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FROM THOMAS AQUINAS TO BERNARD LONERGAN:

Continuity and Novelty[#]

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It may be useful to begin at once with a clarification: In this paper I do not intend to present the thought of St. Thomas and that of Lonergan separately, and then compare them. Instead, I intend to discuss some of the relationships that Lonergan's philosophical and theological thought has with the thought of St. Thomas. The studies of Thomas that Lonergan conducted for more than a decade led to a profound appropriation of the medieval master's thought, but this obvious continuity did not fail to bear new fruit in the disciple, who was living in a cultural context that was seven centuries later.

1 Education

Lonergan's earliest philosophical education at Heythrop College near Oxford was not, properly speaking, Thomist. It was in a Scholasticism (i.e., "Neoscholasticism") that had a Suarezian background. His interest in philosophy was also nourished by other sources, the most influential of which were, besides an introduction to logic and modern science by Joseph W. B. Horace, the first dialogues of Plato and the early writings of Augustine. Above all, the tension toward understanding and truth that characterizes the great western Father found a congenial response in the Jesuit scholastic. In this connection, it is especially significant that Lonergan had already taken an extremely critical position toward the key role that Neoscholasticism gave to the concept as a universal.[1]

It was later, during his studies for the licentiate in theology at the Gregorian University in Rome, that Lonergan came into contact with the thought of St. Thomas, even if only indirectly and partially at first. Lonergan names two factors that directed him toward Aquinas. The first were the lectures on Christology. Lonergan arrived at the conviction that only on the basis of the real distinction between essence and existence was it possible to understand (naturally, only with an analogical understanding) the hypostatic union in Christ: a single person who is at the same time true God and true man. The second factor was his meeting a confrère, Stephanos Stephanou. Stephanou had studied philosophy at Louvain in the Thirties, when Joseph Maréchal, author of the five-volume *Le point de départ de la métaphysique*, was teaching there. In the fifth volume (*Le Thomisme devant la philosophie critique*) Maréchal had adopted the so-called transcendental method in order to "surpass Kantianism from Kant himself" (V, 589). "It was through Stephanou—Lonergan was to say—by some process of osmosis rather than through struggling with the five great *Cahiers*, that I learnt to speak of human knowledge not as intuitive but as discursive with the decisive component in judgment[2]".

[#] Originally published as "Da Tommaso d'Aquino a Bernard Lonergan: continuità e novità", in *Rassegna di Teologia (Napoli)* **36** (1995) 407-425.

[1] For more information on Lonergan's first formative period, as well as on the entire development of his thought, see F.E. Crowe, *Lonergan* (The Liturgical Press, 1992), esp. pp. 1-20.

[2] B.J.F. Lonergan, *A Second Collection*, W.F.J. Ryan and B.J. Tyrrell (eds.), Darton, Longam & Todd, London 1974, 265. Reprinted edition University of Toronto Press, Toronto 1996.

2 The First Study of St. Thomas: the Research on Grace

The real encounter with Thomas dates from 1938, when Lonergan began work for his doctorate in theology. Fr. Charles Boyer proposed for his subject an article in St. Thomas' treatise on grace at the end of the *Prima Secundae* of the *Summa Theologiae*. Augustine, in his *De gratia et libero arbitrio*[3], had replied to the extremist supporters of human liberty, the Pelagians, by saying that God *operates*, alone, on the evil will of man to make it good, but then he *cooperates* with the good will so that it can perform good works. This double intervention of God, which Augustine had presented to take away from the Pelagians any possibility of evasion, was used centuries later by the Scholastic masters to formulate the distinction between operative grace and cooperative grace. Thomas himself dealt with it a first time in his *Commentary on the Sentences* of Peter Lombard, again in the *De Veritate*, and finally in the *Summa Theologiae*. But each time the exposition is different. Why is this?

The method Lonergan adopted to deal with this problem was that proposed earlier by J. de Guibert in his *Les doublets de Saint Thomas d'Aquin*[4]. It consisted in an intensive study of parallel passages, using an inductive procedure. It aimed at a textually based grasp of the question as it presented itself to St. Thomas when he confronted it in the *Commentary on the Sentences*, and as it appeared to him when he left it fifteen years later in the *Summa Theologiae*. By such a procedure, Lonergan observes, it is possible to arrive at a negative conclusion that is certain, while on the positive side one must be content for the most part with a probable conclusion. But the problem is to arrive at a probability that is well grounded and which, while it leaves room for further clarification and deepening, cannot be put into question as to its central nucleus.

