Hugo Meynell: "The Plight and the Prospects of Lonergan Studies: A Personal View"
Journal of Macrodynamic Analysis
3 (2003): 167-185
http://www.mun.ca/jmda/vol3/meynell.pdf

THE PLIGHT AND THE PROSPECTS OF LONERGAN STUDIES: A PERSONAL VIEW

HUGO MEYNELL

I would like in what follows to discuss the uses for civilization of Lonergan's philosophical work, and then say something about the broader significance of the method which he propounded for theology.

In his very useful and stimulating article, Professor McShane raises the question of "the central present problem of Lonergan studies."[1] In my opinion, it is above all one of what Lonergan would call 'communications' – how to make his work, and its immensely important implications for our culture, available for the general intellectual community (as opposed to a small and embattled segment of the learned Catholic ghetto). Apart from the small, though widespread and vocal, community of his followers, the thinking public, notably the philosophers, have received his work with deafening silence. Even books on the nature of understanding as such often do not include *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*[2] in their extensive bibliographies. And this consorts rather strangely with the opinion held by some of us, that *Insight* is among the outstanding intellectual achievements of the twentieth century. Those, like philosophers and psychologists, who might be expected to take most interest in Lonergan's work, do not even pay him the compliment of attacking him.

Catholics too are often unsympathetic to his work, though the reasons that they give for this are not very impressive, so

[1] Philip McShane, "Implementation: The Ongoing Crisis of Method," in this issue, pp 11-33.

[2] *CWL 3*; first edition (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1957).

far as my experience goes. A well-known British Dominican once made fun of me for my interest in Lonergan. When I asked him whether he had read *Insight*, he admitted that he had never got further than the title, by which he had evidently been put off. One might account for his attitude partly by the traditional rivalry between the Dominican and the Jesuit orders. But it was a fellow Jesuit who told me that Lonergan's work taken as a whole was "sheer pedantry." Yet I myself thought, and continue to think several decades later, that Lonergan has succeeded in solving once and for all a number of central and intractable problems of traditional philosophy. Of course, not a few, like Descartes and the Logical Positivists, have claimed to do this; but their alleged solutions have usually been refuted easily by their colleagues. I know of no serious or convincing attempt to refute Lonergan's central philosophical claims and arguments.

From the point of view of professional philosophy, with its well-established and mutually-opposed dogmas and schools,[3] it is a disadvantage for Lonergan that he is, so to say, neither fish nor fowl. He certainly does not practise what goes by the name of "analytical philosophy." I can only recollect one reference to Wittgenstein in his work, and that a curiously indirect one, in the context of a quotation, and in the form of the adjective "Wittgensteinian."[4] The phenomenologists tend to dismiss him as an atavistic Thomist; the Thomists as having capitulated to the subjectivism of the phenomenologists. Yet if one follows him, one sees important points in each of the doctrines of these apparently opposed schools. One can see in them, in fact, virtues which they are notoriously indisposed to see in each other.

When I first began to read *Insight*, I soon felt what one may call the pressure of philosophical genius, as I had previously felt it in reading passages of Plato, Descartes, or Kant. In my enthusiasm, I assumed that everyone interested in

[3] It is fair to observe, that there has been a slight relaxation of this tendency over the last few years.

[4] See Lonergan's response to a number at discussants at the end of *Language, Truth and Meaning*, ed. McShane (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1972).

philosophy or theology would soon be reading and talking about the book. Naturally I tried to share with others the treasure which I thought that I had found. But very soon, and persistently, I encountered the intellectual equivalent of doors slammed in my face. Yet I myself was usually ready and eager to read books for which my colleagues expressed such enthusiasm.

In some ways it is unfortunate that Lonergan was a Catholic, a theologian, and a Jesuit. One reviewer, himself a priest, remarked of my own *Introduction*,[5] that it was odd that I never mentioned that Lonergan belonged to the Jesuit order. The omission was quite deliberate. I wanted people to attend to the merits of Lonergan's claims and arguments for themselves. I hoped that they would wonder, for example, whether the argument for the existence of God in chapter XIX of *Insight* might be sound; rather than dismissing it with the reflection, 'he's a Jesuit; he would argue like that, wouldn't he?' (Lenin seems to have thought it a sufficient refutation of Berkeley's philosophical position, that Berkeley was a bishop.)

