *Method*, 3.

and moral being'[6] that he has identified in *Insight* is a normative structure for theological method. In this chapter I will identify those elements of Lonergan's thought in *Method* that are relevant to the hermeneutics of doctrine. While he ranges widely in his attempt to 'mount to the level of the time,'[7] the work is in continuity with his previous writings and not a rupture from his earlier work. I will argue therefore that Lonergan's thinking remains strongly Thomistic in its character and has, in Ormerod's words, 'deep roots in the Christian tradition.'[8] This is the response to those critics who accuse Lonergan of foundationalism or of proposing a theological method which has been developed in abstract and is divorced from the content of Christian revelation. Key ideas in *Method* are conversion – at the level of the individual and the community – and the free gift of God's love flooding our hearts described by St Paul in Romans 5:5. That text is cited several times in the book and, if any idea is 'foundational' at this stage of Lonergan's thought, it is that one. On the other hand, I will identify areas where Lonergan's thought seems incompletely developed, specifically in relation to the theology of revelation and of the church. I will draw on the work of Neil Ormerod to address those deficiencies.

7.2 The nature of theological method

Lonergan begins: 'A theology mediates between a cultural matrix and the significance and role of a religion in that matrix.'[9] He introduces the empirical notion of culture, which implies that theology is an ongoing process rather than a permanent achievement.[10] In relation to theological method:

> Method is not a set of rules to be followed meticulously by a dolt, it is a framework
> for collaborative creativity.[11]

The reference to 'collaborative creativity' is significant, since Lonergan will argue in *Method* that theology has grown beyond the capacity of any individual to master it, such that creative theological work can only be carried out by a division of labour among specialists.[12] Lonergan goes on to describe what he is offering, modestly, as a 'model' – that is 'something

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[6] *Method*, 4.
[7] Crowe, *Lonergan*, 58.
[8] Ormerod, *Method, Meaning and Revelation*, 218.
[9] *Method*, 3.
[10] *Method*, 3.
[11] *Method*, 3.
[12] *Method*, 121-2.

worth keeping in mind when one confronts a situation or tackles a job,'[13] and adds that he is concerned 'not with the objects that theologians expound but with the operations that theologians perform.'[14] This qualification opens the way for a reading of *Method* focused on Lonergan's account of the interpretative operations that theologians perform and how this account can inform a critical hermeneutics.

7.3 The structure of *Method*

In Part One of the book, 'Background,' Lonergan elaborates the world view that underpins his theological method. This first part deals with general topics; there are chapters on method, the human good, meaning, religion and functional specialties. In Part Two, 'Foreground,' he sets out the method which is structured around the four levels of consciousness of his cognitional theory.

> Thus, on the four levels of the upward development of consciousness we have research corresponding to experience, interpretation corresponding to understanding, history corresponding to judgement, and dialectic corresponding to decision. And, on the same four levels but in a downward movement, we have foundations, doctrines, systematics, and communications on the levels, respectively, of decision, judgement, understanding and experience.[15]

Because the structure of the method corresponds to the 'dynamic structure of [human] cognitional and moral being,'[16] and because Lonergan believes that his account of this dynamic structure is 'not open to radical revision,'[17] he puts forward his method as one that is universally valid – for Catholic theology and beyond.[18]

7.4 Part One: Background

In the first part of *Method*, Lonergan addresses 'general topics that have to be presupposed in the second part.'[19] The first chapter, 'Method,' deals in summary with the subject that Lonergan treated extensively in *Insight* – the structure of human cognition.[20] The reader is encouraged to appropriate, by introspection, his/her knowing and become aware of

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[13] *Method*, 4.
[14] *Method*, 4.
[15] Crowe, *Lonergan*, 111.
[16] *Method*, 4.
[17] *Method*, 4– cf. *Insight*, 359-360.
[18] *Method*, 4.
[19] *Method*, 3.
[20] *Method*, 11 and note 4.

the four levels of consciousness and intentionality; the empirical, the intellectual, the rational and the responsible.[21] This fourth level is a new addition since *Insight*; it is the level of moral responsibility, concerning judgement on the facts and deliberation on what to do about them.[22] From this structure Lonergan derives the transcendental method, which consists in following the transcendental precepts that correspond to the four levels of consciousness: 'Be attentive, Be intelligent, Be reasonable, Be responsible.'[23] Transcendental method constitutes the 'common core' shared by the special methods employed in the various fields of knowledge.[24]

The transcendental method 'supplies the basic anthropological component'[25] of theological method. To address the 'specifically religious component'[26] it is necessary to consider 'The Human Good,' the title of the second chapter. Here Lonergan introduces a notion that is fundamental to his thought on method; that of the 'world mediated by meaning.' This is the world of abstract thought, of imagination, language and symbols. It is the world that a child enters when he/she learns to speak and moves beyond the world of immediate sense experience.[27] In 'higher' cultures, control is exerted over meaning:

> …among high cultures one may distinguish classical and modern by the general type of their controls: the classical thinks of the control as a universal fixed for all time; the modern thinks of the controls as themselves involved in an ongoing process.[28]

This formulation again shows Lonergan working through his own move from a 'classicist' to an 'empirical' notion of culture. He goes on to consider feelings and judgements of value. In each case, Lonergan sees the individual developing from spontaneity to self-transcendence, helped by the appropriate education.[29]

In relation to judgements of value:

> …the development of knowledge and the development of moral feeling head to the existential discovery, the discovery of oneself as a moral being, the realization

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[21] *Method*, 13.
[22] *Method*, 13.
[23] *Method*, 22-23.
[24] *Method*, 24.
[25] *Method*, 27.
[26] *Method*, 27.
[27] *Method*, 29-30.
[28] *Method*, 30.
[29] *Method*, 33.

that one not only chooses between courses of action but also thereby makes oneself an authentic human being or an unauthentic one.[30]

The central place given to the authenticity of the subject in the execution of method – the importance of what Lonergan terms conversion – will be a theme of *Method*.

On the subject of 'Beliefs,' Lonergan follows Newman in pointing out that only a fraction of all that an individual knows is one's own 'immanently generated knowledge,' while the vast majority of our knowledge depends on belief: 'To appropriate one's own social, cultural, religious heritage is largely a matter of belief.'[31] Belief will be well-founded and errors avoided if one follows the transcendental precepts:

> One promotes progress by being attentive, intelligent, reasonable, responsible not only in all one's cognitive operations but also in all one's speech and writing.'[32]

Under the heading 'The Structure of the Human Good,' Lonergan deals with the individual's orientation:

> At its root this consists in the transcendental notions that both enable us and require us to advance in understanding, to judge truthfully, to respond to values.[33]

This leads to the key notion of conversion:

> As orientation is, so to speak, the direction of development, so conversion is a change of direction and, indeed, a change for the better. One frees oneself from the unauthentic. One grows in authenticity.[34]

And because the human good is both individual and social, these processes can also be seen operating at the level of the community and its institutions.[35] Lonergan claims that his account of the structure of the human good is compatible with any stage of development in a given society.[36] An individual who follows the transcendental precepts will develop, while one who disregards them will become alienated. A community whose institutions and laws reflect the transcendental precepts will progress, but if ideology is allowed to provide a rationalisation

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[30] *Method*, 39.
[31] *Method*, 42. Cf. *Insight*, 725-740.
[32] *Method*, 44.
[33] *Method*, 51.
[34] *Method*, 51.
[35] *Method*, 51.
[36] *Method*, 51.

for their abandonment, then decline and corruption will follow.[37] Again, the universal scope of Lonergan's claims is striking.

Lonergan is still arguing in general terms, preparing the ground before addressing the 'specifically religious component'[38] of theological method. His treatment of the human good here makes almost no explicit theological references. He is drawing on Aristotle's concept of virtue,[39] on Kant's transcendental analysis and on Newman's account of belief. He cites psychologists and psychotherapists: Piaget,[40] Maslow,[41] Rogers,[42] the phenomenologist Scheler[43] and, in Rosemary Haughton,[44] a theologian whose thought gives primacy to the experience of the individual and the community. He is putting forward an account of progress and decline which he believes to be universally applicable, to both the individual and the community, across different eras of history and diverse cultures, because it is founded on the facts of human cognition that are discoverable by introspection. Progress follows from the observation of the transcendental precepts: Be attentive, Be intelligent, Be reasonable, Be responsible. Decline follows from ignorance, forgetfulness or deliberate rejection of the precepts. By diligently following the transcendental precepts, the human subject can achieve conversion and self-transcendence; he/she can know and decide authentically. A healthy society is one in which individuals are enabled to achieve such self-transcendence. The edifice is constructed on the foundation that Lonergan has laid in *Insight*:

> There is, then, a rock on which one can build… The rock, then, is the subject in his conscious, unobjectified attentiveness, intelligence, reasonableness, responsibility.[45]

Despite Lonergan's language of 'a rock on which one can build,' I would again argue that his account is not a classically foundationalist one. The fruit of conversion and self-transcendence is not a structure of certain knowledge, but rather the objectification of one's attentiveness,

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[37] *Method*, 51-54.
[38] *Method*, 27; see note 21 above.
[39] *Method*, 41.
[40] *Method*, 28-29.
[41] *Method*, 30-31, 40, 51.
[42] *Method*, 35, 50.
[43] *Method*, 32, 40
[44] *Method*, 50.
[45] *Method*, 22.

intelligence, reasonableness and responsibility so as to achieve an authentic *process* of knowing and deciding. And Lonergan concludes the chapter:

> Finally, we may note that a religion that promotes self-transcendence to the point, not merely of justice, but of self-sacrificing love, will have a redemptive role in human society inasmuch as love can undo the mischief of decline and restore the cumulative process of progress.[46]

Beginning from what he sees as the givenness of human experience, Lonergan arrives at a theocentric perspective.

7.4.1 Meaning

The third chapter of Part One deals with meaning.

> Meaning is embodied or carried in human intersubjectivity, in art, in symbols, in language, and in the lives and deeds of persons.[47]

There follow sections that treat each of these carriers of meaning in turn. For Lonergan, the move from intersubjective expressions of meaning, through symbols and art to language is an ascent to successively greater levels of objectivity and widening possibilities of expression:

> By its embodiment in language, in a set of conventional signs, meaning finds its greatest liberation. For conventional signs can be multiplied almost indefinitely. They can be differentiated and specialized to the utmost refinement.[48]

Lonergan adverts to the complex interplay of meaning and expression:

> So it is that conscious intentionality develops in and is molded by its mother tongue… The available language, then, takes the lead. It picks out the aspects of things that are pushed into the foreground, the relations between things that are stressed, the movements and changes that demand attention…. The action is reciprocal. Not only does language mold developing consciousness, but it also structures the world about the subject.[49]

Lonergan goes on to reflect on the interaction between language and understanding.[50] As we shall see below,[51] he holds to the view that language is the expression of mental acts, leading

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[46] *Method*, 54.
[47] *Method*, 55.
[48] *Method*, 67.
[49] *Method*, 68.
[50] *Method*, 68-70.
[51] Section 7.5.3.

to criticism from theologians such as Lindbeck whose understanding of the nature of doctrine is influenced by the thought of Wittgenstein.

Again in this chapter, Lonergan is drawing on the findings of psychology, psychotherapy and phenomenology. He believes that he is giving an account of meaning that has general validity because it is based on facts of human psychology which are invariant across cultures. He will seek, not so much to 'fit in' the Christian message to his account, as to show that the expression of the meaning of Christian revelation exhibits the same characteristics as all such expressions. This is illustrated when he considers the expression of meaning in human lives:

> *Cor ad cor loquitur*.[52] Incarnate meaning combines all or at least many of the other carriers of meaning… It is the meaning of a person, of his way of life, of his words, or of his deeds… Such meaning may attach to a group achievement, to a Thermopylae or Marathon, to the Christian martyrs, to a glorious revolution.[53]

Lonergan goes on to describe how shared meaning both constitutes a community and expresses its shared identity, and can do so in a way that is authentic or inauthentic:

> Meaning has its invariant structures and elements, but the contents in the structures are subject to cumulative development and cumulative decline… So, finally, it follows that hermeneutics and the study of history are basic to all human science. Meaning enters into the very fabric of human living but varies from place to place and from one age to another.[54]

The constitutive function of meaning[55] means that it shapes a community, its structures and institutions. Below, we will consider this constitutive function of meaning in relation to the meaning communicated in revelation and its role in constituting the church as a community.[56] The task of hermeneutics is to enter into the thinking – the common sense – of another place or time in order to understand the meaning that has been expressed there. For Lonergan, this task can only be undertaken authentically if the interpreter has due regard to the 'invariant structures and elements'[57] of meaning. Here we should recall Tanner's observation that every Christian and every human person lives in multiple, overlapping

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[52] The phrase comes from St Francis de Sales and was adopted as his cardinalatial motto by St John Henry Newman, but Lonergan cites neither source. See Newman, *The Idea of a University*, 327.
[53] *Method*, 70.
[54] *Method*, 78.
[55] *Method*, 76.
[56] Section 7.6.
[57] *Method*, 78.

cultures and that the Christian identity is inescapably complex and contested.[58] Lonergan is confident that, by applying the appropriate method and paying due regard to the invariant structures of cognition and of meaning, the scholar can correctly interpret the expressions of another age or time, but a writer such as Tanner would see a more complex and pluralist picture.

For the individual, differentiation of consciousness leads from common sense to the critical thought that is at home with theory, and finally to the self-appropriation that allows one to move confidently between the two.[59] These three 'stages of meaning' are also seen in the development of a culture and, again, a culture may be in progress or in decline.[60] The move from the first to the second stage of meaning corresponds to the 'discovery of mind'[61] and the development of science and philosophy. The transition to the third stage is characterised by the replacement of an Aristotelian understanding of science with a modern one:

> In the third stage, then, the sciences have become ongoing processes. Instead of stating the truth about this or that kind of reality, their aim is an ever better approximation towards the truth...[62]

Lonergan goes on to make a programmatic statement that anticipates at least partially the critique of Rorty which will be discussed in Chapter 8 below:

> Since the sciences between them undertake the explanation of all sensible data, one may conclude with the positivists that the function of philosophy is to announce that philosophy has nothing to say. Since philosophy has no theoretic function, one may conclude with the linguistic analysts that the function of philosophy is to work out a hermeneutics for the clarification of the local variety of everyday language. But there remains the possibility – and it is our option – that philosophy is neither a theory in the manner of science nor a somewhat technical form of common sense, nor even a reversal [reversion?] to Presocratic wisdom... Its primary function is to promote the self-appropriation that cuts to the root of philosophic differences and incomprehensions. It has further, secondary functions in distinguishing, relating, grounding the several realms of meaning and, no less, in grounding the methods of the sciences and so promoting their unification.[63]

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[58] Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, Chapter 7, 'Diversity and Creativity in Theological Judgment,' 156-175.
[59] 'Realms of Meaning,' *Method*, 78-82.
[60] 'Stages of Meaning,' *Method*, 82-95.
[61] *Method*, 87-90.
[62] *Method*, 91.
[63] *Method*, 91.

This role of oversight of meaning and knowledge is precisely the one that Rorty wishes to deny to philosophy, believing it to be superseded by the success of empirical science in describing the world. Again, Lonergan has anticipated the argument:

> …in Aristotle the sciences are conceived not as autonomous but as prolongations of philosophy and as further determinations of the basic concepts philosophy provides.[64]

On such a view, philosophy and the sciences occupy the same space, and Rorty would be right to say that the success of empirical science leaves no place for philosophy. Lonergan argues, however, that as science achieves autonomy, it reshapes our understanding of the world and so evokes new philosophies.[65] Lonergan holds – and Snell adopts his view[66] – that by appropriating the invariant structure of human cognition, one is in a position both to adjudicate philosophical controversies and to evaluate the methods of the various sciences (Lonergan appears to be using the term 'sciences' here in the broader sense that includes the human as well as the natural sciences.) I will argue below[67] that the idea that the success of the natural sciences has rendered metaphysics redundant is refuted by the work of E A Bum and Thomas Kuhn, that philosophy can retain a critical role without adopting a foundationalist position and that the thought of Lonergan is a helpful resource for such a critical role.

Lonergan's analysis is clearly marked by the realities of 20th-century history: his chapter on 'Meaning' concludes:

> It is the power of an educational system to fashion the nation's youth in the image of the wise man or in the image of a fool, in the image of a free man or in the image prescribed for the Peoples' Democracies… Never has adequately differentiated consciousness been more difficult to achieve. Never has the need to speak effectively to undifferentiated consciousness been greater.[68]

For Lonergan, the call to achieve self-transcendence at the level both of the individual and of the community is an urgent moral imperative. Epistemology and ethics both make the same demand for authenticity.

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[64] *Method*, 92.
[65] *Method*, 93.
[66] See section 8.2.2 below.
[67] See section 8.2.5 below.
[68] *Method*, 95.

7.4.2 <u>Religion</u>

In the fourth chapter of Part One, 'Religion,' Lonergan begins with 'the question of God.' The question arises, Lonergan claims, when the human subject begins to:

> …reflect on the nature of reflection… In the measure that we advert to our own questioning and proceed to question it, there arises the question of God.[69]

The answer that Lonergan gives in *Insight* is that the intelligibility of the universe demonstrates the existence of God.[70] He believes that the question cannot be escaped, in any cultural or historical context, because it arises from the transcendental notions, which are universal and transcultural:

> The transcendental notions, that is, our questions for intelligence, for reflection, and for deliberation, constitute our capacity for self-transcendence. That capacity becomes an actuality when one falls in love. Then one's being becomes being-in-love.[71]

And the 'basic fulfilment of our conscious intentionality'[72] consists in being in love with God – 'God's love flooding our hearts through the Holy Spirit given to us (Romans 5:5).'[73] Religious experience is the 'dynamic state of being in love with God'[74] which is conscious without being known, and therefore is an experience of mystery.[75]

It is here that we find the source of Lindbeck's most fundamental disagreement with Lonergan. Lindbeck interprets Lonergan as identifying a 'basic unity of religious experience,'[76] a primary, universal, preverbal and preconceptual experience of what might be termed 'transcendent reality,' which is expressed differently in different religions. Lonergan does indeed correlate his own description of religious experience with those of Christian thinkers such as Rudolf Otto, Paul Tillich, St Ignatius Loyola, Karl Rahner, William Johnston and the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*.[77] He goes on to draw on the work of Friedrich Heiler to claim that there are

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[69] *Method*, 97-98.
[70] *Insight*, 695.
[71] *Method*, 100.
[72] *Method*, 101.
[73] *Method*, 101.
[74] *Method*, 103.
[75] *Method*, 102.
[76] Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, 18. See above, section 1.5.2.
[77] *Method*, 102 and note 111.

> …common features of the world religions [which] are implicit in the experience of being in love in an unrestricted manner.[78]

As we have seen, Lindbeck responds that if such an experience is common across all religions then its distinctive features cannot be specified, and in that case 'the assertion of commonality becomes logically and empirically vacuous.'[79]

Is this a fair criticism? Lonergan bases his account of religious experience on his cognitional theory, and he has spent nearly 800 pages of *Insight* trying to establish that this theory is 'not subject to radical revision.'[80] The next section of the chapter is headed 'Religious Development Dialectical,' and in it Lonergan emphasises that the self-transcendence that results from being in love with God is never a 'secure possession,'[81] but rather a constant process of 'withdrawal from unauthenticity'[82] in favour of authenticity:

> …this view of religion is sustained when God is conceived as the supreme fulfilment of the transcendental notions, as supreme intelligence, truth, reality, righteousness, goodness.[83]

On the one hand, Lonergan could be criticised for an overly anthropocentric approach in which God is seen as merely the 'supreme fulfilment' of notions derived from his transcendental anthropology:

> There lies within [the human person's] horizon a region for the divine, a shrine for ultimate holiness. It cannot be ignored.[84]

However, the Christian specificity of Lonergan's account is explicit. It is the Christian God revealed in Christ who is the measure of authenticity: 'As the question of God is implicit in all our questioning, so being in love with God is the basic fulfilment of our conscious intentionality.'[85] The 'basic religious experience' that is foundational for Lonergan is the gift of God's love that floods our hearts (Romans 5:5.)[86] Lonergan describes religious development as 'dialectical.'[87] It is a struggle between authenticity and 'unauthenticity' and

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[78] *Method*, 105.
[79] Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, 18.
[80] *Insight*, 366.
[81] *Method*, 106.
[82] *Method*, 106
[83] *Method*, 107.
[84] *Method*, 99.
[85] *Method*, 101.
[86] *Method*, 101.
[87] *Method*, 106f.

authenticity consists in being in love with the one true God. Lindbeck seems to read Lonergan's theory as an anthropocentric one based on an unthematized 'religious experience,' but an attentive reading shows that, for Lonergan, such an experience is the result of God's initiative in granting the gift of divine love.

A related criticism comes from Anthony Kelly,[88] who is concerned with Lonergan's distinction between his theological method, grounded in his transcendental anthropology, and the content of Christian theology, which is derived from God's self-revelation in Christ. Kelly asks:

> …how does this theological method take faith in Christ into its inner vitality? How is Lonergan's *Method* alive to the unique, the original, the absolute element in Christian faith?[89]

Kelly, while generally sympathetic to Lonergan, is sharply critical of the latter's distinction between the 'prior word God speaks to us by flooding our hearts with his love'[90] and the 'outward word' of historical revelation.[91] Kelly believes that this leaves the 'person and mystery of Christ… oddly exterior to theological method.'[92] He prefers the theological approaches of Rahner[93] and von Balthasar,[94] crediting each with allowing faith in Christ to shape and determine the method of Christian theology in a way that, he asserts, Lonergan fails to do:

> It seems to me that it is a less ideological stance, a less gnostic attitude, to take as one's foundation the self-communication of God instead of the general self-transcendence of man, however much that is sustained by the "outer word."[95]

Ormerod, while acknowledging that 'Kelly's criticisms of Lonergan's *Method* are, in many ways, truly perceptive,'[96] criticises Kelly in turn for 'removing Lonergan's transcendental analysis of human subjectivity from its deep roots within the Christian tradition…'[97] Ormerod

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[88] Kelly, Anthony: 'Is Lonergan's *Method* Adequate to Christian Mystery?' *The Thomist* 39/3 (1975) 437-70. Cf. Ormerod, *Method, Meaning and Revelation*, chapter 6, 'Addressing the Critics.'
[89] Kelly, 440.
[90] *Method*, 108.
[91] *Method*, 109; cf. Kelly, 'Is Lonergan's Method Adequate,' 448-452.
[92] Kelly, 'Is Lonergan's Method Adequate,' 453.
[93] Kelly, 461-4.
[94] Kelly, 465-8.
[95] Kelly, 469.
[96] Ormerod, *Method, Meaning and Revelation,* 216.
[97] Ormerod, 218.

believes that Kelly's concerns are addressed adequately in Lonergan's post-*Method* writings and in the subsequent development of his thought by Robert Doran.[98]

This issue is, perhaps, an illustration of the maxim familiar to students of Lonergan that 'you can't understand *Method* until you've read *Insight*.' In *Insight*, Lonergan is attempting throughout to transpose the genius of St Thomas for the modern age.[99] If *Insight* is read in the light of *Grace and Freedom* and *Verbum* it is clear that Lonergan's account of human cognition, epistemology and metaphysics is taken from Aquinas and interpreted for the 20th century. This is still the philosophical underpinning of the theological method that he elaborates in *Method* and it does indeed, as Ormerod recognises, have deep roots within the Christian tradition. Kelly's critique implies that Lonergan is trying to fit Christian theology into a generalised, *a priori* method. In *Method*, however, Lonergan is proceeding in the opposite direction: his aim is to demonstrate the general application of a theological method that he has developed through many years of 'reaching up to the mind of Aquinas.'[100]

Under the same heading of 'Religion,' Lonergan goes on to consider 'Faith' and 'Religious belief.' He defines faith as 'the knowledge born of religious love.'[101] God's love floods the heart of the believer,[102] transforming the individual's cognition such that he/she can recognise the transcendent value of returning God's love[103] and can discern the value of 'accepting the judgments of fact and the judgments of value that the religion proposes,'[104] that is, of believing in doctrines. Here again Lonergan seems to be influenced by Newman.[105]

7.4.3 Functional specialties

In the final chapter of Part One of *Method*, Lonergan describes the eight 'functional specialties' (or 'specializations')[106] that make up his theological method. As we have already

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[98] Ormerod, *Method, Meaning and Revelation*, 216.
[99] *Insight*, 770.
[100] *Insight*, 769.
[101] *Method*, 111.
[102] *Method*, 112.
[103] *Method*, 112.
[104] *Method*, 114.
[105] See Newman, *Grammar*, Chapter 5, 'Apprehension and Assent in the Matter of Religion,' especially 93-94 and 123-131.
[106] *Method*, 121.

seen, these correspond to the four levels of cognitional structure, in an upward and then a downward movement.[107] The two that are most relevant to our question are the first two levels of the 'descending' movement, that is, foundations and doctrines.

In relation to foundations, Lonergan states:

> As conversion is basic to Christian living, so an objectification of conversion provides theology with its foundations… Inasmuch as conversion itself is made thematic and explicitly objectified, there emerges the fifth functional specialty, foundations.[108]

Lonergan distinguishes foundations from traditional fundamental theology:

> …fundamental theology was a set of doctrines… foundations present, not doctrines, but the horizon within which the meaning of doctrines can be apprehended.[109]

Elsewhere in *Method*, he defines an individual's 'horizon' as the range of one's knowledge and interests, the extent of one's learning and growth in understanding to date which limits the capacity for assimilating more.[110] Lonergan sees foundations as a 'theological reflection on religious living' where the task is to:

> …[distinguish] the horizons within which religious doctrines can or cannot be apprehended; and this distinction is foundational.[111]

What is foundational for Lonergan is conversion, which makes possible objective knowledge – 'Genuine objectivity is the fruit of authentic subjectivity'[112] – and opens the way for the subject to apprehend the truth of doctrines. Within the structure of his theological method, foundations is the specialty which objectifies and thematises conversion so that essential theological doctrines can be understood – rather than providing extrinsic arguments to justify such doctrines, which is how Lonergan sees 'the old fundamental theology'[113] and which would be a classically foundationalist approach.

Lonergan has already identified the task of Christian apologetic within his method:

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107 Crowe, *Lonergan*, 111.
108 *Method*, 125-126.
109 *Method*, 126.
110 *Method*, 221-223.
111 *Method*, 126.
112 *Method*, 273 – see also 248.
113 *Method*, 126.

> The apologist's task is neither to produce in others nor to justify for them God's gift of his love… The apologist's task is to aid others in integrating God's gift with the rest of their living.[114]

Clearly, then, the task of the functional specialty 'foundations' is not to provide extrinsic foundations for Christian faith and doctrine, but rather to express and explain the conversion brought about in the believer by the free gift of God's love. Although Lonergan has identified foundations as a functional specialty within theology, he is not putting forward an understanding of theological knowledge as 'foundationalist' in the sense that we have been considering.

We have already considered Williams' interpretation of Aquinas.[115] As Williams reads him, Aquinas sees the *scientia* which is sacred doctrine as a 'delicate structure'[116] built by rigorous reasoning on postulates – the articles of faith – which are ultimately drawn from divine knowledge, but which are accessible to the human mind only through the mediation of scripture and which have to be accepted on faith.[117] The theologian can show the reasonableness of the act of faith, but cannot justify it by reference to extrinsic criteria or build the edifice of doctrine on a foundation of self-evident truths, as a strong foundationalism would demand. Williams supports her interpretation by reference to the first article of the *Summa Theologiae*:

> If, however, an opponent believes nothing of what has been divinely revealed, then no way lies open for making the articles of faith reasonably credible; all that can be done is to solve the difficulties against faith he may bring up.[118]

> All the same holy teaching uses human reasoning, not indeed to prove the faith… but to make manifest some implications of its message.[119]

In his account of the specialty of foundations Lonergan, as always, stays close to Aquinas, while addressing contemporary concerns in contemporary language. His focus on the believer's 'horizon' reflects the turn to the subject which is characteristic of transcendental Thomism (though Lonergan scholars debate whether his thought should be

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[114] *Method*, 118-9.
[115] Section 1.4.2.
[116] Williams, 'Is Aquinas a Foundationalist?' 42.
[117] Williams, 34.
[118] St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a. 1, 8.
[119] St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a. 1, 8.

assigned to that school),[120] and of much 20th-century theology. Lonergan is, once again, attempting to transpose the thought of Aquinas into a key that is understandable to the culture of his own time. If, as I believe, Williams is correct in her judgement that the label of 'classical foundationalism' fails to do justice to the nuance and subtlety of the thought of Aquinas, then Lonergan should be exonerated of the same charge, even when he is writing about the specialty of 'foundations.'

In relation to the functional specialty of doctrines:

> Doctrines express judgments of fact and judgments of value… Such doctrines stand within the horizon of foundations.[121]

The believer who has experienced conversion can discern the truth of the judgements of fact and value which constitute doctrines.

Lonergan adds:

> So initially the Christian religion and Christian theology were not distinguished.[122]

> To identify theology with religion, with liturgy, with prayer, with preaching, no doubt is to revert to the earliest period of Christianity.[123]

But, as Lonergan observes, 'the conditions of the earliest period [of Christianity] have long since ceased to exist'[124] and, he believes, a method such as his is required to address the theological issues and problems of communication that arise in the twentieth century.

This recalls Newman's idealised view:

> …freedom from symbols and articles is abstractedly the highest state of Christian communion, and the peculiar privilege of the primitive Church… when confessions do not exist, the mysteries of divine truth… are kept hidden in the bosom of the Church…[125]

For Newman, the introduction of 'symbols and articles,' creeds and dogmatic statements, was a regrettable necessity resulting from the threat of heresy. Lonergan views the process more positively, believing that God's action in the church brings about a growth in understanding

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[120] See above, section 4.5, and Wilkins, *Before Truth: Lonergan, Aquinas and the Problem of Wisdom*, 165-166.
[121] *Method*, 127.
[122] *Method*, 132.
[123] *Method*, 133.
[124] *Method*, 133.
[125] *Arians*, 41, cited in Nichols, *From Newman to Congar*, 28.

of divinely revealed truth. As we saw above, Lonergan believes that such growth is a necessity for the 'universal and Catholic expression' of divine revelation.[126] However, in Chapter 12 of *Method*, dealing with the functional specialty of doctrines, he will offer a more historically and culturally conscious account of their development and function.[127]

7.5 Part Two: Foreground

7.5.1 Interpretation

The second part of *Method*, 'Foreground,' contains chapters on each of Lonergan's functional specialties. In Chapter 7, 'Interpretation,' Lonergan first distinguishes 'hermeneutics' – principles of interpretation – from 'exegesis' – the application of the principles to a given task.[128] He rejects 'the principle of the empty head' – the idea that the interpreter must 'drop all preconceptions' and simply 'see all that is there and nothing that is not there' in the text.[129] For Lonergan, all errors can be traced back to an erroneous cognitional theory, and the principle of the empty head rests on a 'naïve intuitionism'[130] – the belief that knowledge consists in simply 'taking a look.' On the contrary, Lonergan asserts, the greater the experience, understanding and judgement of the interpreter, the greater the likelihood that he/she will discover the author's meaning. The interpreter must understand the words used,[131] the common sense of the author[132] and the interpreter's own horizon[133] in order to interpret the text. Lonergan recounts his own experience during his doctoral work (published as *Grace and Freedom*) as an example of how:

> … one comes to set aside one's own initial interests and concerns, to share those of the author, to reconstruct the context of his thought and speech.[134]

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[126] *TTG: Systematics*, 99-101: see above, section 6.4.3.
[127] *Method* Chapter 12, 'Doctrines,' 275-309.
[128] *Method*, 146.
[129] *Method*, 149.
[130] *Method*, 149.
[131] *Method*, 150-151.
[132] *Method*, 151-152.
[133] *Method*, 152-154.
[134] *Method*, 154 and note 9.

He quotes Descamps' description of the method of biblical theology to illustrate the 'basic procedure' of interpretation.[135] For Descamps, the biblical theologian must respect the diversity of the texts found in Scripture, and not attempt to impose a single overarching theological model:

> … biblical theology must be as multiple and diverse as are, for the alert exegete, the innumerable biblical authors.[136]

Although he rejects the 'principle of the empty head,' Lonergan still seems to assume that there can be such a thing as a single, correct interpretation of a text, based on the reconstruction of the author's intention – one of the subsections of the chapter is entitled 'Judging the Correctness of One's Interpretation.'[137] Though Lonergan cites Gadamer in support of his approach,[138] the German writer would question the idea that the 'correct' interpretation of a text can be arrived at by reconstruction of the subjective experience of the author.[139] However, remembering that 'Method is not a set of rules to be followed meticulously by a dolt,'[140] I believe that we can read Lonergan's description of the functional specialty 'interpretation' as a guide to an authentically critical hermeneutics which is open to pluralism in the interpretation of a text, rather than as a prescription for arriving at the 'correct' interpretation.

In relation to theological interpretation, it is noteworthy that in both of the examples which he cites – himself as a systematic theologian investigating the thought of Aquinas, and the biblical theologian following the method prescribed by Descamps – the subject whom Lonergan envisages carrying out the procedure of interpretation is the individual theologian addressing a text. He makes no explicit link between the work of the scholar and the ecclesial dimension – how the church as a community of disciples might appropriate and interpret the text. Newman offers a deeper account of the role of the theologian in the life of the church.[141]

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[135] *Method*, 161-162. Cf Albert Descamps, 'Réflexions sur la méthode en théologie biblique.' *Sacra Pagina, Miscelleanea Biblica Congressus Internationalis Catholici de Re Biblica*, vol 1, eds. J Coppens, A Descamps and E Massaux (Editions J Duculot, Gembloux, 1959), 132-57.
[136] *Method*, 161.
[137] *Method*, 154-156.
[138] *Method*, 155-156 and note 11.
[139] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd revised edition, trans. J Wensheiner & D G Marshall, (Sheed & Ward, London, 1989), 164-169.
[140] *Method*, 3.
[141] See section 2.5.4 above.

