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# From A Systematics of History To Communications: Transition, Difference, Options

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FROM A SYSTEMATICS OF  
HISTORY TO COMMUNICATIONS:  
TRANSITION, DIFFERENCE, OPTIONS

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I. INTRODUCTION

Robert Doran proposes a unified field structure for systematic theology.<sup>1</sup> The proposal correlates four real relations in the Trinity (paternity, filiation, active spiration, and passive spiration) with four created participations (*esse secundarium* of the Incarnation, the light of glory, sanctifying grace, and the habit of charity).<sup>2</sup> This is the four-point hypothesis. Joining the correlation to a theological theory of history completes the unified field structure that "would stand to a contemporary systematics as the periodic table of elements stands to contemporary chemistry."<sup>3</sup> The structure serves as a method "capable of guiding for the present and the foreseeable future the ongoing genetic development of the entire synthetic understanding of the

1 Robert Doran, "Bernard Lonergan and the Functions of Systematic Theology," *Theological Studies* 59, 4 (1998): 569-607, "System and History: The Challenge to Catholic Systematic Theology," *Theological Studies* 60 (1999), *What Is Systematic Theology?* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), and "The Starting-Point of Systematic Theology," *Theological Studies* 67 (2006): 750-76. Doran's *Theology and the Dialectics of History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990) lays the groundwork.

2 In page 18 of *What Is Systematic Theology?*, Doran translates and quotes the four-point hypothesis from Lonergan's *De Deo trino: Pars systematica* (Rome: Gregorian University, 1964): 234/5. See English translation, Bernard J.F. Lonergan, *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, vol. 12, *The Triune God: Systematics*, ed. Robert M. Doran and H. Daniel Monsour, tr. Michael Shields (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007).

3 Doran, *What Is Systematic Theology?* 63.

mysteries of faith and of the other elements."<sup>4</sup> The structure develops and refines Bernard Lonergan's method for systematic theology.<sup>5</sup>

Recent discussion of Doran's complex heuristic has addressed the four-point hypothesis.<sup>6</sup> But Doran also conceives the human making of history in the mode of constitutive meaning, no less than the cognitive meaning of dogma and doctrine, as the content or object of systematics. Accordingly, "history is the mediated object of systematics."<sup>7</sup> Doran's "systematics of history"<sup>8</sup> proceeds in light of Lonergan's theory of history amplified with analytic concepts contributed by Doran: psychic conversion, the dialectic of culture along with person and community, and a distinction between a dialectic of contraries and a dialectic of contradictories.<sup>9</sup> Connecting the theory of history to the four-point hypothesis will yield a theological theory of history.

In considering Doran's proposal I would like to move in a different direction from a discussion of the four-point hypothesis. Looking more to Doran's approach to history, yet not confining attention to systematics, I will ask how Doran's theological theory of history affects other functional specialties besides systematics. I will address *communications* in particular. Expectation of further clarity from the continuing debate on the four-point hypothesis notwithstanding, and in advance of a substantial application of Doran's methodological

4 *Ibid.*, 62.

5 Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Seabury Press, 1972).

6 In 1993 Frederick E. Crowe, SJ, drew attention to Lonergan's correlation of the four divine relations in the Trinity with "four divine graces par excellence" in "The Spectrum of 'Communication' in Lonergan," ed. Thomas J. Farrell and Paul A. Soukup, *Communication and Lonergan: Common Ground for Forging the New Age* (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1993), 67-86 at 85. Crowe's survey and summary of communication as a theme in Lonergan's writings are invaluable.

See recent responses by Charles Hefling, "On the (Economic) Trinity: An Argument in Conversation with Robert Doran," *Theological Studies* 68 (2007): 642-60, and Neil J. Ormerod, "Two Points or Four – Rahner and Lonergan on Trinity, Incarnation, Grace, and Beatific Vision," *Theological Studies* 68 (2007): 661-73. Robert Doran replies in "Addressing the Four-Point Hypothesis," *Theological Studies* 68 (2007): 674-82.

7 Doran, *What Is Systematic Theology?*, 147.

8 *Ibid.*, 156.