One might even say that one of the greatest needs of the Lonergan movement is for informed polemic against their master. One volume of critical essays, *Looking at Lonergan's Method*,[6] at least paid Lonergan the compliment of subjecting his work to negative criticism. There were even offerings to this effect by some highly distinguished contributors. But these scholars were uniformly at their worst. Misunderstandings of Lonergan's arguments and claims, based on very superficial readings, were presented, and then sarcastically dismissed. One critic saw Lonergan as peddling a confused blend of rationalism and empiricism. He did not apparently even consider the possibility that one of the main merits of what Lonergan has to offer, is a viewpoint from which empiricism and rationalism are both revealed as partial truths, each

[5] *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Bernard Lonergan* (London: Macmillan, 1976 and 1991). My projected title *was Understanding Understanding*, with the present title as subtitle; but the publishers, to my regret, felt that this would not do.

[6] Ed. P. Corcoran. (Dublin: Talbot Press, 1975). I have discussed this book at some length in *The Theology of Bernard Lonergan* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1986), chapter 3.

needing to be complemented by the other. Empiricists are right in insisting that human knowledge has to start from experience, although, since David Hume, they have had a fatally restricted conception of what such experience may be. We are not only aware of our sense-experience and our feelings, but, as John Locke noted before Hume, of the mental operations, of questioning, hypothesizing, weighing evidence, judging, deciding and so on, which we apply to this experience.[7] And rationalists are correct in maintaining that if our knowledge is to be at all extensive, let alone critical and systematic, we have to subject it thoroughly to our mental capacities of intelligence and reason.

What is the present state of philosophy in general? And what contribution might be made to it by a sustained attempt to take Lonergan seriously, for better or for worse? My own impression is that the dominance of the linguistic philosophy which has prevailed since the late fifties is almost at an end. It is been succeeded by scientism and postmodernism. Since the demise of logical positivism, which presented itself as a vindication of science, scientism has tended to take the superiority of science, and its imperious if not exclusive claim to constitute genuine knowledge, as sheer dogma.[8] One is inclined to retort with the scholastic maxim, that what is asserted gratuitously, is to be denied gratuitously.[9] In stark opposition to scientism, postmodernism evinces despair at ever finding any coherent account of the world at large, or of the place of human beings within it. The 'whole in knowledge' which Hegel declared to be the objective of philosophy turns out, on this view, to be the object of a fool's errand.

From Lonergan's point of view, there is a 'position'[10] and

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[7] I do not think that it has often been observed how far Locke, in his notion of 'reflection' as well as 'sensation' as a source of ideas, anticipates Lonergan's 'generalized empirical method', as opposed to the 'empiricism' of Hume and his myriad followers. See Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, chapter 1, paragraph 4.

[8] Cf. especially the work of W.V.O. Quine and his followers. I have tried to provide a brief critique of Quine's position in a forthcoming article in *MJLS*.

[9] *Quod gratis asseritur, gratis negatur*.

[10] It seems wise to retain the inverted commas, as these are terms of

a ‘counterposition’ in both scientism and postmodernism. It will be remembered that a ‘position’ is an assertion or assumption which is compatible with its being attentively, intelligently, and reasonably asserted; a ‘counterposition’ one which is not so.[11] Science splendidly and outstandingly exemplifies the results of attentiveness, intelligence, and reasonableness as applied to belief about the physical world. But the metaphysical theory or assumption which may be called ‘scientism’ implies that such ‘mentalistic’ conceptions as attentiveness, intelligence, and reasonableness cannot have real application to the world, since everything real is reducible to physics and chemistry, and what is mental is not so reducible. On this view, reference to the mental will either have to be abandoned as a result of the advance of science, or be relegated to the status of mere convenience or metaphor, rather as we still speak of the ‘rising’ of the sun in spite of the discovery of Copernicus.