I will discuss below[142] how Ormerod has attempted to develop the thought of Lonergan in this area.

7.5.2 <u>History</u>

Under the heading of 'History,' Lonergan states: 'Common meaning is a constitutive element in human community.'[143] On the distinction between history on the one hand and interpretation or exegesis on the other:

> In brief, where exegesis is concerned to determine what a particular person meant, history is concerned to determine what, in most cases, contemporaries do not know. For, in most cases, contemporaries do not know what is going forward…[144]

The patterns and trends of historical events are not apparent to those taking part in the events but can only be discerned by historians of later times. This recalls what is said in *TTG: Systematics* about the process of dogmatic development:

> Still, a development of dogma was brought about, especially in the ecumenical councils from Nicea to Vatican I. But it is one thing to intend the individual definitions, one at a time, as each of the councils undoubtedly did, and it is quite another thing to intend the entire series of definitions and declarations in which the development of dogma can be seen.[145]

For Lonergan, the development of dogma in the church is a special case, inasmuch as he sees the historical process of development occurring under divine guidance.[146] In ordinary human history, both development and decline are possible[147] and it is the task of the historian to identify and describe 'what was going forward' from the available data. In the next chapter, 'History and Historians,' he adds:

> In brief, then, history is related to philosophy as historical method is related to transcendental method or, again, as theological method is related to transcendental method.[148]

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[142] Section 7.7.
[143] *Method*, 167.
[144] *Method*, 168.
[145] *TTG: Systematics*, 99.
[146] *TTG: Systematics*, 99.
[147] *Method*, 168.
[148] *Method*, 212.

The historian who has undergone the appropriate conversion[149] and who follows transcendental method correctly will be able to overcome his/her individual bias and will arrive at objectively valid results.[150]

7.5.2.1   Dialectic

Dialectic, the fourth functional specialty, sits at the top of the 'ascending' motion of theological method. Dialectic deals with conflicts and with the conversion by which conflicts are overcome:

> … there are fundamental conflicts stemming from an explicit or implicit cognitional theory… They are to be overcome only through an intellectual, moral, religious conversion. The function of dialectic will be to bring such conflicts to light, and to provide a technique that objectifies subjective differences and promotes conversion.[151]

As we have seen, Lonergan defines an individual's 'horizon' as the range of one's knowledge and interests, the field of vision which sets the limits of what one can understand and learn.[152] Conversion, intellectual, moral and religious,[153] is a move from one horizon to another. Intellectual conversion, for Lonergan, consists in the rejection of the naïve realism that sees knowing as looking, of the empiricism that restricts objective knowledge to sense experience, and of the idealism that denies the reality of the world mediated by meaning.[154] Intellectual conversion leads to the acceptance of critical realism.

> Only the critical realist can acknowledge the facts of human knowing and pronounce the world mediated by meaning to be the real world; and he can do so only inasmuch as he shows that the process of experiencing, understanding and judging is a process of self-transcendence.[155]

This is a crucial point for understanding Lonergan's approach to the hermeneutics of doctrine. For the individual, dialectic leads to conversion, and intellectual conversion consists in the acceptance of the critical realist epistemology that Lonergan has elaborated in *Insight*. Conversion enables the individual to distinguish philosophical positions from

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[149] *Method*, 204.
[150] *Method*, 217-8.
[151] *Method*, 221.
[152] *Method*, 221-2.
[153] *Method*, 223.
[154] *Method*, 223-4.
[155] *Method*, 224.

counterpositions.[156] For the church, the dialectical process brings about a development of doctrine that consists in a gradual clarification and growth in understanding of divinely revealed truth, punctuated by dogmatic definitions when these are made necessary by ecclesial conflict.[157] It seems, in Thiel's terms,[158] a purely noetic model that leaves little or no room for contingency in doctrinal development, or for legitimate pluralism in the expression of doctrine. But later in *Method*, Lonergan will open the door at least slightly to such possibilities.[159]

7.5.3 <u>Lonergan and linguistic analysis</u>

In three subsections under the heading 'The Dialectic of Method,' Lonergan acknowledges that 'there are widely held views that imply that his own procedures are mistaken and even wrong-headed.'[160] He proceeds to address criticisms of his method from the point of view of linguistic analysis, and of idealism. By 'linguistic analysis' Lonergan means the philosophical position associated with Wittgenstein. I will discuss in Chapter 9 the critique of Lonergan's method offered by Fergus Kerr and Nicholas Lash, Catholic theologians influenced by Wittgenstein's thought. At this point it is sufficient to note that, while Lonergan agrees with Wittgenstein in rejecting the Cartesian understanding of mind and of the ocular metaphor for knowing,[161] he believes Wittgenstein's approach to be based on a mistaken 'methodological option' – the rejection of mental acts as a valid subject for philosophical discussion.[162]

For Wittgenstein, the use of a word is its meaning, while Lonergan holds ultimately to the classical Thomist view that a word is an expression of a mental act. Where the 'word' is the theological language used to formulate doctrinal statements, he takes it for granted that such language can express ontological truths, including, as Lindbeck puts it, 'first-order

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[156] *Method*, 235-6.
[157] Elsewhere in *Method*, Lonergan remarks that within the specialty of doctrines, 'the theologian's concern is the relation between the community's origins and the decisions it reached in its successive identity crises.' *Method*, 159.
[158] Thiel, *Senses of Tradition*, 67-73.
[159] See section 7.5.5 below.
[160] *Method*, 238.
[161] Joseph Fitzpatrick, *Philosophical Encounters: Lonergan and the Analytical Tradition* (University of Toronto Press, 2005), 131-136.
[162] *Method*, 240-241.

affirmations about the inner being of God or Jesus Christ.'[163] Lonergan rejects the view of linguistic analysis, '… that the function of philosophy is to work out a hermeneutics for the clarification of the local variety of everyday language.'[164]

The next section, 'The Dialectic of Methods: Part 2'[165] offers a summary explanation and justification of Lonergan's entire philosophical project. He recalls the four 'realms of meaning' in a fully differentiated consciousness: the realms of common sense, theory, interiority and transcendence.[166] The first differentiation to occur historically is that between the realms of common sense and theory, which allows for the development of science, philosophy and theology.

> However, as science develops, philosophy is impelled to migrate from the world of theory and to find its basis in the world of interiority.[167]

As science progresses towards 'the full explanation of all phenomena,'[168] the task left to philosophy is:

> … the problems of truth and relativism, of what is meant by reality, of the grounds of theory and of common sense and of the relations between the two, of the grounds of specifically human sciences.[169]

Philosophy addresses these problems by moving to the realm of interiority and to an appropriation of the data of consciousness, at the level both of culture and the subjectivity of the individual.

> To say it with the greatest possible brevity: one has not only to read *Insight* but also to discover oneself in oneself.[170]

This differentiation of consciousness depends on the development of 'a language that refers to mental acts,'[171] and it opens the way for an account of knowing that does not presuppose a metaphysics, but instead can itself provide a 'logical first' from which one can proceed to epistemology and metaphysics and from there to a 'systematic account of meaning'[172] – as

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[163] Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine,* 80. See section 1.5.4 above.
[164] *Method*, 91.
[165] *Method*, 241-245.
[166] *Method*, 241.
[167] *Method*, 243.
[168] *Method*, 243.
[169] *Method*, 243.
[170] *Method*, 244.
[171] *Method*, 244.
[172] *Method*, 244-245.

Lonergan has demonstrated in *Insight*. But the entry into the world of interiority is made possible by the progress of mathematics, natural science and philosophy, and by 'one's own personal reflective engagement.'[173] *Insight* could not have been written, Lonergan is saying, until Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, Descartes, Pascal and Newman had all made their contributions.[174] And it is notable that he describes mental acts as a 'logical first' rather than a 'foundation' for epistemology and metaphysics. Lonergan is not offering a Cartesian account, where the *cogito* of the knowing subject provides a foundation for certain knowledge. His is rather a Thomist worldview in which the differentiation of consciousness, and the appropriation of one's cognitive process which follows from it, allow the subject to discover the answer to the metaphysical question 'What do we know when we do it?'[175] For Lonergan, as for Aquinas, the answer to the metaphysical question is that, ultimately, we come to know a world that is intelligible because its order has been established by an omnipotent Creator. Rorty sees natural science as having taken the place of metaphysics, but for Lonergan the success of the sciences, and specifically the transition from an Aristotelian science that seeks necessary causes to a modern version that works towards verifiable approximations, both requires and enables a reformulation of Thomist metaphysics. Lindbeck follows Wittgenstein in holding that the meaning of language is simply its use, but Lonergan traces meaning back to the expression of mental acts, acts which provide a 'logical first' for epistemology and metaphysics. Lonergan's critical realism is of crucial importance for the hermeneutics of doctrine. He affirms that the truth can be known and can be expressed in language and that theological language is, in the words of his fellow Jesuit Edward MacKinnon, 'an indirect, partial, analogous, yet indispensible [sic] means of knowing the living God who transcends whatever we can think or say of Him.'[176]

7.5.4 Lonergan and idealism

In Part 3 of 'The Dialectic of Methods,' Lonergan addresses the 'a priori rejection' of his approach that stems from idealist philosophy.[177] The idealist denies that the self-

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[173]*Method*, 245.

[174] *Method*, 244-245.

[175] *Method*, 245.

[176] Edward Mackinnon, 'Linguistic Analysis and the Transcendence of God,' *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 23 (1968), 30. See *Method*, 238-239.

[177] *Method*, 245

appropriation that Lonergan advocates can give rise to objective knowledge. This denial, Lonergan asserts, stems from a failure to distinguish two worlds: the world of immediacy or sense experience, and the world mediated by meaning. If this distinction is not understood, there result 'the ambiguities underlying naïve realism, naïve idealism, empiricism, critical idealism, absolute idealism.'[178] Lonergan responds:

> … it is now apparent that in the world mediated by meaning and motivated by value, objectivity is simply the consequence of authentic subjectivity, of genuine attention, genuine intelligence, genuine reasonableness, genuine responsibility.[179]

The knowing subject who has become aware of and appropriated his/her cognitive process, who has undergone conversion and who follows authentically the transcendental precepts will achieve valid, objective knowledge. The objectivity achievable in the human sciences differs from that which can be attained in mathematics or science,[180] but is appropriate to the subject matter of those sciences.

7.5.4.1 Foundations

For Lonergan, conversion is foundational. As we have already seen [181] the task of the functional specialty of foundationsis not to provide extrinsic justifications for the act of faith but to objectify conversion and make it explicit. Conversion is a change of horizon, in the sense in which Lonergan has defined it;[182] an explicit choice of a horizon within which doctrines are meaningful.[183] He wishes to conceive of foundations in a dynamic manner, not as a set of premises leading to conclusions, but as a method based on conversion and the embrace of authenticity. Pluralism in expression can result from the presence or absence of intellectual, moral or religious conversion.[184] Pluralism in religious language 'has its root in the differentiation of human consciousness.'[185] Again, Lonergan's model seems to be a linear one; doctrine develops as a result of developing understanding,[186] though there can be a pluralism of *communications* that reflects linguistic, social and cultural differences.[187]

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[178] *Method*, 248.
[179] *Method*, 248.
[180] *Method*, 248.
[181] *Method*, 125-127.
[182] *Method*, 126.
[183] *Method*, 251-252.
[184] *Method*, 254-259.
[185] *Method*, 259.
[186] *Method*, 259-264.
[187] *Method*, 259.

In the next subsection, 'Categories,' Lonergan articulates positions that are crucial for our question. Given the universal claims of Christianity, theology must have a 'transcultural base.'[188] The transcendental method outlined in Chapter 1 of *Method* (and developed in detail in *Insight*) is, Lonergan claims, transcultural:

> Clearly it is not transcultural inasmuch as it is explicitly formulated. But it is transcultural in the realities to which the formulation refers, for these realities are not the product of any culture but, on the contrary, the principles that produce cultures, preserve them, develop them. Moreover, since it is to these realities we refer when we speak of *homo sapiens*, it follows that these realities are transcultural with respect to all truly human cultures.[189]

The other transcultural element to which Lonergan appeals is God's free gift of love, which brings about conversion (Romans 5:5).

> God's gift of his love is free. It is not conditioned by human knowledge; rather it is the cause that leads man to seek knowledge of God… All the same, it remains true, of course, that God's gift of his love has its proper counterpart in the revelation events in which God discloses to a particular people or to all mankind the completeness of his love for them.[190]

Lonergan's claim that his transcendental method is founded on realities – 'psychological facts'[191] – that are prior to culture is questionable in the eyes of theologians influenced by Wittgenstein such as Lindbeck, Lash and Kerr. However his appeal to Romans 5:5 – a key text that he cites several times in *Method* – may seem more promising. Given the universal claims of the Christian Gospel, God's gift of love – freely given and prior even to the human desire to seek God – can be understood as a universal and transcultural reality, albeit that the human response to the divine gift of love will inevitably be culturally and historically determined. In Lonergan's terms, the recognition of the conversion brought about by the gift of divine love can serve as a criterion for hermeneutical discernment in relation to a given theological expression.[192]

From this transcultural base can be derived general and special theological categories relevant to any of the eight functional specialties. As always, the authenticity of the results obtained from the method will depend on the authenticity of the theologian; 'it is effected in

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[188] *Method*, 264.
[189] *Method*, 264.
[190] *Method*, 265.
[191] *Verbum*, 104-105.
[192] *Method*, 265-266.

the measure that theologians attain authenticity through religious, moral, and intellectual conversion.'[193] The method is brought to bear on the data in an ongoing process by which theology articulates:

> …the categories in which Christians understand themselves, communicate with one another, and preach the gospel to all nations.[194]

Although Lonergan describes theology as an 'ongoing process,' it is clear throughout his work that he sees doctrinal statements as articulations of eternal truths, albeit that the statements themselves are historically and culturally conditioned. In this, he seems to be at odds with Lindbeck's rule theory of doctrine. But a more nuanced reading of *Method* may show the difference to be less stark than it first appears. Lonergan, like Lindbeck, assumes the primacy of divine revelation. His transcendental method, based on the invariant structures of human cognition and on the free gift of divine love, is the 'transcultural base'[195] from which the church understands and formulates the truths revealed by God. In his 1967 essay 'Theology in Its New Context,' Lonergan observes:

> … theology was a deductive, and it has become largely an empirical science. It was a deductive science in the sense that its theses were conclusions to be proven from the premises provided by scripture and tradition. It has become an empirical science in the sense that scripture and tradition now supply, not premises, but data. The data have to be viewed in their historical perspective. They have to be interpreted in the light of contemporary techniques and procedures.[196]

Lonergan's own work in the two volumes of *The Triune God* is a classic example of a deductive theology which proves its conclusions from the premises provided by scripture and tradition. He recognises that the rise of critical scholarship (and surely, though he does not say so here, the teaching of Vatican II) has brought about a change in the nature of the theologian's task. He remarks:

> The Scholastic aim of reconciling all the elements in its Christian inheritance had one grave defect. It did not realize how much of the multiplicity in the inheritance constituted not a logical or metaphysical problem but basically a historical problem.[197]

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[193] *Method*, 273.
[194] *Method*, 274.
[195] *Method*, 264.
[196] 'Theology in Its New Context,' *Second Collection*, 48-59, 51-52.
[197] *Method*, 262.

In *Method* Lonergan refers to 'the revelation events in which God discloses to a particular people or to all mankind the completeness of his love for them.'[198] But a fully developed theology of revelation is lacking in his work. Ormerod has attempted to address the issue by drawing on various indications in *Method* and elsewhere in Lonergan's writings to articulate a theology of revelation which Ormerod believes is congruent with his thought.[199]

7.5.5 Doctrines

Lonergan's treatment of the functional specialty of doctrines is, again, crucial for our question. Here we encounter the problem of coherently combining what Lindbeck describes as the 'variable and invariable aspects of religious traditions.'[200] Lonergan's approach to the question also illustrates the development of his thought from *Insight* to *Method*. For example, he remarks:

> … one has only to peruse such a collection of conciliar and pontifical pronouncements as Denzinger's *Enchiridion Symbolorum* to observe that each is a product of its place and time and that each meets the questions of the day for the people of the day.[201]

Such a statement reflects a cultural and historical consciousness that was not explicitly present in Lonergan's earlier works. He describes the task of the functional specialty of doctrines as follows:

> There are theological doctrines reached by the application of a method that distinguishes functional specialties and uses the functional specialty 'foundations' to select doctrines from among the multiple choices presented by the functional specialty 'dialectic.'[202]

Doctrines (as a functional specialty) draws on the findings of dialectic and foundations to meet the theological task of distinguishing authentic from inauthentic doctrine by discerning the presence or absence of conversion.[203] Given an empirical notion of culture, the

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[198] *Method*, 265.
[199] See section 7.6 below.
[200] Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, 3.
[201] *Method*, 276.
[202] *Method*, 278.
[203] *Method*, 279-280.

commandment to preach the gospel to all nations (Matthew 28:19) requires a diversity in the expression of doctrine.[204] What is invariant is not 'eternally valid propositions but… the quite open structure of the human spirit.'[205] What is normative is:

> …the ever immanent and operative though unexpressed transcendental precepts:
> Be attentive, Be intelligent, Be reasonable, Be responsible.[206]

Even on such an empirical understanding of culture, the question of development arises: 'How is it that mortal man can develop what he would not know unless God had revealed it?'[207] Lonergan's answer is couched in terms of his cognitional theory. Through differentiation of consciousness, the individual reaches the point of being able to understand scholarship and the technical language in which it is expressed.[208] At the cultural level, Lonergan terms this process the 'ongoing discovery of mind.'[209] He traces the historical development whereby medieval theology came to adopt the thought of Aristotle as its 'systematic substructure,' before Aristotle was in turn superseded.[210] The discovery of mind allowed church doctrines to derive precision, conciseness and organisation from theology.[211] As to the question of the legitimacy of development:

> …there can be many kinds of developments… to know them, one has to study and analyze concrete historical processes while, to know their legitimacy, one has to turn to evaluational history and assign them their place in the dialectic of the presence and absence of intellectual, moral and religious conversion.[212]

Doctrines are understood in their context and it is an 'ongoing context.'[213]

> Ongoing context arises when a succession of texts express the mind of a single historical community.[214]

Lonergan distinguishes 'the context of theological doctrines and the context of church doctrines' while recognising that the two interact and, in a sense, each is the context for the other.[215] But the context of doctrine has been profoundly changed; an Aristotelian world view

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[204] *Method*, 280-282.
[205] *Method*, 282.
[206] *Method*, 282.
[207] *Method*, 282.
[208] *Method*, 282-284.
[209] *Method*, 285.
[210] *Method*, 285-289.
[211] *Method*, 290.
[212] *Method*, 291.
[213] *Method*, 291-292.
[214] *Method*, 291.
[215] *Method*, 292.

within which science sought certainty and necessity has been succeeded by a modern world view in which science is concerned with correlations and verifiable probabilities.[216] Lonergan's method aims to meet this change by the 'shift to interiority.'[217] A method that makes intellectual conversion explicit allows theology to respond authentically to the challenges of modern science and scholarship.[218]

On the development of doctrines, Lonergan favours a historical and retrospective understanding:

> …the intelligibility proper to developing doctrines is the intelligibility immanent in historical process. One knows it, not by a priori theorising, but by a posteriori research, interpretation, history, dialectic, and the decision of foundations.[219]

Lonergan has provided a substantial example of such an analysis of doctrinal development in his own Trinitarian volumes. As we have seen in Chapter 2, Newman offers criteria for the discernment of authentic development and, like Lonergan, he believes that such authenticity is to be judged retrospectively and not *a priori*. Lonergan would see the judgement of authentic development as a dialectical process of 'evaluational history.'[220]

In relation to the question of the permanence of dogmas, Lonergan undertakes a detailed examination of the teaching of Vatican I's constitution *Dei Filius*. He reads Vatican I as teaching that, in relation to revealed mysteries – that is, to truths that lie beyond the competence of human reason – the meaning declared by the church is permanent. He suggests that it is better to speak of permanence than of immutability, and that the permanence attaches to the meaning and not to the verbal formulation of the dogma.[221] Lonergan declares firmly, '…what God has revealed and the church has infallibly declared is true,'[222] but crucially adds, '…the meaning it possessed in its own context can never be denied truthfully.'[223] He leaves open, at least implicitly, the possibility that in another context the same infallibly declared meaning might be expressed by a different 'verbal formulation.'

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[216] *Method*, 293.
[217] *Method*, 294.
[218] *Method*, 295-296.
[219] *Method*, 296.
[220] *Method*, 297.
[221] *Method*, 298-301.
[222] *Method*, 301.
[223] *Method*, 301.

Lonergan goes on to consider the historicity of dogmas:

> We must ask, then, whether the doctrine of Vatican I on the permanence of the meaning of dogmas can be reconciled with the historicity that characterizes human thought and action.[224]

Historicity implies that human understanding can develop over time. But Lonergan distinguishes the fuller understanding of data from the fuller understanding of a truth.

> When data are more fully understood, there results the emergence of a new theory and the rejection of previous theories. Such is the ongoing process in the empirical sciences. But when a truth is more fully understood, it is still the same truth that is being understood.[225]

Dogmas are expressions of revealed truths and are therefore permanent in their meanings, but there can be a growth in understanding of the truth that has been revealed and believed. Nevertheless, dogmas are statements, statements have meaning only within their contexts, and contexts are ongoing and multiple.[226]

However, as we have seen, Lonergan has previously stated that modern theology is an empirical science in which:

> …scripture and tradition now supply, not premises, but data. The data have to be viewed in their historical perspective. They have to be interpreted in the light of contemporary techniques and procedures.[227]

Lonergan is surely correct in his view that even a dogma defined by the church is a statement that is expressed in human language and has to be read and understood in its historical context. But is the dogma a truth which theology has only to seek to understand, or a datum for interpretation? If permanence attaches to the meaning of a dogmatic statement and not to its historically conditioned expression, how is this permanent meaning to be identified and expressed? Lonergan's reference to 'the permanence of the meaning of dogmas'[228] and also the dictum of John XXIII that '…the substance of the ancient doctrine of the deposit of faith is one thing, and the way in which it is presented is another,'[229] suggest a distinction between the content of a dogma and the form of its expression. However, Thiel

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[224] *Method*, 302.
[225] *Method*, 302.
[226] *Method*, 302-303.
[227] 'Theology in Its New Context,' 51-52.
[228] *Method*, 300.
[229] John XXIII, *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia*, Opening Address to the Second Vatican Council, 11th October 1962. Cited by Lonergan, *Method*, 280 note 9.

and others criticise such a distinction as hermeneutically untenable.[230] In the final chapter, I will discuss the suggestion of Gregory Ryan that the concept of a 'hermeneutics of tradition' is a helpful tool for addressing this question and will suggest that Lonergan's method can contribute to such a hermeneutics. Lonergan, as a Catholic theologian, is attempting to uphold the teaching of Vatican I and his belief in the infallibility of solemnly defined dogma, while at the same time embracing the move from a classicist to an empirical understanding of culture. He believes that his theological method allows for both the permanence and historicity of dogmas:

> What builds the bridges between the many expressions of the faith is a methodical theology.[231]

Lindbeck charges that Lonergan has to resort to 'complicated intellectual gymnastics'[232] in an attempt to account for the 'variable and invariable' aspects of Catholic tradition.[233] In *Method*, Lonergan's response to the problem is sketched rather than fully worked out in terms of its implications for both ecclesiology and the theology of revelation.

Under the heading of 'Pluralism and the Unity of Faith,'[234] Lonergan explains his ideas further. The classicist mentality assumes a single, normative culture and a single legitimate expression of Christian faith.[235] But:

> The real root and ground of unity is being in love with God… The acceptance of this gift [of God's love] both constitutes religious conversion and leads to moral and even intellectual conversion.[236]

> The contexts within which such meaning [of church doctrines] is grasped, and so the manner in which such meaning is expressed, vary both with cultural differences and with the measure in which human consciousness is differentiated.[237]

Lonergan envisages a diversity of understanding and of expression, at both the individual and cultural levels. The authenticity of different expressions is ensured by conversion – religious, moral and intellectual – and this is brought about by God's gift of the

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[230] Thiel, *Senses of Tradition*, 88-89.
[231] *Method*, 303.
[232] *Nature of Doctrine*, 3.
[233] *Nature of Doctrine*, 3.
[234] *Method*, 303-307.
[235] *Method*, 303.
[236] *Method*, 304.
[237] *Method*, 304.

Holy Spirit through which God's love floods our hearts – here again Lonergan cites Romans 5:5.. For the individual theologian, too, it is conversion and the application of the proper method that will ensure that he/she is able to make a distinctive contribution to the life of the church, while remaining appropriately responsible to her teaching authority.[238]

7.5.6 Systematics

Lonergan defines the functional specialty 'systematics' in terms of the teaching of the First Vatican Council:

> [Vatican I] taught that reason illumined by faith, when it inquires diligently, piously, soberly, can with God's help attain a highly fruitful understanding of the mysteries of faith both from the analogy of what it naturally knows and from the interconnection of the mysteries with one another and with man's last end.[239]

Systematics helps the believer to understand the realities affirmed in doctrines by demonstrating the connections between them and their coherence with one another in a comprehensive system. Significantly, Lonergan here rejects the idea that Christian faith can be demonstrated by reason alone. Intellectual, religious and moral conversion can only be reached 'through the self-transcendence of the concrete existing subject.'[240] Lonergan believes that his view does not contradict the teaching of Vatican I that 'through creatures God can be known with certainty by the natural light of human reason,'[241] for he reads that teaching as referring 'tacitly' to humanity in the state of pure nature, rather than our present fallen state.[242]

> … with regard to the actual order in which we live, I should say that normally religious conversion precedes the effort to work out religious proofs for the existence of God.[243]

Because of this 'primacy of conversion' over proof,[244] Lonergan advocates the integration of natural with systematic theology and claims that this is 'proposing a return to the type of systematic theology illustrated by Aquinas's *Summa contra Gentiles* and *Summa*

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[238] *Method*, 307-309.
[239] *Method*, 311; cf. *DF*, Chapter 4.
[240] *Method*, 313.
[241] *Method*, 313; cf. *DF*.
[242] *Method*, 313-314.
[243] *Method*, 314. See also Lonergan, 'Natural Knowledge of God,' *Catholic Theological Society of America Proceedings*, 23 (1968), 54-69.
[244] *Method*, 314.

theologiae.'[245] Lonergan thus rejects the strong foundationalist position that Christian faith can be demonstrated by reason starting from self-evident principles; and, crucially, he believes that in doing so he is following Aquinas.[246] In *Insight*, Lonergan famously – or notoriously – affirmed:

> If all reality is completely intelligible, then God exists. But all reality is completely intelligible. Therefore, God exists.[247]

Here in *Method*, he states:

> Now an orientation to transcendent mystery is basic to systematic theology. It provides the primary and fundamental meaning of the name 'God.'[248]

The cause of this 'orientation to transcendent mystery' is God's prior gift of love. (Romans 5:5) Its effect is that one asks questions about the world and humanity.

> Such questions invite answers and, as the questions intend, so too the answers can reveal, an intelligent, necessary, moral ground of the universe.[249]

Thus it seems that Lonergan's 'proof' of the existence of God is rather a demonstration of the rationality of Christian conversion, leading, like Aquinas' five ways, to the conclusion 'And this is what everyone knows as God.'[250]

Lonergan claims, further, that by building his theological method on intentionality analysis, he has derived a critical metaphysics.

> The positive function of a critical metaphysics is twofold. On the one hand, it provides a basic heuristic structure, a determinate horizon, within which questions arise. On the other hand, it provides a criterion for settling the difference between literal and metaphorical meaning and, again, between notional and real distinctions.[251]

This structure allows for both development and continuity, and it can be validated by the appropriation of one's own 'conscious and intentional operations' of knowing.[252] This is Lonergan's response to the problem of reconciling Lindbeck's 'variable and invariable' aspects

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[245] *Method*, 314.
[246] As we have seen, Williams also rejects a reading of Aquinas as a classical foundationalist – see section 1.4.2 above.
[247] *Insight*, 695.
[248] *Method*, 315.
[249] *Method*, 316-317.
[250] *Summa Theologiae*, 1a. 2, 3.
[251] *Method*, 317. In a footnote, Lonergan refers the reader to *Insight*, chapters 2, 14 and 16.
[252] *Method*, 317-318.

of the Christian tradition.[253] By the application of method, based on intellectual, moral and religious conversion, authentic and inauthentic development can be distinguished.

Lonergan summarises:

> Doctrines are concerned to state clearly and distinctly the religious community's confession of the mysteries so hidden in God that man could not know them if they had not been revealed by God. Assent to such doctrines is the assent of faith, and that assent is regarded by religious people as firmer than any other.[254]

The task of systematic theology is to set out the understanding of such mysteries 'on the level of one's times.'

> In the medieval period it was static system. In the contemporary world it has to be at home in modern science, modern scholarship and modern philosophy.[255]

Though systematic theology cannot 'exhaust or even do justice' to what God has revealed,[256] nevertheless it provides believers with the basis both for resisting secular attacks on faith and for communicating the truths that they believe.[257]

Lonergan concludes his chapter on systematics by returning to the question of 'Continuity, Development, Revision.' Four factors make for continuity: the normative structure of human knowing; God's gift of love; the permanence of dogma (that is, the special status of truth which is divinely revealed rather than being the fruit of human investigation); and the 'genuine achievement' of the past.[258] As an example of the latter, Lonergan refers to writings of Aquinas which he himself has studied in *Grace and Freedom* and *Verbum*.

> … Aquinas's thought on grace and freedom and his thought on cognitional theory and the Trinity were genuine achievements of the human spirit. Such achievement has a permanence of its own.[259]

Development can arise when the gospel is preached in a new cultural context; it can come about through the differentiations of human consciousness; or through the 'fruits of dialectic:'

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[253] Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, 3.
[254] *Method*, 323.
[255] *Method*, 323.
[256] *Method*, 323.
[257] *Method*, 324.
[258] *Method*, 324-325.
[259] *Method*, 325.

> Truth can come to light, not because truth has been sought, but because a contrary error has been affirmed and repulsed.[260]

Here, Lonergan is drawing together themes that are foundational in his own thought. The whole of *Insight* (and *Verbum*) is dedicated to validating and transposing into modern language the Thomist account of human knowing, and to establishing it as a normative foundation for method in theology (as well as for other disciplines.) Lonergan's reference to God's gift of love and to the permanence of dogma reflects his identity as a Roman Catholic theologian who believes in divine guidance of the church's magisterium. With his acknowledgement of the contribution of theologians to the church's understanding of revelation, and his recognition of the fact of development in that understanding (which he himself traced in detail, in relation to Trinitarian doctrine, in *TTG: Dogmatics*) he is embracing the dynamic view of the church's tradition found in the Vatican II constitution *Dei Verbum*.[261]

Tentatively, Lonergan goes further when he speaks of revision.

> Besides continuity and development, there also is revision… at the present time theological development is fundamentally a long delayed response to the development of modern science, modern scholarship, modern philosophy.[262]

Lonergan's own work is such a response, which aims to maintain the integrity of Catholic doctrine while responding to the challenges of modern science, scholarship and philosophy. He raises the 'very large' question of what kind of 'demythologizations' may be required by modern scholarship, before declaring that such questions lie outside the scope of *Method*.[263] He is not ready to step beyond, in Thiel's terms, a prospective account of doctrinal development. Despite the great depth and scope of his thought, there is still lacking the fully developed ecclesiology and theology of revelation that would enable a more profound exploration of such questions.

7.5.7 Communications

Lonergan's eighth and final functional specialty is that of communications.

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[260] *Method*, 325.
[261] Vatican II, *Dei Verbum* § 8.
[262] *Method*, 325.
[263] *Method*, 325-326.

… it is in this final stage that theological reflection bears fruit. Without the first seven stages, of course, there is no fruit to be borne. But without the last the first seven are in vain, for they fail to mature.[264]

For Lonergan, common meaning is constitutive of community, while divergent meaning divides a community.[265] Such division can have different causes, but 'the serious division is the one that arises from the presence or absence of intellectual, moral or religious conversion.'[266] A community divided by the lack of conversion is 'headed for disaster'[267] as the lack of conversion causes ever-increasing division.

Lonergan distinguishes 'community' from 'society.'

On an ancient and traditional view, society is conceived as the organized collaboration of individuals for the pursuit of a common aim or aims.[268]

The 'ideal basis' of society is community.[269] Community depends on common meaning, which in turn depends on conversion, and so there is a need for individuals, groups and organisations which attempt to bring about conversion. 'Among such bodies should be the Christian church.'[270] Lonergan goes on to consider 'The Christian Church and its Contemporary Situation.'[271]

The Christian church is the community that results from the outer communication of Christ's message and from the inner gift of God's love.[272]

Consideration of the task of communicating the Christian message brings us back to the distinction between classicist and empirical notions of culture with which Lonergan began *Method*.[273]

Insofar as one preaches the gospel as it has been developed within one's own culture, one is preaching not only the gospel but also one's own culture.[274]

[264] *Method*, 327.
[265] *Method*, 329.
[266] *Method*, 329.
[267] *Method*, 330.
[268] *Method*, 331.
[269] *Method*, 333.
[270] *Method*, 333.
[271] *Method*, 333-338.
[272] *Method*, 333.
[273] *Method*, 3.
[274] *Method*, 334.