9 See Doran, *Theology and the Dialectics of History*, 70-77.

proposal, questions about its wider implications are unavoidable.<sup>10</sup> A modification in the application of the seventh functional specialty cannot help but affect the successor specialty that at once depends on and crowns not only systematics but the whole task of theology. I hazard the view that it is not too soon to ask how Doran's modification of Lonergan's systematics leads into adjustments in receiving and applying Lonergan's functional specialty of communications. Change initiates consequences. Hence, what consequences occur for communications following from the proposed changes in systematics?

One consequence involves the goal of systematics. Doran's modification touches *Method in Theology's* stated goal for this specialty. Lonergan said that systematics seeks an "understanding of the realities affirmed in the previous specialty, doctrines."<sup>11</sup> When attained, this understanding becomes available to the next and final specialty, communications. But Doran broadens "the realities affirmed" by dogmas and doctrines to those also meant in (non-dogmatic) Christian constitutive meaning.<sup>12</sup> This calls for an adjustment in the overall goal of systematics. A re-statement of what systematics seeks in light of Doran's proposal could read: an "understanding of the realities affirmed in the previous specialty, doctrines, ["and an understanding of the realities intended in the community's constitutive meaning"].<sup>13</sup> Expansion of the scope of systematics from dogma to constitutive meaning directs systematics to a broader goal. The fact and formulation of a reformulated goal flows from a modification in method.

Incorporating history and constitutive meaning into the object of systematics changes the goal and content of systematics. The altered content in turn impinges on the tasks for communications outlined in chapter 14 of *Method*. To explain how, I will comment on chapter 14

<sup>10</sup> Doran anticipates substantive application in reference to the mission of the Holy Spirit in *What Is Systematic Theology?*, 76-77. Ivo Coelho, SDB reflects fruitfully on applying Lonergan's whole approach in "Applying Lonergan's Method: The Case of an Indian Theology," *METHOD: Journal of Lonergan Studies* 22 (2004): 1-22. He remarks that "communication is mediated not only by understanding [systematics] but also by love," 16.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 335.

<sup>12</sup> See especially, Doran, "Bernard Lonergan and the Functions of Systematic Theology," and *What Is Systematic Theology?*, Chapter 3, 'Dogma and Mystery'.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

and then will consider how Doran's work on systematics affects it. My interest stems from a conviction that the importance and potential of communications in reference to Doran's work merits extensive discussion. I hope my contribution will resonate with others and further the discussion.

## 2. COMMUNICATIONS

Chapter 14, "Communications", lays out a path that articulates theology's mediation between a cultural matrix and the significance and role of religion in that matrix. Doran emphasizes that communications occurs through the "mutual self-mediation" between religion and its cultural context.<sup>14</sup> Lonergan removed this crowning specialty from simply being a direct implementation of the determinate content taken over from systematics.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, communications is not about "a band of preachers sermonizing the passive congregation."<sup>16</sup> The eighth specialty is more than how to speak about, write on, teach and preach the meaning of dogmas and doctrines attained in systematics. That is, Lonergan did not title the eighth specialty ethics, homiletics, or mission. Nevertheless, Christian commitment to the common good of society, the witnessing to and preaching of the gospel, mission, and inculturation are all important objectives.<sup>17</sup>

First of all, Lonergan emphasizes that it is the church that does the communicating. Therefore, communications has a strong ecclesial di-

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14 Robert Doran in *What Is Systematic Theology?*, especially in pages 202-203, distinguishes the church's self-mediation accomplished in the first seven specialties from the mutual self-mediation between religion and culture carried out in the eighth. See also Francisco Sierra-Gutiérrez, "Communication: Mutual Self-Mediation in Context," in Farrell and Soukup, eds., *Communication and Lonergan*, 269-293.

15 *The Handbuch der Pastoraltheologie* takes the same approach.