It may readily be seen that this is a clear example of a ‘counterposition’. If attentiveness, intelligence, and reasonableness do not exist in the last analysis, then scientism cannot in the last analysis be attentively, intelligently and reasonably affirmed. One of the main reasons for the apparent plausibility of postmodernism, of course, is the dogmatism implicit in scientism, and the apparent failure of attempts to show how the pretensions of science can be justified otherwise than by sheer assertion. But on Lonergan’s view, the authority of science, within its proper bounds, can be justified; though not the *obiter dicta* of which some scientists may see fit to relieve themselves on the subject of metaphysics, ethics, or theology, when these are consequences of scientism. And it may be asked how far the characteristic doctrines of postmodernism, largely negative as they are (about the failure of the Enlightenment enterprise, and the impossibility of satisfactory ‘grand narratives’ on the model of Freudianism or Marxism) can be attentively, intelligently, and reasonably

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art in Lonergan’s thought which have a sense that is slightly different from their usual ones.

[11] Cf. *CWL 3*, 413-15, 513, 519-20, 523-4 etc.; *Method*, 249-254, 270-1, etc.

asserted. If they cannot, it seems as arbitrary to accept them as it is to accept the claims of scientism. If they can, one seems to be committed to the 'grand narrative' which consists in and follows from the applicability of attentiveness, intelligence, and reasonableness to the justification of assertions in general. One may hazard that there are perhaps 'positions' and 'counterpositions' in Freudianism and Marxism themselves; according to how far the accounts they offer of the world and human affairs bring out the manner in which attentiveness, intelligence, and reasonableness may be enhanced or frustrated by, say, early individual upbringing and socio-economic circumstances; or how far these systems seem to make such mental activities impossible or inconceivable in the last analysis.

As to scientism, it depends on oversight of the 'aha--experience' or act of understanding which is constitutive of every scientific discovery. For Lonergan, each such 'aha-experience' is a glimpse of God, whom he describes in *Insight* as 'the unrestricted act of understanding.' Scientism, of course, is closely associated with what one might call the Cartesian-Newtonian nightmare. According to this view, the world is by no means the beautiful prospect that is presented to our senses, which really is just the result of its impinging upon the surfaces of our bodies; it is an invisible, inaudible congeries of particles or waves, an absolutely pointless chaos. Such disenchantment of the world has been felt by very many, like Max Weber, to be the inevitable consequence of the advance of reason in our apprehension of the world and the place of humankind within it. But Lonergan's account reveals this to be merely a mistake. True, there is a world which exists prior to our senses and the application of our mental processes to them; but it is an intelligible world, grasped and to be grasped by the insights or acts of understanding of scientists over the course of the centuries. Such an intelligible world is full of enchantment, radiant as it is with divine creative intelligence. Its progressive decipherment, furthermore, is a primary component of that service of God to which humanity is called.

For all their radical opposition to one another, scientism and postmodernism are at one in their repudiation of what is

called ‘foundationalism.’ It is not the least of the merits that may be claimed for Lonergan, however, that he has found satisfactory foundations for knowledge. It is now commonly argued, of course, that it is impossible to find such foundations.[12] The combination of logic and experience, as expounded by the radical empiricism which was in vogue six or seven decades ago, is woefully inadequate, as would now be almost universally admitted. From the fact that I seem to see a coloured patch, it follows logically that I seem to see an extended patch; but this is hardly an adequate basis for contemporary physics or astronomy. But other candidates for the foundations of knowledge seem all to founder on the rocks of infinite regress. If I propose foundations for knowledge, you may properly ask, on what those in turn are founded; and if I give an answer, you may simply reiterate the question; and so on for ever.