For a classicist who conceives culture normatively this is perfectly legitimate, but 'In contrast, the pluralist acknowledges a multiplicity of cultural traditions'[275] and would therefore seek to communicate the gospel within the culture of those to whom he/she is speaking.

Finally, Lonergan reflects on the nature of the Christian church.

> Through communication there is constituted community, and, conversely, community constitutes and perfects itself through communication. Accordingly, the Christian church is a process of self-constitution, a *Selbstvollzug*... The substance of that process is the Christian message conjoined with the inner gift of God's love and resulting in Christian witness, Christian fellowship, and Christian service to mankind.[276]

The church is a process which is structured, outgoing and redemptive.[277] The working out of plans for achieving its ends is the work of pastoral theology.[278] But in order for the church to become 'a fully conscious process of self-constitution'[279] Lonergan wishes to see the integration of theology with 'all other relevant branches of human studies.'[280] He believes that his theological method, with its functional specialties, makes possible such an integration. Such integrated studies:

> ...correspond to a profound exigence in the contemporary situation... It will bring theologians into close contact with experts in very many different fields.[281]

The aim would be to '[find] ways to meet the needs both of Christians and of all mankind.'[282]

Finally, Lonergan turns to the question of ecumenism. The division between different confessions of Christian faith, he believes,

> ...resides mainly in the cognitive meaning of the Christian message. The constitutive meaning and the effective meaning are matters on which most Christians very largely agree.[283]

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[275] *Method*, 334.
[276] *Method*, 334-335. The term *Selbstvollstug* is taken from Arnold, Rahner, Schurr, Weber, Klostermann, eds., *Handbuch der Pastoraltheologie: Praktische Theologie der Kirche in ihrer Gegenwart* (Herder, Freiburg, 1964-74) referred to by Lonergan at *Method*, 328, note 3.
[277] *Method*, 335.
[278] *Method*, 328 note 3 and 335 note 10.
[279] *Method*, 335.
[280] *Method*, 336.
[281] *Method*, 338.
[282] *Method*, 338.
[283] *Method*, 339.

And, Lonergan believes, that agreement can be expressed by 'collaboration in fulfilling the redemptive and constructive roles of the Christian church in human society.'[284] There he ends.

Crowe notes that like *Insight*, *Method* does not fully realise Lonergan's ambition to contribute to 'the new theology that the level of the times seemed to call for.'[285] He was working under pressure of time and uncertain health and did not fully develop his thought in all its aspects. I have identified gaps specifically in the treatment of the theology of revelation and of the church. In the next two sections I will consider the work of the Lonergan scholar Neil Ormerod, who has carried forward Lonergan's thought in these areas.

7.6 Issues in *Method* (1); theology of revelation

As Ormerod notes,[286] both Lonergan's critics and his admirers agree that a fully developed theology of revelation is lacking in his work. He offers a compelling account of meaning and its constitutive role in human society but does not apply his account specifically to the divine meaning that is revelation or to the church as the society that is constituted by such divine meaning. As a Catholic theologian, he acknowledges the authoritative role of the church's magisterium but does not elaborate how he sees this ecclesial office of discernment operating in practice. As noted above,[287] Lindbeck criticises Lonergan's treatment of the 'variable and invariable' aspects of Catholic tradition and we do not find in *Method* a fully worked out response to this issue. Ormerod attempts to meet the deficiency by drawing together indications of Lonergan's thought on the subject of revelation, drawn primarily from *Method* but also from earlier works.

Ormerod finds that, in the course of the development of his thought, Lonergan 'freed himself from classicist assumptions about the nature of revelation'[288] so as to develop a historical understanding of revelation and:

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[284] *Method*, 339.
[285] Crowe, *Lonergan*, 104-105.
[286] 'The Problem: Revelation and Lonergan's Method,' Ormerod, *Method, Meaning and Revelation*, 3-6.
[287] Section 1.5.2.
[288] *Method, Meaning and Revelation*, 78.

> …to see revelation in terms of the category of meaning. Revelation is regarded as the entry of new meaning into the human situation.[289]

> Lonergan conceives revelation as the entry of new, transcendent meaning and value into human history. Revelation is a divine act of communicating meaning to humanity…[290]

As Ormerod recognises, two consequences follow from conceiving of revelation in this way, as a 'divine act of communicating meaning.' Lonergan's extensive treatment of meaning in *Method*[291] can be drawn on to understand his theology of revelation; and, since Lonergan sees shared meaning as constitutive of community,[292] the same understanding will shape his ecclesiology – which is also implicit rather than explicit in *Method*.

Ormerod traces Lonergan's discussion of different carriers of meaning, suggesting that these can be correlated with the different levels of consciousness described in Lonergan's cognitional theory[293] and also with the eight functional specialties of his theological method.[294] Thus:

> **This kind of correlation provides the basic structural isomorphism between revelation, as carried into human history, and Lonergan's theological method.**[295]

Ormerod goes on to consider the functions of divine revelation on the basis of this structure and finds such functions to be first moral, establishing norms for human conduct[296] and secondly cognitive, informing the believer about reality, being and truth:

> The cognitive function of revelation is not simply a matter of imparting facts; it is also a matter of creating the framework within which revelation can be coherently understood. The cognitive function of revelation demands and promotes intellectual conversion. [297]

Finally, revelation has a constitutive and communicative function, creating 'a community with its own tradition of belief and practice.'[298]

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[289] *Method, Meaning and Revelation*, 78.

[290] *Method, Meaning and Revelation*, 135.

[291] 'Meaning,' *Method*, chapter 3, 55-95.

[292] *Method*, 76-77.

[293] *Method, Meaning and Revelation*, 139.

[294] *Method, Meaning and Revelation*, 139.

[295] *Method, Meaning and Revelation*, 139 (emphasis in original.)

[296] *Method, Meaning and Revelation*, 141.

[297] *Method, Meaning and Revelation*, 141.

[298] *Method, Meaning and Revelation*, 142.

The cognitive function of revelation means that doctrines 'express judgments of fact and judgments of value.'[299] Lonergan describes church doctrines as:

> …the content of the Church's witness to Christ; they express the set of meanings and values that inform individual and collective Christian living.[300]

He distinguishes church doctrines from theological doctrines, which

> …are part of an academic discipline, concerned to know and understand the Christian tradition and to further its development.[301]

Theology influences church doctrine, Lonergan notes, and it is a theological task to evaluate the legitimacy of the various types of development.[302]

Ormerod notes that Lonergan differs from many of his theological contemporaries in maintaining this cognitive role of revelation: 'it does, in fact, tell us something about God.'[303] On the other hand, revelation cannot be reduced to this cognitive function.[304] Doctrines have a constitutive and communicative function – establishing a tradition and constituting a community – as well as a cognitive or normative function, making truth claims about the events of salvation history. Thus Ormerod claims that doctrines are, in their proclamation, themselves historical events in the life of the church[305] This is important to Ormerod because of the connection that he wishes to make between the thought of Lonergan and that of Alisdair MacIntyre:

> …one of the effects of revelation is to initiate, sustain and prolong what Alasdair MacIntyre calls a "tradition of rationality."[306]

Ormerod explains:

> [MacIntyre] conceives of a tradition of rationality as a socially established and culturally accepted way of reasoning and arguing… Reasoning requires the support of a cultural and social embodiment if it is to have enduring force…[307]

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[299] *Method*, 127, cited by Ormerod, *Method, Meaning and Revelation*, 153-154.
[300] *Method*, 289-290, cited by Ormerod, *Method, Meaning and Revelation*, 154.
[301] *Method*, 290.
[302] *Method*, 290-291.
[303] *Method, Meaning and Revelation*, 141.
[304] *Method, Meaning and Revelation*, 141-142.
[305] *Method, Meaning and Revelation*, 154-155.
[306] *Method, Meaning and Revelation*, 155.
[307] *Method, Meaning and Revelation*, 156, citing Alisdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, (University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 350.

For MacIntyre, one has no standpoint from which to engage in enquiry and reasoned argument except from within some particular tradition. Ormerod transposes MacIntyre's notion to his interpretation of Lonergan's theology of revelation and claims, boldly, that the hand of God can be seen here:

> …historically, revelation has provoked the emergence of critical realism and transcendental method. Further, this emergence, I suggest, is part of the redemptive action of God in human history…[308]

> Provisionally, then, we may suggest that revelation initiates, sustains and prolongs a tradition of rationality.[309]

Ormerod does not claim that Lonergan has developed an explicit theology of revelation, or that he has identified the theology of revelation that Lonergan *would* have developed, but rather that he has elaborated an 'account of revelation congruent with [Lonergan's] method' – a theological understanding of revelation which correlates with the method that Lonergan has established.[310] His account is based on a detailed engagement with the whole body of Lonergan's work and presents a convincing synthesis of Lonergan's references to revelation as the entry of divine meaning into human history.[311] The significance of Ormerod's account for this thesis is twofold. Methodologically, my own aim is somewhat similar to Ormerod's: to draw out from Lonergan's writings a response to questions that Lonergan himself does not explicitly address, on postfoundationalist approaches to the hermeneutics of doctrine. Substantively, I believe that Ormerod brings to the fore elements in Lonergan's understanding of doctrine that are significant for hermeneutical questions. Ormerod shows persuasively that Lonergan recognises multiple dimensions of meaning for doctrinal statements – cognitive, constitutive and communicative – and that his method provides tools for evaluating the authenticity of doctrinal development.

Ormerod judges Lonergan's thought on the subject of revelation to be more credible than the theology of revelation that he discerns in figures as significant as Rahner,

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[308] *Method, Meaning and Revelation*, 156-157.
[309] *Method, Meaning and Revelation*, 157.
[310] *Method, Meaning and Revelation*, 165.
[311] Lonergan, 'Theology in its New Context,' *Second Collection* 48-59, 55. Cited by Ormerod, 'Transposing Theology into the Categories of Meaning,' *Gregorianum*, Vol. 92, No. 3 (2011), 517-532, 523.

Pannenberg and Lindbeck[312] - and, at least in principle, capable of providing universally valid criteria:

> …there are norms which transcend every cultural-linguistic context, inherent as they are within the subject itself. These norms provide a basis for a critique of all traditions…[313]

In a later article,[314] Ormerod elaborates his ideas when he considers the contribution of Lonergan's understanding of revelation to the challenge of *ressourcement* and *aggiornamento* posed by Vatican II. The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum* speaks of God 'revealing himself' in Christ who is the mediator and fullness of revelation.[315] Ormerod suggests that, rather than conceiving of such divine self-communication in terms of quasi-formal causation as Karl Rahner and others do,[316] it can be thought of more fruitfully in terms of Lonergan's categories of meaning. The carriers of meaning identified by Lonergan can be considered as potential carriers of divine meaning.[317] The functions of meaning that Lonergan describes in *Method* can be correlated with the functions of the divine meaning which is communicated in revelation.[318] Following Lonergan, Ormerod characterises revelation as being '...constitutive of the church as a community of shared meanings.'[319] He notes that Lindbeck also emphasises this aspect of revelation and describes the function of doctrine as 'cultural-linguistic:'

> In this way revelation functions to establish the religious identity of the community and is reminiscent of what Wittgenstein called a "language game."[320]

However, he adds that Lindbeck:

> … seems to deny any determinative cognitive function for doctrines, adopting an agnosticism in relation to their truth claims.[321]

This seems a rather summary dismissal of Lindbeck's comprehensive and nuanced treatment of these questions in *The Nature of Doctrines*, which is, in part, elaborated in

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[312] 'Clarification by Contrast,' *Method, Meaning and Revelation*, chapter 5, 173-210.
[313] *Method, Meaning and Revelation*, 203.
[314] Ormerod, 'Transposing Theology into the Categories of Meaning.'
[315] *Dei Verbum* § 2.
[316] Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, New York, 116-133, cited by Ormerod, 'Transposing Theology into the Categories of Meaning,' 523.
[317] 'Transposing Theology into the Categories of Meaning,' 523.
[318] 'Transposing Theology into the Categories of Meaning,' 525-526.
[319] 'Transposing Theology into the Categories of Meaning,' 525; cf *Method*, 76-77.
[320] 'Transposing Theology into the Categories of Meaning,' 525, citing Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, 19.
[321] 'Transposing Theology into the Categories of Meaning,' 525.

explicit dialogue with Lonergan. But Ormerod is correct in identifying, on the one hand, the shared recognition by Lindbeck and Lonergan of the constitutive function that doctrine serves for the Christian community and, on the other, their different evaluations of the metaphysical truth claims made by doctrinal statements. These differing evaluations, in turn, reflect the different philosophical options of the two theologians; Lindbeck is strongly influenced by Wittgenstein's understanding of the nature of language, while Lonergan's project is to transpose into contemporary terms the thought of Thomas Aquinas. These options lead Lonergan to place greater emphasis on the cognitive dimension of doctrine, believing that doctrinal statements can make true statements about the being of God, while Lindbeck restricts doctrine to a regulative function in the life of the Christian community and is suspicious of 'first-order' metaphysical statements.[322] I will argue in the concluding chapter that Lonergan's thought in this area develops significantly in the course of his writings and that the distance between the two approaches may not be as great or as unbridgeable as it initially appears.

7.6.1 Continuity and discontinuity; form and content

Ormerod goes on to consider the communicative function of revelation:

> As Pope John XXIII reminded us, there is a genuine distinction to be made between the meaning of doctrines and the way that meaning is expressed or communicated. The communication of revelation needs to be intelligible to the audience who receives it, and so the same truths may be communicated in different ways to different audiences, depending on the needs and context of the times.[323]

Ormerod is referring here to John XXIII's address at the opening of Vatican II.[324] In itself, the statement that 'The communication of revelation needs to be intelligible to the audience who receives it' is indisputable, but it is not clear that the form/content distinction alluded to by Pope John provides a complete solution to the problem.[325] Ormerod refers to:

> …early Councils [transposing] the truths of the New Testament into thought-forms that communicated to a more philosophically informed culture of the Roman Empire…[326]

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[322] Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, 80.
[323] 'Transposing Theology into the Categories of Meaning,' 525.
[324] John XXIII, *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia*.
[325] I address this question in section 10.2 below.
[326] 'Transposing Theology into the Categories of Meaning,' 525.

Lonergan traces this process in detail in his Trinitarian works and remarks in *Method* that, '…it seems better to speak of the permanence of the meaning of dogmas rather than of its immutability.'[327] However, the idea that there exists a 'meaning' that can remain permanent while being expressed in different languages, different philosophical categories and different cultural contexts is problematic and disputed.

Ormerod believes that the approach which he has drawn from Lonergan's writings offers a way to 'faithfully transpose the achievements of the past.'[328] Indeed, he claims in *Method, Meaning and Revelation*:

> …Christian revelation demands a turn to interiority, as exemplified in Lonergan's *Method*, for its coherent explication.[329]

> In conclusion, I would say that the turn to interiority is the major achievement of a tradition of rationality initiated by Christian revelation. If such is the case, Lonergan's *Method* is not simply an accidental and purely extrinsic element of Christian intellectual history but a culmination of a process [which] lies at the heart of the cultural significance of revelation itself.[330]

Ormerod's assessment reflects the ambition of Lonergan's theological project. His theological method, built on the foundation of the cognitive theory elaborated in *Insight*, forms an imposing structure. If one accepts the assertion in *Insight* that the account of cognition is 'not subject to radical revision'[331] then the objectivity and the transcultural validity of the method seem to follow inescapably. However, as we shall see in the next two chapters, theologians who do not share Lonergan's epistemological and metaphysical positions – those, for example, influenced by Wittgenstein – are less persuaded.

7.7 Issues in *Method* (2); ecclesiology

Ormerod has also addressed the question of ecclesiology in a Lonerganian framework.[332] He argues that a systematic ecclesiology must be empirical, critical, normative, dialectical and practical. An empirical and critical approach is necessary for the evaluation of

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[327] *Method*, 300.
[328] 'Transposing Theology into the Categories of Meaning,' 531.
[329] *Method, Meaning and Revelation*, 277.
[330] *Method, Meaning and Revelation*, 277.
[331] *Insight*, 366.
[332] Ormerod, 'The Structure of a Systematic Ecclesiology,' Theological *Studies* 62 (2002), 3-30.

the historical data on the development of the church and her structures.[333] However, ecclesiology is more than a critical history of the church and so its analysis must attempt to '[spell] out not just how Church actually is but how it should be, at least in the theologian's understanding.'[334] This is the normative dimension:

> … the introduction of an explicit teleology based on the kingdom of God provides us with norms for evaluating the life of the Church.[335]

This in turn requires that ecclesiology be dialectical, in the Lonerganian sense, exposing 'systematic breakdowns' and failures of the church's understanding of her goal.[336] And:

> This brings us to the final type of insight proper to the task of ecclesiology. An analysis that is normative and dialectical will also be practical. It will guide action, propose possible courses of action, and outline their likely outcomes.[337]

To make the vast range of data intelligible in order to realise the goal of an empirical, critical, normative, dialectical and practical ecclesiology will require engagement with the social and human sciences;[338] however, such an engagement will not take the findings of such disciplines at face value but will attempt a theological reorientation of them.[339]

Ormerod's approach to the question of ecclesiology is explicitly shaped by Lonergan's method and terminology. He recognises throughout the role of shared meaning in constituting a community[340] and specifically the role of the divine meaning communicated in revelation in constituting the community that is the church.[341] Ormerod applies his systematic approach to the categories of structure, identity, authority and change in the church[342] and, as a case study, considers the historical-theological question of the emergence of structures of ordained ministry in the early church.[343] Finally, in what could be seen as an application of Lonergan's functional specialty of dialectic, he compares approaches to ecclesiology based on

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[333] 'The Structure of a Systematic Ecclesiology,' 4-7.
[334] 'The Structure of a Systematic Ecclesiology,' 7.
[335] 'The Structure of a Systematic Ecclesiology,' 9.
[336] 'The Structure of a Systematic Ecclesiology,' 10.
[337] 'The Structure of a Systematic Ecclesiology,' 10.
[338] 'The Structure of a Systematic Ecclesiology,' 11.
[339] 'The Structure of a Systematic Ecclesiology,' 11-13.
[340] 'The Structure of a Systematic Ecclesiology,' 13, 14, 19.
[341] 'The Structure of a Systematic Ecclesiology,' 20, 21, 23.
[342] 'The Structure of a Systematic Ecclesiology,' 13-15.
[343] 'The Structure of a Systematic Ecclesiology,' 15-27.

the organising principle of 'communion' – *communio* or *koinonia* – with those based on the notion of 'mission.'[344] Appealing to Lonergan's notion of development,[345] Ormerod finds 'mission' to be the more appropriate principle:

> Communion may be our eschatological end in the vision of God, but in the here and now of a pilgrim Church mission captures our ongoing historical responsibility.[346]

Significantly, Ormerod wishes to place his work firmly in the Thomist intellectual tradition, '… [drawing] upon the principle that nature is completed and perfected by grace, not supplanted or destroyed by it'[347] and emphasising 'the concrete reality of ecclesial history.'[348]

As in relation to the theology of revelation, Ormerod does not attempt to provide the ecclesiology which is lacking in *Method*, but rather offers a persuasive account of how ecclesiology might be done by a theologian following the canons of Lonergan's method. His work provides at least a partial reply to authors such as Lash, who criticise *Method* for lacking an adequate theology of revelation or of the church.[349] His reference to the Thomist tradition at the conclusion of his essay on ecclesiology illustrates the way that this tradition is the key to understanding the thought of Lonergan.

7.8 Conclusion

In the two volumes of *The Triune God* and in *Method in Theology* Lonergan is applying the cognitional theory and metaphysics that he has elaborated in *Insight*. In his Trinitarian work he treats doctrinal questions that are central to Christian faith with great depth and subtlety, while remaining within the theological paradigm set by Vatican I and Leo XIII and the constraints imposed by his position as a professor in a pontifical university. In *Method* he is responding to the challenges presented by the emergence of a world church and by the

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[344] 'The Structure of a Systematic Ecclesiology,' 27-29. Cf. *Method* chapter 10, 'Dialectic.'
[345] 'The Structure of a Systematic Ecclesiology,' 28.
[346] 'The Structure of a Systematic Ecclesiology,' 29.
[347] 'The Structure of a Systematic Ecclesiology,' 29.
[348] 'The Structure of a Systematic Ecclesiology,' 30.
[349] See Chapter 9 below.

teachings of Vatican II. The empirical notion of culture has replaced the classicist one[350] and theology has become an empirical science,[351] historically and culturally conscious. A contemporary method, Lonergan says, will conceive the tasks of theology 'in the context of modern science, modern scholarship, modern philosophy, of historicity, collective practicality, and coresponsibility.'[352] However, he does not embrace modernity in a naïve or uncritical way: culture 'may be in process of slow development or rapid dissolution.'[353] Hence his method is a critical one, based on the 'dynamic structure of… cognitional and moral being' and hence 'not open to radical revision.'[354] He believes it to be of value beyond Catholic theology and beyond theology to other disciplines.

In the next two chapters I will address criticisms of Lonergan's method made by a number of theologians, including some who nonetheless find his work valuable. But some concerns have already emerged from our consideration thus far. Lindbeck discerns an appeal to a 'underlying unity of religious experience' which cannot be substantiated.[355] Kelly criticises Lonergan for taking as his foundation 'the general self-transcendence of man' rather than 'the self-communication of God,' leaving revelation exterior to theological method.[356] And, as Thiel notes,[357] Lonergan's method would be identified by at least some postfoundationalist critics as an example of the classical foundationalism which contemporary theology needs to leave behind.

As we have noted above, Lonergan refers to:

> …a rock on which one can build… The rock, then, is the subject in his conscious, unobjectified attentiveness, intelligence, reasonableness, responsibility.[358]

However, to repeat, the 'rock' is the converted subject. Conversion is brought about by 'God's love flooding our hearts through the Holy Spirit given to us.' (Romans 5:5) This gift of God's love brings about self-transcendence.[359] It is the grace that God offers to all people,

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[350] *Method*, 3.
[351] 'Theology in its New Context,' *Second Collection*, 51-52.
[352] *Method*, 3.
[353] *Method*, 3.
[354] *Method*, 4; cf. *Insight*, 366.
[355] Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, 18.
[356] Kelly, 'Is Lonergan's Method Adequate,' 469.
[357] Thiel, *Senses of Tradition*, 120-121.
[358] *Method*, 22.
[359] *Method*, 99-101.

making possible interreligious and ecumenical dialogue.[360] God's gift of love allows divine revelation to be understood in different cultures.[361] It is the root and ground of the unity of the church's faith.[362] It is the exception to Thomas' maxim *nihil amatum nisi praecognitum* because the gift of God's love 'precede[s] our knowledge of God and, indeed, may be the cause of our seeking knowledge of God.'[363] It is a key principle of Lonergan's thought that the conversion which is basic to Christian living and foundational for theology[364] comes about at God's initiative and by the gift of God's love. Lonergan's method is a profoundly theocentric one; this is true in *Insight*, though God is not mentioned until Chapter 12, and it is equally true in *Method*. And, as Ormerod points out, Lonergan's 'transcendental analysis of human subjectivity' has 'deep roots within the Christian tradition'[365] – specifically, in the thought of Thomas Aquinas. He is always a Thomist even when not explicitly speaking as one and this should be borne in mind when addressing the concerns of his critics.

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[360] *Method*, 261.
[361] *Method*, 265.
[362] *Method*, 304.
[363] *Method*, 315.
[364] *Method*, 125-126.
[365] Ormerod, *Method, Meaning and Revelation*, 217-218.

8 Dialogue with the critics (1): epistemology and metaphysics

8.1 Introduction: Lonergan and his critics

In previous chapters I have outlined the main features of Lonergan's thought and traced its development from *Grace and Freedom* to *Method in Theology*. He is a metaphysical realist who holds that the Thomist view of the world is substantially vindicated by the discoveries of modern science. Epistemologically, he is a critical realist who affirms that by appropriating our cognitional process we can have valid knowledge of the world; 'genuine objectivity is the fruit of authentic subjectivity.'[1] Lonergan is also a doctrinal realist who believes that doctrines are true statements about God and about the objects of faith, albeit that they have to be understood in a way that is historically and culturally conscious and, as formulated in human concepts and language, are never adequate expressions of the mystery of faith. He has elaborated a theological method that reflects these fundamental positions. Each, however, is controverted. As we have seen, nonfoundationalist and postfoundationalist thought problematises the epistemology that was long assumed to underpin Christian theology. The writings of Wittgenstein call into question the nature of language – and therefore of doctrine – as well as the givenness of metaphysical reality.[2] Contemporary hermeneutics compels us to reconsider what we mean by the truth of doctrine. Each of these challenges, while originating in secular philosophy, has been embraced by Christian thinkers who believe that they are not necessarily opposed to Christian theology but rather can enrich it. In this chapter and the following one I will bring these positions into dialogue with the work of Lonergan, with a view to identifying the resources that his work can offer for these conversations.

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[1] *Method*, 273.

[2] 'It is neither objective metaphysical realities… nor subjective states of consciousness… but *Lebensformen* that are "the given."' Fergus Kerr, *Theology after Wittgenstein*, 2nd edition (London, SPCK, 1997), 69. See section 9.2 below.

I will begin with the nonfoundationalist neo-pragmatism of Richard Rorty. Rorty is a philosopher who calls into question the whole notion of truth. His thinking clearly has far-reaching implications for theology, as Rorty himself recognises in a late work.[3] I will consider the responses to Rorty from Paul D Murray and R J Snell, the latter drawing on Lonergan to refute Rorty's ideas. In this context I will consider the call of Pope John Paul II in his encyclical *Fides et Ratio* for a philosophy adequate to the needs of the contemporary world. However, I will argue that Snell goes too far in dismissing the questions that Rorty raises and that the 'charitably critical' reading of Rorty's thought offered by Paul D Murray is a more credible response from a Catholic perspective. Murray draws on the classical Catholic understanding that God is always and everywhere intimately related to the created world to underpin his reading. I turn to the thought of the classical Thomist Jacques Maritain to draw out the philosophical issues and show that an authentically Thomist epistemology and metaphysics does not have to adopt a foundationalist perspective.

8.2 Richard Rorty: Nonfoundationalist neo-pragmatism

Rorty's neo-pragmatism is a postfoundationalist line of analysis which contains profound challenges to the self-understanding of Christian theology. Rorty calls into question the view that sees philosophy as a discipline which has a special understanding of the nature of knowledge and of mind. He describes the position that he intends to critique as follows:

> Philosophy can be foundational in respect to the rest of culture because culture is the assemblage of claims to knowledge, and philosophy adjudicates such claims…To know is to represent accurately what is outside the mind; so to understand the possibility and nature of knowledge is to understand the way in which the mind is able to construct such representations.[4]

Rorty traces this account of the role of philosophy to the 17th and 18th centuries, to Locke, Descartes and Kant. When empirical science began to transform our understanding of the world in the early modern era, philosophy had to justify its claim to a position of pre-eminence among other branches of knowledge, and it did so by claiming a foundational role, on the basis of its understanding of 'the possibility and nature of knowledge'. However, for

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[3] Richard Rorty & Gianni Vattimo, *The Future of Religion*, ed. Santiago Zabala (English edition, New York, Columbia University Press, 2005.) Here Rorty argues that the end of metaphysics paves the way for a privatised and antiessentialist religion.

[4] Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton and Oxford, Princeton University Press, 1979; Princeton Classics Edition, 2018), 3. Hereafter *PMN.*

Rorty, the 'intuitionist' theory of knowledge on which such a claim rests is untenable, and therefore philosophy has to be dethroned from its position as judge of other disciplines. He writes in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature:*

> The aim of the book is to undermine the reader's confidence in "the mind" as something about which one should have a "philosophical" view, in "knowledge" as something about which there ought to be a "theory" and which has "foundations," and in "philosophy" as it has been conceived since Kant.[5]

Rorty claims that the ocular metaphor for knowledge goes back to ancient philosophy. The idea of the Eye of the Mind 'seized the imagination of the founders of Western thought,'[6] and modern philosophy is still working out what Rorty regards as its baleful consequences.

> Without the notion of the mind as mirror, the notion of knowledge as accuracy of representation would not have suggested itself. Without this latter notion, the strategy common to Descartes and Kant – getting more accurate representations by inspecting, repairing, and polishing the mirror, so to speak – would not have made sense.[7]

This 'notion of knowledge as accuracy of representation,' Rorty claims, leads inevitably to scepticism,[8] and hence to modern epistemological theories whose aim is to overcome such scepticism.[9]

On Rorty's account, Descartes 'invented the mind,'[10] and this invention:

> …provided a field of inquiry which seemed "prior" to the subjects on which the ancient philosophers had had opinions. Further, it provided a field within which *certainty*, as opposed to mere *opinion*, was possible.[11]

Descartes believes that knowledge can be founded firmly on 'clear and distinct ideas.' In Rorty's view, however, once knowledge has been conceived of, as Descartes does, as the representation in 'inner space' – the mind – of what is in 'outer space' – the outside world – then the question inevitably arises whether such representations are accurate.[12] Locke offered the empiricist response that knowledge is determined by experience derived from sense perception; Kant, instead, claimed that our knowledge is of our ideas, which are

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[5] *PMN*, 7.
[6] *PMN,* 38.
[7] *PMN,* 12.
[8] *PMN*, 113.
[9] *PMN*, 113-114.
[10] *PMN*, 136.
[11] *PMN*, 136-7 (emphasis in original.)
[12] *PMN*, 139-140.

constituted by the activities of our mind, and we can have certain knowledge of these constituting activities by 'Cartesian privileged access.'[13] Thus, says Rorty, Kant:

> …made it possible for epistemology to be thought of as a foundational science, an armchair discipline capable of discovering the "formal" (or, in later versions, "structural," "phenomenological," "grammatical," "logical," or "conceptual") characteristics of any area of human life. He thus enabled philosophy professors to see themselves as presiding over a tribunal of pure reason, able to determine whether other disciplines were staying within the legal limits set by the "structure" of their subject matters.[14]

Rorty accuses Descartes, and more particularly Locke, of contributing to a further confusion: between 'knowing of' and 'knowing that.' A model of knowing based on sense perception – 'taking a look' at an external object and 'knowing of' it – cannot account for processes such as judgement, predication and synthesis – for the difference between a statement such as 'I see a green frog,' which expresses 'knowledge of,' and one such as 'Most frogs are green,' expressing 'knowledge that.'[15] Kant, for Rorty:

> …advanced half of the way toward a conception of knowledge as fundamentally "knowing that" rather than "knowing of" – halfway toward a conception of knowing which was not modeled on perception.[16]

However, Kant 'confuses predication with synthesis;' he maintains that to believe a sentence to be true is to relate two types of 'representations,' namely concepts and intuitions.[17] Rorty wishes to undermine 'the Kantian picture of concepts and intuitions getting together to produce knowledge.'[18] He wishes to make the point:

> …that the notion of "foundations of knowledge" – truths which are certain because of their causes rather than because of the arguments given for them – is the fruit of the Greek (and specifically Platonic) analogy between perceiving and knowing.[19]

If we free ourselves of this analogy, Rorty claims, we can abandon the search for 'foundations of knowledge,' and adopt conversation as the determinant of our belief.[20] Rorty describes his own position as 'epistemological behaviourism.' He appeals to philosophers such as Dewey and Wittgenstein, wishing to abandon any attempt to anchor our knowledge in (alleged)

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[13] *PMN*, 137-138.
[14] *PMN*, 138-139.
[15] *PMN*, 140-146.
[16] *PMN*, 147.
[17] *PMN*, 148.
[18] *PMN*, 158.
[19] *PMN*, 157.
[20] *PMN*, 163-164.

ontological facts, and to '[explain] rationality and epistemic authority by reference to what society lets us say, rather than the latter by the former.'[21] In Murray's words:

> According to Rorty, people describe as true not what they *know to correspond to reality* (as the epistemological tradition maintains) but what they *most value* (as, he claims, pragmatism maintains). In short, he views himself not as proscribing how rationality *should* function but, rather, as describing how it *does* function, regardless of what else people imagine (*PMN*, p. 181)[22]

8.2.1 Catholic responses to Rorty

As Murray observes, Rorty's work is profoundly at odds with Christian theology's traditional understanding of itself as faith seeking understanding of the reality of God. The transposition of his appropriation of the pragmatist tradition into the theological realm:

> … would clearly result in a relinquishing of the traditional claim to be dealing in true and yet always inadequate knowledge of a reality that exists in its own right and not merely in the minds and hearts of human beings.[23]

Christian doctrine depends on the claim that God has revealed himself to humanity in such a way that the human mind can truthfully – though never adequately – grasp and express truths about God and about God's relation to humanity, truths which are prior to their articulation in human language. While Rorty does not deal explicitly with the truth claims of theology, his thought represents a denial, at the fundamental level, that human knowing works in this way. As such, his work requires a response from Catholic thinkers. Murray himself offers one such response, but I will consider first the critique of R J Snell,[24] who concludes that Lonergan's work provides a sufficient answer to the problems raised by Rorty.