16 Frederick E. Crowe, SJ, *The Lonergan Enterprise* (USA: Cowley Publications, 1980), 99.

17 On preaching, see Carla Mae Streeter, OP, "Preaching as a Form of Theological Communication: An Instance of Lonergan's Evaluative Hermeneutics," in *Communication and Lonergan*, 48-66. Streeter remarks, "Teaching intends ordered information. Preaching pushes on to the behavioral transformation we identify as conversion," 58. Attention to the link between communications, here instantiated in preaching, and conversion is important.

mention. As Lonergan pointed out subsequent to *Method*: "communications is not simply about one person doing something. What is the church? The church is a process of communication ... of the message of the Gospel, of that message that is what the Christian knows, of the content that informs his life, and of the precepts that guide his actions."<sup>18</sup> Frederick E. Crowe states succinctly that the specialty described in chapter 14 of *Method* is about "the church constituting herself."<sup>19</sup> Communications brings within its ambit preaching, inculturation, evangelization, the church's handing on of faith within itself, the self-constitution of the church, the reconstitution of society, ecumenism, interreligious relations, and integral human studies. Communications is a pastoral or practical theology as exemplified in the Arnold, Rahner, et al. *Handbuch der Pastoraltheologie* to which Lonergan refers.<sup>20</sup>

The *Handbuch* concentrates on the life and activity of the church as the material object; that life and activity precisely as conditioned by

18 Bernard Lonergan, *The Philosophy of God, and Theology* (London: Darton, Longman, & Todd, 1973) 65/6, quoted by Crowe, *The Lonergan Enterprise*, 99/100.

19 Crowe, *The Lonergan Enterprise*, 100.

20 Lonergan, *Method*, 355/6. Herausgegeben von Franz Xavier Arnold, Karl Rahner, Viktor Schurr, Leonhard M. Weber, Ferdinand Klostermann, *Handbuch der Pastoraltheologie: Praktische Theologie der Kirche in ihrer Gegenwart*, zweite, überarbeitete Auflage, Bände I-5 (Freiburg: Herder, 1970-72). Volume 5 is a *Lexikon der Praktische Theologie*, herausgegeben von Ferdinand Klostermann, Karl Rahner, Hansjörg Schild. An entry by K. Gastgeber at 421 under "Praktische Theologie" explains that what Catholic theology called pastoral theology, Protestant theology has designated practical theology. An entry on "Pastoraltheologie" at 393-395 by Rahner agrees that practical theology is a preferable title.

Today there is a tendency to redefine practical theology as public theology. See for example William F. Storrar and Andrew R. Morton, *Public Theology for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Essays in Honour of Duncan B. Forrester* (London: T & T Clark, 2004) and Elaine Graham and Anna Rowlands, editors, *Pathways to the Public Square: Practical Theology in an Age of Pluralism* (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2005). See also Michael J. Himes and Kenneth R. Himes, *Fullness of Faith: the Public Significance of Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1993) and Mary Doak, *Reclaiming Narrative for Public Theology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004).

the present situation are the formal perspective.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, because of Vatican II the *Handbuch* moved beyond being simply a model for pastoral theology meant specifically for seminaries which followed dogmatic theology and concluded the sequence of seminary courses by instructing future pastors in the ways and means of parish ministry. In contrast, Lonergan's communications, as it presupposes the analysis of operations in intentional consciousness and the account of meaning in social existence, pushes past the ecclesiocentric perspective of the earlier *Handbuch*. Lonergan sets communications in the direction not only of a contribution to renewal in the life and work of the church, but also of a contribution to progress in society in those dimensions of social existence – political life, social movements, economic life, and cultural life – outside church authority but not separate from the Reign of God.

The final 'crowning' specialty in theology, communications, is not to be understood primarily as theology coming back full circle to common sense. However, it is true that engaging common sense in church and society eventually plays a significant role in the renewal of both insofar as teaching and preaching, on the one hand, and policy-formation, on the other hand, both introduce changes and elicit feed-back in church as well as in society. Moreover, communications takes up the labor of transposing and translating religious beliefs in order to make them accessible to people from various cultures on diverse levels, and this includes using mass media effectively. Such a return to common sense, however, is not the first immediate step or operation in communications, as if all theology had been wrapped up in systematics, leaving communications with, as it were, the job of marketing the systematic product. For this would be to revert to the obsolete idea of praxis as the mute vessel or agent of theory. Communications is "theology in its external relations."<sup>22</sup> Communications returns theology to the level of experience, not only in a noetic mode, but also as active experience in actions that make history and produce further data.

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21 H. Schüster, Part One, chapter 3 "Wesen und Aufgabe der Pastoraltheologie als praktischer Theologie," *Handbuch der Pastoraltheologie* I 93-117. In the entry on "Pastoraltheologie," Rahner says the key question is, what must the church do today? This question "encompasses the whole task of practical theology" 394.