Some religious believers have reacted with great relief to the apparent failure of the quest for the foundations of knowledge. The foundations expounded by the radical empiricism which issued in logical positivism, as is well known, were atheistic in implication; except on a very primitive conception of ‘God,’ no course of sense-experiences counts as being of God. On the other hand, what some have taken to be ‘experiences of God’ always have quite a different explanation for their occurrence, like obscure memories of life in the womb, or of the loving parent deemed by the infant to be omnipotent. But if such irreligious or atheistic claims have no better foundation than theistic ones, which follows from the supposition that they all equally lack foundation, then the religious person or theist has nothing to fear from polemics of this kind. Such a view is typical of what has been called the ‘Reformed epistemology’ expounded by such authors as Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff. On their view, a religious believer may properly take a statement like ‘There is a God’ to be what is called a ‘basic statement’, not requiring justification by appeal to any other statement or corpus of statements. Since unbelievers, on anti-foundationalist assumptions, have statements which are basic to their own position, they are in no

[12] E.g., by Quine and Richard Rorty.

position to object to statements characteristically made by theists or Christians on the ground that they are basic. The obvious trouble with this position, however, is that it is hard to see at this rate why any belief whatever, however monstrous or bizarre on first appearance, should not be defended by its champions on the ground that it is basic. To use Plantinga's own example, why should I not take it as basic to my belief system, that there is a Great Pumpkin which descends to earth every Hallowe'en?[13]

But the foundations of knowledge proposed by Lonergan are not subject to the objection that they lead to infinite regress. It was a standard and crushing objection to the foundations proposed by the logical positivists that they were self-destructive; since there is no course of experience by which you can verify or falsify the presumably meaningful and non-analytic proposition, that all meaningful non-analytic propositions can be verified or falsified by experience. But it is the *contradictories* of Lonergan's proposed foundations which are self-destructive. According to Lonergan, I tend to get to know what is true, so far as I am attentive to the relevant experience, intelligent in envisaging possible explanations for it, and reasonable in preferring as likely to be true the explanation which does appear best to explain it. Suppose someone denies that one tends to get to know the truth about things in this way. Has she attended to the relevant evidence, and so on? If she has, she has used in support of the alleged truth that she is expounding the very mental procedures whose relevance to the determination of truth she is denying. But if she has not attended to the relevant evidence, and so on (and is not even appealing to an authority supposed to have done so), what is the point of paying any attention to her?[14] The proposed foundations seem not only secure in themselves, but to do the required job. Why do we believe that there are quarks or

[13] I have criticized the Reformed epistemology at greater length in "Faith, Foundationalism, and Nicholas Wolterstorff" in Linda Zagzebski, ed., *Rational Faith: Catholic Responses to Reformed Epistemology* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993).

[14] For Lonergan's account at the foundations of knowledge, see especially *CWL 3* chapter XI; for a brief argument showing the self-destructiveness of the denial that they are such, see *Method,* 16-17.

leptons? Because physicists over many generations have been attending to the relevant evidence in experience; have envisaged the hypothesis that there are quarks and leptons as one of the ways in which this evidence can be explained; and have come to prefer the judgment that there are such to any other explanation that has been proposed of the relevant evidence. And just the same applies, of course, to the confidence of astronomers that there are quasars and pulsars.

To set store by 'basic statements' is incidentally objectionable as encouraging the intellectual equivalent of the ghetto mentality. Rather than feeling obliged to reason for my position, in the face of opposition, all I can do, in effect, is to plead that, since everyone in the last analysis plumps for their own position, why should I not plump for mine? Surely it is more healthy, from the point of view of the life of the mind, to regard every position as owing a defence to its opponents on principles of a comprehensive rationality. This would be impossible, of course, if such principles were not available; but on Lonergan's account, they are so.

If Lonergan is correct, the older foundationalism, including logical positivism, was on the right lines, at least in what it was searching for. But in another respect his position is the very antithesis of logical positivism, or indeed of the view of the later Wittgenstein. Logical positivism stigmatized all philosophy that was not purely critical of other philosophy as nonsense, while Wittgenstein claimed that it depended in what he called 'language gone on holiday.' For Lonergan, on the contrary, all philosophies make some sense, as emphasizing one aspect of the cognitional process at the expense of the rest. Like Aristotle and Hegel, he regards himself as obliged to give some account of why intelligent and reasonable persons have maintained philosophical positions other than his own. Thus empiricists are right to attend to the important role of experience in knowing, but neglect the contribution made by constructive intelligence. Idealists on the other hand stress the role of constructive intelligence, but neglect the part played by reason in determining which of the constructions of human intelligence are true of the world. Materialism rightly maintains that the world largely exists, and is as it is, prior to

and independently of the application to it of the human cognitional apparatus; but does not take proper account of the fact that it is nevertheless nothing other than what is to be known by means of its proper application.

