

METHOD IN THEOLOGY

- Topic: History in Theology
Conveners: M. Shawn Copeland, Marquette University
J. Michael Stebbins, Gonzaga University
Presenter: Robert M. Doran, Regis College, Toronto

This year's workshop hosted a paper given by Robert Doran, "System and History: Issues in Method." Drawing on Bernard Lonergan's methodological proposals, Doran advanced work that he had published in two articles on the functions of systematic theology and the challenge history poses to systematics in *Theological Studies*.

Following a brief summary of the theses of these articles, Doran outlined the problem of system and history as a distinct but related sets of questions: (1) adjudicating the past genetic and dialectical history of a theological system itself and including that history in systematics itself as part of a theology of theologies that would also include an ongoing appropriation of the religious truth of non-Christian traditions; (2) anticipating a future genetic sequence of related systematic achievements; (3) regarding history as the mediated object of systematic construction; (4) purposefully facing the intimate relations between systematic thought and options regarding praxis. The paper focused on the third and fourth sets of issues: the notion of history as mediated object of systematics and the grounds that can govern that mediation and the social responsibility of a theology that knows that its task is to mediate between a cultural matrix and the significance and role of a religion in that matrix.

Doran began with clarifications: that dogma is a subset, twice removed, of the category of "church doctrines" and expressive of mysteries of the faith provide the core problems of theology; that systematic theology is organized around that subset; that systematic theology can be grasped as the ordered, coherent, hypothetical, gradually developing, structured, synthetic and, in places, analogical and obscure, understanding of the realities intended in the meanings constitutive of the community that is church. The paper, then, engaged several pertinent questions: What grounds the synthetic inclusion in systematic theology of elements of the Christian mystery that have not been and perhaps never will be formulated in dogmatic pronouncements? Are there aesthetic and dramatic analogies that can function in systematic theology? Can these analogies be explanatory? How are these analogies to be grounded? How are the normative sources of meaning to be expanded appropriately and authentically? Responses to these questions presume religious conversion and include not only an adequate account of cognitional theory, but also moral and psychic conversion.

Doran observed that in order to address issues raised by history, systematic theologians need to identify those tests that, if passed, would endow systematic theological achievements with a certain doctrinal status. He suggested three possibilities for resolution: closure of debate, best analogy, and inescapable practical and

existential implications. Further, Doran treated the issue of the relation between tradition and innovation by exploring the question, How are the theological doctrines that theologians accept from contemporaries, or that a theologian proposes on her or his own, to be integrated with those that are accepted from the doctrinal and theological tradition?

The discussion, which followed the presentation, focused on the meanings of doctrine and dogma, and on mutual self-mediation and its significance for systematics.

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