8.2.2 R J Snell: Lonerganian critical realism

In his work *Through a Glass, Darkly,* Snell compares the thought of Rorty and Lonergan and claims:

> …while Lonergan and Rorty share similar criticisms of the philosophical tradition's dependence on intuitionism, Rorty's subsequent attempt to jettison the

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[21] *PMN*, 174.
[22] Paul D Murray, *RTT*, 28.
[23] Murray, *RTT*, 10.
[24] R J Snell, *Through a Glass Darkly: Bernard Lonergan & Richard Rorty on Knowing Without a God's-Eye View* (Milwaukee, Marquette University Press, 2006.) Hereafter *Through a Glass*.

correspondence theory of truth is unsatisfactory given the success of Lonergan's critical realism.[25]

By 'intuitionism,' Snell means theories that rely on the ocular analogy of knowledge – in Lonergan's terms, those which see knowledge as 'taking a look.'[26] As Snell's subtitle, *Bernard Lonergan & Richard Rorty on Knowing Without a God's-Eye View* implies, if knowledge is conceived in this way, then certainty of knowledge requires a 'God's-eye view' from a higher viewpoint, capable of judging all other 'looks;'[27] and, as no such God's-eye view is available to human knowing, certain knowledge becomes impossible.[28] Snell agrees with Rorty in rejecting intuitionism, but believes that:

> Rorty commits a false dichotomy by assuming that either we have the certainty of intuitionism or there is no truth as correspondence.[29]

Snell undertakes a detailed analysis of the problem to support his conclusion that Lonergan's critical realism is capable of answering Rorty's objections. He agrees with Rorty in rejecting Descartes' attempt to overcome scepticism by adopting vision as his model for knowledge, tracing this attempt to the decadence of late scholasticism.[30] It is interesting to note that Rorty himself, in *PMN*, refers to the 'radical' response of Jacques Maritain to Cartesian scepticism.[31] Maritain believes that a correct understanding of the classical Thomist theory of knowledge is sufficient to refute Descartes.[32] Snell wishes to do the same by relying on 'Lonergan's *aggiornamento* of Thomism.'[33] He rejects Kant's project, too, as a failure, following Sala (and Maritain[34]) in holding that Kant has failed to free himself from

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[25] *Through a Glass*, 13.

[26] *Insight*, 344 and passim.

[27] Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth: Philosophical Papers, Volume 1*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990), 24.

[28] As Murray points out, the notion of a 'God's-eye view of things' is theologically unfortunate because 'it suggests a removed, perspectiveless form of "knowing" on God's behalf that stands in tension with the intimate, committed, searching presence attested to in the Judaeo-Christian scriptures.' *RTT*, 25-6.

[29] *Through a Glass*, 13.

[30] *Through a Glass*, 28-34.

[31] J Maritain, *The Dream of Descartes*, trans. Mabelle L Andison, (Philosophical Library, New York, 1944) Cited by Rorty, *PMN* 113, note 19.

[52] Maritain, *The Dream of Descartes*, 108-9. Maritain's critique of Descartes is discussed further below, section 8.2.6.

[33] *Through a Glass*, 40.

[34] Maritain, *The Dream of Descartes*, 135-8.

intuitionism.[35] He reads Rorty as concluding from the failure of intuitionism that the whole project of epistemology should be abandoned.

> Justification [of knowledge] "is a social phenomenon rather than a transaction between 'the knowing subject' and 'reality.'" (PMN 9); "justification is not a matter of a special relation between ideas (or words) and objects, but of conversation, of social practice" (PMN 170)… 'Truth' is simply what your audience accepts from your attempts to persuade them.[36]

However, says Snell, if Rorty is correct in exposing the intuitionist project as both a contingent historical choice and a fundamentally untenable one, then his discrediting of intuitionism does not lead inevitably to a rejection of realism: 'If there is a realism which is not at all based on the ocular metaphor it might escape Rorty's critique.'[37] Snell will conclude that Lonergan's realism is one that does escape Rorty's critique. It does so because Lonergan, too, rejects the idea of knowledge as 'taking a look,' and instead focuses on the *process* of knowing. While Rorty rejects correspondence theories of truth as empty, Lonergan shows that:

> We solve the problem [of the correspondence theory of truth] by providing a second-order, or notional, definition of reality as *that which we would come to speak about if and when we follow the threefold process of knowing*.[38]

Rorty denies that there is an innate human desire to know the truth:

> His argument runs broadly as follows: If there is no way things really are it is impossible for there to be truth about the way things are, and if there is no truth about the way things are there can be no desire to know the truth.[39]

But Snell claims that Rorty's reasoning contains a performative contradiction. He wishes to replace the search for truth with a claim to justification, but:

> …his distinction between truth and justification is unresponsive since the desire to coherently justify one's beliefs is *performatively* identical to the desire for truth.[40]

It is impossible, Snell affirms, to ask 'Do I desire to know?' without verifying that at least in this instance, one desires to know.[41] Thus, Snell believes, he has decided one important issue in favour of Lonergan and against Rorty. He spots a further performative contradiction in

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[35] *Through a Glass*, 34-9; cf. G Sala, *Lonergan and Kant: Five Essays on Human Knowledge*, trans. J Spoerl, ed. R M Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994.)
[36] *Through a Glass*, 62.
[37] *Through a Glass*, 63.
[38] *Through a Glass*, 119 (emphasis in original); cf. *Insight*, 374.
[39] *Through a Glass*, 121-2.
[40] *Through a Glass*, 128 (emphasis in original.)
[41] *Through a Glass*, 136.

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Rorty's account. Rorty holds to the false Cartesian dichotomy that either we have direct intuition of the real, or else true belief is impossible. Since he denies intuitionism, he rejects the attempt to know the real. But in doing so, Snell claims, Rorty engages in the threefold process of knowing – experience, understanding and judgment – identified by Lonergan as true of all human knowers. By engaging in this three-fold process of knowing without acknowledging that this is what knowing is, Rorty places himself in what Lonergan describes as a 'counterposition,[42]' which, according to Lonergan's cognitional theory, can be overcome once it is exposed.[43]

Snell goes on to consider Lonergan's project, and defends him against critics such as Fergus Kerr, who believe that his thinking is not radical enough for the needs of a theology that takes seriously the work of Wittgenstein and linguistic analysis.[44] Snell notes that, on the other hand, 'classicists' – traditional Thomists:

> …fear that Lonergan has given in too much to the historical and contingent by relativizing concepts; the *a priori* intendings of the subject are insufficient for them and they demand a return to the unchanging faculties of the metaphysical soul.[45]

As Snell sees it, the debate rests upon two issues. Is Lonergan correct to claim that the data of sense and the data of consciousness are given, and can provide a basis for surety of knowledge and a foundation for his cognitional theory? And can he make good his account of the subject, so that transcendental method can provide the *a priori* foundations of cognitional structure?[46] Snell concludes:

> …he [Lonergan] is a foundationalist, for it is impossible to deny the desire for truth, and the undeniable search for truth allows intentionality analysis and its resulting cognitional theory. The only foundation necessary is the desire for truth and the operations of cognitions revealed when the desire is reflexively understood.[47]

Thus, while Rorty's account forces him to reject realism, 'Lonergan's rational account of knowing allows self-transcendence.'[48]

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[42] *Through a Glass*, 140.

[43] 'One can gasp and accept, propose and defend a counterposition; but that activity commits one to grasping and accepting one's grasping and accepting; and that commitment involves a grasp and acceptance of the basic positions.' *Insight*, 413.

[44] *Through a Glass*, 143-8. Fergus Kerr's critique of Lonergan's thought is discussed below, section 9.2.

[45] *Through a Glass*, 174.

[46] *Through a Glass*, 148.

[47] *Through a Glass*, 174-5.

[48] *Through a Glass*, 174.

Rorty is forced to reject realism, Snell claims, because having dismissed the claim of epistemology to judge the rationality of any particular discourse, there is no means of making different discourses 'commensurable' in order to decide between them. Epistemology is replaced by hermeneutics; an attempt to bring different discourses into conversation, in the hope of finding common ground between them.[49] For Snell, Rorty (in common with the critics of Lonergan whom Snell also wishes to refute) arrives at this conclusion because he has failed to overcome the Cartesian counterposition. Intuitionism sees knowledge as 'taking a look;' Rorty denies that a look leads to knowledge of things as they are, and therefore rejects the possibility of true knowledge. In contrast, Lonergan's Thomist theory of knowledge, which conceives of knowledge as experience plus understanding plus judgment, and correlates these with being as potency, form and act,[50] allows objectivity to be achieved as the fruit of genuine subjectivity.[51] Snell concludes:

> Lonergan provides a means, self-appropriation, whereby one develops fully rational norms of rationality and another means, dialectic, whereby the critique of positions can develop according to transcendent, objective, normative and irrefutable principles. But these principles are known only when the concrete subject is known. Unfortunately, Rorty does not fully know himself.[52]

Snell credits Lonergan with discovering 'a new method of thinking, an organon for our times,' a new organon for a New Enlightenment.[53] He accepts Lonergan's own view that, because the operations of cognition are given and invariant, those who deny Lonergan's account fall into performative contradiction in doing so – including Snell himself, at an earlier stage in his development:

> I discovered that each time I turned Lonergan into a foundationalist I experienced a subsequent bout of despair because of incomplete intellectual conversion.[54]

As we have seen, Snell has earlier described Lonergan as a foundationalist; but he distinguishes Lonergan's brand of foundationalism, which depends on the human desire for truth and operations of cognition, from an 'illicit foundationalism' based on immediately

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[49] *Through a Glass*, 178, citing *PMN* 316.
[50] *Understanding and Being*, 154-5.
[51] *Through a Glass*, 208; cf. *Method*, 273.
[52] *Through a Glass*, 213.
[53] *Through a Glass*, 215. The term 'organon' for Lonergan's work seems to have first been used by Frederick Crowe; see, e.g., F E Crowe, *The Lonergan Enterprise*, (Cowley Publications, USA, 1980.)
[54] *Through a Glass*, 216.

given knowledge, privileged access to the contents of consciousness or universally known propositions or categories.[55]

8.2.2.1 <u>The Catholic context: *Fides et Ratio*</u>

Snell begins his book by citing a passage from Pope John Paul II's encyclical *Fides et Ratio*,[56] in which the late Pope first affirms a universal desire to know the truth, placed in the human heart by God,[57] and laments a philosophical 'false modesty' that is ready to 'rest content with partial and provisional truths.'[58] John Paul II goes on to identify three requirements for a philosophy adapted to the needs of the contemporary world. First, such a philosophy must have a '*sapiential dimension* as a search for the ultimate and overarching meaning of life.'[59] It must address itself to:

> …the total and definitive truth [of reality], to the very being of the object which is known. This prompts a second requirement: that philosophy verify the human capacity to *know the truth*, to come to a knowledge which can reach objective truth by means of that *adaequatio rei et intellectus* to which the Scholastic Doctors referred. [60]

Thirdly, the Pope calls for a philosophy:

> … of *genuinely metaphysical* range, capable, that is, of transcending empirical data in order to attain something absolute, ultimate and foundational in its search for truth.[61]

John Paul II reaffirms the conviction, which he identifies as a longstanding theme in Catholic tradition, 'that the human being can come to a unified and organic vision of knowledge.'[62] He goes on to identify a number of contemporary currents of thought which he believes to contain dangerous errors: eclecticism,[63] scientism,[64] pragmatism[65] and nihilism.[66] While recognising the significance of 'the currents of thought which claim to be postmodern,'[67] John

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[55] *Through a Glass*, 174.
[56] *FR.*
[57] *FR* § 1.
[58] *FR* § 5, cited in *Through a Glass*, 9.
[59] *FR* § 81 (emphasis in original.)
[60] *FR* § 82 (emphasis in original.)
[61] *FR* § 83 (emphasis in original.)
[62] *FR* § 85.
[63] *FR* § 86.
[64] *FR* § 88.
[65] *FR* § 89.
[66] *FR* § 90.
[67] *FR* § 91.

226

Paul II detects among these 'currents of thought' both a destructive nihilism, according to which:

> … the time of certainties is irrevocably past, and the human being must now learn to live in a horizon of total absence of meaning, where everything is provisional and ephemeral…[68]

The Pope also sees 'a certain positivist cast of mind.'[69]

Snell is undoubtedly correct to judge that Rorty's epistemological behaviourism is an example of exactly the type of philosophy which is criticised in *Fides et Ratio*.[70] He also seems to be on solid ground in finding Lonergan's critical realism to be broadly the type of philosophy for which John Paul II is calling in the encyclical – though the personalism of Karol Wojtyla would also fit the bill.[71] Snell believes that Lonergan has vindicated realism while avoiding classicism:

> … since Lonergan gives us a rational and critically grounded realism, he allows realism to pervade every aspect of human activity, although, to be sure, we must remember that such realism is not classicist but admits of a great deal of variety in its categorical determinations.[72]

This seems good news for Catholic theologians disturbed by the implications of Rorty's writings, or of the other contemporary 'currents of thought' criticised in *Fides et Ratio*. Not only does Lonergan's account validate realism, but it is sufficiently flexible to allow for the development of theology beyond the bounds of the classical paradigm.[73]

Snell's treatment of Rorty can be read as an exercise in the functional specialty of dialectic.[74] He incisively analyses the philosophical underpinnings of Rorty's thinking and demonstrates that it rests on a counterposition: 'Rorty's explicit statements about the

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[68] *FR* § 91

[69] *FR* § 91

[70] *Through a Glass*, 12.

[71] Webster says of *FR*: 'The preferred philosophy is, roughly defined, a metaphysics of ultimacy which sets great store by the phenomenology of human world-openness or self-transcendence: the curious amalgam of quasi-existentialist anthropology and transcendental metaphysics which had ascendency in some European Christian circles in the mid-century,' and cites *Insight* and Wojtyla's *The Acting Person* as examples. John Webster, '"Fides et Ratio", articles 64-79,' *New Blackfriars*, Vol. 81, No. 948 (February 2000), 68-76, 70.

[72] *Through a Glass*, 220. For Lonergan's distinction between classicist and empirical notions of culture, see *Method*, 3.

[73] *Through a Glass*, 220-1.

[74] *Method*, chapter 10.

impossibility of Truth contradict the performance of his own intellect.'[75] On the other hand, Rorty's work is influential, though controversial.[76] John Paul II himself acknowledges that the postmodern 'currents of thought' identified in *FR* 'merit appropriate attention,'[77] while the Lonergan scholar Fred Lawrence remarks:

> If postmodernists are simply wrong in their relativist and nihilist conclusions, this does not mean that they are not raising real questions about issues that need to be engaged – issues that are not engaged by the strategy of wholesale rejection of postmodernist conclusions.[78]

In Rorty's case, his polemic against the use of the aspiration for objective truth to legitimate the privileged position of an elite caste of 'knowers,' discussed in the next section, is one that the theologian cannot ignore. Is there, then, another way for Catholic theology to address Rorty's challenge? I turn next to the approach of Paul D Murray.

8.2.3 Paul D Murray: A pragmatic (Catholic) critique of Rorty's neo-pragmatism

Like Snell, Murray notes the importance of truth in Catholic self-understanding, and he addresses John Paul II's exploration of this theme in FR and other encyclicals.[79] Echoing Snell, he notes that:

> [Rorty's] hugely influential neo-pragmatism bears striking resemblance to the brief sketches John Paul II gave of the position against which he wrote.[80]

However, Murray wishes to 'draw Rorty into the conversation,'[81] and to offer:

> … [a] detailed, charitably critical reading of Rorty's writings in order to clarify the postfoundationalist challenge to the epistemological tradition by thinking *through* (as distinct from straightforwardly arguing *against*) his hugely influential neo-pragmatist position.[82]

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[75] *Through a Glass*, 13; cf. *Insight*, 413-415.
[76] For a summary of the debate, see Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 'Richard Rorty,' https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/rorty/#CultPoli [Accessed 4/6/25]
[77] *FR* § 91
[78] Fred Lawrence, 'The Fragility of Consciousness: Lonergan and the Postmodern Concern for the Other.' *Theological Studies* 54 (1993), 55-94, 56.
[79] Paul D Murray, 'On Valuing Truth in Practice: Rome's Postmodern Challenge,' *International Journal of Systematic Theology* Volume 8 Number 2 (April 2006), 163-183 (hereafter *RPC*), 166-172.
[80] *RPC*, 171; cf. *FR* § 56.
[81] *RPC*, 171.
[82] *RTT*, 17 (emphasis in original)

He identifies three reasons for Rorty's rejection of the ideal of 'objective truth,' which he redescribes as:

> …the hope for reality in the raw; reality devoid of the supposedly distorting slant of language, perspective and context.[83]

First, Rorty claims, the search for objective truth is an illusion because there is no pre-linguistic reality with which our language can 'correspond,' or which it can 'accurately describe.'[84] Second, this illusion has the effect of devaluing the type of knowledge of which we *are* capable; 'contingent, rooted, linguistically-shaped knowledge.'[85] Third:

> Rorty views the aspiration for objective truth as complicit also in the promotion of élite castes that arrogate to themselves the unique ability to know reality truly in such a fashion as leads to the institutionalized antidemocratic privileging of their voices over ordinary conversation.[86]

The foundational role granted to philosophy legitimates a hierarchical and elitist view of social order,[87] and furthermore:

> Notably for Rorty, the classic examples [of elite castes] are priests in pre-modern Europe and scientists in the contemporary West.[88]

As Murray recognises, this third point is a crucial one for Rorty. One of the key aims of his project is to develop an understanding of truth that will reinforce the values of liberal democracy. In identifying priests as an example of the privileged castes whose elite status is problematic, Rorty is not specifically aiming his critique at the truth claims of religion; he takes it for granted that such claims have already been defeated.[89] However, a Catholic response to his thought has to uphold the importance of the human search for truth and the claims of doctrine to articulate divinely revealed truth – albeit partially and imperfectly – without ignoring the force of Rorty's polemic against elitism. Rorty is undoubtedly correct to claim that the idea of 'objective truth' can serve in practice as an instrument for maintaining the status quo in a given society, or in the church.

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[83] *RPC*, 172; cf *PMN,* 3, 8, 333-5.
[84] RPC, 172-3; *RTT* 27-49.
[85] *RPC*, 173.
[86] *RPC,* 173.
[87] *RTT*, 53-4.
[88] *RTT*, 53-4.
[89] *PMN*, 4.

229

Rorty presents his case against the objectivist tradition, not by attempting to prove it wrong by logical analysis – which would be self-contradictory – but by tracing the historical roots of objectivism, with a view to demonstrating its pathological nature.

> Far from seeking, incoherently, to prove objectivism wrong on its own terms, he seeks to expose what he takes to be the historically particular and, hence, non-necessary status of the entire objectivist aspiration.[90]

Murray traces and affirms Rorty's 'diagnosis of the ills of foundationalist objectivism and his therapeutic concern to return us to contingent ways of knowing.'[91] As he recognises, it would be self-contradictory for Rorty to attempt to establish his position by adopting the modes of argument of the tradition that he rejects – that is, by a logical demonstration of the objective truth of his view.[92] Instead, Rorty attempts to indicate:

> …how the language of truth actually functions. According to Rorty, people describe as true not what they *know to correspond to reality* (as the epistemological tradition maintains) but what they *most value* (as, he claims, pragmatism maintains.)[93]

Murray addresses Rorty's view of objectivity as an 'unattainable illusion.'[94] For Rorty, the search for objectivity is a futile attempt to 'get behind' language to a pure 'in-itself' reality of things.[95] Nevertheless, Murray acquits Rorty of the charge of 'espousing an extreme linguistic idealism for which there really is no reality other than that which language brings into being.'[96] As Rorty himself states:

> It is one thing to say (absurdly) that we make objects by using words and something quite different to say that we do not know how to find a way of describing an enduring matrix of past and future inquiry into nature except in our own terms…[97]

What is the impact on theological understanding of Rorty's replacement of the aspiration for objective truth with a search for localised consensus? In considering this question, Murray distinguishes the epistemological tradition, shaped by 'the Cartesian search

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[90] *RPC*, 173.
[91] *RTT*, 27.
[92] *RTT*, 28.
[93] *RTT*, 28 (emphasis in original.)
[94] *RTT*, 29.
[95] *RTT*, 29.
[96] *RTT*, 45.
[97] Rorty, *PMN*, 279, cited by Murray, *RTT*, 45.

for absolute certainty and the Kantian distinction between phenomenal and noumenal reality,'[98] from the Catholic tradition which:

> …is framed by the quite different assumption that all that exists has being in and through the Word and so analogically reflects – albeit always in a way elusive of strict determination – something of the abundance of God in ways to which, in turn, our intellects resonate, partially at least, on account of their being likewise formed in analogical accordance with that same Word.[99]

Thus, our 'situated, linguistically shaped knowing'[100] is not a constraint that must be escaped in order to know and articulate the truths of God, but rather is itself an aspect of God's world that speaks of its Creator. Murray cites John Paul II in support of this view:

> …this community is constrained to the duty of proclaiming the certainties which she knows, while conscious herself that every truth arrived at is just one stopping-place on the way to that fullness of truth which will be shown forth in the final revelation of God.[101]

This dynamic notion of a truth that is proclaimed by the community of faith, which at the same time knows its proclamation to be partial and incomplete – a stop on the journey towards the fullness of truth – is in striking contrast to the static understanding of the 'deposit of faith' found in the teaching of Vatican I.[102] It is in tune with the historically and culturally conscious understanding of doctrine that Lonergan elaborates in *Method*[103] and, with its focus on proclamation, moves closer to Lindbeck's rule theory which sees doctrines as regulating what can be said about the truths of faith within the Christian community.

Murray claims that the Catholic understanding of the human orientation to truth need not fall under Rorty's critique of the epistemological tradition, but rather:

> …it would seem to represent a richer account of things that may even hold the potential, in some respects at least, for [the epistemological tradition's] redemption.[104]

Nevertheless, Murray identifies some aspects of the recent papal magisterium that would seem to 'fall down under the terms of Rorty's criticism.'[105]

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[98] *RPC*, 174
[99] *RPC*, 174. Cf. *Summa Theologiae*, 1a.12.2, 1a.13.1-3, 1a.3,5-6.
[100] *RPC*, 174
[101] *FR* §2, cited at *RPC*, 174.
[102] *DF*, Chapter 4.
[103] *Method*, 280-282.
[104] *RPC*, 174-5.
[105] *RPC*, 175.

8.2.3.1 A response to Rorty: The need for truth in practice

Murray distinguishes Rorty's 'critique of the aspiration for objective truth as a striving after untainted immediacy,'[106] a critique which Catholic theological understanding can accept, from his 'wholesale, undiscriminating abandonment of all concern for truth as the articulation of reality,'[107] which, Murray argues, undermines Rorty's intentions in three ways. It ignores the reality of everyday experience, in which we generally believe ourselves to be speaking at least partial truth about reality. It undermines our ability to act purposefully in the world, since such action presupposes at least some knowledge of the world as it is. And, by redefining truth as 'localised consensus,' it closes off the possibility of fruitful dialogue between different voices, discourses and perspectives.[108]

Murray believes that these shortcomings can be addressed, and Rorty's account enriched, by bringing it into dialogue with Christian tradition. The core Christian belief that God subsists in a Trinity of dynamic relations can lead us to affirm that:

> …the full objective reality of any particular thing consists precisely in its manifold interrelatedness (both actual and potential) with other particular things, rather than in the spartan abstraction of a naked *in-itself*.[109]

If the 'God's-eye view' is seen as a dynamic 'view from everywhere,' reflecting the Creator's intimate and immanent presence to the whole of creation, rather than a detached, objectivist 'view from nowhere,' then the way of truth becomes a way of continual conversion, based on a commitment to subject the perspectives of one's own community to continued scrutiny and challenge from the perspectives of others, particularly of those whose perspectives may be routinely 'hidden from view.'[110] Thus:

> …rather than Christian theism representing one of the final refuges and necessary presuppositions of an outmoded commitment to unrevised objectivity, as Rorty assumes, the claim here is that it represents a unique resource for supporting precisely the kind of way forward needed if we are to embrace Rorty's constructive agenda while avoiding the significant problems his own position raises.[111]

> …far from the Christian tradition having a case to answer here (as Rorty assumes), or having to undergo fundamental revision in order to meet the challenge of the

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[106] *RPC*, 176.
[107] *RPC*, 176.
[108] *RPC*, 176-7.
[109] *RTT*, 89 (italics in original.)
[110] *RPC*, 89.
[111] *RPC*, 89.

contemporary refusal of foundationalist objectivism, the claim here is that it is in fact a certain reading of the Christian understanding of God's Trinitarian being and knowing of created reality and, likewise, of created reality's analogical participation in the being and knowing of God that underwrites the articulation of the kind of constructive postfoundationalist overcoming of the objectivist/relativist, realist/non-realist impasse called for by… Rorty.[112]

On the other hand, Murray recognises the challenges that emerge from such a dialogue for the 'practice, ethos, polity and performance of Catholicism.'[113] The church:

…must grow beyond its default instinct of absolutist authoritarianism to develop the procedures, structures and all pervading ethos of a mature and vibrant Catholicity.[114]

8.2.4 The right response to Rorty?

In *Fides et Ratio*, John Paul II identifies errors in a number of contemporary currents of though and lays out the principles for 'philosophical thinking which is not at odds with faith.'[115] By comparing Rorty with Lonergan, Snell demonstrates cogently why his philosophical thinking is 'at odds with faith.' However, Murray asks whether, nevertheless, the shortcomings of Rorty's approach can be overcome by bringing him into dialogue with Christian theism and whether, in turn, Rorty may raise questions that need to be addressed humbly and sincerely in the interests of an authentic Catholicity. To embrace such a 'charitably critical' reading of Rorty does not entail abandoning Lonergan's critical realism. On the contrary, Lonergan's thoroughly Thomist metaphysics, derived from his equally Thomist cognitional theory, meets the philosophical requirements identified by John Paul II. It is a philosophy that has a sapiential dimension as a search for ultimate meaning;[116] that includes a verification of the human capacity to know the truth;[117] and which is of genuinely metaphysical range,[118] while also (particularly in his later thought) adopting an empirical understanding of culture[119] that allows for a genuine pluralism in the understanding and expression of truth, potentially even in relation to dogmatic statements.[120] Snell asserts that

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[112] *RTT*, 89-90.
[113] *RPC*, 177.
[114] *RPC*, 182.
[115] *FR* §63.
[116] *FR* §81.
[117] *FR* §82.
[118] *FR* §83.
[119] *Method*, 3.
[120] *Method,* 302-3.

233

Lonergan is misunderstood by those who think that he provides 'only a variety of coherentism,'[121] but I believe that a more cautious interpretation of Lonergan along these lines may be better adapted to meet the challenge of postfoundationalism, while remaining true to the Thomist character of his thought.

8.2.5 Philosophical issues

While Snell presents his critique of Rorty as a Lonerganian response, it could be argued that the disagreement between Rorty and Lonergan is even deeper than Snell recognises. Murray identifies:

> ...the Cartesian concern for absolute certainty and the Kantian distinction between phenomenal and noumenal reality [which] embeds anxiety about a subject–object divide in its very foundations.[122]

For Snell, Lonergan has defeated Rorty on his own terms. Rorty recognises correctly that intuitionism – the idea that knowing means 'taking a look' – leads inevitably to scepticism. But Lonergan has shown us the way to overcome intuitionism:

> Lonergan's genius was the realization that absent the labor of self-appropriation one will remain within a defunct model of knowing based on the ocular metaphor and so not undergo the intellectual conversion which finally overcomes intuitionism.[123]

As we have seen, Snell reads Lonergan as a successful foundationalist.[124] But I suggest that Snell's analysis of the problem is one which is still marked by 'Cartesian anxiety' about a subject-object divide, and that a more authentically Thomist approach allows the anxiety to be overcome without resorting to foundationalism. This is illustrated by the work of a Thomist of an earlier generation, Jacques Maritain, who criticises Descartes from the perspective of a Scholastic theory of knowledge.

8.2.6 Maritain on Descartes: a Scholastic critique

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[121] *Through a Glass*, 216.
[122] Murray, *RPC*, 174.
[123] Snell, *Through a Glass*, 138-139.
[124] Snell, *Through a Glass*, 174-175; see section 8.2.2 above.

In *The Dream of Descartes*, Maritain attempts to '…determine the value and significance of the Cartesian reform with regard to metaphysical and theological wisdom.'[125] His judgement on Descartes' rationalism will be that:

> The Cartesian experiment was an admirable metaphysical undertaking bearing the hall-mark of genius; we owe it a great deal, if only for having brilliantly proven that any experiment of that nature is doomed ahead of time to failure.[126]

Maritain's critique of Descartes is framed in the language and concepts of classical Thomism. It is in these terms that he analyses Descartes' theory of knowledge. For Descartes, the immediate objects of thought are ideas and, as Maritain reads him, ideas are 'images or pictures painted in the soul.'[127] The Thomist understanding of knowledge is fundamentally different:

> Descartes thus transposed into his system a classic thesis of ancient philosophy, according to which the intellect "is never mistaken" in the simple apprehension of the objects of thought. But the difference in meaning between the Scholastic thesis and the Cartesian thesis was fundamental. In the latter, these objects primarily apprehended are the ideas themselves (terms *quod*, images of a thing); in the former they were the "natures" of possible realities (*quidditates*) apprehended by and in the concepts (terms *quo*) without these concepts themselves being known as objects, unless through an ulterior reflection. From this follows an equally fundamental difference which has to do with the theory of judgment. For the Scholastics, if truth or falsehood is the attribute of judgment, or of the "second operation of the mind," it is because at this point the mind unites its objects of concept… and because this composition may or may not correspond to the behaviour of *what is* (in actual or possible existence.)[128]

In the Scholastic/Thomist account, the human mind receives sense data, understands the data by means of concepts, and makes a judgement. The judgement can be true or false, but there is no radical disjunction between being – 'what is' – and the mind which knows being. Knower and known are part of the same ordered reality, and epistemology is a subset of metaphysics. In Descartes' world view, on the other hand, the objects of human thought are 'ideas,' not derived from sense experience, but innate in the mind.

> For Descartes on the contrary, it [the possibility of a true or false judgement] is because at this point the mind, by a voluntary movement or consent, takes the idea-object or idea-picture which it perceives within itself, as being conformable

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[125] Maritain, *The Dream of Descartes*, Preface.
[126] Maritain, *The Dream of Descartes*, Preface. (Maritain is here quoting the words of Etienne Gilson.)
[127] Maritain, *The Dream of Descartes*, 108.
[128] Maritain, *The Dream of Descartes,* 108-109 (emphasis in original.)

to an actual or possible extramental counterpart, and because this conformity may or may not be real in fact.[129]

As Maritain recognises, such an understanding calls into question not only the human ability to know the truth of 'things as they are,' but the very existence of extramental reality.

> It is clear – but it is a stroke of genius to have been the first to see it so strongly – that if our ideas are our only immediate objects, the whole existence of things becomes doubtful. The problem of existence, then, takes the foremost place in Descartes' preoccupations.[130]

Rorty and Maritain are in agreement that Cartesian epistemology leads inevitably to scepticism.[131] Maritain concludes that, having got his metaphysics wrong, Descartes cannot avoid getting his epistemology wrong too. Rorty, believing metaphysics to have been superseded by modern science, draws the conclusion that epistemology also needs to be abandoned.[132]

Maritain adopts a classical Thomist position to refute Descartes, and Snell wishes to adopt Lonergan's Thomist thought to refute Rorty. But there may be a Catholic critique of Rorty which is both more and less ambitious than Snell's; attacking the 'Cartesian anxiety' at its roots, rather than implicitly accepting its presuppositions, and at the same time avoiding a 'grand narrative' style of epistemology that may claim more than it can deliver. Murray claims that, in contrast to Cartesian anxiety,

> [theological understanding] – within Catholic tradition at least – is framed by the quite different assumption that all that exists has being in and through the Word and so analogically reflects – albeit always in a way elusive of strict determination – something of the abundance of God in ways to which, in turn, our intellects resonate, partially at least, on account of their being likewise formed in analogical accordance with that same Word.[133]

Murray cites Aquinas in support of this view of the relationship between human intellect and the created world.[134] E A Burtt[135] has traced the breakdown of this

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[129] Maritain, *The Dream of Descartes*, 109.

[130] Maritain, *The Dream of Descartes*, 113.

[131] Rorty, *PMN*, 112-114.

[132] Rorty is aware of Maritain's critique, describing it as a 'radical interpretation' of '[the] veil-of-ideas epistemology which took over philosophy in the seventeenth century.' *PMN*, 113, footnote 19.

[133] Murray, *RPC*, 174.

[134] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae, Vol. 3 (1a.12–13): Knowing and Naming God*, ed. Herbert McCabe OP (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1964), 1a.12.2, 1a.13.1–3, 1a.13.5–6. Cited by Murray at *RPC*, 174, footnote 34.

[135] E A Burtt, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Science*, 2nd edition (Dover Publications, Inc, Mineola, New York, 1932.)

understanding as empirical science gained sway in modern thought and displaced classical metaphysics. Burtt claims that the breakdown begins with Galileo. From his discoveries in natural science, Galileo came to conceive of the natural world as a 'simple, orderly system,'[136] fundamentally mathematical in character. Nature was 'the domain of mathematics,'[137] and it was mathematical demonstration, rather than scholastic logic, that would enable us to understand the world. Burtt points out, however, that Galileo's method was firmly empirical and not *a priori*; he would observe the world, and then attempt to 'resolve' his observations in mathematical terms.[138] Nevertheless, for Galileo, mathematics was the fundamental language of nature; his was a 'mathematical metaphysic,'[139] and according to Burtt, this metaphysic led necessarily to his distinction of primary and secondary qualities.

> Galileo makes the clear distinction between that in the world which is absolute, objective, immutable and mathematical; and that which is relative, subjective, fluctuating and sensible. The former is the realm of knowledge, divine and human; the latter is the realm of opinion and illusion.[140]

> The reality of the universe is geometrical; the only ultimate characteristics of nature are those in terms of which certain mathematical knowledge becomes possible. All other qualities, and these are often far more prominent to the senses, are secondary, subordinate effects of the primary.[141]

Galileo regards these secondary qualities as having no other existence than in the human senses and mind, a move which Burtt describes as one of 'incalculable importance:'

> It is a fundamental step toward that banishing of man from the great world of nature and his treatment as an effect of what happens in the latter, which has been a pretty constant feature of the philosophy of modern science, a procedure enormously simplifying the field of science, but bringing in its train the big metaphysical and especially epistemological problems of modern philosophy. Till the time of Galileo it had always been taken for granted that man and nature were both integral parts of a larger whole, in which man's place was the more fundamental… *Now, in the course of translating this distinction of primary and secondary into terms suited to the new mathematical interpretation of nature, we have the first stage in the reading of man out of the real and primary realm.*[142]

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[136] Burtt, 74.
[137] Burtt, 75.
[138] Burtt, 76-79.
[139] Burtt, 83.
[140] Burtt, 83.
[141] Burtt, 84.
[142] Burtt, 89 (emphasis in original.)