Linguistic philosophers such as J. L. Austin, or some of Wittgenstein's disciples, have been inclined to stress the traditional wisdom that is preserved in the attributions, relations, and distinctions implicit in ordinary language. Marxists, on the other hand, have been inclined to regard ordinary language as dominated by ideology. Which party to this dispute is right? It is said that matrimonial therapists, in approaching the problems posed by warring couples, often resolve disputes by suggesting that both partners are right. Perhaps disappointingly, much the same applies to this case; the thesis of the ordinary language philosophers, and the antithesis insisted on by the Marxists, each have a point, but are to be *aufgehoben* on Lonergan's account. Ordinary language preserves results of attentiveness to experience, intelligence in envisaging possibilities, reasonableness in making judgments, and responsibility in coming to decisions, which have been occurring from time immemorial. On the other hand, the Marxists do well to point out the probability that results of inattention, and of restriction of intelligence and reason, may also be crystallized in ordinary language, particularly when these suit privileged groups and economic classes within societies. It is amusing and instructive to note, in this connection, that the English word 'noble' is used to ascribe both membership of a privileged class, and possession of high moral character.[15] This makes it natural to assume without question that to have the one attribute is always to have the other, which is not, it is to be feared, invariably the case. Similarly, the word 'villain' was once descriptive of persons very low in the social hierarchy of the European feudal system. Furthermore, it is surely only common-sense to acknowledge that the arcana of science and philosophy, with which ordinary language did not evolve to cope, are not themselves matters of common sense, and so involve extensions and modifications of

[15] This was pointed out by the anthropologist and philosopher Ernest Gellner.

the conceptual apparatus provided by ordinary language.

The minds of philosophers and scientists have long been plagued by the recalcitrant problem of the relation of consciousness to the world, and how consciousness could possibly have evolved in a universe which, from the point of view of a science based on physics and chemistry, seems so alien to it.[16] For the disciple of Lonergan, the problem of consciousness as usually conceived is (largely) solved by being turned inside-out. Reality or the concrete universe is nothing other than what one can become conscious *of* in a particular way by using one's conscious faculties in an appropriate manner. We attend to the experience available to us on any topic; we envisage a range of possibilities; we judge that possibility to be the case which is best corroborated by the evidence to which we have attended. So we come to a number of judgments; and reality or the concrete universe is nothing other than what these judgments tend to be about so far as we have followed the process to an indefinite extent. The real world is nothing other than what true judgments are about; judgments converge on the truth so far as they are well-founded; and well-founded judgments are those which are based so far as possible on attentiveness, intelligence, and reasonableness. The more strictly scientific problem still remains, of course, of just what physical and chemical circumstances must obtain for consciousness to arise within the world, and why they must do so. It may be remarked as well, that the fact that the world is ineluctably *for* consciousness in the manner just described consorts well with its being *due* to the creative act of the consciousness which all call God.

When it comes to moral philosophy, Lonergan shares the existentialist stress on personal responsibility, without any of the tendency to arbitrariness which may be attributed to existentialism. One may come attentively, intelligently, and reasonably to make a judgment of value as well as of sheer fact; and decide responsibly to act accordingly. We have plenty of data on the question of what will contribute to a relatively happy and fulfilled human life, in others as well as ourselves;

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[16] See Jonathan Shear, ed., *Explaining Consciousness: The Hard Problem* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: MIT Press, 1998).

and what will not. That knowledge of what is of value is so similar to knowledge of ordinary fact, in Lonergan's view, distinguishes it sharply from the extreme subjectivism, the 'emotivism' and 'prescriptivism', which have plagued the ethical thinking of so much analytical philosophy since G.E. Moore[17] and the logical positivists. The latter seem to have assumed that goodness cannot be *a matter of* contribution to happiness, universalizability, and so on, without being *logically deducible* from them. Of this assumption, subjectivism was the almost inevitable result; what else can a moral judgment be, at this rate, but the evincing of an emotion about something, or the encouragement in oneself or others of a practical attitude towards it? And according to nearly everyone who is not philosophically sophisticated, to subjectivise moral judgments to this degree is fatally to trivialize them.