Through a series of studies of interrelated problems, Lonergan arrived at the recognition that these three expositions were three stages by which St. Thomas reached the more mature position of the *Summa*. There, along with grace as *habitus*, St. Thomas speaks of a different type of grace that directly touches on action. This in turn is divided into *operative* grace, insofar as it brings about the willing of the end, and *cooperative* grace, insofar as the willing of the end leads to a corresponding performance. This divine motion or grace is the act that theologians would later call "actual grace".

Besides his main subject, Lonergan's research led him to deal with and to notably clarify, both historically and systematically, other subjects that concern the theology of grace: the basic theorem about the two entitatively different orders of nature and supernature, operation in general, the *praemotio* [premotion] and the application of secondary causes to their acts, the certainty of providence, universal instrumentality, and the conception of human will and freedom.

Of entirely singular importance is the theme of divine transcendence. God acts in the order of nature and in the order of grace by thinking the order of worldly causes and imposing it on them. Thus he produces, as transcendent cause, the very difference between necessity and contingency, determinism and freedom, that characterizes creatures. It is not possible to read, along with Lonergan, what St. Thomas wrote on this problem that is so existentially important for everyone, without realizing how consistent and profound his teaching is. To be sure, it does not pretend to eliminate the mystery, but it is able to point out exactly what the data of the problem are and to indicate the infinitely distant point where the converging lines of the intelligibilities that we can grasp come together. There we find the mystery of God, not as a new datum to be

[3] Cf. c. 17: PL 44, 901.

[4] J. de Guibert, *Les doublets de Saint Thomas d'Aquin*. Leur étude méthodique. Quelques réflexions, quelques examples, Paris 1926.

explained, but as the excess of intelligibility, the absolute explanation of the reality we know on the basis of experience, an explanation we can grasp only in a limited way.

Extremely brilliant is the section devoted to the possibility of sin. If God, as the source of being, causes even our free actions, one wonders whether this does not apply also to moral evil—theologically, to sin. At the basis of this question is our spontaneous presupposition of a universal intelligibility, so that even sin must have a reason, and thus a cause. But if this cause is the free decision of man, that decision itself must be referred back to God as the first universal cause. What is surprising to us is that St. Thomas was not very worried by this objection that makes God responsible, indeed the principal one responsible, for sin. The reason is that, with respect to willing and the consequent willed realities, St. Thomas does not argue on the basis of the principle of the excluded middle, but on the basis of a trichotomy. There is contingent being, and it is intelligible. To the extent that this being is due to human freedom, it is due with even greater reason to the action of God. There is intelligible non-being. This too, since it is due to a human willing, must be referred back to the plan and the action of God. It may seem that this is all: either being or non-being, both of which are intelligible. But in fact, it is not all. In the sphere of willing, there is a third thing, non-intelligible non-being, and that is sin. An example: I have committed a theft. If someone asks me "why?", I can produce a hundred reasons, but in fact I know that none of them are valid; they are excuses. In this sense, my decision is a non-being, a saying "no" to the moral imperative without any reason. Sin formally lies precisely in this non-intelligible non-being. But just because a sin is not in intelligible correlation with anything else, it does not have as antecedent any cause that might explain it. Sin is a failure of the will, a withdrawing from the dictates of conscience, and therefore a withdrawing from the ordinances of the divine mind. Sin is the absolute irrational; it is, as has been said, the *mysterium iniquitatis* [mystery of iniquity], a mystery that, unlike the mysteries of faith, does not consist in an excess of intelligibility and thus of reality. It consists, rather, in a total defect of intelligibility, a falling short of reality, a falling into nothing, so far as it depends on the free will. Sin is a *primum* [underived first] due only to the sinner.

In this lies the significance of St. Thomas' trichotomy: "God therefore neither wills evil to be done, nor wills it not to be done, but wills to permit evil to be done; and this is a good."[5]. God does not will that evil be done: the Supreme Good does not will evil! God does not will that evil not be done: whatever the Omnipotent wills against, cannot in any way happen. God permits evil. And this is a good. It is a good that God has endowed man with freedom and responsibility. In this lies his unique dignity in all creation. When man, in an abyss of irrationality, abuses the gift of freedom to withdraw from the governance of God, he makes himself a *primum* in the causal order, a first that is a defect. He thus lays the foundation for his damnation in a way different from the way the correct use of his freedom lays the foundation for eternal happiness.

Lonergan's study of operative grace was the beginning of a long apprenticeship in the school of St. Thomas, eleven years dedicated to "reaching up to the mind of Aquinas". Hence, if it is true that Lonergan did not begin his intellectual career as a Thomist, it is no less true that the study of the writings of St. Thomas "changed [him] profoundly", as Lonergan was to confess at the end of his greatest work[6].

