

FUNDAMENTAL THEOLOGY/METHOD

Topic: Theological Method as Leading Beyond Impasse
Convener: Alison Mearns Benders, Ursuline College
Moderator: Vincent Miller, Georgetown University
Presenter: Cyril Orji, University of Dayton

Cyril Orji's presentation, "Heythrop as 'impasse' and Rome as 'beyond' in the Development of Lonergan's Organon," offered a retrieval of Bernard Lonergan's intellectual development to address the impasse in contemporary Catholic thought, experienced especially as a crisis of meaning and authority. Heythrop College, where Lonergan studied philosophy, languages, and mathematics, represented a time of 'impasse' for him prior to theological studies at the Gregorian University in Rome. With permission from the Lonergan Research Institute at Regis College in Toronto, Dr. Orji reviewed Lonergan's unpublished letters to his religious superiors and friends during his study at Heythrop in England from 1926 to 1930. From these letters, Dr. Orji demonstrated how Lonergan's widely revered transformational understanding of Aquinas blossomed from his formative studies during the Heythrop years.

Dr. Orji described Lonergan's intellectual formation as deriving from the material context of his life, the "dynamic mental and psychic background that sets the habits of one's skills and sensibilities" and the formal context of his life, "the genetical-dialectical development of one's ideas." Lonergan's emergence as a scholar and theologian in the 1940's resolved the years of impasse and frustration at Heythrop. In particular, Dr. Orji related how the influence of Joseph Marechal and Peter Hoenen at the Gregorian enabled Lonergan to breakthrough traditional interpretations of Aquinas to an insight into the role of understanding in Thomistic thought. He argued that Lonergan's thoughts, like those of any great intellectual, changed both genetically and dialectically, and that the seeds of change were planted at Heythrop. Finally, Dr. Orji contended that Lonergan's own development provides us with an important insight into the meaning and significance of his later thought and its application to the methodological crisis facing Christian theology now.

The discussion following the presentation centered on the contemporary role of Catholic universities as well as Lonergan's methodological contributions to this question.

ALISON MEARNS BENDERS

*Ursuline College
Pepper Pike, Ohio*