The philosopher Leibniz looked forward to a time when, on all matters of dispute between human beings, they would be able to resolve them by saying, 'Let us calculate.' In one sense, Lonergan's work is an indication of why this cannot be done; not only experience, but also understanding and judgment cannot be reduced to calculation. But in a more important sense, I think, it is a kind of fulfillment of Leibniz's ideal. What he offers us is a method for resolving important basic disputes. It is a corollary of antifoundationalism, of course, that there can be no such method. But surely this augurs rather desperately for the future. There are many important differences of belief which divide human beings, some of them with momentous practical consequences, as we were reminded on September 11, 2001. Unless reason is in principle available to resolve them, we seem to have no other recourse but the guns and the thumbscrews, and perhaps the psychiatric wards. If it is available, in the manner that Lonergan shows us, perhaps we may be able to afford after all, as Dr. McShane says, "an optimism that regards humanity's butterfly history as

[17] It should be noted that Moore himself was not a subjectivist; but subjectivism was soon inferred from his arguments against 'naturalism' in *Principia Ethica* ([1903] Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1956).

being at present in a grey but golden chrysalis stage."[18] Dr. McShane alludes to "the complex issue of the relation of Lonergan's work to feminism."[19] It ought to be admitted straight away, that the lack of inclusive language in Lonergan's work can jar on later sensibilities. But the essence of what is at issue in feminism is not at all difficult to convey on his account. We tend to get at the truth, especially about the human world and about what is of value, by encompassing within the range of our own understanding as many points of view as possible. It is therefore obvious that we are liable to stray very far indeed from the truth on such matters if we systematically exclude the point of view of half the human race. As postmodernists like Foucault have well brought out, we are apt especially to err when we have an interest in not attending to a viewpoint, or not taking it seriously, due to our group or class position. Unfortunately, males have been very prone to neglect the female viewpoint for these reasons.

What is Lonergan's contribution to the dialogue between religions, and between religion and irreligion? *Insight* culminates in an argument for Roman Catholic Christianity; whereas *Method* is at pains to emphasize that different religious traditions may each in their way encourage, or discourage, authentic human living.[20] These positions are usefully seen as complementary to one another. A Buddhist, or a secularist, could of course in principle use Lonergan's method to show that an authentic human being should reject the doctrines of the existence of God, and of the special revelation in Jesus Christ, which are of the essence of Catholic Christianity. It appears to me that, in the foreseeable future, after so much barren polemic and mutual misrepresentation, the main stance of the religious traditions should be to listen to one another. This does not imply, as some have argued,[21] that all religions are really expressing the same belief from the point of view of different cultural contexts. But the fact remains that they all have a great deal to learn from respectful

[18] McShane, 12.
[19] McShane, 12, n. 3.
[20] See *Method*, chapter 4; *CWL 3*, chapter XX.
[21] Notably, John Hick and Wilfred Cantwell Smith.

listening. For example, a Christian may have much to learn from Buddhists on the restraint of the passions, from Marxists on the importance of social justice in promoting the reign of God, from Confucians about the merits of traditional decencies in maintaining a good society, from Muslims about the immediate presence of God in the actions and events of human life, and from secularists about the demand that one should not neglect the moral requirements of the present life on the pretext of preoccupation with the next. If one is a theist, it is not reasonable to claim, or to imply, that no-one has ever been an atheist and at the same time to a great extent attentive, intelligent, reasonable, and responsible. It is worth insisting in some circles, of course, that the converse also applies; that there have been attentive, intelligent, reasonable, and responsible believers, even in religions other than one's own. Lonergan's method, it may be concluded, provides a basis for fruitful dialogue not only between religions, but between religion and irreligion.