I have indicated some key ideas in Thomas' teaching on grace that Lonergan obtained from this study. But a second fruit of his study should also be mentioned. This topic brought Lonergan face to face with the evolving nature of theological speculation and of human knowledge in general. St. Thomas had found himself confronted with an enormous mass of scriptural, patristic, theological, and dogmatic data. Only by stages did he manage to work through the many aspects of the problem raised by the Pelagians, and to find a solution that brought everything into a single coherent perspective. Knowing is not only, or mainly, a question of universal and necessary

[5] *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 19, a. 9, ad 3m. [English Dominican translation]

[6] Cf. B.J.F. Lonergan, *Insight. A Study of Human Understanding* (CWL 3), F.E. Crowe and R.M. Doran (eds.), University of Toronto Press, Toronto 1992, 769.

concepts, or of syllogistic deductions. Essentially, knowing is understanding the data correctly. This must have struck Lonergan most of all, so that it directed him definitively toward what would be his field of research in the following decades, I mean his theory of knowledge and his theological method. But that happened by stages.

3 The Study of the *Verbum*: the Discovery of the Subject

From 1946 to 1949 a series of articles by Lonergan appeared in the journal *Theological Studies* with the title "The Concept of *Verbum* in the Writings of St. Thomas Aquinas"[7]. The intent of this study was theological. In a celebrated passage in his *De Trinitate*[8] St. Augustine had spoken of a *verbum verum* [true word], prior to any linguistic expression, that is born in us "quando quod scimus loquimur [when we say what we know]". In this inner word that is consciously generated in our mind in accordance with understanding and truth, St. Augustine recognized the image of the Word of God. On the basis of this Augustinian idea it became customary in the theological tradition to see in the human spirit an image of the mystery of the intimate life of God: In the absolute unity of the divine nature, the Son proceeds from the Father, and the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son. This is what is called the psychological Trinitarian analogy.

Here too St. Thomas refers to Augustine. In the first part of the *Summa Theologiae* Aquinas poses the question whether an image of the Trinity is given in man. And he answers that this image resides in the characteristic mode of operating of the human spirit: "First and chiefly, the image of the Trinity is to be found in the acts of the mind, that is, namely, as from the knowledge which we possess, by thinking we form an internal word, and thence break forth into love"[9]. The Augustinian analogies of the doctrine of the Trinity suggested to Lonergan that—contrary to the most recent interpretation by Scholastic theologians—the image of the procession of the second and of the third person of the Holy Trinity could not reside in the metaphysical structure of the human spirit as knowing and willing. A structure of that kind was outside the interests of an Augustine, who was intent on sounding the depths of the human spirit by an introspective investigation. On the other hand, if St. Thomas presented his doctrine of the *verbum* [word] in the context of Aristotelian metaphysics, one must suppose—this was Lonergan's working hypothesis—that Thomas used metaphysical categories and theorems to express systematically operations and realities that are conscious and so are to be identified through an introspective analysis. Already, at the end of the first part of his study, Lonergan wrote: "The Thomist concept of inner word… is no mere metaphysical condition of a type of cognition; it aims at being a statement of psychological fact"[10].

Employing this interpretive key, Lonergan first of all examines St. Thomas' teaching on the *prima mentis operatio* [first operation of the mind]. The central moment in this operation is the *intelligere in sensibili*, the Thomist equivalent of the Aristotelian expression[11] that Lonergan renders as "insight into phantasm". St. Thomas' appeal to experience is explicit: "Anyone can experience this for himself, that when he tries to understand something, he forms certain phantasms to serve him by way of examples, in which as it were he examines what he is trying to understand. It is for this reason that when we wish to make someone understand something, we

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[7] Cf. *Theological Studies* 7 (1946) 349-392; 8 (1947) 35-79; 404-444; 10 (1949) 3-40; 359-393. An interesting introduction by Lonergan appeared in *Philippine Studies* 13 (1965) 575-585 with the title "Subject and Soul". The articles, with this introduction, were edited in a single volume as D.B. Burrell (ed.): *Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame 1967, and in a corrected edition in England by Darton, Longman & Todd, London 1968. A new edition has been published as *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan 2. Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas*, F.E. Crowe and R. M. Doran (eds.), University of Toronto Press, Toronto 1997.

[8] Cf. XV, xii, 22 (=PL 42, 1075).

[9] *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 93, a. 7. [In the translation used by Fr. Sala, "from an act of understanding we form a word inwardly and thence break forth in an act of love".]

[10] *Verbum* (CWL 2), p. 59.