The human mind and the natural world that it observes are no longer understood as 'integral parts of a larger whole,' but as two distinct realities. In Burtt's view, Galileo's doctrine of primary and secondary qualities leads to Descartes' dualism:

> Observe that the stage is fully set for the Cartesian dualism… Man begins to appear for the first time in the history of thought as an irrelevant spectator and insignificant effect of the great mathematical system which is the substance of reality.[143]

And Descartes follows through the implications of his own and Galileo's thought:

> Such, then, is Descartes' famous dualism – one world consisting of a huge, mathematical machine, extended in space, and another world consisting of unextended, thinking spirits. And whatever is not mathematical or depends at all on the activity of thinking substance, especially the so-called secondary qualities, belongs with the latter.[144]

This dualistic view raises the question of the interaction of these two absolutely distinct 'worlds.' Descartes' answer was to locate the mind within the body – within the brain – making the mind, as it were, a spectator looking out at the physical world. Burtt notes the magnitude of the change brought about by the acceptance of Descartes' philosophical view:

> The scholastic scientist looked out upon the world of nature and it appeared to him a quite sociable and human world… It was clearly and fully intelligible, being immediately present to the rational powers of his mind… Now the world is an infinite and monotonous mathematical machine… It was simply an incalculable change in the viewpoint of the world held by intelligent opinion in Europe.[145]

Burtt analyses the thought of Descartes in metaphysical terms, while Maritain's critique of the French philosopher is couched in the language of classical scholastic epistemology. However, they reach the same conclusion; by introducing a dualistic separation between the human mind and the natural world, Descartes has brought about an 'anxiety' about the mind's ability to know and understand the world, an anxiety that has shaped philosophical thought ever since.

According to Rorty, by the 19th century, 'Metaphysics – considered as the description of how the heavens and the earth are put together – had been displaced by physics.[146]' For Burtt, however, it is not the case that the advance of the physical sciences has rendered

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[143] Burtt, 90.
[144] Burtt, 121.
[145] Burtt, 123-124.
[146] Rorty, *PMN*, 132.

238

metaphysics obsolete. Rather, the 'Platonic-Aristotelian-Christian view… centrally a teleological and spiritual conception of the processes of nature,'[147] has given way to a mechanical and mathematical understanding of the world which itself is nevertheless a metaphysics, even if not expressed in metaphysical language. Though he does not himself adopt an explicit metaphysical or theological position, Burtt spells out uncompromisingly the problems with such a view; it leads to Cartesian dualism and to the problem of the validity of knowledge.

> It has, no doubt, been worth the metaphysical barbarism of a few centuries to possess modern science.[148]

The 'metaphysical barbarism' to which Burtt refers is the separation of the human mind from the natural world and, in his judgement, the absence of an adequate philosophy of mind.

> In general, it may be said that two main directions have been pursued. On the one hand there have been those eager to make mind itself, the knower of physical nature, an object of scientific study. To do this with exactitude and objectivity has meant breaking down the dualism by incorporating mind somehow into the world of bodily motions. On the other hand there have been those anxious to substantiate on a basis more acceptable in modern times the medieval accordance to mind of a high place in cosmic affairs.[149]

Burtt's second 'direction' seems a good approximation to Lonergan's project of 'importing' the 'compelling genius' of Thomas to contemporary problems.[150] Burtt concludes:

> An adequate cosmology will only begin to be written when an adequate philosophy of mind has appeared, and such a philosophy of mind must provide full satisfaction both for the motives of the behaviorists who wish to make mind material for experimental manipulation and exact measurement, and for the motives of idealists who wish to see the startling difference between a universe without mind and a universe organised into a living and sensitive unity through mind fully accounted for.[151]

Lonergan is attempting to provide an 'adequate philosophy of mind' on the basis of an appropriation of one's own cognitive process, and to make it the foundation for a

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[147] Burtt, *Metaphysical Foundations*, 113.
[148] Burtt, 305-306.
[149] Burtt, 319-320.
[150] Lonergan, *Insight,* 770.
[151] Burtt, *Metaphysical Foundations*, 324.

metaphysics which is neither materialist nor idealist but describes 'a universe organised into a living and sensitive unity' – an updating of the Thomist view of the world.

Before moving on from this question, it is helpful to consider the impact of Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.[152] Though he is not a 'philosopher of mind,' Kuhn addresses some of the issues raised by Burtt. Kuhn's central claim is that a mature science operates within a 'paradigm,' a conceptual structure which shapes the questions which scientists ask, the experiments they perform and the way in which they interpret their experimental results.[153] 'Normal science' is the process in which scientists solve the puzzles set by the currently prevailing paradigm, making incremental progress in knowledge of their subject.[154] A scientific revolution occurs when an existing paradigm accumulates so many anomalies that it becomes untenable; a new paradigm is put forward, and eventually replaces the old one because it is shown to account more fully for scientists' observations.[155] Normal science then continues within the new paradigm. Since, however, Kuhn acknowledges that competing paradigms are incommensurable,[156] his account calls into question the traditional understanding of progress in science as a linear, additive process. In response, Kuhn describes himself as 'a convinced believer in scientific progress,'[157] while denying what might often be considered an essential element of the notion of progress:

> A scientific theory is usually felt to be better than its predecessors not only in the sense that it is a better instrument for discovering and solving puzzles but also because it is somehow a better representation of what nature is really like. One often hears that successive theories grow ever closer to, or approximate more and more closely to, the truth. Apparently generalizations like that refer not to the puzzle-solutions and the concrete predictions derived from the theory but rather to its ontology, to the match, that is, between the entities with which the theory populates nature and what is "really there."[158]

Kuhn decisively rejects such a view:

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[152] Thomas S Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 4th edition (University of Chicago Press, 2012.) Hereafter *SSR*.
[153] *SSR* section II, 10-22.
[154] *SSR* section II, 10-22.
[155] *SSR* section VII, 66-76.
[156] *SSR*, 147-149.
[157] *SSR*, 205.
[158] *SSR*, 205.

> There is, I think, no theory-independent way to reconstruct phrases like 'really there'; the notion of a match between the ontology of a theory and its "real" counterpart in nature now seems to me illusive in principle.[159]

Kuhn denies that his position is a relativist one; he accepts that scientific development is a 'unidirectional and irreversible process' in which successive theories improve on those which have preceded them.[160] But he can see 'no coherent direction of ontological development' in the succession of theories.[161] Rather, he sees the process of scientific development as analogous to that of Darwinian evolution. Competing theories are tested against one another in a process of conflict within the scientific community, and those which are best adapted to account for scientists' observations of the world are the ones that survive.[162] Scientists are engaged, not in a long march towards metaphysical Truth, but in an open-ended process of advancement from their current understanding of the world. In passing, it is interesting to note the similarity between Kuhn's account of scientific theories, offering empirically testable solutions to puzzles posed by the current paradigm in the relevant discipline, and Lindbeck's description of doctrinal statements as normative articulations of the truths of faith within the tradition of a particular community. In each case, statements about the world (scientific theories or doctrinal formulae) are seen to be meaningful within a particular conceptual framework (a scientific paradigm or a church tradition) and the judgement of truth or falsity refers to the framework – the paradigm or tradition – as a whole, rather than the quality of truth being seen as attaching to a specific statement. In each case, too, the truth of a statement is judged in terms of adequacy, rather than in the strong sense of correspondence to metaphysical reality.[163]

Rorty acknowledges the influence of Kuhn in *PMN*.[164] However, he wishes to carry further the 'dialectic... which has carried... philosophy of science from Carnap to Kuhn.'[165] In contrast to what might be characterised as Kuhn's metaphysical modesty, Rorty rejects metaphysics altogether and is prepared to abandon the whole idea of a philosophical theory

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[159] *SSR*, 205.
[160] *SSR*, 205.
[161] *SSR*, 205.
[162] *SSR*, Section XII (143-185) and 170-172.
[163] Lindbeck refers to the work of Kuhn in support of his denial of the possibility that 'universal norms of reasonableness... can be formulated in some neutral, framework-independent language.' Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 116-117.
[164] *PMN*, 7 and passim in chapters 1 and 2.
[165] *PMN*, 7.

of knowledge.[166] In doing so, he goes beyond the conclusions that Kuhn himself draws from his work.

8.2.7 Rereading Lonergan in the light of Rorty

How can Lonergan inform a Catholic response to Rorty? Rather than arguing, as Snell does, that the critical realism of Lonergan allows the Catholic theologian to defeat Rorty and re-establish a classical metaphysical understanding, I wish to read Lonergan in support of a more cautious view, closer to that of Murray.

Unlike Kuhn, Lonergan is, in at least some respects, a 'philosopher of mind.'[167] In Burtt's view, the rise of empirical science, and the philosophy of Descartes (and Kant) have rendered classical metaphysics untenable, while at the same time producing what he characterises as 'metaphysical barbarism.' Such 'barbarism' cannot be overcome by a return to a medieval world view. The Transcendental Thomists aimed instead to reread Aquinas in the light of Kant, in order to retrieve Thomism for the modern world.[168] Lonergan rereads Aquinas in the light of modern science so as, in the words of Pope Leo XIII, to 'renew and strengthen the old by means of the new.'

Lonergan is aware of the work of Burtt[169] and of Kuhn.[170] *Insight* begins with five chapters devoted to the methods of the modern natural sciences, because Lonergan takes the work of mathematicians and scientists as his exemplar for insight. Kuhn dismisses the idea of an ontological 'match' between scientific theory and what is 'really out there.'[171] Lonergan insists that being is that which is intelligible, and not a subset of the 'already out there now.'[172] Kuhn asks, 'What must the world be like in order that man may know it?'[173] and acknowledges that the question remains open. Lonergan devotes the whole of *Insight* to the question of how the human mind can know the world, believing that the most compelling answer is found in a transposition of the thought of Aquinas into contemporary terms.[174] It is

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[166] *PMN*, 7-8.
[167] Burtt, *Metaphysical Foundations*, 324.
[168] J. Donceel, *Transcendental Thomism*. *The Monist*, January 1974, Vol. 58, No. 1, 67-85.
[169] *Insight* 178, note 3.
[170] See, for example, 'Second Lecture: Religious Knowledge,' *Third Collection*, 124-139, 133.
[171] *SSR*, 205.
[172] *Insight*, 413-414.
[173] *SSR*, 172.
[174] Lonergan, *Insight*, 770.

striking that these thinkers, from such different starting points, identify similar issues in the relationship between the human mind and the world which, for the Christian disciple, bears the unmistakable imprint of the God who creates and orders it.

8.3 Conclusion

In this chapter I have considered the challenge posed to Catholic theology by the 'nonfoundationalist neopragmatism' of Richard Rorty. R J Snell finds Lonergan to have articulated a convincing critical realist response to Rorty. I have suggested that, rather than dismissing postfoundationalist concerns or attempting to defeat this movement on its own terms, it is helpful to go deeper into the Thomist roots of Lonergan's thought. An authentically Thomist epistemology and metaphysics does not adopt the foundationalist paradigm but rather places the human knower within a universe that is God-centred and divinely ordered. Lonergan, in *Insight*, aims to correlate such an understanding with the findings of modern science. Paul D Murray shows that a 'charitably critical' reading of Rorty's thought can integrate some of his insights into Catholic theology. Such an approach allows for a coherentist understanding in which knowing is always situated and contingent but nevertheless valid as a 'view from somewhere.' This in turn paves the way for a modest realism in the understanding of doctrine, whereby doctrinal statements can be seen as true though limited and culturally conditioned expressions of revealed truth.

The context for such questions is set by the 1998 encyclical *Fides et Ratio*. I argued for a reading of Lonergan's thought as authentically Thomist and not classically foundationalist, which meets the expectations set out in *Fides et Ratio* for Catholic philosophy and theology and which takes account of the work of E A Burtt and Thomas Kuhn on the philosophy of modern science. In the next chapter I will address criticisms of Lonergan's work coming from within the field of Catholic theology.

9 Dialogue with the critics (2): hermeneutics and pluralism

9.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will consider criticisms of Lonergan's work made by three Catholic theologians: Fergus Kerr, Nicholas Lash and David Tracy. All three adopt a hermeneutical approach to theology and are concerned with questions of pluralism and diversity in the expression of Christian faith. Each sees both strengths and weaknesses in Lonergan's thought.

9.2 Lonergan and Wittgenstein: the critique of Fergus Kerr

The Catholic theologian Fergus Kerr is a contemporary interpreter of Thomas Aquinas who brings the thought of Wittgenstein to bear on theological problems. His critique of Lonergan's method is made from that perspective.

<u>Lonergan, Wittgenstein and 'Linguistic Analysis'</u>

The only explicit reference to Wittgenstein in *Method in Theology* comes in Part Two, chapter 10, 'Dialectic.'[1] Dialectic is the fourth of Lonergan's functional specialties and it deals with conflicts. In Lonergan's account, the presence or absence of conversion can lead to a variety of opposed philosophies, theologies and methods, reflecting differing horizons.[2] The task of dialectic is to make explicit the philosophical commitments that constitute the opposed horizons. Such commitments will be shown either to be positions, compatible with intellectual, moral and religious conversion and capable of development, or counterpositions, which are not.[3] Through the method of dialectic, Lonergan believes, erroneous philosophies, theologies and methods will be refuted by the exposure of the counterpositions on which they depend.

Under the heading 'The Dialectic of Methods: Part 1,' Lonergan notes that '…there are widely held views that imply that his own procedures are mistaken and even wrong-headed.'[4]

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[1] *Method*, chapter 10, 221-249.
[2] *Method*, 238.
[3] *Method*, 234.
[4] *Method*, 238.

He selects, apparently as a kind of case study, two such views: 'linguistic analysis' and 'idealism.' He does not offer a definition of 'linguistic analysis' or identify the philosophers against whom he is arguing, but instead cites a paper entitled 'Linguistic Analysis and the Transcendence of God'[5] by his contemporary, the Jesuit Edward MacKinnon, which he describes as 'valuable.' MacKinnon analyses this philosophical movement from a Catholic perspective.

MacKinnon begins by noting that linguistic analysis is not 'a regular philosophy with an established body of doctrine' but rather a philosophical movement committed to:

> …a methodology of philosophical inquiry centering on an analysis of the meaning and use of language and the significance this has for some basic philosophical questions.[6]

Some within this movement – MacKinnon cites the 'ordinary language analysts' John Wisdom, Anthony Flew and Alisdair MacIntyre[7] - have expressed the view that theological language is simply meaningless because unverifiable. MacKinnon responds that, rather than trying to defeat such a position, he wishes 'to use linguistic analysis as a means of clarifying the meaningfulness of discourse about a transcendent God.'[8] He agrees with the position of Wittgenstein that the meaningfulness of language is essentially public, and continues:

> A consequence of this position… is that the meaning of a word is not explicable by reference or reduction to private mental acts. The usual scholastic doctrine is that words have meaning because they express concepts.[9]

According to Wittgenstein,[10] however, and to philosophers influenced by him such as Gilbert Ryle, words cannot meaningfully refer to private mental acts because such acts are not publicly accessible. A response to this critique, MacKinnon acknowledges, requires:

> …a critical justification of the way language is used to refer to and describe such mental acts and states as experience, insight, conceptualization, reflection, and judgment.[11]

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[5] Edward Mackinnon, 'Linguistic Analysis and the Transcendence of God,' *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 23 (1968), 30. Cited by Lonergan, *Method*, 238-9.
[6] MacKinnon, 28.
[7] MacKinnon, 28
[8] MacKinnon, 29.
[9] MacKinnon, 30.
[10] MacKinnon refers to the *Philosophical Investigations* and therefore to the 'later' Wittgenstein.
[11] MacKinnon, 31.

In response, MacKinnon follows Strawson in arguing that language can only be meaningful if it contains an implicit characterisation of the world to which it refers. In any conversation between two subjects, we refer to:

> ...particulars, to objects, situations, and events, which we can both identify. This in turn presupposes a space-time framework.[12]

If what is said contradicts this implicit understanding of the world, it is, in Lonergan's terms, a counterposition whose development will reveal its incoherence.[13]

> Language can not be used to refer, describe, narrate, or explain unless it implicitly contains some conceptualization of the reality treated.[14]

This principle, MacKinnon believes, applies to scientific language. Philosophers who 'focused on the problem of meaning,' if they applied their principles strictly, would characterise electrons or chromosomes as 'theoretical entities' which cannot be directly observed. Therefore, they are useful theoretical constructs, but cannot be real entities.[15] Such a position is untenable in relation to the discussion of science and therefore, MacKinnon claims, also in relation to the discussion of theology:

> Any principles that logically lead to a denial of the real existence of atoms logically preclude any discussion, whether positive or negative, of the real existence of God.[16]

Any discourse, MacKinnon argues – ordinary conversation, science or theology – implicitly includes a descriptive metaphysics. When the discourse is theological, the implied metaphysics is a theistic one, but that does not in itself render the discourse empty or meaningless. He claims that there are atheist philosophers who agree with this view.[17]

MacKinnon argues further that Wittgenstein's notion of language includes the existence of the transcendent subject – the 'I' who speaks.

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[12] MacKinnon, 'Linguistic Analysis,' 31-32.
[13] MacKinnon, 32-33; cf. *Insight*, 412-415.
[14] MacKinnon, 33; cf. P. F. Strawson, *Individuals: An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics* (Doubleday, Garden City, New York,1963)
[15] MacKinnon, 'Linguistic Analysis,' 36-37.
[16] MacKinnon, 37.
[17] MacKinnon, 37, note 9. The philosophers named are E. Nagel, N. R. Hanson and P. Feyerabend.

But a person speaks, in a proper sense, only to other persons. Recognizing another as a hearer involves recognizing him as a person, as another conscious subject. Language need not directly say this; its usage implies it.[18]

In the language of faith, God is understood as another subject – the 'term of an I-thou relation.'[19] In relation to theological language, MacKinnon affirms:

…to discuss God as an object of knowledge we must conceptually create a surrogate God. This is not blasphemy, but an explicitation of how any conceptual system necessarily functions. Thus, the surrogate God conceptually created by man can be: a pure act of existence, the wholly other, the ultimate Ground of Being, or the One who calls man to achieve a truly authentic existence. With this as a basic ontic commitment we can have a conceptual framework in which meaningful propositions can be formulated.[20]

Theological language – language that speaks *about* God rather than *to* God – has meaning only if one has made such a 'basic ontic commitment;' but, as MacKinnon points out, it is equally true to say that a theory of atoms only has meaning because the scientist believes that atoms exist.[21]

MacKinnon concludes:

Yet, this conceptualization can serve as a vehicle for the formulation of propositions which we accept as true, provided we already believe in the existence of God. In this sense it does serve as a means, an indirect, partial, analogous, yet indispensible means of knowing the living God who transcends whatever we can think or say of Him.[22]

Despite this reference to 'the existence of God' in his final, summary paragraph, it seems clear from the qualification cited above that MacKinnon does not conceive of God as 'a being among beings.' He affirms rather that the theologian can accept Wittgenstein's insight that 'the meaningfulness of language is essentially public and only derivatively private'[23] while holding to the Thomist view that the language of religion and theology is meaningful and can express, albeit in an imperfect and analogical fashion, truths about the God whose fullness is beyond human understanding.

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[18] MacKinnon, 'Linguistic Analysis,' 39.
[19] MacKinnon, 40.
[20] MacKinnon, 41.
[21] MacKinnon, 43.
[22] MacKinnon, 44.
[23] MacKinnon, 30.

Lonergan describes MacKinnon's view as 'a helpful basis of discussion' but clarifies his own position by drawing a distinction between 'the ordinary meaningfulness of ordinary language' and the 'original meaningfulness' of any language.[24] In common use by the members of the relevant group, language means what those individuals understand it to mean, just as Wittgenstein says. But, Lonergan points out, language develops.

> New developments consist in discovering new uses for existing words, in inventing new words, and in diffusing the discoveries and inventions. All three are a matter of expressed mental acts.[25]

Here, Lonergan has identified an important problem with Wittgenstein's approach. If meaning is *simply* usage, how does meaning arise in the first place? How does a 'language game' come about? In the words of Fitzpatrick, comparing Lonergan with Wittgenstein:

> …the mechanism proposed by Wittgenstein for determining the meaning of words is thoroughly conservative and quite lacking in any explanatory value concerning how linguistic change occurs. The whole thrust of Wittgenstein's argument… presumes that the network of word meanings in any language-game is settled and established so that the meaning of any term or word or sentence in that game can be determined by reference to established practice.[26]

Lonergan believes that this 'confusion of ordinary meaningfulness and original meaningfulness' can be traced a reductionist view or methodological option that limits philosophical discourse to the study of language and excludes any consideration of mental acts. Within such a horizon, the distinction between ordinary and original meaningfulness disappears from view.[27] Only by adverting to mental acts can innovation in language be understood.

MacKinnon gives a careful and nuanced response from a Thomist position to the critique of religious language offered by Wittgenstein and philosophers influenced by him. Lonergan here employs a somewhat broader brush, aiming to establish the validity of his own method rather than to give a detailed account of opposing views. By implication, he adopts the argument of his fellow Jesuit Thomist and arrives at essentially the same conclusion; that the position he characterises as 'linguistic analysis' is contradicted by the way that language

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[24] *Method*, 239-40.
[25] *Method*, 240.
[26] Joseph Fitzpatrick, *Philosophical Encounters: Lonergan and the Analytical Tradition* (University of Toronto Press, 2005), 145.
[27] *Insight*, 240-241.

actually operates. It is a counterposition, and once it has been exposed as such the space is reopened for language to describe the world – metaphysics – and to speak of God – theology.

It is not surprising to find Lonergan criticising Wittgenstein and his followers on these grounds. Since his *Verbum* articles of the 1940s, Lonergan's theological project had been to retrieve the authentic thought of Thomas Aquinas and transpose it to the modern world. His fundamental methodological choice was to do so by the method of psychological introspection that he detected in Aristotle, Augustine and Aquinas.[28] Lonergan believes that by this method, one can arrive at an appropriation of one's own cognitive process. Since cognition is a subset of metaphysics, the subject who has achieved such an appropriation is then on the way to a critical realist metaphysics within which the existence of God can also be discerned.[29]

Fergus Kerr, a theologian strongly influenced by Wittgenstein and a sharp critic of Lonergan's method, rejects this whole approach:

> It is neither objective metaphysical realities… nor subjective states of consciousness… but *Lebensformen* that are 'the given.' What is given is the human world: neither meanings in the head, accessible by introspection, nor essences in the objects around us, yielding to analysis, but the order that human beings establish by their being together.[30]

Though he criticises the idea that 'objective metaphysical realities' are 'the given,' Kerr does not uncritically adopt a non-realist or anti-realist position. Indeed, he criticises non-realists in theology such as Don Cupitt, who regard religious language as *purely* symbolic, i.e. non-cognitive and conventional.[31] Kerr finds Wittgenstein's later writing to be '…always so dialectical that he cannot be read as plumping for either realism or anti-realism'[32] and notes that Wittgenstein does not deny 'an irreducible given element' in regular human behaviour and thinking.[33] The connotation of the 'given' that Kerr rejects in the passage cited above is the foundationalist assumption that human knowing can have some direct point of contact with the world that is not already mediated by language and shaped by 'the order that human

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[28] *Verbum*, 5-10.

[29] *Insight*, chapter 19.

[30] F Kerr, *Theology after Wittgenstein*, 2nd edition, (SPCK, London, 1997), 69.

[31] F Kerr, 'What's wrong with realism anyway?' in C Crowder, ed., *God and Reality: Essays on Christian Non-realism*, (Mowbray, London/New York, 1997), 128-143, 130. Cf. Don Cupitt, *Taking Leave of God*, (SCM Press, London, 1980.)

[32] Kerr, 'What's wrong with realism?', 130-131.

[33] Kerr, 'What's wrong with realism?', 131.

beings establish by their living together.'[34] What Kerr wants to bring to theology from the thought of Wittgenstein is what he terms 'a more hardly-won realism;'[35] a recognition that the access of the human mind to metaphysical reality is always shaped by language and culture. Such a recognition, of course, profoundly affects the theologian's understanding of the meaning and nature of doctrine, in ways that Kerr brings out in his own theological writings.

There seems a wide gap, then, between Kerr and Lonergan in their starting points and methodological choices. But the two share similar concerns. Kerr rejects the realist claim to know the world from a 'God's eye point of view'[36] which Lonergan would see as one of the errors of intuitionism. Kerr attributes to anti-realists, influenced by Wittgenstein and Heidegger, the belief that we can only know the world 'as it is now' from where we happen to be standing;[37] Lonergan wrote *Insight* in the attempt to establish the validity of such a situated knowledge of the world. Kerr writes:

> Heidegger and Wittgenstein, in quite different ways, struggled to bring about an understanding of ourselves as engaged agents, as embodied and embedded in a culture.[38]

Lonergan begins *Method* with the distinction between the classicist and empirical notions of culture,[39] showing that has recognised and intends to engage with the questions that such an understanding poses for theology.

Kerr sets out his specific 'Objections to Lonergan's Method' in an article of that title published in 1975 in the journal *New Blackfriars*.[40] The article is a review of a volume[41] arising from a conference on *Method* held at St Patrick's College, Maynooth in 1973, in which theologians as eminent as David Ford, Wolfhart Pannenberg, T F Torrance and Nicholas Lash make harsh criticisms of the book and of Lonergan's whole approach to theological method. For Kerr, the 'reconstruction of Catholic theology' to meet the demands of a world church

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[34] Kerr, *Theology After Wittgenstein*, 69.
[35] Kerr, 'What's wrong with realism?', 131.
[36] Kerr, 'What's wrong with realism?', 134.
[37] Kerr, 'What's wrong with realism?', 137-138
[38] Kerr, 'What's wrong with realism?', 139.
[39] *Method*, 3.
[40] F Kerr, 'Objections to Lonergan's Method,' *New Blackfriars*, Vol. 56, No. 662 (July 1975) 305-316.
[41] *Looking at Lonergan's Method*, ed. Patrick Corcoran SM (The Talbot Press, Dublin, 1975.)

after Vatican II is an urgent task.[42] He credits Lonergan with helping to dislodge what he characterises as:

> …that highly deductivist and proposition-cased neo-Scholasticism that persisted, incredibly, until Vatican II.[43]

But he agrees with many of the criticisms of *Method* made by the contributors to the book. From a Wittgensteinian perspective, Kerr is suspicious of Lonergan's focus on the mental operations of the knowing subject.[44] In a criticism reminiscent of Lindbeck, Kerr agrees with Torrance that:

> Lonergan's theological method thus becomes indistinguishable from (what seems to Torrance) Bultmann's conception of theology as reflection on one's own experience of faith, or any conception of theology as reflection on the timeless essential truths of faith.[45]

Kerr is sympathetic, too, to Lash's criticism that:

> …Lonergan fails to take seriously the problems generated by discontinuity between different ways of life… his insistence on the fundamentally unrevisable and invariant cognitional structure of the human subject irrespective of epoch, class or culture, would be inclined to push him in that that direction.[46]

For Kerr, this volume of critical essays leaves Lonergan's method looking 'ramshackle.'[47] Lonergan, Kerr judges, has taken some important steps forward from neoscholasticism but has failed to take sufficient account of contemporary currents in philosophy (especially Wittgenstein) and hermeneutics (especially authors influenced by Heidegger.)

William Mathews replied with a trenchant defence of his fellow Jesuit,[48] believing that Kerr and the contributors to the original book had misunderstood Lonergan's theory of mind and knowledge. Mathews affirms the value of Lonergan's transcendental method as a tool for addressing the very issues with which Kerr is concerned.[49] Mathews concludes:

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[42] Kerr, 'Objections to Lonergan's Method,' 305-306.
[43] Kerr, 'Objections to Lonergan's Method,' 306.
[44] Kerr, 'Objections to Lonergan's Method,' 307-308.
[45] Kerr, 'Objections to Lonergan's Method,' 310.
[46] Kerr, 'Objections to Lonergan's Method,' 312.
[47] Kerr, 'Objections to Lonergan's Method,' 318.
[48] William Mathews, SJ, 'Lonergan's Awake: A Reply to Fergus Kerr.' *New Blackfriars*, Vol. 57, No. 668 (January 1976), 11-21. Also Willam Mathews, 'Lonergan: A Final Word.' *New Blackfriars*, Vol. 58, No. 687 (August 1977), 357-367.
[49] Mathews, 'Reply,' 14-18.

> *Method in Theology* has a profound contribution to make to theology on two fronts. It will help promote the inner coherence and unity of the theological enterprise while at the same time restoring its cultural role in relation to the religious community.[50]

In a further article, Kerr sets out more explicitly his own disagreements with Lonergan. He expresses his view that theology must break free from an 'intellectual tradition' that privileges the European philosophical perspective.[51] Kerr's criticism of such a tradition is comprehensive:

> (1) it propagates a conception of language which plays down imaginative and creative uses; (2) it privileges a notion of rationality which is finally elitist and ethnocentric; (3) it seeks determinedly to promote unity and homogeneity at the expense of difference and plurality; and (4) it remains inveterately idealist and metaphysical.[52]

Kerr acknowledges that Lonergan has recognised the need for 'The Dehellenisation of Dogma,'[53] and for a move from a classicist to an empirical notion of culture,[54] but adds:

> For myself I cannot see that, in *Method*, he has been able to think his way out of and beyond the closure (which he recognises) of that tradition of thinking.[55]

He believes that Lonergan's method has been shown to be inadequate to the task. Is Kerr's critique justified and does it support his negative assessment of the value of Lonergan's method? I will address his four major concerns in turn.

9.2.1 Literary language and symbol

Kerr charges Lonergan with an inadequate notion of symbol[56] and with lacking 'sensitivity to the full range and power of language.'[57] He sees these as serious deficiencies in the understanding of language and meaning that is an essential element of Lonergan's theological method. The implication is that Lonergan remains stuck in the precise and rigorous

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[50] Mathews, 'Reply,' 21.
[51] Fergus Kerr, 'Beyond Lonergan's Method: A Response to William Mathews.' *New Blackfriars*, Vol. 57, No. 669 (February 1976), 59-71,
[52] Kerr, 'Beyond Lonergan's Method,' 64-65.
[53] Kerr, 'Beyond Lonergan's Method,' 66; cf. Lonergan, 'The Dehellenization of Dogma,' *A Second Collection*, 11-30.
[54] *Method*, 3.
[55] Kerr, 'Beyond Lonergan's Method,' 66.
[56] Kerr, 'Beyond Lonergan's Method', 60.
[57] Kerr, 'Beyond Lonergan's Method', 61.

but perhaps lifeless language of his neoscholastic formation – or worse, in 'the language of middle-management.'[58]

It is true that, as Kerr points out, Lonergan says in *Method* that '…literary language tends to float somewhere in between logic and symbol'[59] – a formulation that could sound dismissive. But he has already said that literary language '…would have the listener or hearer not only understand but also feel.'[60] He has written elsewhere of the power of art:

> Art, whether by an illusion or a fiction, or a contrivance, *presents* the beauty, the splendor, the glory, the majesty, the 'plus' that is in things… It draws attention to the fact that the splendor of the world is a cipher, a revelation, an unveiling, the presence of one who is not seen, touched, grasped, put in a genus, distinguished by a difference, yet is *present*.[61]

And in *Method*:

> As the proper expression of the elemental meaning is the work of art itself, so too the proper apprehension and appreciation of the work of art is not any conceptual clarification or judicial weighing of conceptualized evidence. The work of art is an invitation to participate, to try it, to see for oneself.[62]

Also in *Topics in Education*, Lonergan writes: 'Poetry, then, can be conceived as the living memory of the group,'[63] recalling his account in *Method* of 'incarnate meaning'[64] and his view of a community as constituted by 'common meaning.'[65]

The symbol is defined in *Method* as:

> … an image of a real or imaginary object that evokes a feeling or is evoked by a feeling.[66]

And:

> The symbol, then, has the power of recognizing and expressing what logical discourse abhors: the existence of internal tensions, incompatibilities, conflicts, struggles, destructions.[67]

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[58] Kerr, 'Beyond Lonergan's Method', 60, quoting Coulson, *Looking at Lonergan's Method*, 189.
[59] *Method*, 70, cited by Kerr, 'Beyond Lonergan's Method', 60.
[60] *Method*, 70.
[61] Lonergan, *Topics in Education*, vol 10 in the *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, (University of Toronto Press, 1993), chapter 9, 'Art,' 222 (italics in original.)
[62] *Method*, 62.
[63] Lonergan, *Topics in Education*, 229.
[64] *Method*, 70-71.
[65] *Method*, 76-77.
[66] *Method*, 62.
[67] *Method*, 64.