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I believe that Professor McShane is perfectly right when he says that "(a)n important goal of Lonergan studies is to indicate clearly and pragmatically the full global need and scope of functional specialization."[22] When I first read *Method in Theology*, I was quite disappointed at what I found. I had expected that Lonergan would have more to say on the topics covered in chapters XIX and XX of *Insight*, where an argument for the existence of God is followed by an apologetic for Christianity. But my expectation, as well as turning out to be wrong in fact, was quite misguided. To use an analogy I have used before, the area devoted to weapon training is not the same as the battlefield. But both are essential, if one is to engage in successful campaigns. *Method in Theology* is analogous to the former; it sets out what has to be done in articulating what the Christian message has been in the past, and applying it to the present and future. Part of this task is to provide reasons for believing that there is a God, and showing

[22] McShane, 19.

what can be demonstrated of the divine nature by following through the consequences of these reasons; this is done in chapter XIX of *Insight*. Another part is to commend specifically Christian beliefs as more worthy of acceptance to the thoroughly rational mind than their contradictories, as is done in chapter XX. If these things are to be done in a rigorous rather than a shoddy manner, and in a way which meets the fundamental objections head-on, it has to be within the context of a systematic theology; and systematic theology is the topic of the seventh of the functional specialties distinguished by Lonergan.

What is the nature of Lonergan's distinction between functional specialties in theology, and what is its point? Christianity is a set of beliefs and practices which comes to us from the past, and which we may feel (if we are Christians) obliged to defend arid apply in the present and future. Getting clear what the beliefs and practices have been is the role of the first phase of theology, and the first four of the eight functional specialties; and setting out what they are to be here and now is the role of the second phase of theology, and the fifth to the eighth of the functional specialties.

Perhaps it will make the matter dearer if we take a non-Christian example, since the method is applicable to every human utterance and performance which comes from the past and is felt to be relevant to the present. Suppose I am a Muslim scholar dealing with one of the suras of the Koran. I may wish to establish what is the correct original text (research); what the prophet's meaning was when he first uttered it (interpretation); how it fits in with the whole milieu of the prophet's life and times (history); how the prophet was in good faith and acting for the best in delivering it, rather than, say, using the pretext of divine revelation to increase his own power or privileges (dialectic). I may on the other hand be more directly concerned with the here and now – with what it is to be a fully authentic and converted human subject (foundations); with why a fully converted human subject should embrace rather than deny the basic tenets of Islam (doctrines); with how these doctrines form a systematic and coherent whole which fitly crown the edifice constituted by the rest of human knowledge and

appropriate belief (systematics); and how this systematically-understood set of doctrines is to be expressed and lived in all the multifarious cultural milieux and life situations in which the twenty-first-century Muslim may find herself (communications).

Now it seems to me clear, when one reflects on the matter, that whenever anything has been said or done in the past which is felt in any way to have relevance to the present, all of these eight types of activity are relevant and important. And it is extremely useful to have them dearly and distinctly set out, so that none of them is omitted. In our own times, the first three functional specialties are heavy industries; as applied to religious matters, they constitute what is generally known as 'Religious Studies'. But the question, 'Why should this old stuff be of any significance to us here and now?' which is the point where 'Religious Studies' may be said to issue in theology properly speaking, can hardly be passed over. Nor does it seem very sensible just to expect the individual to work out for herself what is to be believed and why, when so many considerable minds over the course of history have applied themselves to these problems. What is it to be an intellectually, religiously, and morally authentic human being, and what is it to strive to become such a being? Why are the doctrines of the religion in which one has been brought up, or some other set of religious (or irreligious) doctrines, appropriate to be believed by an authentic human being? How, if at all, do these doctrines form an intellectually coherent whole, fitting together with the rest of human knowledge? How is this whole to be applied by each human being to her own special situation, which is not quite the same as that of anyone else? Thomas Aquinas has been a notable systematic theologian for the Catholic tradition, John Calvin for the Protestant, Shankhara and Ramanuja for the Hindu. But it is of no use just repeating what they said; their language and concepts have to be communicated to people who are struggling to direct and order their lives in our own time.