[11] Cf. *De Anima,* III, 7.

lay examples before him, from which he can form phantasms for the purpose of understanding"[12]. Understanding is grasping how the data of sense or of consciousness are interrelated. It is adding to the manifold of the presentations a correlation, a meaning, that reduces the multiplicity of the data to intelligible unity. But this understanding does not occur without data that ultimately are sensible data, even if refined and elaborated in virtual or symbolic images.

Only when it has understood, and just because it has understood, our mind is able to pronounce its inner word, the concept, which expresses in a universal way what we have understood in the singular. This means that the inner word is not produced "mechanically", but intelligently. It arises through the kind of causality proper to spirit that St. Thomas, at the beginning of his treatise on the Trinity, calls *emanatio intelligibilis*[13], an intelligent act of saying. Everyone is familiar with the difference between the student who repeats a formula because he has memorized it, and the student who says the same thing because he has understood. This illustrates unequivocally what the intelligible emanation is, the mode of causing proper to the human spirit. The conscious act of understanding is the vital nexus between the final product of thought and the ever-fertile matrix of all human knowledge, our sensibility. It thus acts as a pivot in the movement of the mind from the singular, concrete, approximate, to the universal, abstract, ideal: in a word, from the datum to the concept. But if this pivot is lacking, then no way is left to explain the concept except by resorting to a thetic [creatively positing] *a priori* activity, as Kant does in speaking continually about concepts and ignoring understanding[14].

But understanding is not enough. Besides insight there is also oversight. There are brilliant ideas that, for lack of confirmation in reality, end in the wastebasket. Therefore our mind, once it has formulated a concept, spontaneously asks "is it really so?" The concept becomes a hypothesis. Intelligent curiosity is followed by a reflexive moment in which the same spirit is revealed as critical spirit in search of what is true in order to arrive at knowledge of being. In the judgment phase too, the central moment is held by an act of understanding, which now is intended to establish whether the intelligibility expressed in the concept has its counterpart in the data. Only in that case is our mind able to judge rationally. Only then, in the absolute positing of the judgment, is reality known.

St. Thomas thus recognizes the image of the generation of the divine Word in the operation by which the mind forms the intelligent and true inner word. The analogy with the proceeding of the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son is similar. Human spirit is not only intelligence in search of what is intelligible, not only reasonableness in search of what is true, but also morality in search of what is good. Hence it poses the question that leads to a practical judgment: What should I do? Here, in the proceeding of a virtuous act of will from that previous inner word that is the judgment of value, Lonergan sees with St. Thomas the creaturely datum that permits us some understanding of the third person of the Holy Trinity. The Holy Spirit is the act of love that emanates from the true and good word with which the Father expresses himself in the Son.

This teaching of St. Thomas that develops an intuition of Augustine's is extremely profound and, at the same time, extremely simple. In fact, the central point about the intelligible emanation by which the true word and the virtuous decision arise in us is not difficult to grasp. It appears unmistakably whenever we speak because we have understood, or judge because we have grasped a sufficient reason for affirming, or make a choice because we know that something is a value. This is the least inadequate experience we have of a dependence of origin [i.e., of the Son from the Father, or of the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son] that, far from signifying an absolute duality [between Origin and Originated], instead indicates a radical unity. This unity is mirrored by the unity within our consciousness, between what that consciousness is by its nature

[12] *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 84, a. 7; cf. I. q. 88, a. 1.
[13] Cf. *ibid.*, I, q. 27, aa. 1 and 2.
[14] Cf. G.B. Sala, *Lonergan and Kant: Five Essays on Human Knowledge*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto-Buffalo-London 1994.

and that [inner word or act of will] by which it reaches that to which it tends, the true and the good[15].

4 The Latin Treatises on Dogmatic Theology

The most immediate result of Lonergan's study of the *verbum* was the speculative part of the treatise on the Holy Trinity that he published in 1957, while he was teaching in Rome[16]. Following the example of St. Thomas, Lonergan starts from the intelligible emanations in God to arrive at the relations, and from those he arrives at the persons, in themselves and in their temporal mission.

The purpose of speculative theology (which later, in *Method in Theology*[17], would be the functional specialization of "systematics") is to propose an understanding of revealed mystery. St. Thomas speaks of this understanding in a passage in the *Quodlibetum* IV, article 18, that Lonergan quotes with delight. There is a twofold purpose, says Thomas, to which theological inquiry can be directed. The first is certainty about revealed truths. Here the theologian must make use of authorities. The other is to lead the student *ad intellectum veritatis* [to an understanding of the truth]; in this case, the theologian must adduce reasons that can make us understand what we know from authority to be true. Without these reasons, the student will know that things are so, but as far as understanding is concerned, *vacuus abscedet*: he will go away with an empty head.