He draws on the findings of psychology to support his contention that symbols express an 'elemental meaning.'[68]

On poetry:

> With Giambattista Vico, then, we hold for the priority of poetry. Literal meaning literally expressed is a later ideal…[69]

Kerr argues:

> One prerequisite of any future theologising, surely, is a real sense of how meaning is produced in creative literature and embodied there into a complex texture of insight and understanding that illuminates the work of reading the Scriptures in addition to amplifying one's sense of the diversified power of language.[70]

It is implied that such a sense is lacking in *Method*. The above quotations, I suggest, show that a keen sense of the power of literary language, poetry and other forms of art is not absent from Lonergan's thought and that he is aware of the power of symbol. However, Kerr is perhaps correct to judge that the implications for theology are not fully developed in *Method*. In *Insight*, Lonergan takes science and mathematics as the paradigm of knowledge and seems to aspire to the same rigour and exactitude for theology. In his Trinitarian work he describes dogmas as clear and precise statements extracted from 'the other riches contained in the word of God'[71] such as poetry, parable and symbol; but it is the clarity and precision that he seems to value most highly. By the time of writing *Method*, Lonergan has moved on from this quasi-mathematical understanding of the work of the dogmatic theologian. But he has not fully thought through the implications for theology of the power of symbol and poetry to express the meaning that arises from a shared life of faith and constitutes a community. Ricoeur, among others, has argued that the diverse literary forms found in Scripture are not merely vehicles for carrying a philosophical meaning that can be abstracted into dogmatic formulations. Rather, the different discourses are themselves revelatory, an aspect of God's self-communication to humanity.[72] In *Method* Lonergan has only begun to embrace such an understanding.

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[68] *Method*, 65-67.
[69] *Method*, 70.
[70] Kerr, 'Beyond Lonergan's Method', 61.
[71] *TTG: Doctrines*, 41.
[72] Paul Ricoeur, 'Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation,' *The Harvard Theological Review*, Jan-Apr 1977, Vol. 70, No. 1/2, 1-37.

9.2.2 <u>Rationality</u>

Kerr claims that the intellectual tradition inherited by Christian theology 'privileges a notion of rationality which is finally elitist and ethnocentric.'[73] This recalls Rorty's charge that the notion of 'objective truth' which has held sway in the Western philosophical tradition serves as a means for an antidemocratic privileging of the voices of elite castes – priests in medieval Europe, scientists in the modern world – over the voices of those who are less privileged.[74] Lonergan would reply that his method is, at least in principle, universally valid because it is based on the invariant facts of human cognition.[75] While references to 'primitive people,' jarring to contemporary ears, can be found in his writings,[76] he would affirm that anyone from any culture can, by the process of conversion, achieve the objectivity which is the fruit of authentic subjectivity.[77] Snell judges this to be a satisfactory response[78] while Kerr rejects Lonergan's whole approach. But as MacKinnon points out,[79] even a Wittgensteinian understanding of language sees it as a discourse among conscious and intelligent subjects. Such subjects, as human, may be authentic or inauthentic, informed or ignorant. Where the topic of their discourse is theology, a critical assessment of its authenticity, its internal consistency and its fidelity to revelation is required, as Mathews affirms.[80] Such a critical assessment is in itself neither elitist nor ethnocentric – though, of course, an individual theologian could fall into such a trap, a fall which Lonergan would attribute to the absence of conversion. Lonergan's transcendental precepts – Be attentive, Be intelligent, Be reasonable, Be responsible[81] - and his notion of conversion can be accepted as helpful tools for such an assessment while maintaining a critical distance from his Thomist epistemology and metaphysics.

9.2.3 <u>Pluralism</u>

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[73] Kerr, 'Beyond Lonergan's Method,' 65.
[74] See Murray, *RTT*, 53.
[75] *Method*, 21-22: *Insight*, Chapter 11.
[76] For example, *TTG: Doctrines*, 39.
[77] *Method*, 248 and 273.
[78] Snell, *Through a Glass*, 209-213.
[79] MacKinnon, 'Linguistic Analysis,' 39.
[80] Mathews, 'Reply,' 21.
[81] *Method*, 22-23.

Kerr places Lonergan within an inherited tradition which 'seeks determinedly to promote unity and homogeneity at the expense of difference and plurality.'[82] It is hard to deny the presence of this impulse in Lonergan's early works, for example in his treatment of Trinitarian dogma. As I have argued above,[83] in *Method* he has at least begun to recognise a legitimate diversity of understanding and of expression of the truths of faith at both the individual and cultural levels.[84] He writes:

> The meaning of [defined dogmas] lies beyond the vicissitudes of human historical process. But the contexts within which such meaning is grasped, and so the manner in which such meaning is expressed, vary both with cultural differences and with the measure in which human consciousness is differentiated.[85]

The earlier Lonergan would have seen pluralism only in terms of a greater or lesser differentiation of consciousness. Now he can recognise difference in expression resulting from cultural differences, while still holding to the ideal of an absolute 'meaning' that transcends historical process. It is interesting to wonder where a further development of this aspect of Lonergan's thought, including a fully elaborated theology of revelation, would have led. I have described above the project of Neil Ormerod to develop such a theology of revelation consistent with Lonergan's thought.[86] This is another point on which Kerr may be justified in judging that Lonergan has gone some way, but not yet far enough to meet the challenges of contemporary theology.

9.2.4 Metaphysics

The fourth criticism to be considered here is that Lonergan's method stands within an intellectual tradition that 'remains inveterately idealistic and metaphysical.'[87] The charge of idealism can surely be summarily dismissed. Lonergan spends 800 pages of *Insight* arguing *against* Kantian idealism and in favour of an updated version of Thomist critical realism.

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[82] Kerr, 'Beyond Lonergan's Method,' 65.
[83] Section 7.5.5.
[84] 'Pluralism and the Unity of Faith;' *Method*, 303-307.
[85] *Method*, 304.
[86] Section 7.6.
[87] Kerr, 'Beyond Lonergan's Method,' 65.

However, he does indeed build a Thomist metaphysics on the foundation of the cognitional theory developed in *Insight*. He does see doctrinal statements as expressing 'first-order affirmations about the inner being of God or Jesus Christ.'[88] Is Kerr correct to judge that these commitments tie him inescapably into an 'intellectual tradition' that is now exhausted and sterile?

For Kerr, the 'picture of the self as an autonomous and rational consciousness'[89] and the 'indifference to community and the antipathy to the body which constitute the metaphysical way of thinking that has interacted with Christian theology from the start'[90] are a problem that theology needs to overcome. He urges contemporary theologians to examine or at least acknowledge their 'inherited metaphysical commitments.'[91] He targets:

> …the picture of the self-conscious and self-reliant, self-transparent and all-responsible individual which Descartes and Kant between them imposed upon modern philosophy [which] may easily be identified, in various guises, in the work of many modern theologians.[92]

Kerr quotes Karl Rahner as an example. Central to Rahner's theology is the subject's transcendental experience of dependence on God. But, Kerr asks:

> What if the problem lies with the very idea of the Rahnerian subject? What if the transcendental experience that Rahner wants for the self only obscures and excludes the membership of a community and tradition that gives rise to subjectivity in the first place?[93]

Kerr believes that the most illuminating critique of the Cartesian 'myth of the worldless ego' is found in the later writings of Wittgenstein.[94] He sees in Wittgenstein's thought a way to overcome 'the myth of the soul'[95] – the metaphysical dualism that devalues the flesh and regards the body as a prison for the immaterial soul. This understanding of the soul as an immaterial 'Cartesian self,' Kerr believes, is pervasive in modern Catholic theology.[96] It is not however the view of Aquinas, for whom the *ego* 'is the human being whole

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[88] Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine,* 80.
[89] Kerr, *Theology after Wittgenstein*, vii.
[90] Kerr, *Theology after Wittgenstein*, vii.
[91] Kerr, *Theology after Wittgenstein*, 3.
[92] Kerr, *Theology after Wittgenstein*, 5.
[93] Kerr, *Theology after Wittgenstein*, 7-8; cf. Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, vol. IX, 38.
[94] Kerr, *Theology after Wittgenstein*, 23.
[95] Kerr, *Theology after Wittgenstein*, 168-169.
[96] Kerr, *Theology after Wittgenstein*, 177-179.

and alive.'[97] Nor, as I have argued above,[98] is it a view that shapes Lonergan's method. He is not offering a Cartesian foundationalist epistemology in which the ego's certainty of its own existence provides a rock on which the edifice of knowledge can be constructed. He explicitly rejects the intuitionist theory of knowledge which, it might also be said, 'Descartes and Kant between them imposed upon modern philosophy'[99] and the mind/body dualism that such a theory entails. The aim of his epistemological reflection is rather to uphold and update the Thomist world view that he regards as a 'genuine achievement of the human spirit.'[100] It is a theistic world view in which the guarantee of valid knowledge is not the Cartesian *cogito* but rather the intelligibility established in the world by its Creator.

If, then, Kerr's concern is the 'New Cartesianism'[101] that he discerns in contemporary theology then Lonergan should be vindicated; he is a Thomist and not a Cartesian. However, Kerr, following Wittgenstein, has a broader concern about Lonergan's method. He believes that both mental processes and metaphysics are inaccessible to the knowledge of language-using human intelligence, save in ways that are already language- and culture-shaped. Wittgensteinian forms of life are 'the given.'[102] This is a fundamental methodological difference between the two theologians that seems unbridgeable. But Kerr's own position is not without its problems. As noted above, Wittgenstein's theory seems unable to account for development in language – what Lonergan calls 'original meaningfulness.' One might ask also how revelation is accommodated within the Wittgensteinian picture; a form of communication that is not only profoundly original and meaningful, but which has the power to constitute a new community rather than arising within an existing one.

Kerr praises A N Williams' reading of Aquinas:

> Thomas's *Summa Theologiae* has often been construed as logic-chopping system-building, philosophy-dominated apologetics, or metaphysical speculation – in contrast with all such views Anna Williams insists that the project is wholly shaped by Thomas's relentless portrayal of God as the God who is intent on union with humanity.[103]

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[97] Kerr, *Theology after Wittgenstein*, 179.
[98] Section 8.2.7.
[99] Kerr, *Theology after Wittgenstein*, 5.
[100] *Method*, 325.
[101] Kerr, *Theology after Wittgenstein*, 185-186.
[102] Kerr, *Theology after Wittgenstein*, 69.
[103] Kerr, *After Aquinas*, 157; cf. A N Williams, *The Ground of Union: Deification in Aquinas and Palamas* (Oxford University Press, 1999.)

And:

> …the *Summa Theologiae* is… not foundationalist apologetics but a set of practices
> for receiving the gift of beatitude.[104]

I argue that Lonergan should be read as a true Thomist and therefore his method should not be seen as a formula for 'metaphysical speculation' or 'foundationalist apologetics.' Rather, the theocentric orientation that Williams and Kerr discern in Aquinas is also the key to understanding the thought of Lonergan. While Kerr and Lonergan belong to different theological generations and adopt different methodological options, to the extent that each is an authentic disciple of St Thomas, the distance between them may be less than at first appears, at least when the full trajectory of Lonergan's thought is taken into account.

9.3 Lonergan and Nicholas Lash: method and meaning

As a seminarian at Oscott College, the young Nicholas Lash read *Insight* on its publication as a corrective to the manuals that were the staple of Catholic theological education at the time; he even smuggled Lonergan himself into the institution to speak to the students, against the wishes of the elderly Rector.[105] The influence of Lonergan's thought on Lash's writing is clear and he is frequently in dialogue with the Canadian theologian, explicitly or implicitly. He shares with Lonergan an admiration for Newman. But like Fergus Kerr, Lash is strongly influenced by Wittgenstein and makes some penetrating criticisms of Lonergan's theological method in this light.

Lash's contribution to the 1975 volume *Looking at Lonergan's Method* is entitled 'Method and Cultural Discontinuity.'[106] This in itself is telling, since the question of continuity and discontinuity is an overriding concern in Lash's theology; in what sense is it possible to speak truthfully about God in historical and cultural contexts that are irreducibly diverse? Lash's concern with pluralism underlies the criticisms that he makes of Lonergan's method in

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[104] Kerr, *After Aquinas*, 161.
[105] The story was recounted by the journalist John Cornwell after Lash's death: *The Tablet*, 25 July 2020, 16.
[106] Lash, 'Method and Cultural Discontinuity,' *Looking at Lonergan's Method*, 127-143.

his chapter. I will address specifically Lash's comments of 1975, before looking at how these and related themes are developed in his later work, often in critical dialogue with Lonergan.

Lash charges Lonergan with failing to

> …come to grips with the problem of *discontinuity* between different 'ways of life'…
> and thus between the 'sets of meanings and values that inform' them.[107]

This matters for Lash because he believes that issues of method, interpretation and human understanding are at 'the heart of the matter' not only in theology but in many academic disciplines.[108]

Lash sees four problems with *Method* in relation to the question of cultural discontinuity: (1) Lonergan's claim that theological method yields 'cumulative and progressive' results; (2) his appeal to the transcultural invariance of transcendental method; (3) his treatment of community; and (4) the place in his method of the functional specialty 'communications.'[109] I will address each of these concerns in turn.

9.3.1 Cumulative and progressive results

Lonergan defines a method as 'a normative pattern of recurrent and related operations yielding cumulative and progressive results.'[110] While Lash recognises that Lonergan 'does not conceive of theological method on the analogy of method in the natural sciences,'[111] nevertheless he discerns in Lonergan's formulation an 'evolutionary' understanding of theological history, whereby theology advances towards complete understanding. Lash finds such an understanding problematic:

> …it is possible to admit the occurrence of 'genuine achievements' in theology
> without conceiving of theology as 'advancing', during the course of its history,
> towards some 'ideal goal' of total explanation.[112]

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[107] 'Method and Cultural Discontinuity,' 127 (emphasis in original), quoting *Method*, 3.
[108] 'Method and Cultural Discontinuity,' 127-128.
[109] 'Method and Cultural Discontinuity,' 128.
[110] *Method*, 5, cited by Lash, 'Method and Cultural Discontinuity,' 128.
[111] 'Method and Cultural Discontinuity,' 130.
[112] 'Method and Cultural Discontinuity,' 131.

Lash asks by what criteria the genuine achievements of the past could be recognised in order to incorporate them into contemporary thought,[113] and criticises the inadequacy of the implied concept of revelation in *Method*.[114]

I believe that Lash draws too broad a conclusion from Lonergan's use of the words 'cumulative and progressive' in this context. Lonergan does indeed turn to the work of the natural scientist to illustrate his notion of method.[115] He speaks in *Insight* of his 'appropriation of the modes of scientific thought.'[116] But as Lash acknowledges,[117] this does not mean that Lonergan conceives of theological method as simply analogous to method in natural science. The results yielded by following the transcendental method are 'cumulative and progressive' in relation to the *particular issue* on which the researcher is working. In the classical model of scientific method the natural scientist observes, hypothesises and tests the hypothesis by experiment. Experimental results either support the hypothesis or necessitate its modification, leading to another iteration of the process.[118] Lonergan describes theology in the following terms:

> [Theology] has become an empirical science in the sense that scripture and tradition now supply, not premises, but data. The data have to be viewed in their historical perspective. They have to be interpreted in the light of contemporary techniques and procedures… An empirical science does not demonstrate. It accumulates information, develops understanding, masters ever more of its materials, but it does not preclude the uncovering of further relevant data, the emergence of new insights, the attainment of a more comprehensive view.[119]

The results of following Lonergan's method are 'cumulative and progressive' in the sense that, by following the process and observing the transcendental precepts – Be attentive, Be intelligent, Be reasonable, Be responsible – the theologian will grow in his/her own grasp of the problem, building on the knowledge that he/she has already achieved and ultimately contributing to an advance in theological understanding. The method will yield results, not if it is followed blindly, but only if the one following it has appropriated his/her

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[113] 'Method and Cultural Discontinuity,' 130.
[114] 'Method and Cultural Discontinuity,' 131.
[115] *Method*, 9.
[116] *Insight*, 16.
[117] 'Method and Cultural Discontinuity,' 130.
[118] This describes what Thomas Kuhn identifies as 'normal science;' Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, chapters 2-5. When this process breaks down because of new data that undermine the prevailing paradigm, there follows what Kuhn terms a 'paradigm shift;' *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, chapter 7.
[119] Lonergan, 'Theology in its new context,' *Second Collection*, 51-52.

own cognitional process – 'usually, only through a struggle with some such book as *Insight*.'[120] Lonergan is prescribing the way that a theologian – or, in principle, a researcher in any subject – should work with rigour and integrity. The '"ideal goal" of total explanation' is achievable only by divine knowledge.[121]

It is true that, in relation to the historicity of dogmas, Lonergan, at least in his earlier works, sees a development over time towards the fuller understanding of revealed truth.[122] However, I would suggest that in doing so, he is simply expressing an orthodox Catholic understanding of the nature of dogma. In *TTG: Doctrines* he traces in detail the development of Trinitarian and Christological doctrine that came to be crystallised in the decree of the Council of Nicea.[123] He offers a highly nuanced account of the encounter between Christian revelation and Greek culture that led to the formulation of dogmas in the early church[124] and his understanding of the interaction between doctrine and its context develops in the course of his work.[125] His reading of Vatican I leads him to affirm that 'it seems better to speak of the permanence of the meaning of dogmas rather than of its immutability.'[126]

On the other hand, Lash's observation that the 'high level of formal and heuristic abstraction' at which the argument of *Method* is conducted[127] makes it difficult to determine how Lonergan's methodological prescriptions can be executed, or what would be the criteria for assessing their successful execution, has some force. So does his criticism of Lonergan's insufficient treatment of the theology of revelation. Questions of 'revelation and inspiration, scripture and tradition, development and authority, schisms and heresies' are dismissed as 'not methodological but theological' and left to the theologians.[128] I have described above[129] how Neil Ormerod has applied Lonergan's method to questions of revelation and ecclesiology. Ormerod claims that a fruitful understanding of revelation as the entry of divine

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[120] *Method*, 11, note 4.
[121] *Method*, 107.
[122] 'The Historicity of Dogmas,' *Method*, 301-303.
[123] *TTG: Doctrines*, 47-49.
[124] See 'The Dehellenization of Dogma,' *Second Collection*, 11-30. Lonergan concludes the essay by expressing his hope for '…the removal from theology of the many limitations of Hellenism,' 30.
[125] '…dogmas are statements. Statements have meaning only within their contexts. Contexts are ongoing…' *Method*, 302.
[126] *Method*, 300.
[127] 'Method and Cultural Discontinuity,' 130.
[128] *Method*, 115.
[129] Section 7.6.

meaning into human history can be traced in *Method* and in other later writings of Lonergan. Lash would nevertheless point out that even divine meaning can only be understood within human culture and that such understanding is inevitably contextual. The question of pluralism in the human understanding and appropriation of divine meaning remains open.

9.3.2 The transcultural invariance of transcendental method

In Lonergan's account of method, the functional specialty of systematics 'is concerned with promoting an understanding of the realities affirmed in... doctrines.'[130] Systematics seeks connection and coherence among the truths of faith expressed in doctrines. Under this heading, Lonergan identifies four factors which make for continuity: the normative structure of our conscious and intentional acts; the free gift of God's love; the permanence of dogma; and genuine achievements of the past contained within the church's tradition.[131] Lash identifies the first two as the most important for Lonergan's method.

> The rock [on which one can build] is the subject in his conscious, unobjectified
> attentiveness, intelligence, reasonableness, responsibility.[132]

As Lash recognises, this insistence on the fundamentally invariant cognitional structure of the human subject is the basis for all of our attempts to understand one another. There can be no understanding save on the basis of a shared human nature and subjectivity. 'As Wittgenstein said, if a lion spoke, we should not understand him.'[133] Lonergan's emphasis on the gift of God's love, as a creative and redemptive presence bringing about the conversion which is central to his understanding of theological method, is likened by Lash to Newman's understanding of this question.[134] Lash's criticism, again, centres on the 'individualism and formality'[135] of Lonergan's method. However, his underlying concern may be that the method is, in substance if not in name, a foundationalist one; that Lonergan's reference to the conscious, attentive, intelligent and reasonable subject as 'the rock on which one can build' may betray an implicitly foundationalist understanding. Lash has written elsewhere:

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[130] *Method*, 310.

[131] *Method*, 342-325.

[132] *Method*, 22, cited by Lash, 'Method and Cultural Discontinuity.' 135.

[133] 'Method and Cultural Discontinuity,' 135. Cf. Nicholes Lash, 'Understanding the Stranger,' in *Theology on Dover Beach* (Darton Longman & Todd, London, 1979), 70.

[134] 'Method and Cultural Discontinuity,' 133.

[135] 'Method and Cultural Discontinuity,' 136.

263

Scholars in many disciplines have become increasingly conscious [since the mid-20th century] of the irreducible *pluralism* of human languages, thought-forms, and 'ways of seeing the world'. The 'world' in which each group, each individual lives, is the world as seen from a particular point of view. Increasing sensitivity to the fact of contemporary pluralism has made us newly aware that pluralism is no new phenomenon.[136]

The phenomenon of pluralism is a central concern of Lash's thought. This accounts for his unease at Lonergan's attempt to, as it were, 'solve the problem' of pluralism by reference to his account of the conscious and intentional operations of the knowing subject. Is Lonergan relying on this understanding of the subject as a 'foundation' for knowledge which is incorrigible and transculturally valid? Though Lonergan's language has a foundationalist sound, I have argued that it does not have to be understood in this way. He writes in *Method* that 'Genuine objectivity is the fruit of authentic subjectivity'[137] and the guarantee of authentic subjectivity is the conversion which is brought about by God-given grace. While, in *Insight*, he elaborates his theory of a common pattern to human reasoning and cognition, he does not understand it in foundationalist terms as a guarantee of incorrigible knowledge. Rather, he is seeking to transpose Thomist cognitional theory into contemporary terms; and I have argued above that Aquinas should not be understood as a classical foundationalist.[138] What Lonergan is trying to build on the 'rock' of the reasonable subject is not an edifice of indubitable knowledge but a theocentric world view within which human cognition yields reliable results because it is a process that occurs within a divinely ordered world.

9.3.3 Meaning and community

For Lonergan, meaning is constitutive of community.[139] To understand what has been said in another context, one has to 'set aside one's own initial interests and concerns, to share those of the author, to reconstruct the context of his thought and speech.'[140] Once again, Lonergan is confident that the scholar can achieve such understanding by authentically following the transcendental method. Once again, Lash is unpersuaded that Lonergan has made sufficient allowance for the reality of 'the discontinuities of meaning between

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[136] Nicholas Lash, *Change in Focus: A study of doctrinal change and continuity*. (Sheed and Ward, London, 1973), 133 (emphasis in original.)
[137] *Method*, 273; cf. *Method*, 248.
[138] *Insight*, 431-433; cf. section 1.4.2 above.
[139] *Method*, 76.
[140] *Method*, 154.

experientially heterogeneous contexts.'[141] He suggests that the problems associated with such a transposition do not receive the close attention that they require in *Method* because Lonergan sees the task of 'working out the suitable transposition from one culture to another'[142] as included within his theological method. That is, the process of doing theological work in accordance with Lonergan's method is itself a process of translation. It requires the theologian to undergo an appropriate differentiation of consciousness and to move between:

> …that world of meaning whose expressions constitute, in any given situation, the data for mediated theology, and that world of meaning in which the results are to be communicated…[143]

Pope Benedict XVI has said:

> …the critically purified Greek heritage forms an integral part of Christian faith…[144]

Such a view reflects the classicist view where theological training consisted in forming the individual in a normative culture whose philosophy and language were shaped by the Graeco-Roman heritage. He or she (but usually he) would then have the task of communicating theological knowledge in the academic or pastoral setting. Lonergan himself spent many years as an educator working within this paradigm and he describes it, tongue in cheek, in *Method*.[145] However, as he recognises:

> Currently in the church there is quietly disappearing the old classicist insistence on worldwide uniformity, and there is emerging a pluralism of manners in which Christian meaning and Christian values are communicated.[146]

There clearly do exist 'discontinuities of meaning between experientially heterogeneous contexts'[147] and Lonergan is surely correct to think that it is part of the theologian's task to bridge such discontinuities by translating into theological terms the data which are drawn from Scripture and from tradition, understood in the Vatican II sense of that term which encompasses the whole life of the church. We might suspect, as Lash seems to, that Lonergan sees the issue of translation arising only in relation to the 'communication' of

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[141] 'Method and Cultural Discontinuity,' 138.
[142] *Method*, 143-144, cited by Lash, 'Method and Cultural Discontinuity,' 138-139.
[143] 'Method and Cultural Discontinuity,' 139.
[144] Pope Benedict XVI, Regensburg Address, 12th September 2006. Available at https://familyofsites.bishopsconference.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/2019/07/BXVI-2006-Regensburg-address.pdf [Accessed 23/09/24]
[145] *Method*, 303.
[146] *Method*, 304-305.
[147] 'Method and Cultural Discontinuity,' 138.

the results of theological reflection and that, *de facto*, he still envisages a single normative language and conceptual structure for the work of the trained theologian. Alternatively, drawing on Lonergan's characterisation of community as constituted by meaning, we might suggest that theologians form a community within the church, constituted as such by their shared world of meaning. Such a community can of course lose its bearings and become detached from the lived reality of the church, or can fail to recognise the significance of cultural differences between different areas of the church's life. But Lonergan would reply that the safeguard against such failures is intellectual conversion, following the transcendental precepts and applying correctly the canons of theological method; in a word, doing theology well.

9.3.4 The functional specialty 'Communications'

Communications is the eighth and final functional specialty in Lonergan's method.[148] Lash's concern here is that, as well as referring to the relationship between theology and other human sciences, the term as used by Lonergan also refers to 'the relationships between academic theologians and the rest of the believing community.'[149] For him, this indicates that Lonergan sees the whole task of theology taking place in isolation from the life of the church as a whole. Only once the theological work of the first seven functional specialties has been completed, in a language which is 'transculturally invariant,'[150] and the conclusions have been reached, does the question of pluralism arise – a 'pluralism of communications rather than of doctrines.'[151] Although Lash does not express his concern in this way, we might think once again of the natural scientist, emerging from the laboratory to explain his/her esoteric findings to a scientifically naïve public. If this is a fair interpretation of Lonergan's thought on the theological specialty of communications, then Lash is right to speak of 'ecclesiological weakness or, at least, ambiguity'[152] in this final chapter of *Method*.

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[148] 'Communications,' *Method* chapter 14, 327-339.
[149] 'Method and Cultural Discontinuity,' 139-140.
[150] 'Method and Cultural Discontinuity,' 140.
[151] *Method*, 259, cited by Lash, 'Method and Cultural Discontinuity,' 141.
[152] 'Method and Cultural Discontinuity,' 142.

Here, the 2014 document of the International Theological Commission on the 'Sensus Fidei in the Life of the Church' is relevant.[153] Quoting Vatican II, the ITC recalls that the church's tradition encompasses 'all that she is and believes.'[154] Therefore it is part of the task of the theologian to discern the action of the Holy Spirit in forming the *sensus fidelium*, to investigate the reception of doctrine among the people of God and to '[recognise] the authenticity of the symbolic or mystical language often found in the liturgy and in popular religiosity.'[155] Theologians should also critically discern and clarify the content of the *sensus fidelium*[156] and help to promote a 'strong and sure understanding of the faith'[157] among the faithful. The ITC sees the *sensus fidelium* as a theological source and envisages an ongoing dialogue between theologians and the people of God.

A close reading of the chapter on 'Communications' in *Method* offers at least some responses to Lash's criticisms. As we have already seen, Lonergan sees community as constituted by shared meaning, and this is reflected in his understanding of the church:

> The Christian church is the community that results from the outer communication
> of Christ's message and from the inner gift of God's love.[158]

Those who would communicate the Christian message must understand it (drawing on the first seven functional specialties), live it and practise it.[159] In keeping with the move from a classicist to an empirical notion of culture, preachers and teachers must not preach their own culture along with the Gospel, but must rather enlarge their horizons so as to understand the culture and language of those whom they address in their preaching.[160] The Christian church is 'a process of self-constitution' which is structured (because it is an ordered human society), outgoing (because it exists for humankind and not only for itself) and redemptive (because it exists to realise the kingdom of God.)[161] 'The redemptive process has to be exercised in the church and in human society generally.'[162] Lonergan goes on to consider the need for the

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[153] International Theological Commission, (ITC) Sensus Fidei *in the Life of the Church*, 2014. Available at https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20140610_sensus-fidei_en.html#3._The_sensus_fidei_and_theology [Accessed 23/09/24]
[154] ITC, §82, citing *Dei Verbum* §8.
[155] ITC, §82.
[156] ITC, §83.
[157] ITC, §84.
[158] *Method*, 333.
[159] *Method*, 333.
[160] *Method*, 334.
[161] *Method*, 334-335.
[162] *Method*, 335.

integration of the church's understanding of itself through theology with 'all other relevant branches of human studies.'[163] This is where, he believes, his transcendental method comes into its own, for it 'can be applied to the data of any sphere of human living.'[164] Thus, it seems, the findings of theology will be commensurate with those of other sciences (Lonergan apparently has in mind both human and natural sciences) allowing for dialogue and integration. As I have described above,[165] Ormerod has shown how these methodological indications can form the basis of a systematic ecclesiology that is empirical, critical, normative, dialectical and practical. However, it is probably fair to say that Lonergan envisages the conversation between theology and other sciences occurring at the academic level and that in his model of theological method he has not averted to the dialogue between theologians and the people of God called for by the ITC document cited above. In a 1954 essay, Lonergan wrote:

> So we find that non-Catholic clergymen, often more learned in scripture and the fathers, preach from their pulpits the ideas put forward in the latest stimulating book or article, while the Catholic priest, often burdened with sacerdotal duties and administrative tasks, spontaneously expounds the epistle or gospel of the Sunday in the light of an understanding that is common to the ages.[166]

He does not seem to have considered that the Catholic congregation might also be steeped in 'an understanding that is common to the ages' and so be a theological source.

9.3.5 Lash in dialogue with Lonergan

Lash concludes his chapter in *Looking at Lonergan's Method* by acknowledging his own debt to Lonergan and 'the sheer power and scale of his achievement in *Method in Theology*.'[167] But he raises concerns about problems generated by cultural discontinuity which he believes Lonergan to have marginalised and about the 'ecclesiological and sociopolitical assumptions' that underlie such a marginalisation.[168] Such concerns would be recurring themes in Lash's writings, and I will explore below some areas in which he can be seen to be both influenced by and disagreeing with Lonergan.

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[163] *Method*, 336.
[164] *Method*, 336.
[165] Section 7.7.
[166] Lonergan, 'Theology and Understanding,' *Collection*, 114-132, 125.
[167] 'Method and Cultural Discontinuity,' 142.
[168] 'Method and Cultural Discontinuity,' 142-143.

9.3.5.1 Epistemology and hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is a central concern of Lash's theology. He remarks:

> It is not simply the *plurality* of contexts of meaning of which we have become acutely conscious. More specifically, it is the *discontinuity* between these contexts which has moved to the centre of our hermeneutical concern… we are no longer confident that we can understand the stranger.[169]

Lash gives credit to Lonergan for recognising the 'problem of cultural mutability' and for responding to the replacement of a 'classicist notion of culture' by an 'empirical' one.[170] But Lash criticises Lonergan's approach to the problem:

> …there is a serious weakness in an appeal, such as Lonergan's, to formally invariant cognitional structures. Such an appeal tells us nothing about *how* particular individuals, members of particular societies, go about the business of being attentive, intelligent, reasonable, and responsible.[171]

Elsewhere, Lash dismisses the idea that there could be a single common and essential feature of all varieties of knowledge or an absolute starting point on which epistemology and ontology could be constructed, suggesting that to entertain such a possibility 'demands steadfast refusal to learn anything from Heidegger or Wittgenstein.'[172] However, one thing that Lash himself has learned from Wittgenstein is the principle that the meaning of a word is its use in the language.[173] Therefore he quotes in full and describes as 'splendid' a lengthy passage in which Lonergan characterises community as 'an achievement of common meaning.'[174] Lash applauds Lonergan for going this far, but criticises him for failing to recognise that the experience of different communities might be so different as to render problematic the idea of shared meaning.[175] Lash cites Lonergan again when criticising William James' attempt to find a secure foundation for religious truth:

> ...at some center of our individual privacy rather than in the public realm of common action, common understanding, and shared experience.[176]

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[169] Lash, 'Understanding the Stranger,' *Dover Beach*, 62 (emphasis in original.)
[170] 'Method and Cultural Discontinuity,' 127, citing *Method*, 3.
[171] 'Understanding the Stranger,' 70 (emphasis in original.)
[172] Lash, 'Contemplation, metaphor and real knowledge,' in *The Beginning and End of 'Religion,'* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 114.
[173] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* 43.
[174] Lash, 'Method and Cultural Discontinuity,' 137, citing *Method*, 76-77. Lonergan writes in almost identical terms in 'Dimensions of Meaning,' *Collection*, 234.
[175] 'Method and Cultural Discontinuity,' 137-138.
[176] Lash, *Easter in Ordinary*, 89; cf. Lonergan, '*Existenz* and *Aggiornamento*,' *Collection*, 226-227.

Lonergan, then, is Lash's ally in insisting on the public nature of meaning and of the meaningfulness of language. But, as we have seen above,[177] Lonergan parts company with Wittgenstein, and implicitly with Lash, in maintaining that the original meaningfulness of all language has to be traced back to mental acts and that such acts are a proper subject of study for philosophy.[178] Rather than having learned nothing from Wittgenstein, Lonergan holds ultimately to Aquinas.

The nature of human knowing is another shared concern. Lash writes that 'metaphors of "sight" can be most misleading as descriptions of human knowledge and understanding,'[179] and would agree with Rorty and others who trace such metaphors back to Cartesian dualism. Lash notes that:

> Few people have devoted as much effort as Lonergan did, over fifty years, to demythologizing "the myth that knowing is looking." This may be one of the reasons why he is not widely read.[180]

For Lash, the dominance of 'early modern 'spectatorial' models of human understanding'[181] leaves science as the only valid model of knowledge and the 'mediator of the truth' of theology.[182] Lash wishes to affirm instead that:

> Now, in contrast, it is in irreducible diversity of image and narrative, experiment, labour and technique, and not in any single, overarching description or theory of the world, that such self-understanding as we are capable of finds primary expression.[183]

However, as I have argued above,[184] Lonergan's transposition of Thomist epistemology and metaphysics does not have to be understood in a foundationalist sense as an 'overarching description or theory of the world.' It can be seen, rather, as a theocentric account in which the knowing subject takes his/her place as part of the created order. In such a view, epistemology is inextricably linked with metaphysics and the subject's confidence in his/her knowledge is based on the divinely established order of the world.