One author has seen fit to object to Lonergan's method and its scheme of functional specialties, that they presuppose

that one is a Roman Catholic.[23] Nothing could be further from the truth. The scheme would be just as useful to an atheist, or one who repudiated all religion as mistaken from an intellectual and reprehensible from a moral point of view. Any thinking person, in confronting a document or monument from the past, has to ask the questions: What did they say then, and what attitude should we take to it? What, in consequence of what they said, are we to say now? Presumably some writers in the past, like David Hume[24] or Vladimir Lenin, are regarded by atheists as having expressed and argued for their point of view more effectively than others. If this is so, it is worth establishing as accurately as one can the actual text of, say, *The Natural History of Religion* or *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*; what the authors meant in writing as they did; what was going forward at the time; and how far the authors in question were intellectually clear-sighted and virtuously motivated in what they did. Furthermore (to move from the first to the second phase), atheists just as much as theists have a proper concern with what it is to be an intellectually and morally authentic human being. Also, as atheists they are and ought to be concerned with why the judgments of fact and value constitutive of atheism are proper ones for authentic human persons to believe; with how these judgments fit together compellingly into a logically consistent whole which is compatible with the rest of human knowledge; and by what means atheism is to be communicated to women and men of all

[23] See Corcoran, *Looking*, 80. The source of this bizarre mistake is presumably that Lonergan, as writing in the first instance for Catholic theologians, concentrates on Catholic theology and doctrines for his examples. One may usefully cite the contrary objection, brought by Karl Rahner, that the method is not specific enough for explicitly theological or religious doctrine (*Language, Truth and Meaning*, 194-96). I concede that it is unfortunate that Lonergan should have insisted that 'religious conversion' was a prerequisite for doing theology; as some have, understandably though wrongly, taken this to imply that one has to be a Christian, or even a Roman Catholic, to engage fruitfully in theology at all. I am convinced, however, that the difficulty here is rather terminological than substantial. For a longer discussion of this point, see *The Theology of Bernard Lonergan*, 38-41.

[24] This is not to imply unequivocally that Hume was an atheist; but there is no denying that his work has, and quite properly, proved useful to atheists.

temperaments, cultural types, and educational levels.

Why is it anything more than pedantry to distinguish these functional specialties? Most of these stages in communicating a message are not usually explicitly distinguished, and it is surely of importance, if the enormous range of messages which come to us from the past, and of the backgrounds of their proclaimers and hearers, is to be taken properly into account, that they should be so. There is of course no lack of persons effectively engaged in research, interpretation, and history as these relate to religion and Christianity. Dialectics, however, is apt to be done unsystematically and intemperately; foundations to be left in obscurity; doctrines to be affirmed or denied stridently and with 'insecure resentment' (as Lonergan put it). Systematics is largely neglected, or carried out on the crumbling basis of 'scientism'. Certainly there is no lack of attempts at communication, but these cannot be done either adequately or honestly when the work to be done in the fourth to seventh functional specialties is not even adverted to as needing to be done. Each of us assumes more or less without question that she is intellectually and morally authentic; surely it is useful that the question of what it is to be so should be explicitly set out (foundations), so that one may not only apply oneself to be a fully authentic subject, but ask the question how far those to whom one is attending in the past are so in what they wrote, said, or did (dialectics).

Dr. McShane reports that, when Fr. Frederick Crowe asked what functional specialty he was working in, he replied that he was working in all of them. I would not have responded to Fr. Crowe's question in at all the same way. What I have tried to write has always been pretty closely related to the functional specialty of dialectic, with a view to doctrines. I have tried to expound various authorities to whom I have attended, with a view to developing the 'positions' in their thinking, and to reversing the 'counterpositions.' It is characteristic of dialectics, that the various sorts of intellectual insufficiency and bad faith which are possible are articulated and thematized. In this way the range of possible hidden agendas may be brought to light.

I hope that what I have said does something to account for

my view that Lonergan is a thinker of first-rate but vastly underestimated importance, who has contributions to make to our culture which are urgently needed.

Hugo Meynell is the author of, most recently, *Redirecting Philosophy: Reflections on the Nature of Knowledge from Plato to Lonergan*. He is recently retired from the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Calgary.

Comments on this article can be sent to jmda@mun.ca.