St. Thomas' thought has a determining role not only in the treatise on the Holy Trinity, but also in the treatise on Jesus Christ[18]. In that treatise, after the historical reconstructions and the properly probative work of dogmatic theology, Lonergan seeks some understanding of the saving truth. The reference to Thomas is constant, above all in those doctrines that touch on themes that Lonergan was able to deepen himself: the hypostatic union, the consciousness of Christ, his knowledge, his freedom, sin, and redemption.

Further development led Lonergan to recognize more clearly the limits of his Master's thought, in particular his lack of the historical view that characterizes the modern age. This is the direction in which Lonergan moved in pursuit of his long-term goal of a theological method that is consonant with the modern cultural context. In an interview he granted in 1970, when he had completed his book on theological method, Lonergan observed that his Latin treatises were the fruit of a way of conceiving theology that now has been demolished. Above all, it is demolished because at least in theory it attributed an almost exclusive role to the dogmatic theologian, on the unreal assumption that he could be competent in all the various disciplines and in all the specializations required by theology today[19]. When he drew up his treatises, Lonergan formally was not yet thinking of what he later would call "functional specializations". But a careful examination of these writings will show that he was aware of the proper contributions of the diverse specialists and so of the limits inherent in the fact that a single specialization is not the whole of theology.

Hence, I believe that criticism of a theological method that today can no longer answer to the real situation of theology does not *per se* imply the invalidity of what Lonergan—and with him not a few other theologians—wrote in the years before Vatican Council II. Indeed, in the same

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[15] Cf. *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 27, a. 1 ad 2m.

[16] Cf. *Divinarum Personarum Conceptionem Analogicam evolvit Bernardus Lonergan S.I.* (ad usum Auditorum), PUG, Romae 1957. Reprinted with the same title and with corrections and additions in 1959. Later the treatise on the Trinity was published in two largely reworked volumes: *De Deo Trino* I., Pars Dogmatica; II., Pars Systematica, PUG, Romae 1964.

[17] Cf. *Method in Theology*, Herder and Herder 1972 and 1973; Darton, Longman & Todd, London 1972; Seabury 1979.

[18] Cf. *De Verbo Incarnato dicta scriptis auxit B. Lonergan* (ad usum Auditorum), PUG, Romae 1960; *De Verbo Incarnato,* PUG, Romae 1964 (third revised edition).

[19] Cf. *A Second Collection*, op. cit., 212.

interview in which he criticized the theological method that had been in use, Lonergan hastened to state no less explicitly that in those treatises that he wrote in an "antiquated" academic system there are "chunks… that I think are permanently valid"[20].

5 New Things: *Insight*

I spoke above about the discovery of interiority that Lonergan made under the guidance of Thomas. Because of it, Lonergan was able to go beyond St. Thomas by carrying out for himself that *anthropologische Wende* [anthropological turn] that marks modern thought, moving from the metaphysical doctrine on the soul to intentionality analysis and thus to the intelligently, rationally, and responsibly conscious subject. On that basis Lonergan felt himself able, in the celebrated phrase of Pope Leo XIII, to go beyond the *vetera* [old things] of the medieval master in order to integrate them with the *nova* [new things] that western culture has borne in the following centuries, thanks in part to the seeds planted in it by St. Thomas[21]. These new things, which take up again and carry forward the valid things from our cultural past, were discussed by Lonergan in his greatest work, *Insight. A Study of Human Understanding*[22].

In a first draft of the preface, Lonergan had described *Insight* as an effort to "mount to the level of one's time"[23]. That is, an effort to bring Catholic thought to the level of the 20th Century, just as St. Thomas had done in the 13th Century with regard to the new ideas that Greek and Arabic culture had introduced into western Christianity. For that purpose, Lonergan's privileged dialogue partners in *Insight* are the sciences of nature and modern philosophy—in the first place, Kant.

It is not possible to go into the particulars of this book here. I will limit myself to indicating three basic themes that Lonergan later connected to three questions: 1) What am I doing when I am knowing? —the theme of knowledge; 2) Why is doing that knowing?—the theme of the objectivity of our knowledge; 3) What do I know when I do it? —the theme of the reality that our knowledge reaches[24].

With regard to the first theme, Lonergan shows by an introspective analysis that human knowledge results from an ordered combination of many different acts, which lie on three distinct levels: experiencing, understanding, and judging. This is exactly the teaching of St. Thomas, but the modern cultural context enabled Lonergan to work out this structure much more concretely and precisely. Concerning understanding, modern science has developed appropriate methods for arriving at a grasp of things: classical and statistical method for the investigation of nature, genetic method for the study of living things, and dialectical method for the comprehension of the human world. Concerning judgment, the experimental character of science has enabled us to recognize even more clearly that sketching a possible explanation of the data and judging that things really are that way are two distinct moments in knowing.