22 Lonergan, *Method*, 132. See Streeter, "Preaching as a Form of Communication," 61.

However, there are specific tasks of a theological nature proper to communications. Communications takes the content of systematics a further step towards contextualization. In doing so, communications allows for advances in the understanding attained in systematics and should not be construed simply as an addition to or transmission of what systematics already understands. Lonergan spoke of communications as "concerned with the task of preaching and teaching the doctrines to all men [*sic*] in every culture and in every class of each culture," and there is a sense, one could say, that systematics hands over the clarification of doctrines to preachers and teachers.<sup>23</sup> Understanding of the mysteries of faith does not come to fruition in systematics alone. For instance, Lonergan remarks that, "communications is concerned with...interdisciplinary relations with art, language, literature, and other religions, with the natural and the human sciences, with philosophy and history..."<sup>24</sup> Interdisciplinary relations are not strictly matters of common sense although personal relations between exponents of the various disciplines likely involves common sense as well as their respective expertise. A method promoting interdisciplinary relations between theology and other disciplines already prolongs the theological position on the Athens/Jerusalem debate, likewise supporting their interchange and resisting the temptation to view them as simply antithetical. In Lonergan's terms, these interdisciplinary relations involve the theological task of combining the general categories that theology has in common with other disciplines with the special categories proper to theology. This is in contrast with a position that prefers that theology stay exclusively with special categories, as tends to be the case with Karl Barth and Hans Urs von Balthasar.

Another theological task proper to communications has to do with theology's contribution to the Christian mission. Communications brings together theological analysis of a cultural context with systematic-theological understanding of the missions of Son and Spirit, of participation in them by the church and other Christians, of the sending of the Gospel to all nations, and to the growth of the church. This is needed within and between cultures since, as Lonergan states about communications, "there are the transpositions that theological

23 Bernard Lonergan, *Philosophy of God, and Theology: The Relationship between Philosophy of God and the Functional Specialty, Systematics* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1973), 23.

24 Lonergan, *Method*, 132.



thought has to develop if religion is to retain its identity and yet at the same time find access into the minds and hearts of men [sic] of all cultures and classes."<sup>25</sup> Communications has to combine those special categories gained from its specific traditions within a particular language and for a culture or subculture in a given stage of development, with the general categories derived from the dynamic and operations of intentional consciousness.

Still another theological task in communications consists in promoting common meaning in the church and in society. The orientation in communications toward common meaning, whether in church or society, does not derive only from the tendency inherent in the intentional consciousness and from socially situated persons to expression, language, and intersubjective communication. Rather, subsuming that tendency, the orientation toward common meaning flows from and expresses the finality inherent in the mission and message of Christ toward communication in all functions of meaning to all peoples. This depends on the church's own prior hearing and receiving of Christ's message, as understood to some degree in systematics. Communications involves theological analysis of the contemporary situation of the church and identifying specific needs of renewal in the church's common Christian meaning. On that basis communications then puts a more nuanced systematic understanding into motion toward church renewal.

### 3. THE TRANSITION FROM SYSTEMATICS TO COMMUNICATIONS

With chapter 14 of *Method* in mind let us take up a second issue, the consequences of Doran's unified field structure for communications. How would accepting at least the main lines of Doran's complex argument for a theological theory of history affect the reception and application of Lonergan's final specialty, communications? This question parallels one raised and answered in the *Handbuch der Pastoraltheologie* in a section defining the material and formal object of pastoral theology.<sup>26</sup> There may be implications in this parallel, but the purpose for describing it here is simply to note that altering one aspect

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25 Ibid.

26 See H. Schuster, "3 Kapitel: Wesen und Aufgabe der Pastoraltheologie als praktischer Theologie," in *Handbuch der Pastoraltheologie*, Bd. I 93-117.

of systematic theology affects not only other parts of systematics but other parts that are dependent upon systematics and in this case communications.

