

SEMINAR IN COMPARATIVE THEOLOGY

THEOLOGICAL CATEGORIES: THE TRANSPOSITION NEEDED FOR COMPARATIVE THEOLOGY

In the second session of the Seminar in Comparative Theology, Carla Mae Streeter of Aquinas Institute of Theology in St. Louis presented a paper exploring the Lonerganian framework for establishing transcultural theological categories. Using chapter 11 of *Method in Theology* as basic source, Streeter developed five points: the meaning of category, categories as theological, the distinction of general and special theological categories, and finally the usefulness of this attention to how we form theological categories for the ongoing transposition of systematic theology as it prepares itself for dialogue in a growing global context.

For Lonergan the meaning of categories becomes clear in a contrast of modes of intending (*Method*, 11-12). Transcendental intending is comprehensive and unrestricted. Categorial intending, by contrast, is limited. It varies with cultural change. Categories are determinations, mental constructs or concepts.

Under the more transcendental intending to religious truth we can consider categories that are specifically theological. These determinations emerge from the interaction of religion with the cultural context in which it finds itself.

Theological categories are treated by Lonergan under the functional specialty of foundations. This specialty deals with the objectification in a systematic way of the theologian's own conversion. It seeks to name and explain the theologian's position of conviction.

If the Christian theologian has experienced the religious conversion that is distinctly Christian, that is, religious mystery mediated through Christ Jesus, then the grounding for doctrines, systematics, and communications comes not merely from a set of propositions from the past. The foundational reality that the theologian is, must be taken into account. This reality will function regardless. It behooves us to gather objective data on it as we are able. This grounding in personal position or conversion provides the point of view by which one researches and interprets one's own religious literature and that of others.

The consciousness of the theologian who is religiously converted as a Christian also is differentiated in other ways. He or she may be differentiated aesthetically. More important, the theologian may be differentiated interiorly by the capacity to advert to his or her own conscious operations, and understand the relation among them. This is intellectual conversion as Lonergan understands it. Religious and interior differentiation will be required for the creation of theological categories that can transpose systematics into the key needed for pluralist discourse.

General theological categories are those which determine objects of study that theology shares with other disciplines. Examples would be the human good, human values, the nature of belief and meaning, the question of God, of religious experience as a phenomenon, and the question of hermeneutics.

Special theological categories deal with objects of inquiry that pertain to theology alone. Examples would be religious experience as specifically Christian, the meaning of Christian community, its history, witness, and service, the theology of God as triune, and the meaning of grace, sin, virtue, and vice.

In seeking both general and special theological categories that are adequate for pluralist dialogue it is necessary to determine if there is such a thing as a transcultural base for such universal communication.

Streeter emphasizes that this base must have two dimensions in interpreting Lonergan. The first is anthropological, and is the very dynamism of human consciousness in its recurrent pattern of experiencing, inquiring, concluding, and deciding. This dynamism is not transcultural as it is explicitly formulated. It will vary culturally in this formulation. It is transcultural in the realities to which those varied formulations refer. These realities are not the product of any one culture. Rather, they are the very principles which produce authentic cultures through authentic human beings.

The second dimension of the transcultural base is the gift of God's love. This gift is offered to all, though received and manifested in the diverse religious traditions of the human community. The gift itself, distinct from its manifestations in religious traditions, is transcultural. The manifestations are not.

The thesis of Streeter's paper, and Lonergan's guiding principle, is that the theological categories we seek will be transcultural only as they refer to the inner core we have indicated. In the anthropological dimension that inner core was the dynamism itself, not its cultural formulation. In the religious dimension that inner core was the gift of God's love, not its manifestation in distinct religious traditions.

Of what use is this clarification theologically? At this point Lonergan introduces the notion of the model or ideal type. While not actual descriptions of reality, the model merely makes possible interlocking sets of terms and relations. These become very useful in guiding investigations and writing the descriptions that tease out further explanations.

The above distinctions are also helpful in critiquing that growing body of writing that proposes world theologies of one type or another. Finally, the distinctions Lonergan offers need to be tested in the scholarship summoning Catholic theologians to midwife the church's universality, perhaps authentically possible for the first time in history.

Vernon Gregson's response to Streeter's paper affirmed the value of the distinctions Lonergan suggests. Gregson directed the attention of the participants to the universal problem of good and evil as a pivotal starting place for the very dialogue we seek.

Reflecting on his own experience as a therapist, Gregson stressed that he must enter another's situation with the conviction that "nothing human is foreign to me." What one does bring to another, he noted, is one's own analysis, both from at-

tentive listening and from one's study. We can thus be a "holder of another's hope," yet always as a fellow seeker.

Loneragan located religion at the root of the decisional level of consciousness, as the highest level of the feeling response to value. Feeling as intentional response to value gives a form of knowledge available in no other way. This in no way denegrates understanding, Gregson assures us. Instead it assures a depth to understanding one's own operations. Recognizing this is essential, for drawing all the mediated operations into play requires the authentic humanness this brings.

The exploration into Lonergan's insights into the forming of theological categories as presented in the paper challenges theologians to return to the dynamism of their own desires. It is also an indication that Lonergan was very aware of the situated Western perspective out of which he wrote, a personal owning of the very point he makes in calling us to identify the transcultural base for the creation of new theological categories.

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