With regard to reality, reality is nothing but the objective of our intelligent and rational dynamism; it is whatever is to be known by intelligent grasp and reasonable affirmation[25]; it is the correlative of our intentionality. In this way, Lonergan overcomes the disparity between reality and the operations of our intellect that is at the basis of Kantian phenomenalism. Lonergan summarizes this conception of reality in the following programmatic statement: "The impalpable act of rational assent is the necessary and sufficient condition for knowledge of reality"[26]. Making this thesis

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[20] *Ibid.*
[21] Cf. *Insight,* 768.
[22] Cf. n. 6.
[23] Cf. Crowe, *Lonergan*, op. cit., 58.
[24] Cf. *Method in Theology*, op. cit., 25.
[25] Cf. *Insight*, op. cit., 374; 416; 470 and *passim.*
[26] *Ibid*., 561.

one's own, says Lonergan, is a discovery that "one has not made […] yet if one has no clear memory of its startling strangeness"[27]. It is no exaggeration when he speaks of an intellectual conversion[28] that consists in passing from the conception of reality as the objective of an extroverted tendency on the model of sense, to the conception of reality as what is known by understanding correctly.

With his teaching on knowledge and reality, Lonergan in fact has already answered the question of the objective value of our knowledge. The conditions of knowledge are at the same time the conditions of the transcendence of knowledge. These conditions are two: first, the unlimited range of the intelligent and rational conscious dynamism that embraces the whole cognitive process and, second, judgment. The object intended by our questions, which are not constrained by any principle of immanence and hence aim for the transcendent, is what we know by answering those questions [in judgment]. Hence, there is an intrinsic connection between subjectivity and objectivity. Knowing is the achievement of a person who attends to the data, who does not avoid the labor of inquiry, and who uses all the means at his disposal to make sure of the correspondence between data and interpretation. Only then does he judge. All these things do not happen without a true morality of knowing that engages the subject personally. Thus we can understand the statement that the later Lonergan pens so often: "Genuine objectivity is the fruit of authentic subjectivity"[29].

It is now possible for us to identify Lonergan's place in the return to Thomas that began in the 19th Century. Essential elements in Lonergan's thought indicate his substantial dependence on St. Thomas, as well as his debt to the historical studies that flourished in the Neoscholastic movement. But Lonergan was critical of this reborn Scholastic movement, insofar as it let itself be imprisoned by a classical conception of culture that recognizes, *de jure*, only one universal and permanent culture. Under this conception, the recovery of medieval thought, and of St. Thomas in particular, was unable to bring to fruition the valid elements in our cultural past within the modern context of the science of nature, the human sciences, philosophy, and historical consciousness.

It has seemed to more than one scholar that Lonergan's work should be placed within the current called Transcendental Thomism or the Maréchallian school. I have already noted the indirect influence of Maréchal on Lonergan. The role that Maréchal attributed to the intentional dynamism and to judgment found a deep response in a young Lonergan nourished by reading Augustine and Newman. But this does not permit us to see Lonergan's thought as a specific form of so-called Transcendental Thomism. For Maréchal, the metaphysical interpretation of the intellectual dynamism is decisive for demonstrating the objective character of human knowledge. But in Lonergan's enterprise, the *primum* [first element] is a theory of knowledge worked out by introspective analysis. Only from there does Lonergan develop a critically structured metaphysics, i.e., a metaphysics capable of indicating for every reality it speaks of the cognitive act through which that reality is known.

6 A Method for Theology in the New Cultural Context

His first study of St. Thomas had confronted Lonergan with the evolving nature of human knowledge. His subsequent studies led him to ascend to the origin of this developing knowledge, the subject in its intentional consciousness. But this same subject is also the source of another world that it constructs and superposes on nature: the human world, a world that is constituted by meanings gradually thought up and implemented, a world motivated by values freely and responsibly pursued. The human world is the world of history, so that reflection on it in human

[27] *Ibid.*, 22.
[28] Cf. *Method in Theology*, op. cit., 238.
[29] *Ibid.*, 265; 292; 338.

studies has contributed decisively to the emergence of the historical consciousness that characterizes our culture. In the period after the publication of *Insight*, Lonergan's attention was directed to the world of meaning in its various functions, to the human world, and to history, in particular to the relevance of the human world's historicity for theology.