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[177] Section 9.2.
[178] *Method*, 238-240.
[179] *Easter in Ordinary*, 93.
[180] *Easter in Ordinary*, 94, note 18, citing Lonergan, 'Cognitional Structure,' *Collection*, 215.
[181] *The Beginning and the End of 'Religion'*, 80.
[182] *The Beginning and the End of 'Religion'*, 80.
[183] *The Beginning and the End of 'Religion'*, 81.
[184] Section 8.2.7.

9.3.5.2   Revelation and the nature of doctrine

In his 1973 work *Change in Focus*, Lash criticises Lonergan for not sufficiently re-examining the concept of revelation.[185] He cites a passage in *Method* in which Lonergan speaks of 'the original message' and 'the divine revelation in which God has spoken to us.'[186] Lash also criticises Lonergan's formulation that 'dogmas… are not just data but expressions of truths… revealed by God.'[187] His concern seems to be that Lonergan's concept of revelation is a formal and schematic one that leads to a linear or, in Thiel's terms, a noetic understanding of doctrinal development[188] - lacking even the richer understanding of tradition and the 'Christian idea' which Lash discerns in Newman.[189] I have suggested above that, while the theology of revelation is not fully developed in Lonergan's thought, there are, as Ormerod has shown, indications of how a fuller account might appear.[190]

9.3.6   Lash and Lonergan: dialogue and divergence

As noted above, Lash began his theological career as a thinker strongly influenced by Lonergan. He agrees wholeheartedly with the rejection of the idea that knowing is 'taking a look' that underpins Lonergan's whole project from *Insight* onwards.[191] He endorses the rejection of the classicist notion of culture in favour of an empirical understanding which is the starting point of *Method*.[192] He recognises the authority of Lonergan's account of the development of Christological and Trinitarian dogmas in the early church and relies on him as an interpreter of Aquinas.[193] He quotes more than once Lonergan's insight that community is

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[185] 'The Recovery of History,' *Change in Focus*, 138-139.
[186] *Method* 276, cited by Lash, 'The Recovery of History,' 139.
[187] *Method* 302, cited by Lash, 'The Recovery of History,' 139.
[188] Link to Method chapter and development chapter.
[189] See section 2.5.3 above.
[190] Section 7.6 above.
[191] *Easter in Ordinary*, 94, note 18, citing Lonergan, 'Cognitional Structure,' *Collection*, 215.
[192] Lonergan, *Method*, 3.
[193] *The Beginning and End of 'Religion'*, 83, note 23.

'an achievement of common meaning,'[194] while perhaps wishing that the Canadian theologian had developed further the implications of the idea for ecclesiology and theology of revelation.

Lash's disagreements with Lonergan can be traced back to his concern with pluralism and diversity. For Lash, human culture is irreducibly plural and as the church exists within human cultures, diversity within the church's life is equally irreducible. Since the meaning of Christian revelation is expressed in human language and cultural forms, pluralism within theology is inescapable. Lash is unconvinced by what he sees as Lonergan's attempt to solve the 'transcultural problem' by his transcendental method, based on what are claimed to be the universal structures of human cognition. Influenced by Wittgenstein, Lash is cautious about metaphysical language. He remains a metaphysical realist who believes that theology can express truths about God, but holds that the most important function of doctrine is to help us to avoid idolatry by telling us what God is *not*.[195] In this sense there are similarities between Lash's understanding of doctrine and that of Lindbeck.[196] Lash, however, like Lonergan and in this respect unlike Lindbeck, remains firmly within the Catholic tradition and its presuppositions about the ecclesial nature of doctrine and theology. He criticises Lindbeck's treatment for its neglect of the 'unity and the forms of... coherence' of doctrines[197] - the concern of Lonergan's functional specialty of systematics.[198]

In his essay 'Ideology, Metaphor and Analogy,'[199] Lash quotes extensively from David Burrell's analysis of the first thirteen Questions in the first part of the *Summa Theologiae*[200] in support of his claim that the concern of Aquinas – as distinct from his later neoscholastic interpreters – was first to show 'what God is not.'[201] This theme recurs elsewhere in Lash's

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[194] *Easter in Ordinary*, 89 and 255, citing Lonergan, '*Existenz* and *Aggiornamento*,' *Collection*, 226-227. See also 'Method and Cultural Discontinuity,' 137, where Lash cites *Method*, 76-77 and 'Dimensions of Meaning,' *Collection*, 234.
[195] 'When did the theologians lose interest in theology?' *The Beginning and the End of 'Religion'*, 134.
[196] Lash declares himself 'unpersuaded by the claim that the functions of church teaching can be *confined*, as Lindbeck proposes, to the regulative.' 'When did the theologians lose interest in theology?' *The Beginning and the End of 'Religion'*, 134 (emphasis in original.)
[197] 'When did the theologians lose interest in theology?' *The Beginning and the End of 'Religion'*, 135.
[198] 'Systematics,' *Method* chapter 13, 310-326.
[199] 'Ideology, Metaphor and Analogy,' *Theology on the Way to Emmaus*, 95-119.
[200] David Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979.)
[201] 'Ideology, Metaphor and Analogy,' 109.

writings.[202] At least to this extent, he shares Lonergan's concern to recover for the contemporary church the genius of St Thomas.

9.4 David Tracy and Lonergan

The American theologian and priest David Tracy was taught by Lonergan at the Gregorian University in Rome, wrote his doctoral dissertation on the development of his teacher's thought on method and was described by Lonergan as an example of Schleiermacher's paradox that 'an intelligent interpreter will know the process of a writer's development better than the writer himself.'[203] In his subsequent work Tracy has travelled a considerable distance in the direction of a pluralistic and hermeneutical approach to theology, while maintaining his positive appreciation of Lonergan's thought. I will trace the development of his thought and the influence of Lonergan as it appears in Tracy's major works.

9.4.1 _The Achievement of Bernard Lonergan_: Tracy's analysis of Lonergan's method

In his first book, Tracy notes that his interest in Lonergan's work is 'more formal than material, more structural than determinate,'[204] because:

> … Lonergan's major contribution to theology, in my judgment, does not lie so much in his often original and important solutions to particular theological questions as it does in the reflective attitude and structural forms which ground all his individual achievements.[205]

Tracy would come to question the whole idea that the job of the theologian was to offer 'solutions to particular theological questions' but would continue to value Lonergan's theological method as an approach to the conversation that he believed to be theology's essential task.

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[202] *Theology on Dover Beach*, 28; *Easter in Ordinary* 227-228; *The Beginning and the End of 'Religion'*, 60, 62, 129-130, 133.
[203] Lonergan, 'Foreword' in Tracy, *Achievement*, xii.
[204] *Achievement*, xiv
[205] *Achievement*, xiv

Writing in 1970, before the publication of *Method* (but with access to Lonergan's manuscript of that book), Tracy identifies a shift from classical to historical consciousness in contemporary Catholic thought,[206] which presents alternatives of classicism or romanticism and necessitates a critical response of the kind offered by Lonergan.[207] Though Tracy refers to '…the foundational… work of Bernard Lonergan on the nature of theology…'[208] he is not interpreting Lonergan as a foundationalist but rather endorsing the 'turn to the subject' which he discerns in Lonergan, as also in other contemporary theologians such as Karl Rahner:

> …it is the reality of no single object or even series of objects (including the subject as object in introspection) which can ground one's horizon or one's critique of horizons. Rather, it is the reality, first, of the subject as subject: the subject, moreover, in all his concreteness… It is, in Lonergan's words, "Descartes' 'cogito' transposed to concrete living."[209]

Tracy agrees with Lonergan that the subject must be present to him/herself in order to engage with theology or with any kind of critical thinking. In *Grace and Freedom* and in *Verbum*, Lonergan traces the method of psychological self-appropriation from Aristotle to Augustine to Aquinas, before making it the basis of knowledge and metaphysics in *Insight* and of theological method in *Method*. Tracy notes that the 'Leonine adage,' *vetera novis augere et perficere*, is:

> … an important hermeneutic principle for recognizing the continuity between Lonergan's earlier work (on the *vetera* of the Catholic theological tradition, more specifically on St Thomas Aquinas) and his later work (on the *nova* of the modern and contemporary periods, i.e. from the critical work of *Insight* on.)[210]

Tracy reads the 'early Lonergan' (up to *Insight*) as seeking a scientific method for theology[211] and finding a basis for such a method in Aquinas' understanding of the subject. He remarks that the then unpublished introductory chapter to the *Gratia Operans* dissertation describes Lonergan's 'own understanding of the proper method for speculative theology.'[212] That chapter is now available in the *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan.*[213] There Lonergan states, in characteristic style:

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[206] *Achievement*, 2; cf. *Method*, 147.
[207] *Achievement*, 3-4.
[208] *Achievement*, 5.
[209] *Achievement*, 12.
[210] *Achievement*, 22 note 1.
[211] *Achievement*, 40-41.
[212] *Achievement*, 41.
[213] *GF*, 155-161.

> A study of St Thomas's thought on *gratia operans* cannot but be historical. A historical study cannot but be inductive. An inductive conclusion, though it may be certain when negative, can for the most part be no more than probable when positive. If that probability is to be, not an opinion, but a scientific conclusion, no other method than the one we have adopted appears available.[214]

Tracy notes the importance of historical consciousness for Lonergan, even at this early stage in his thought. Theological method for Lonergan is historically conscious, inductive and not positivist, seeking to enter into the thinking – in Tracy's terms, the horizon – of earlier eras. The method is founded on the subject's appropriation of his/her own cognitive structures and processes. Tracy approves:

> …a generic scheme based upon the nature of the development of understanding in any human mind will provide the interpreter with an upper blade of interpretative method capable of synthesizing any given set of data which, in their turn, are revealed by the inductive lower-blade procedures of the historico-critical method.[215]

Lonergan's project, in *Grace and Freedom* and *Verbum*, is to retrieve and clarify Aquinas' use of the psychological analogy of the Trinity, based on an understanding of the human intellect derived from psychological introspection.[216] This understanding of the intellect forms the basis of the cognitional theory and metaphysics elaborated in *Insight*, which represents Lonergan's attempt to transpose the thought of Aquinas to address the questions of the 20th century. Tracy, at this point, is in agreement with Lonergan's approach: 'It [the human mind] *is*, for Aquinas, a created participation of the divine mind'[217] and this is why the human mind can serve as an analogy for the Trinity.

I believe that Tracy's understanding of the trajectory of Lonergan's thought becomes even more important in the light of the foundationalist controversy. In *Grace and Freedom* and *Verbum*, Lonergan writes explicitly as an interpreter of St Thomas. But he is no less a Thomist when writing *Insight*, though Aquinas is cited only a dozen or so times in almost 800 pages. Despite the reference to Descartes' 'cogito,'[218] the self-appropriation and intellectual conversion to which Lonergan leads his reader in *Insight* is not a Cartesian foundation for an edifice of certain knowledge. Rather, the process of self-appropriation which occurs through

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[214] *GF*, 156.
[215] *Achievement*, 42.
[216] *Verbum*, 104-105.
[217] *Achievement*, 61 (emphasis in original.)
[218] *Achievement*, 12.

the 'struggle' with *Insight*[219] leads the modern reader to recognise the enduring validity of the Thomist model of *scientia* or knowledge: a model which, in Williams' words, 'has both fragility and provisionality built into it'[220] and which sits within a profoundly theocentric world view.[221] Tracy recognises the importance of Lonergan's clarification of this issue:

> For in Aquinas, as in Aristotle, science is principally understanding. Eliminate that concern with understanding and that high ideal very soon becomes merely that search for the "certitude" of concepts that is so entrenched in most of post-Tridentine Catholic theology. But that theological cult of certitude cannot be attributed to Aquinas himself. It is, rather, a product of the fourteenth century which followed.[222]

Tracy notes the 'disastrous' consequences of the search for certitude which led to 'Denzinger theology.'[223] Furthermore, when 'the age of certitude' ended even for the natural sciences,[224] theology too had to adopt a new understanding of knowledge. In 1970, Tracy was confident that Lonergan's method represented an appropriate response:

> … it is possible in Lonergan's view to… get hold of (i.e. "self-appropriate") not some hypothetically necessary structures of inquiry but rather certain cognitional matters of fact which are invariant in all inquiry…[225]

He would be less bold in his later writings, but in *Achievement* Tracy is prepared to endorse both Lonergan's cognitional theory and his metaphysics.

> …for Lonergan at least, [metaphysics] is to be defined as a heuristically structured anticipation of all that is to be known. To be more exact, it is the integral heuristic structure of proportionate being.[226]

Again, it is important to read such a formulation within Lonergan's Thomist horizon. The claim is not a foundationalist one that a metaphysics can be built on incorrigible knowledge of oneself as subject, but rather that self-appropriation enables the subject to discern the structure of one's own knowing, the intelligibility of the real[227] and the structure

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[219] *Method*, 11, note 4.
[220] A N Williams, 'Is Aquinas a Foundationalist?', 43.
[221] See section 9.2.4 above.
[222] *Achievement*, 80.
[223] *Achievement*, 80.
[224] *Achievement,* 85-86.
[225] *Achievement,* 98.
[226] *Achievement*, 154, citing *Insight*¸416.
[227] *Insight*, 695.

of being as proportionate to human knowing; that is, to discern the structure of a world that is divinely created and depends on God for its continued existence. Tracy describes this as:

> … one of the most interesting results of *Insight*; the possibility of verifying the traditional metaphysical categories (potency, form and act) as the structural contents isomorphic to the cognitional acts, experience, understanding and judgment.[228]

Tracy approves of Lonergan's remedy for the shortcomings of neoscholasticism; to get back to Thomas and to reappropriate his thought in the light of the Kantian turn to the subject and the advances of modern science.

Tracy would come to define the theologian's task as one of interpreting both the texts of the Judaeo-Christian tradition and the contemporary situation and seeking correlations between the two. He remarks in the final chapter of *Achievement* that the notion of hermeneutic employed by Lonergan in *Insight* is a limited one,[229] pointing towards his own later focus on hermeneutics.

9.4.2 *Blessed Rage for Order*: the method of correlation.

Tracy describes *Blessed Rage for Order* as his first constructive book.[230] Its focus is on fundamental theology, which he defines as:

> …philosophical reflection upon the meanings present in common human experience and language, and upon the meanings present in the human fact.[231]

Tracy believes that theology should adopt as a 'heuristic guide' a method of correlation, seeking to correlate the data of the Christian tradition with those of contemporary experience. He identifies as a key argument of his book the need for a theology that is genuinely public, accessible to all intelligent, reasonable, responsible persons.[232] He puts forward as one of his theses:

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[228] *Achievement*, 157.
[229] *Achievement*, 244, note 18.
[230] David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order*, NY, Seabury Press, 1975; published with a new preface (Chicago & London, University of Chicago Press), 1996, xiii. Hereafter *BRO*.
[231] *BRO*, 43; see also note 1, where Tracy says that he is 'attempt[ing] to articulate the criteria and evidence for theological argument' and links his project with Lonergan's notion of a 'foundational' theology.
[232] *BRO*, xiii.

To Determine the Truth-Status of the Results of One's Investigations into the Meaning of Both Common Human Experience and Christian Texts the Theologian Should Employ an Explicitly Transcendental or Metaphysical Mode of Reflection.[233]

By metaphysical reflection, Tracy means:

> …the philosophical validation of the concepts "religion" and "God" as necessarily affirmed or necessarily denied by all our basic beliefs and understanding. We seem to be unavoidably led to the conclusion that the task of fundamental theology can only be successfully resolved when the theologian fully and frankly develops an explicitly metaphysical study of the cognitive claims of religion and theism as an integral moment in his larger task.[234]

Tracy does not appeal to Lonergan in support of this thesis, but it reflects the thought both of his mentor and of Karl Rahner, another important influence on Tracy's early work.[235] Tracy is seeking 'adequate criteria and modes of analysis'[236] for the task of correlation and he believes that metaphysical (or transcendental) reflection is an indispensable part of the task. He goes on to cite Aristotle in support of his contention that the choice for philosophy:

> …is not really between metaphysics or no metaphysics; the only real choice is between a self-conscious and explicit metaphysics or an unconscious yet operative one.[237]

However, Tracy is now also influenced by the hermeneutical thought of Ricoeur and Gadamer and sees the task of interpretation as involving a 'fusion of horizons' between reader and author.[238] *Blessed Rage for Order* can be read as a conversation in which Tracy tries to integrate the insights of these European thinkers into fundamental theology within the framework of theological method which he has adopted from Lonergan. For example, Tracy interprets Lonergan's analysis of the relationship of faith and science[239] as revealing the emergence of 'limit-questions' in scientific enquiry:

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[233] BRO, 52 (italics in original.)
[234] *BRO*, 56.
[235] 'The theologies of Rahner and Lonergan can be interpreted by their neo-transcendental formulation of the traditional Catholic analogical vision.' Tracy, 'The Analogical Imagination in Catholic Theology,' in David Tracy and John B Cobb, Jr, *Talking About God: Doing Theology in the Context of Modern Pluralism* (The Seabury Press, New York, 1983), 23.
[236] *BRO* Chapter 4, 64-90.
[237] *BRO*, 68.
[238] *BRO*, 78.
[239] *BRO*, 95-99.

> Can these answers [reached by scientific research] work if the world is not intelligible? Can the world be intelligible if it does not have an intelligent ground?[240]

The inescapability of these limit-questions, Tracy believes, points to the existence of a religious dimension to scientific enquiry.[241]

Tracy affirms that metaphysical or transcendental analysis is the only mode of analysis that claims to investigate the cognitive claims of the limit concept of 'God.'[242] Therefore he rejects the 'anti-metaphysical tradition' in theology.[243] The following lengthy quote summarises Tracy's thought on this issue, at this point in his development:

> Metaphysics is neither axiomatic nor inductive argumentation. Rather its mode of argument can be more properly described as transcendental in the exact sense that metaphysical argument shows that certain basic beliefs must necessarily be maintained as basic conditions of the possibility of our understanding or existing at all. Such basic beliefs (not "self-evident axioms" or "world-views") can be shown to be basic by demonstrating the self-contradictory character which their denial involves for any intelligent and rational ("reflective") inquirer. [Here Tracy cites Lonergan's essay 'Metaphysics as Horizon.'[244]] Insofar as this mode of reflection and discourse can investigate all basic beliefs, it can (indeed, it alone can) investigate the cognitive claims made in religious language (as itself re-presentative of our basic existential confidence or trust).[245]

This passage can be seen as a re-formulation of the account that Lonergan has put forward in *Insight* and *Method*. The reflective inquirer who has appropriated him/herself as subject must necessarily maintain certain 'basic beliefs' – in Lonergan's terms, positions. The denial of such basic beliefs is revealed by the process of dialectic to be self-contradictory – it is a counterposition. The reflective inquirer is able to investigate critically the cognitive claims of religious language. Tracy adopts Lonergan's view while carefully avoiding the foundationalist claim that the edifice of knowledge can be built on 'self-evident axioms.'

But Tracy parts company with Lonergan on the question of the meaningfulness of God-language. He praises Lonergan, along with Karl Rahner, for offering one of the 'clearest and

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[240] *BRO*, 98; cf. *Insight*, chapter 19.
[241] *BRO*, 99-100.
[242] *BRO*, 148.
[243] *BRO*, 157-163.
[244] 'Metaphysics as Horizon,' *Collection*, 188-204.
[245] *BRO*, 159.

soundest' reformulations of the classical Aristotelian-Thomist metaphysical tradition in the light of the Kantian turn to the subject.[246] However, Tracy declares his own

> …revisionist conviction that classical Christian theism is neither internally coherent nor adequate as a full account of our common experience and of the scriptural understanding of the Christian God.[247]

Common experience and the witness of the Scriptures, Tracy believes, point to a 'dipolar understanding of the Christian God of love;'[248] a God who is both absolute – omnipotent, omniscient, self-sufficient – as required by a classical metaphysical understanding and at the same time 'supremely relative'[249] in the sense of relating intimately and immediately to every created being, as described by the Scriptures. Tracy believes that process thought best captures this dipolar understanding of God. However, he also criticises process thinkers such as Hartshorne for rejecting 'some outdated neo-scholastic interpretation of Aquinas' meaning'[250] and failing to consider contemporary interpretations of St Thomas such as those of Lonergan. A fruitful conversation is possible, Tracy thinks, between process thought and these 'newer forms of Thomism.'[251]

In the final chapter of *BRO*, Tracy expresses the view that:

> …contemporary fundamental theology is best understood as philosophical reflection upon both the meanings disclosed in our common human experience and the meanings disclosed in the primary texts of the Christian tradition.[252]

He concludes the book by considering what light such a revisionist model of fundamental theology might throw upon 'pressing questions of a theology of *praxis*.'[253] The concern for *praxis* echoes Lonergan's fourth transcendental precept, 'Be responsible.'

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[246] *BRO*, 172.
[247] *BRO*, 172.
[248] *BRO*, 191.
[249] *BRO*, 179
[250] *BRO*, 188.
[251] *BRO*, 188.
[252] *BRO*, 237.
[253] *BRO*, 241.

The Lonergan scholar Neil Ormerod responds to Tracy's criticism of Lonergan in an article entitled 'Quarrels with the method of correlation.'[254] Following Robert Doran,[255] Ormerod argues that the task of theology is to understand the 'one real world' in which the Christian tradition exists and which it shapes.[256] He rejects the idea that the tradition and the contemporary situation are as 'disparate' as the method of correlation presupposes.[257] Ormerod asks further where the criteria are to be found for the analysis both of tradition and situation which the method envisages. Unless such criteria can be identified, the conclusions of the method of correlation will be arbitrary and will simply reflect the presuppositions of the theologian employing the method, with equally plausible arguments leading to diametrically opposed conclusions.[258] In what he describes as an exercise in dialectic, Ormerod analyses the difference between the two methods – Tracy's method of correlation and Doran's Lonerganian approach – in terms of their philosophical and cognitional underpinnings. He claims that the method of correlation can be understood as a contemporary variant of Scotist conceptualism – the counterposition against which Lonergan was arguing in *Verbum*.[259] For Ormerod, only the theologian's appropriation of the tradition on the basis of the necessary religious, moral, intellectual and psychic conversion can avoid the arbitrariness that he detects in the method of correlation.[260] The debate is an interesting example of a disagreement among scholars influenced by Lonergan as to the correct appropriation of his method in contemporary theology, with Doran and Ormerod holding closely to Lonergan's method, while Tracy's thought shows the influence of other currents of thought.

9.4.3   *The Analogical Imagination*: systematics

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[254] Neil Ormerod, 'Quarrels with the method of correlation,' *Theological Studies* 57 (1996) 707-719.
[255] Robert Doran, *Theology and the Dialectics of History* (University of Toronto Press, 1990.)
[256] Ormerod, 'Quarrels,' 712; cf. Doran, *Theology and the Dialectics of History*, 454.
[257] Ormerod, 'Quarrels,' 712.
[258] Ormerod, 'Quarrels,' 713-714.
[259] Ormerod, 'Quarrels,' 715-716.
[260] Ormerod, 'Quarrels,' 712-713.

In *The Analogical Imagination*[261] Tracy turns his attention to systematic theology. In a pluralist culture, theology must articulate publicly its claims to meaning and truth. It must address three publics: society, academy and church.[262] The influence of Lonergan on Tracy's thought remains explicit:

> Lonergan's extraordinary achievements in methodology… consist principally in employing his own empirical-transcendental method as the key by which the present diversity of field and subject specialties can be transformed into *functional* specialties.[263]

> Any voluntary church relationship… is to both a social institution and to an interpersonal community and tradition of shared meanings.[264]

Considering the role of the theologian, Tracy states:

> Indeed, the theologian, in Lonergan's judgment, grounds the truth-status of all properly theological discourse ultimately on the "foundation" of the concrete, radically personal but neither private nor individualist basis of the theologian's own self-transcending subjectivity as one who is intellectually, morally and religiously "converted." The cognitive "therapy" provided by a book like *Insight* must be matched by a moral therapy from satisfactions to values and a religious therapy grounded in the radical and transformative gift of God's grace experienced as a state of "being-in-love-without-restriction."[265]

In footnotes to this passage, Tracy states his assumption that Lonergan's language of 'conversion' can be changed into language referring to the 'radical transformation of the subject's "horizon," occasioned by intellectual, moral and religious transformation'[266] and notes that the term 'therapy' comes from David Burrell's commentary on Lonergan's work.[267] But is Tracy here adopting a foundationalist interpretation of Lonergan's method? I believe that this is not Tracy's view and that, in any event, it is not the correct interpretation of Lonergan's thought. The 'foundation' for the truth of theological discourse in Lonergan's view is, as Tracy states, the 'radical and transformative gift of God's grace.' The model of knowledge is not of a Cartesian subject looking out at the world from inside one's head, but

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[261] David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination* (London, SCM Press Ltd, 1981.) Hereafter *AI*.
[262] *AI*, xi.
[263] *AI*, 15 (emphasis in original.)
[264] *AI*, 22. See section 9.3.5 above for Lonergan's account of community as constituted by shared meaning.
[265] *AI*, 70; cf. *Method*, 250-254.
[266] *AI*, 94, note 84.
[267] *AI*, 94, note 85.

a graced subject coming to know a divinely created and ordered world – a world which is itself graced – of which the subject him/herself is a part.

A key notion in *AI* is that of the classic. Classics are

> …those texts, events, images, persons, rituals and symbols which are assumed to disclose permanent possibilities of meaning and truth…[268]

The task of the systematic theologian, working within a living tradition,[269] is to interpret the 'religious classics' of that tradition. Lonergan's influence is again perceptible when Tracy observes that 'we are… required to develop a nonclassicist notion of the classic.'[270] The classic is a text that can 'compel and concentrate our attention with the… power of recognition of an essential truth about ourselves and our lives.'[271] Interpretation involves dialogue between the interpreter and the text, and between the interpreter and the wider 'community of inquirers.'[272] Reflecting Tracy's openness to theological pluralism, various models of interpretation can all contribute to the conversation.[273] Where the task of the fundamental theologian is to articulate in a general way the 'religious dimension' of human experience,[274] that of the systematic theologian is to give expression to the 'particular, concrete reality of an "explicit religion."'[275] For Lonergan, following Vatican I, the aim of the functional specialty systematics is to understand the interconnection of the truths of faith and to 'attempt to work them into an assimilable whole.'[276] Tracy similarly ascribes to the systematic theologian the task of assuring the internal coherence of a religious tradition. He describes the language of systematic theology as 'intrinsically dialectical.'[277] In *Method*, the functional specialty dialectic brings to light conflicts in interpretation and resolves them by exposing the counterpositions that underpin false interpretations.[278] Tracy, however, is using the term 'dialectical' in a broader and richer sense; the dialectical language of systematic theology is:

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[268] *AI*, 68.
[269] *AI*, 99-100.
[270] *AI*, 100; cf. *Method*, 3.
[271] *AI*, 116.
[272] *AI*, 120-121.
[273] *AI*, 121-124.
[274] *AI*, 160.
[275] *AI*, 162.
[276] *Method*, 311; cf. *DF*, chapter 4.
[277] *AI*, 178.
[278] *Method*, chapter 10, 220-249.

283

> …a language appropriate to the originating religious experience of the event – an event eliciting the dialectical experiences of fascination, trust, fear and awe, an event disclosing and concealing our radical belonging to and estrangement from the whole.[279]

Already, Tracy is at ease with a greater degree of 'plurality and ambiguity' than is allowed for by Lonergan's understanding of the nature of doctrine.

Lonergan features less prominently in the second half of the work, 'Interpreting the Christian Classic.' In the final chapters, however, Tracy puts forward his notion of an 'analogical imagination' which he describes as 'a contemporary strategy that allows, indeed demands, pluralism without forfeiting the need for common criteria of meaning and truth;'[280] a formulation that seems to hold in balance Tracy's own concerns and those of his mentor Lonergan.

9.4.4 *Plurality and Ambiguity*: the model of conversation

The theme of Tracy's work *Plurality and Ambiguity*[281] is conversation as a model for interpretation and specifically for the interpretation of religion.[282] To be human, Tracy affirms, is to be an interpreter:

> Interpretation is thus a question as unavoidable, finally, as experience, understanding, deliberation, judgment, decision and action.[283]

Tracy does not envisage an anarchic, free-form conversation but rather conversation as 'a game with some hard rules'[284] in order to maintain both openness and integrity. The rules, Tracy asserts, are:

> In a sense… merely variations of the transcendental imperatives elegantly articulated by Bernard Lonergan: "Be attentive, be intelligent, be responsible, be loving and, if necessary, change."[285]

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[279] *AI*, 178.

[280] *AI*, x.

[281] David Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity* (San Francisco, Harper & Row, 1987.) Hereafter *PA*.

[282] *PA*, Preface, ix-x.

[283] *PA*, 9. Tracy cites *Insight* and adds that Lonergan's readers 'will recognize his presence here and elsewhere in this work – a presence for which I remain all the more thankful despite the obvious differences on "language" and understanding and thereby interpretation,' 115 note 4.

[284] *PA*, 19.

[285] *PA*, 19; cf. *Method*, 217.

And:

> ...interpretation, on the model of conversation, is a complex phenomenon comprised of three elements: text, interpreter, and their interaction grounded in questioning itself.[286]

Tracy is trying to offer a model for the interpretation of religious tradition that can meet the challenges of a postmodern, postpositivist culture; a world in which even the natural sciences are now (or rather, are again) both historical and hermeneutical.[287] He accepts Wittgenstein's insight that 'there are no pure ideas free of the web of language.'[288] The Cartesian idea of 'the self as a reality-founding ego'[289] has been exposed as an illusion. Tracy even critiques the position that he himself adopted in *Blessed Rage for Order*:

> The moderns were relatively untroubled by reflection upon the indissoluble relationships between knowledge and language. They were relatively confident about the power of reflection to eliminate error and render consciousness translucent if not transparent.[290]

Tracy acknowledges that his own 'optimistic appraisal' of the achievements of a phenomenological-transcendental analysis is now seen to be problematic. But he adds:

> In sum, the need to reformulate all earlier transcendental analyses which are based on a philosophy of consciousness seems clear and difficult. The need, however, to demand that kind of analysis for all the implicit validity claims in our discourse and, even more so, for the logically unique claims of theology on the strictly necessary individual, God, seems equally clear. Lonergan's insistence that his version of "transcendental method" should not be interpreted in a neo-Kantian way but as a "generalized empirical method" is also relevant here.[291]

Tracy believes that Lonergan's 'generalised empirical method' remains valuable though his claims for what it can achieve are now more limited. He concludes:

> Our theories and our conversations can become... what they in fact always were: limited, fragile, necessary exercises in reaching relatively adequate knowledge of language and history alike.[292]

Tracy is arguing for a hermeneutical and conversational model of theology that sees pluralism as desirable and not regrettable, that is modest in its claims but nevertheless

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[286] *PA*, 28.
[287] *PA*, 33.
[288] *PA*, 43.
[289] *PA*, 58.
[290] *PA*, 77.
[291] *PA*, 134, note 40.
[292] *PA*, 81.

committed to disciplined enquiry and a search for truth. Though his thought has developed considerably from his beginnings as an interpreter of Lonergan, he continues to see the latter's method as a valuable resource. In an essay published around the same time[293] Tracy refers to 'a major transformation of the Schleiermacher-Tillich-Rahner-Lonergan experiential paradigm into an explicitly hermeneutical one.'[294] He speaks of the 'noble, correlative enterprise' of Lonergan among other theologians and adds, 'To recognize an "anomaly" is not necessarily to abandon a paradigm completely.'[295] Tracy still 'agrees with the basic thrust'[296] of Lonergan while having rethought the relationship between experience and language in a way that transforms Lonergan's 'experiential paradigm' into an 'explicitly hermeneutical one.'[297] He disagrees with Lonergan's view that certain essential characteristics can be located in all religions[298] while still believing that religious experience is an important source for theology.[299]

In the same volume of essays, in Part 2 under the heading of 'Mentors,' is published a lecture that Tracy gave at Boston College in 1994.[300] There he explores the possibility of a 'second reception' of Lonergan's thought that would be based on 'the important praxis recovery of an ancient philosophical and theological notion of "spiritual exercises" for contemporary philosophy and theology.'[301] His premise is that the first part of *Insight*, 'Insight as Activity,' is structured as a series of 'intellectual exercises of self-appropriation' needed for the reader to achieve authentic self-affirmation.[302] Tracy claims that certain parts of *Method* can be read as analogous exercises[303] and that this makes possible:

> …a reception [of Lonergan's work] in a changed intellectual climate, where modernity's typical suspicion of any union of theory with praxis, much less with spiritual exercises, is now itself under suspicion.[304]

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[293] David Tracy, 'Lindbeck's New Program for Theology,' *The Thomist* 49 (July 1985), 460-472. Now chapter 12, 285-288, in David Tracy, *Filaments*, (University of Chicago Press, 2020.)

[294] 'Lindbeck's New Program,' 288.

[295] 'Lindbeck's New Program,' 289-290.

[296] 'Lindbeck's New Program,' 291-292.

[297] 'Lindbeck's New Program,' 288.

[298] Lonergan takes this idea from the work of Friedrich Heiler: *Method*, 105 and note 17.