Lonergan locates the inadequacy of the traditional theological method in the conception of science it is based on, a conception that goes back to Aristotle. In the *Posterior Analytics*[30] scientific knowledge is defined as true and certain knowledge that is had when one knows the universal and necessary cause of a thing. Consequently, the principal instrument of scientific argumentation is the syllogism, which in turn refers back to the first principles that serve as premises. Now, St. Thomas, in his effort to work out a theology at the level of his time, had adopted (and adapted!) the Aristotelian philosophy that the Christian West was becoming more exactly aware of. This system offered a conceptual basis for addressing and reducing to a coherent unity the many and diverse "sentences" inherited from the past. But with this advantage theologians also acquired a conception of science that did not fit the materials that theology deals with. At the beginning of the *Summa*, where he discusses theology as a science, St. Thomas resolves the difficulty that arises from the Aristotelian conception of science by saying that singular realities are not the principal object of theology. They belong to theology only as examples and illustrations. The inadequacy of this answer is obvious. In fact, the realities that belong to the order of salvation are not absolutely necessary. The Incarnation, the Redemption through the Cross, the Church, the sacraments, etc., were not absolutely necessary. Equally, Our Lord Jesus Christ, the deeds narrated in Scripture, the doctrinal tradition of the Church, are all singular realities.

Actually, both Aristotle and St. Thomas were not excessively concerned in their scientific research with finding first principles from which to draw necessary conclusions, or with arriving in every case at universal conclusions. They were content to do what the material they were dealing with permitted. In other words, between the strictly deductivist ideal of science in the *Analytics* and St. Thomas' theological praxis, there are notable adaptations made *via facti* [by deed], without a revision in principle of the very ideal of science. What St. Thomas did in his time, other theologians also did in the following centuries. But, beginning in the Renaissance, a new conception of science gradually developed. This science, as experimental, does not seek the absolutely necessary, but possibilities that in fact are verified. It is not interested exclusively in the universal, but also in the singular, for example in the genesis of the cosmos or the evolution of living species. This attention to the singular is still more evident in the human sciences. The new science is not indifferent to truth (that is why it abandons a hypothesis whenever it does not turn out to be corroborated by the facts); but it is content with what in fact is possible, the ever closer approach to the truth through a continuous and cumulative ongoing process of understanding.

The basic procedure of Aristotelian science was logic; hence the necessity of finding first principles from which to deduce by steps the whole *corpus* [body] of conclusions. But the basic procedure of modern science lies in the method it adopts. This method consists in becoming familiar with the relevant data, in advancing more and more in the understanding of those data, and in formulating judgments based on that understanding, while always remaining open to possible revisions when different data or a more adequate comprehension of the data requires it. Hence, the *primum* in method are not propositions considered to be evident or borrowed from a higher science, but concrete realities, i.e., empirically, intelligently, rationally, and morally conscious human subjects. At the base of modern science therefore stands method, understood as a normative pattern of recurrent and related operations yielding cumulative and progressive results[31]. Science is grounded in the subjectivity that we saw was the focal point of Lonergan's inquiries. Hence, Lonergan did not think it sufficient simply to adapt the scientific ideal that comes from Aristotle. Rather, he worked out a new method capable of taking up in a coherent

[30] Cf. L. I, c.2.
[31] Cf. *Method in Theology*, op. cit., 5.

unity the adaptations and directives that were introduced *via facti* or formulated explicitly by scholars engaged in the various sectors of theological research.

In the complex that is theology, Lonergan distinguishes two phases: encountering the past of the Christian community (theology *in oratione obliqua* [in indirect discourse]), and taking a personal stand with regard to what that past has handed down to us, in order to guide the community toward its future (theology *in oratione recta* [in direct discourse]). These two phases in turn are each subdivided into different moments that correspond to the four levels of intentional consciousness. Eight "functional specializations" are the result. In the first phase: discovering the data in "research", grasping their meaning in "interpretation", establishing the facts in "history", analyzing doctrinal conflicts in "dialectic". In the second phase, in reverse order from that in which the levels of consciousness follow one another: objectifying the horizon of pre-comprehension that is implied in the existential event of conversion in "foundations", expressing judgments of fact and of value in "doctrines", seeking an appropriate understanding of doctrines in "systematics", providing suitable data for the diffusion of the Christian message in "communications".

This division corresponds, in large part, to disciplines that already exist. What is new in Lonergan's methodology is that these eight components are defined as eight interdependent, continuous, and cumulative processes that borrow their arrangement and their norms from the very structure of our intentionality. They are eight different tasks that have different proximate ends and are to be carried out according to different rules. Of particular significance are the two specializations that are connected with the existential level of consciousness. Here we find the specifically innovative element in Lonergan's method. The study of theological doctrines formulated by past generations and taken up, in different measures, by the magisterium of the Church cannot neglect the human subjects of this past in their intellectual, moral, and religious lives. This is the task of "dialectic" in its assessment of those doctrines. But just as it is not possible to comprehend and evaluate the past without taking into consideration its protagonists, similarly today the mediation of saving truth—enunciating, understanding, and communicating the Christian truths [in "doctrines", "systematics", and "communications", resp.]—does not occur independently of those concrete subjects that are the theologians. Their subjectivity is the real foundation of the work they perform; this applies particularly to these three functional specializations in the phase of theology *in oratione recta*. "Foundations" as a theological discipline therefore has the task of reflecting on that foundation. It thematizes the personal event of intellectual, moral, and religious conversion (or the lack of such conversion) that is operating in the subject, the theologian, as the horizon within which the meaning, truth, and value of Revelation can be grasped, affirmed, and lived.

To say that religious conversion (together with the moral and intellectual conversion implied in it) is fundamental for doing theology is to identify the point of juncture between Christian life and reflection on the Christian mystery, the point where an authentically Christian life carries over into a theology that is adequate to the object of its concern. It is true that scientific and cultural problems have their own laws and must be resolved by their own means, but scientific means are in the service of the human mind and do not give any results independently of the concrete subject's horizon of truth and values. The transcendence of Christian truth, its supernatural character, requires the transcendence of Christian life; otherwise, that truth degenerates into an ideological superstructure employed to give a Christian veneer to a conception of the world and of life whose matrix is not the Gospel.

Lonergan certainly does not intend to support a confusion between the proper task of the theologian and the theologian's personal religious life. The two realities are undoubtedly distinct, but it is no less certain that they are connected. The result of theological inquiry is not independent of what the theologian considers human knowledge, and its relation to reality, to be. It is not independent of the theologian's morality, i.e., of his dedication to the true and the good. It is not independent of the theologian's faith, and consequently of his disposition to accept

revealed truth, even when it exceeds the capacities of the human mind or appears implausible in a culture that is enclosed in the immanent.

For St. Thomas and the medieval theologians, the point was so obvious that they felt no need to thematize it. But today, in an epoch that has behind it the Enlightenment with its reductionist treatment of the Christian fact, in an epoch that is fundamentally marked by secularization, I think there is a need that the authentically Christian subject be explicitly recognized as the foundation for doing theology[32]. The religious component makes a method that in itself is suited to the study of any human reality into a specifically theological method. This agrees perfectly with what recent studies of hermeneutics have shown regarding the horizon of pre-comprehension as a determining factor for grasping the meaning of a text. It is even more in agreement with the theological tradition that speaks of an *instinctus fidei* [instinct of faith], a *sensus fidei* [sense of faith], the "eyes of the heart" (Eph. 1, 18). St. Thomas expresses the same thing when, in his *Commentary on the Sentences*, he writes: *ubi amor ibi oculus* [where there is love there is an eye][33]. These are different ways of recognizing the unity that exists between the saving truth in its objective, propositional expression and authentically Christian life.

It was at the beginning of 1965 that Lonergan arrived at the key idea of his method, the idea of a correlation between the specializations of theology and the levels of intentional consciousness. He thus arrived at the idea that the foundation of theology, where it takes a stand toward the past that has handed down to us the revelation of God and the teaching of the Church, lies in conversion, and thus in the authentically believing theologian himself. I would say that today, thirty years later, the truth of this idea is even more evident. There is no correct theology without a sincere personal and communal commitment to holiness[34].

In proposing his method, Lonergan went beyond St. Thomas, but he remained in continuity with his medieval master. St. Thomas was a man at the level of his time, but he was also a man in whom scientific means were in the service of a subjectivity that was in accord with the Gospel message: he was a saint. This is the challenge launched by contemporary culture at Christians and at theologians in particular. The long road that Lonergan traveled to bring out the role of the subject at all levels of knowing and acting helps us understand that, just as there cannot be science without competent scientists, just as there cannot be a truly human society without citizens dedicated to bringing about authentic values, so there cannot be theology without theologians who live by the Gospel. In each of these cases, *res tua agitur* [what is at stake concerns you]. Christian truth is disclosed only to an authentic Christian subjectivity.

[Translation by Donald E. Buzzelli]

[32] The following description of theologians is current in Germany today: "Theologen ohne Glauben, mit Beamtenstatus auf Lebenszeit" (theologians without faith, with lifetime State appointments). A *boutade* [lampoon]? Unfortunately, I think it is more than an irreverent *boutade*, since the theological faculties of the German universities are engaged in large measure in a radical *démontage* [dismantling] of Christian doctrine that is without precedent.

[33] Cf. *In III Sent.*, d. 35, q. 1, a. 2.

[34] Cf. CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, The Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian, Vatican City 1990, nn. 8 and 9.