[299] 'Lindbeck's New Program,' 291-292.

[300] 'Bernard Lonergan and the Return of Ancient Practice in Philosophy and Theology,' *Filaments*, chapter 9, 225-238.

[301] 'Bernard Lonergan,' 227.

[302] 'Bernard Lonergan,' 227-228.

[303] 'Bernard Lonergan,' 229.

[304] 'Bernard Lonergan,' 229-230.

The modern separation of theory from practice would have seemed strange to ancient thinkers:

> *Philosophy*… was for the ancients above all a love of wisdom, a unity of thought, and a way of life.[305]

Tracy believes that this premodern praxis of spiritual exercises is a recurring, though largely implicit, element of Lonergan's thought. Among other examples, he remarks:

> [Lonergan] brilliantly transposes the methods of Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas into exercises from experiencing, understanding, and judging one's experience.[306]

Tracy finds such transpositions in *Method*:

> …Lonergan's self-transcending subject reinterprets Aristotle's virtuous person in order to clarify moral conversion… Lonergan's appropriation of modern mathematics and physics reinterprets Plato's exercises for clarifying intellectual conversion… his explicit turn to interiority radically transposes Aquinas's systematic understanding of grace in terms of inwardness.[307]

By unveiling this feature of his thought a second reception is possible and the work of Lonergan – usually considered a thoroughly 'modern' theologian – can be received in a postmodern climate. Rather than being required to accept the claim that the cognitional structure identified in *Insight* is universally valid and 'not subject to radical revision,'[308] the postmodern reader is invited to enter, under the guidance of Lonergan's thought, into exercises that are both intellectual and spiritual and thereby identify what seem to be frequently recurring patterns or movements in human consciousness and understanding, seen to operate at the level of the individual, of society and of the church. What was previously presented as a 'generalised empirical method' can instead be received as a helpful and suggestive hermeneutical instrument.

In a somewhat similar way I wish to argue that, by attending to the genuinely Thomist character of Lonergan's thought, in his later work as well as in his earlier writings, he can be exonerated from the suspicion of foundationalism and shown to be still relevant for theology in a postmodern era; that the contemporary believer can find Lonergan's method to be valuable without having to become a Lonerganian.

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[305] 'Bernard Lonergan,' 232 (emphasis in original.)
[306] 'Bernard Lonergan,' 235.
[307] 'Bernard Lonergan,' 237-238; cf *Method*, 317-318.
[308] *Insight*, 366.

9.5 A postfoundationalist reading of Lonergan

In this chapter I have considered the responses to Lonergan's work of Fergus Kerr, Nicholas Lash and David Tracy. Kerr, a Thomist whose thought is shaped by Wittgenstein, criticises Lonergan's reliance on the appropriation of individual mental processes as a foundation for his theological method and his adoption of a metaphysical structure. While the methodological options of the two theologians are probably incompatible in this respect, I suggest, again, that the gap between them is narrowed if we attend to the Thomist character of Lonergan's thought. Lash and Tracy, both theologians whose work is significantly influenced by Lonergan, are concerned about his handling of the issue of pluralism. Each, however, finds his method to be of enduring value as a guide to an authentically hermeneutical theology. I believe that this is indeed the value of a postfoundationalist reading of Lonergan's work and I will conclude by considering how such a reading can contribute to the understanding of two contemporary theological issues: the distinction of form and content in the interpretation of doctrines and the theological method proposed by Pope Francis.

10 Contemporary Issues

10.1 Introduction

In this final chapter I suggest how Lonergan's method can contribute to the consideration of two contemporary theological questions: the perennial problem of accounting for and 'coherently combining' the 'variable and invariable aspects of religious traditions'[1] and the call from Pope Francis for a new theological method appropriate to a discerning church.

10.2 The form-content distinction and its problems

In his opening address to the Second Vatican Council, *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia*, Pope John XXIII said:

> The substance of the ancient doctrine of the deposit of faith is one thing, and the way in which it is presented is another…[2]

As Thiel notes:

> The form-content distinction typically has been invoked in influential twentieth-century Catholic accounts of the development of doctrine to explain how continuity can abide within historicity.[3]

Thiel cites Lonergan alongside Rahner and Schillebeeckx as examples of Catholic theologians invoking this distinction of form and content.[4] Before addressing the hermeneutical issues that it raises, we should note that it is a distinction which has been adopted only cautiously by the church's magisterium. Gregory Ryan has traced this process,[5] observing that in fact the words of John XXIII were even redacted between the delivery of the address in Italian, given in translation above, and the publication of the official Latin text, which when translated reads:

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[1] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 3.
[2] Pope John XXIII, *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia*.
[3] Thiel, *Senses of Tradition*, 225, note 60.
[4] Thiel, *Senses of Tradition*, 225, note 60.
[5] Gregory A Ryan, *Hermeneutics of Doctrine in a Learning Church: The Dynamics of Receptive Integrity* (Brill, Leiden and Boston, 2020.) Chapter 3, '*Gaudet Mater Ecclesia* as a Hermeneutical Lens.'

> For the deposit of faith, the truths contained in our venerable doctrine, are one thing; the fashion in which they are expressed, but with the same meaning and the same judgement, is another thing.[6]

The addition of the words, '…the truths contained in our venerable doctrine…. but with the same meaning and the same judgment…' significantly shifts the emphasis of John XXIII's dictum.

The same distinction of form and content in relation to the deposit of faith is found in documents of the Council: the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*[7] and the Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio*.[8] When it appears in the 1973 declaration *Mysterium Ecclesiae* of the then Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith,[9] the historical consciousness attached to doctrinal statements is, as Ryan notes, expressed in 'cautious and defensive language.'[10] And in the 1989 document of the International Theological Commission on the Interpretation of Dogmas we read:

> Without doubt a distinction must be made between the permanently valid content of dogmas and the form in which this is expressed. The mystery of Christ transcends all possible elucidations, no matter what the epoch, and therefore can never lend itself to a finally exclusive system of interpretation.[11]

The tone of this document is, however, again cautious, emphasising the indispensable role of the Magisterium in the interpretation of dogma[12] and resisting any suggestion that, for example, 'social progress and the emancipation of women become the decisive criteria for interpreting the meaning of dogmas.'[13] Thus we see a half-hearted magisterial adoption of a

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[6] Ryan, *Hermeneutics of Doctrine*, 49. A translation of the text made by Joseph A Komonchak, noting variations between the Italian and Latin versions, is available at https://jakomonchak.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/john-xxiii-opening-speech.pdf [Accessed 25/09/24]

[7] 'For the deposit and the truths of faith are one thing, the manner of expressing them is quite another.' *GS* §62.

[8] 'If, in various times and circumstances, there have been deficiencies in moral conduct or in church discipline, or even in the way that church teaching has been formulated – to be carefully distinguished from the deposit of faith itself – these can and should be set right at the opportune time.' *UR* §6

[9] *Mysterium Ecclesiae*, available at https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19730705_mysterium-ecclesiae_po.html [Accessed 25/09/24]

[10] Ryan, *Hermeneutics of Doctrine*, 51.

[11] *The Interpretation of Dogma*, §C.iii.3, available at https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_1989_interpretazione-dogmi_en.html [Accessed 25/09/24]

[12] *The Interpretation of Dogma*, §C.iii.6.

[13] *The Interpretation of Dogma*, §1.

principle that seems to offer a way out of the problem of 'the relationship between truth and history'[14] but with a recurring emphasis on permanence rather than development.

In any event, as Thiel argues persuasively, the distinction of form and content is hermeneutically unsatisfactory. When the church's tradition is conceived of as a historical reality unfolding in an incarnational world – and Vatican II surely requires such an understanding[15] - then the idea of a hypostasised 'content' that can be distinguished from an abstract 'form' is unsustainable. Both continuity and development are aspects of the living tradition that can only be discerned retrospectively by the believing community.[16]

On the other hand, Pope Francis has observed:

> There are times when the faithful, in listening to completely orthodox language, take away something alien to the authentic Gospel of Jesus Christ, because that language is alien to their own way of speaking to and understanding one another. With the holy intent of communicating the truth about God and humanity, we sometimes give them a false god or a human ideal which is not really Christian. In this way, we hold fast to a formulation while failing to convey its substance.[17]

The form-content distinction is unsatisfactory as a way of explaining the development of doctrine but, as the Pope observes here, a purely static understanding of doctrine is also unsustainable. Because language and culture are themselves living and developing realities, the abiding truth contained in a dogmatic statement cannot be preserved by simply repeating the same words. Lonergan makes the same point.[18]

Ryan, in response, proposes a move from the idea of 'development of doctrine' to a 'hermeneutics of tradition.'[19] Such a hermeneutic adopts Thiel's 'retrospective' conception of tradition, whereby the action of the Spirit in the life of the church is discerned by looking back over the process of development from the perspective of the present day, as opposed to a 'prospective' conception in which tradition is envisaged as a truth handed on from an

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[14] *The Interpretation of Dogma*, §A.i.4.
[15] *Dei Verbum*, § 8.
[16] Thiel, *Senses of Tradition*, 88-89.
[17] Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*: Apostolic Exhortation on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World, 24 November 2013. Available at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html [Accessed 25/09/24]
[18] *Method*, 300.
[19] Ryan, *Hermeneutics of Doctrine*, 74.

authoritative past and development, if it occurs at all, consists simply in a growth in understanding of the truth which has already been fully revealed.[20]

Ryan identifies three 'perspectives or horizons,'[21] taken from *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia*, which can function as hermeneutical principles to suggest how the contemporary church can 'receive with integrity' its living tradition. These are, first, 'integrity with the tradition, both in terms of scripture and later interpretation and reception—the deposit of faith through the ages.'[22] What has been taught and believed in the church's history remains normative. Secondly, the 'means of expression' are understood not simply as verbal formulae but as the whole cultural and intellectual context in which 'the gospel is proclaimed and lived.'[23] This second principle recalls Lonergan's idea of the 'cultural matrix' within which a religion is received and understood.[24] Thirdly, 'the pastorality of doctrine points towards a principle of integrity with… actual lived experience.'[25] Ryan shows how praxis in the life of the church is not simply the application of doctrinal theory, but a significant theological locus for the understanding and development of doctrine.[26] The principle of the pastorality of doctrine, prominent in the thought of Pope Francis but drawn from Vatican II, takes seriously this understanding of praxis.[27]

Ryan, then, puts forward a hermeneutics that envisages the contemporary church embracing the reality of both continuity and historicity of tradition, rather than seeing it as a theological problem to be solved. Does Lonergan have anything to contribute to such an understanding? As we have seen, Thiel numbers Lonergan among the influential Catholic theologians who invoke the form-content distinction.[28] The text that Thiel quotes to show Lonergan making the distinction is the following, from *Method*:

> The permanence of the dogmas… results from the fact that they express revealed mysteries. Their historicity, on the other hand, results from the facts that (1)

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[20] Thiel, *Senses of Tradition*, 80-83 and 84-95.
[21] Ryan, *Hermeneutics of Doctrine*, 74.
[22] Ryan, *Hermeneutics of Doctrine*, 74.
[23] Ryan, *Hermeneutics of Doctrine*, 74.
[24] *Method*, 3.
[25] Ryan, *Hermeneutics of Doctrine*, 74.
[26] Ryan, *Hermeneutics of Doctrine*, 70 and 79.
[27] Ryan, *Hermeneutics of Doctrine*, 69-72.
[28] Thiel, *Senses of Tradition*, 225, note 60.

statements have meanings only in their contexts and (2) contexts are ongoing and ongoing contexts are multiple.[29]

On the previous page, however, Lonergan has said this:

…dogmas are statements. Statements have meaning only within their contexts. Contexts are ongoing…[30]

He does not refer explicitly to the form-content distinction nor envisage a hypostasised meaning being clothed in a new form. Rather, a statement – even a dogmatic statement – has meaning in its context and that meaning is to be ascertained by critical scholarship.[31]

Vincent Birch disagrees with Thiel's reading of Lonergan as adopting the form-content distinction.[32] The point for Lonergan, as Birch reads him, is that doctrines – or more specifically, dogmas – are answers to questions that arise in the life of the church.[33] The task of the interpreter is to understand both the question and the answer in historical context. In the light of this interpretive work, subsequent reception and mediation of the revealed meaning contained in a dogma can be judged. The judgement will involve a dialectical process of the type that Lonergan describes in *Method*[34] and which is exemplified in his own Trinitarian thesis.[35] The theologian's task is to discern the authenticity or otherwise of a doctrinal expression, not to seek for some hypostasised content 'behind' its form. If we recall Ryan's three criteria of integrity with the tradition, contextual understanding of the means of expression of doctrine and integrity with the lived experience of the church, Lonergan's method seems relevant at least to the first two, offering a means of ensuring the authenticity and coherence of the community's understanding of doctrine.

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[29] *Method*, 303.

[30] *Method*, 302.

[31] *Method*, 302-303.

[32] Vincent Birch, 'Growth of the Christian Idea: An Application of Bernard Lonergan's Thought to Discourse on Doctrinal Development,' *Irish Theological Quarterly* 2023, Vol. 88(2) 137 –154.

[33] Birch, 142-143; cf. Lonergan, *Method*, 302-303.

[34] *Method* Chapter 10, 'Dialectic,' 220-249.

[35] Birch, 'Growth of the Christian Idea,' 144-145; cf. Lonergan, *TTG: Doctrines*, 35-55.

10.2.1 Judging the authenticity of development

I have referred above[36] to the 'episodic' understanding of doctrinal development that Lash discerns in Newman's *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine.*[37] In such an understanding, development is seen not as a linear and cumulative process, but rather:

> …at every period, the church's creed and rite are the complete, if inadequate and symbolic expression of the external 'idea' of christianity [*sic*]; such factors enabled [Newman] to view the process of development as that of the 'realization' (one might almost say, 'incarnation') of the ineffable word of God in the life, institutions, worship and belief of a people: the history of a 'living' and 'real' idea.[38]

The idea of Christianity is one, but it comes to expression in different ways at different periods of history and in different cultural contexts. Of course, such a 'realisation' of the Christian 'idea' cannot be arbitrary. Any given expression of Christian faith in 'life, institutions, worship and belief' must stand in integrity with the tradition and with the belief and practice of the universal church; and the judgement of such integrity is, in a broad sense, a hermeneutical task, as Ryan has described. As Sykes observes, Newman's 'scheme of thought' places great responsibility on the theologian in the life of the church;[39] he would see it as the theologian's task, in dialogue with the church's magisterium, to discern the authenticity of development and its continuity with the tradition. Lonergan's method provides the tools for such discernment. He reflects in *Method* on 'Pluralism and the Unity of Faith'[40] in the light of the move to an empirical notion of culture and the teachings of Vatican II. As always, he emphasises the importance of conversion:

> …the real menace to unity of faith does not lie either in the many brands of common sense or the many differentiations of human consciousness. It lies in the absence of intellectual or moral or religious conversion.[41]

10.3 Lonergan and Pope Francis

As a final example of the application of Lonergan's thought to the situation of the contemporary church, I will consider the recent work by Gerard Whelan, SJ, *A Discerning*

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[36] Section 2.5.3.

[37] Lash, *Newman on Development*, 57-60.

[38] Lash, *Newman on Development*, 59.

[39] Sykes, *The Identity of Christianity*, 121-122.

[40] *Method*, 303-307.

[41] *Method*, 307.

294

Church,[42] which traces affinities between the thought of Lonergan and Pope Francis. Whelan agrees with Cardinal Walter Kasper that Pope Francis has initiated a 'new reception of Vatican II'[43] and a change in theological method. He suggests that the thought of Pope Francis 'converges with that of Lonergan, who can provide explanatory depth for it,' offering theological support for the 'discerning Church' that the Pope seeks.[44] Whelan explores this convergence. He employs Lonergan's 'dialectic method' to evaluate the philosophical presuppositions that lie behind theological arguments, judging some such presuppositions to represent positions and others counterpositions, in Lonergan's terms.[45] Some of the arguments of Pope Francis' opponents, for example, are judged to rest on a classicist world view, lacking historical consciousness.[46]

Whelan looks at the four pastoral principles put forward by Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium*[47] to see how each can be deepened by Lonergan's thought.[48] He traces the perceptualist bias that Lonergan observes from medieval philosophy through Descartes and Kant and which is still a problem in postmodern thought.[49] He notes Lonergan's view that Vatican II represented a breakthrough by the church to historical consciousness, but an incomplete one.[50] In 1965, Lonergan foresaw the emergence of a 'solid right' and a 'scattered left' in Catholic philosophy and theology.[51] Both did in fact appear after Vatican II and Whelan recounts Lonergan's concern both at the apparently uncritical adoption of the ideas of Hegel and Marx by liberation theologians[52] and at the perceptualist presuppositions that marked the neo-Augustinian method which would later become prominent during the pontificates of John Paul II and Benedict XVI.[53]

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[42] Gerard Whelan, SJ, *A Discerning Church: Pope Francis, Lonergan, and a Theological Method for the Future* (Paulist Press, New York/Mahwah, New Jersey, 2019.)
[43] Whelan, 12.
[44] Whelan, 12.
[45] Whelan, 14.
[46] Whelan, 12-13.
[47] *Evangelii Gaudium* § 222-237.
[48] Whelan, 33-34.
[49] Whelan, 41-46; *Method*, 200-201. Whelan employs the term 'perceptualist' to denote the type of cognitional theory that sees knowing as 'taking a good look.' (Whelan, 41f.) Sala describes this type of theory as 'intuitionist.' (Sala, *Lonergan and Kant*, 63.)
[50] Whelan, 63.
[51] Lonergan, 'Dimensions of Meaning,' *Collection*, 232-245, 245. The original lecture was given at Marquette University in May 1965. Cited by Whelan, *A Discerning Church*, 79.
[52] Whelan, *A Discerning Church*, 80-81.
[53] Whelan, 81-83.

The trajectory of Jorge Mario Bergoglio's life and ministry led him to adopt the inductive method characterised by the three stages: See-Judge-Act. However, Whelan notes that, as bishop and subsequently as pontiff:

> …Pope Francis had insisted upon adding a theological dimension to the first step of inductive method, See. This becomes apparent in the early chapters of both *Evangelii Gaudium* and *Laudato Si'*. This instinct is supported by Lonergan. Implicitly, Pope Francis is seeking to recognize that each situation is constituted not only by dimensions of progress and decline, but also by redemption.[54]

In discerning how the church is to act in a given situation, not only the human dimensions of progress and decline, but also the supernatural reality of God's redemptive action have to be considered. The inductive method is a theological and not a purely philosophical method and, Lonergan would say, intellectual, moral and religious conversion is required in order to apply it authentically.

Whelan addresses criticisms of Pope Francis' apostolic exhortation *Amoris* Laetitia. He concludes that the Pope's critics are basing their objections on a 'classicist and perceptualist presupposition about moral reasoning' which sees such reasoning as simply assent to propositions. As a result of this counterposition, such critics wrongly conclude that *Amoris Laetitia* 'promotes the [sacramental] forgiving of an unrepentant person in a state of mortal sin.'[55] However, Whelan also criticises Cardinal Kasper, writing in support of the document, for opposing 'perceptualist classicist arguments with intellectualist classicist arguments.'[56] He suggests that an argument based on Lonergan's contemporary transposition of the thought of St Thomas would be more persuasive.[57]

Whelan concludes that:

> …historical consciousness, as Lonergan understands it, can make a key contribution to Catholic theology.[58]

Lonergan's notion of intellectual conversion can assist with an authentic reception and development of the teaching of Vatican II.[59] His elaboration of functional specialties can be a resource for the collaboration, collegiality and synodality that Pope Francis wishes to promote

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[54] Whelan, *A Discerning Church*, 145.
[55] Whelan, 154.
[56] Whelan, 157.
[57] Whelan, 157, note 23.
[58] Whelan, 159.
[59] Whelan, 159.

in the church.[60] His 'general empirical method' can facilitate interdisciplinary collaboration and dialogue in pursuit of the church's mission *ad extra*.[61] The vibrant community of Lonergan scholars can carry forward the work of developing his thought to meet the challenges of the contemporary world.[62] Whelan believes that the pontificate of Francis is 'a *kairos* for a wider acceptance of a Lonergan-based approach.'[63]

10.4 Conclusion

Crowe describes Lonergan's body of work as an 'organon for our time.'[64] In this final chapter I have given two examples of the application of his thought as an instrument to respond to the needs of the contemporary church. Ryan, addressing the question of continuity and historicity in doctrine, proposes a 'hermeneutic of tradition' to judge the authenticity of development. I suggest that Lonergan's method can be a resource for such a hermeneutic. Whelan sees a convergence between the thought of Pope Francis and his fellow Jesuit Lonergan. He identifies Lonergan's understanding of historical consciousness and of intellectual conversion as key principles for Catholic theology as it seeks to 'mount to the level of the times.'[65] While Whelan substantially accepts Lonergan's cognitional and metaphysical theories and his Thomist outlook, it is not necessary to do so in order to find valuable hermeneutical resources in Lonergan's thought. David Tracy defines classics as 'those texts, events, images, persons, rituals and symbols which are assumed to disclose permanent possibilities of meaning and truth...'[66] In the development of his thought, Lonergan left behind the classicist assumption of a single, normative culture[67] in favour of an empirical understanding. Others have travelled further in the direction of a hermeneutical and postfoundationalist theology. However, I believe that Lonergan's work can justly be described as a 'classic' in Tracy's terms, disclosing enduring possibilities of meaning and truth. In this thesis I have tried to draw out some of those possibilities for theology in the 21st century.

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[60] Whelan, *A Discerning Church*, 159-160.

[61] Whelan, 161-163.

[62] Whelan, 160.

[63] Whelan, 159.

[64] F E Crowe SJ, *Method in Theology: An Organon for our Time* (Milwaukee, Marquette University Press, 1980.)

[65] Crowe describes Lonergan quoting this phrase from Ortega y Gasset in his original preface to *Insight*: *Lonergan*, 58.

[66] Tracy, *AI*, 68.

[67] *Method*, 303.

11 Conclusion: A framework for creativity

In 1970 the First International Lonergan Congress was held in Florida. Lonergan gave a public interview at the congress which was published in *A Second Collection*.[1] In it he said of his theological method:

> It's both a way and something like a theory… The word "Lonerganian" has come up in recent days. In a sense there's no such thing. Because what I'm asking people is to discover themselves and be themselves. They can arrive at conclusions different from mine on the basis of what they find in themselves. And in that sense it is a way.[2]

Lonergan saw his project as one of offering 'a framework for creativity,'[3] a way of approaching theology, rather than founding a 'Lonergan school.'[4] This, I suggest, is the value of his method for Catholic theology in a postfoundationalist era.

This thesis began by considering the challenge presented to Catholic theology by nonfoundationalist and postfoundationalist thought, which calls into question the nature of truth and the way in which reality can be known and articulated in language. As such, it challenges what are generally considered to be the philosophical underpinnings of theology and it is tempting to see such a movement simply as an enemy to be resisted. However, theologians from diverse traditions have instead embraced the challenge and have offered responses to the posfoundationalist critique. In the first chapter I considered the responses of Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff, taken together under the heading of 'Reformed epistemology,' and the rule theory of doctrine proposed by George Lindbeck. Each offers valuable insights into the issues. Reformed epistemology, in making belief in God a basic or foundational one, rightly rejects any attempt to make human reason a judge over divine revelation, while at the same time demanding rigorous reasoning to ensure theology's internal coherence and integrity. However, its antievidentialist character and rejection of the project of natural theology set it at odds with the Catholic tradition. Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic or rule theory, influenced by Wittgenstein, has the merit of recognising that doctrinal statements can be meaningful only within the context of a religious tradition and

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[1] 'An Interview with Fr Bernard Lonergan, SJ,' *A Second Collection*, 176-194.
[2] 'An Interview,' 180.
[3] *Method*, 4.
[4] O'Neill, 'The Rule Theory of Doctrine,' 426.

can never offer more than a partial and provisional articulation of the truths of faith. But Lindbeck leaves unresolved the question of the metaphysical reference of doctrine: is it meaningful *only* within its tradition, or can it communicate truth – if not the Truth – about the realities of faith? Each is in dialogue with Aquinas; Reformed epistemology regards him as an example of the natural theology which they regard with suspicion and of the classical foundationalism against which they wish to argue; Lindbeck tries to recruit Aquinas as a supporter of his cultural-linguistic theory. In both cases, contemporary Thomists have criticised the superficiality of the interpretation of Aquinas which is set up. This leaves space for a response to the postfoundationalist critique based on a fuller and deeper understanding of the thought of Aquinas such as that found in the work of Lonergan. I suggested that, while each offers valuable insights on the issues, they are shaped by assumptions that are not necessarily shared by a Catholic theologian. I therefore drew in Chapter 2 on the work of John Henry Newman, finding that his *Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* offers possibilities for a specifically Catholic response to the epistemological challenge of postfoundationalism, while his *Essay on the Development of Doctrine* is a helpful starting point for addressing questions of doctrinal pluralism.

Both Reformed epistemology and Lindbeck's theory share the assumptions of the Reformed traditions within which they were formed. The act of faith is seen as an existential commitment of the individual before God, whereas a Catholic understanding sees the believer making his/her act of faith within the church and, in doing so, assenting to the content of the church's tradition. Tradition, in the Reformed context, means the interpretation of Scripture, in contrast to the broader Catholic understanding of tradition as an expression of the whole life of the church articulated by Vatican II. A Catholic hermeneutics of doctrine has to do justice to this ecclesial dimension. The *locus classicus* for Catholic thought on both of these issues is the work of St John Henry Newman. In his *Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* Newman reflects in depth on the nature of the act of faith and on the epistemology of faith. His *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* is the first major work in the English language to deal with questions of development and hence of doctrinal pluralism. Lonergan described Newman as his 'mentor and guide' and therefore the discussion of Newman's thought in this area in Chapter 2 is an essential preliminary to the consideration of Lonergan's own work. I argue that Newman's contribution includes a rich

understanding of the nature of doctrine and tradition, an awareness of the historically and sociologically conditioned nature of the life of the church, a recognition of the fact of doctrinal development and an account of the dialectical nature of the process of development. However, Newman does not seem to allow for the genuine historical contingency in the process of development for which authors such as Lash and Thiel would argue. This raises the question of whether Lonergan's theological method has room for such contingency.

In Chapters 3 and 4 I engaged with the early thought of Bernard Lonergan. *Grace and Freedom* and *Verbum* established him as an important interpreter of St Thomas Aquinas. He himself defines his project in these works by the maxim of Pope Leo XIII, *vetera novis augere et perficere* and I argue that this, together with the influence of Aquinas, remains the fundamental orientation of his theological thinking; to transpose the thought of Aquinas for the 20th century. The claim that Lonergan's method can be the basis of a postfoundationalist hermeneutics of doctrine stands or falls on the question of whether such a transposition is successful. In Chapter 5 I considered *Insight*, in which Lonergan he elaborates his cognitional theory and metaphysics, founded on the method of psychological introspection that he discerns in both Aristotle and Aquinas. I traced the elements of his theory relevant to the hermeneutics of doctrine and argued that it is not a classically foundationalist structure but should instead be read as an authentically Thomist one, shaped by the teaching of Vatican I on the task of theology. Lonergan has learned from Aquinas a strong sense of God as mystery and an understanding that theology's formulations of divine truths are always analogical and limited, and this keeps him clear of the classical foundationalist position that would make human reason the judge of divine revelation.

In *Insight* Lonergan constructs an impressive edifice of theory, but one which has its problems. His account of doctrinal development is arguably more linear and less sophisticated than that of Newman and the hermeneutics underpinned by his epistemology – at that stage – makes no allowance for historical or cultural pluralism.

In Chapter 6 I analysed Lonergan's treatise on trinitarian theology, *De Deo Trino*, now published in English as *The Triune God*. There he applies the cognitional theory and metaphysics of *Insight* to a substantive theological issue, namely the psychological analogy of the Trinity, while remaining within the framework of Vatican I's formulation of the task of theology and the constraints of the classical model of theological formation. In the dogmatic

volume he addresses the nature of doctrine itself, tracing the historical-theological process which led to the Council of Nicea and the formulation of the Nicene Creed. The work is striking in its sophistication and precision, but these qualities serve to show up the limitations of the methodological framework within which Lonergan is working. Dogmatic formulae are compared in their precision and clarity to the geometric demonstrations of Euclid, giving rise to no hermeneutical problems. The development of doctrine consists, as per Vatican I, in a gradual growth in understanding of what has been divinely revealed – a linear model. There is, at this stage, no allowance for the contingency of development or for legitimate pluralism in the understanding of doctrine. The emphasis is on the clarity and precision of dogmas and the gradual growth in understanding of what has been divinely revealed. There seems, at this point in Lonergan's thought, no allowance for the contingency of development or for a genuine pluralism in doctrinal expression. I argued, however, that Lonergan himself was already aware of these limitations and was carrying forward his theological project.

In *Method in Theology*, discussed in Chapter 7, Lonergan elaborates a method based on the cognitional theory, epistemology and metaphysics of *Insight*, while also reflecting the teachings of Vatican II. and the move from a classicist to an empirical notion of culture. He embraces historical and cultural consciousness and moves from a classicist to an empirical notion of culture. While *Method* is a major achievement, I suggested that Lonergan's treatment of the hermeneutics of doctrine remains limited by the lack of a developed theology of revelation and of the church and I considered the work of Neil Ormerod in drawing out indications in his work that are relevant to these issues to fill the gap. I argued further – agreeing with Ormerod – that in Lonergan's thought, what is basic for Christian living and foundational for theology is conversion which is brought about at God's initiative and by the gift of God's love. If the motto for Lonergan's early work is the Leonine maxim *vetera novis augere et perficere* then that of his mature thought might be Romans 5:5: 'God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.' His approach remains thoroughly Thomist and theocentric, and claims of classical foundationalism miss the mark: though his work could perhaps be read as a form of 'Catholic non-classical foundationalism' in which a rigorous analytical structure is built on a foundation of divinely revealed truth accepted in faith.

In Chapter 8 I brought Lonergan into dialogue with his philosophical and theological critics. The nonfoundationalist neopragmatism of Richard Rorty jettisons the whole project of epistemology and the correspondence theory of truth. Rorty wishes to abandon the search for 'foundations of knowledge,' and adopt conversation as the determinant of our belief. While R J Snell believes that Lonergan's critically realist epistemology, based on self-appropriation, has the is a convincing answer to Rorty's critique, I argued that the 'charitably critical' reading of Paul D Murray is more plausible and opens for Catholic theology the possibility of a fruitful dialogue with Rorty. A reading of Lonergan in this framework, I suggest, can meet the requirements set out by Pope John Paul II in *Fides et Ratio* for a philosophy adequate to our era, able to engage with the great questions of existence, truth and meaning. I brought into the conversation the classical Thomist, Maritain, who like Rorty rejects the intuitionist theory of knowledge and the Cartesian dualism of 'mind' and 'world,' but believes that both can be overcome by a correct understanding of the metaphysics of Aquinas. I turned to the philosophers of science, E A Burtt and T S Kuhn, to refute Rorty's claim that the progress of the natural sciences has rendered metaphysics superfluous. Therefore, I argued, Lonergan's updating of Thomist metaphysics and epistemology can be a resource to address, rather than to dismiss, postfoundationalist concerns.

I went on to consider the critique of Lonergan's thought by Fergus Kerr who, influenced by Wittgenstein, denies that metaphysical or cognitive realities can constitute a 'given' on which a theological method can be based in the way that Lonergan wishes to do. s I identified cogent criticisms made by Kerr of some areas in which Lonergan's thought is underdeveloped, such as his treatment of symbol and of pluralism. Nevertheless, I argued that a recognition of the authentically Thomist and therefore theocentric nature of Lonergan's thought lessens the apparent gap between the two. I traced the influence of Lonergan's work on the writings of Nicholas Lash and considered Lash's later criticisms of Lonergan, acknowledging again that some of these criticisms seem to find the mark. However, Lash's modest understanding of the nature and function of doctrine – his belief that the most important function of doctrine is to help us to avoid idolatry by telling us what God is *not*[5] - is

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[5] 'When did the theologians lose interest in theology?' *The Beginning and the End of 'Religion'*, 134.

compatible with Lonergan's Thomist understanding that doctrinal statements are always an analogical and incomplete articulation of the mysteries of faith.

David Tracy is another contemporary theologian who began as a student of Lonergan and whose first published work was an analysis of his achievement. Tracy, however, has travelled a considerable distance from Lonergan's thought. He comes to argue for a hermeneutical and conversational model of theology that sees pluralism as desirable and not regrettable, that is modest in its claims but nevertheless committed to disciplined enquiry and a search for truth. of his mentor. In a later essay, Tracy argues for a 'second reception' of Lonergan that sees his paradigm, not as an unrevisable 'generalised empirical method,' based on invariant cognitive realities and universally applicable, but rather as a valuable resource for theological hermeneutics.

In Chapter 10 I turn to Gregory A Ryan, who has analysed the application of the form/content distinction in the documents of Vatican II, and subsequently, as a means of reconciling the variant and invariant elements of doctrinal statements. Ryan questions whether this distinction on its own is sufficient to meet the challenge and proposes a 'hermeneutic of tradition' that enables the contemporary church to embrace both the continuity and the historicity of its tradition in doctrine. I suggested that Lonergan's method can be a valuable resource for such a hermeneutic, providing criteria for the assessment of authentic development. Finally, I considered Gerard Whelan's analysis of the convergences in the thought of Lonergan and Pope Francis. Whelan suggests that Francis' call for a discerning church requires a new theological method and that Lonergan's notions of historical consciousness and intellectual conversion can be key elements in such a method. This, I believe, is an example of the fruitful application of the work of Lonergan to meet the needs of the church in the 21st century.

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304

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306

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