H. Schuster explains that Vatican II's ecclesiology as a whole, and not only the structures, offices, and official ministries, modified dogmatic ecclesiology. This, in turn, prepared for a renewal in pastoral theology, one no longer centered in the official exercise of clerical ministries. This altered dogmatic ecclesiology led to questions about pastoral theology which had been defined in reference to pre-conciliar dogmatic ecclesiology. By identifying pastoral theology anew, Schuster defines its material object as the church. However, he is not referring simply to the church's sacramental life and essential structures but to the event of manifesting the Gospel's divine truth and love in the concrete human dimensions of the church's actual, contemporary life and work. In his view dogmatic ecclesiology (still unfinished) and pastoral theology cannot be separated because dogmatic ecclesiology has an element of pastoral theology within it and likewise pastoral theology carries principles of dogmatic ecclesiology. What then is distinctive about pastoral theology?

The answer is that it is to become practical theology, an existential ecclesiology. The event-character of the church as such is also an element in dogmatic ecclesiology. While ecclesiology can say on the basis of scripture and tradition what the church is and does, these sources by themselves do not suffice to interpret the present situation as the condition within which the church realizes itself. What distinguishes a practical-theological approach to the church as actualizing itself, that which is its formal object or viewpoint, is the qualification and conditioning of the church-event by the present situation.<sup>27</sup> The church's realization in and interaction with the contemporary situation reflects its participation in the mission of Jesus Christ and likewise constitutes part of its historicity. Practical theology analyzes the church in relation to the ever changing contemporary situation that enters into both the web and woof of the church. It also contains a call from God which the social sciences alone cannot enable practical theology to discern.

The parallel between pastoral theology and communications arises from the fact that a change in systematic theology, whether by the ecclesiology of Vatican II or in systematics as with Doran's integration of history into it, initiates the rethinking of a dependent yet distinct

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 100-102.

theological discipline. It is with this respect for change now underway in systematic theology, and without wanting to foreclose further debate on it, that I raise the question about how accepting history as the mediated object of systematics goes on to affect the method, tasks, and perspectives of communications. What is the impact of Doran's systematics on communications? Summarily, history as the mediated object of systematics brings increased clarity to the transition from systematics to communications and opens up the difference between systematics and communications with new options for communications.

First, the matter of the transition from systematics to communications arises for discussion because of the lexical sequence through the specialties, from research, interpretation, history, and dialectic to foundations, doctrines, and systematics. After the specialty of research, each subsequent specialty in one way or another takes over content arrived at by the operations of its predecessor. The opening paragraph of chapter 14 of *Method* recapitulates this sequence and then "finally comes our present concern with the eighth functional specialty, communications."<sup>28</sup> Like its predecessors, communications takes over content, in this case from systematics. Earlier, in chapter 5 on the functional specialties, Lonergan set forth a direct purpose for the last specialty by stating, "communications is concerned with theology in its external relations."<sup>29</sup>

However, there is no statement at the start of communications about its relation to systematics analogously comparable in clarity to the first sentence in the chapter on systematics about systematics relation to doctrines ("...systematics is concerned with promoting an understanding of the realities affirmed in the previous specialty, doctrines.")<sup>30</sup> Given the sequence of specialties, one would expect that communications would open with a similar programmatic statement. There is one, but it occurs in section 4: "Since God can be counted on to bestow his grace, practical theology [chapter 14] is concerned with the effective communication of Christ's message."<sup>31</sup> This declaration of the parameters and focus of the specialty occurs halfway through the

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28 Lonergan, *Method*, 355.

29 *Ibid.*, 132.

30 *Ibid.*, 335.

31 *Ibid.*, 359/60.

chapter in the section titled 'The Christian Church and Its Contemporary Situation'. Yet it seems to be a transitional statement offering a clear point of departure for a method in service of such apostolic labors on behalf of Christ's message as witness, that is, the witness through preaching, inculturation, and assisting local churches to develop, insofar as evangelization or mission is understood to include a collaboration with those seeking the renewal of society. One wonders why sections 1-3 precede sections 4 and 5. In other words, there seems to be a jagged edge at the outset of chapter 14 rather than a clear, smooth transition.

There are advantages to this abrupt turn to the topic of meaning insofar as sections 1-3 protect the 'message of Christ' from being misunderstood, that is, as if only kerygmatic formulas or verbal formulations sum up the New Testament witness to Christ. However, Lonergan's breadth and depth of perspective removes the pre-eminence assigned to dogmas as stated in chapter 13. Therein, the cognitive meaning of Nicaea and Chalcedon, for example, could be stable even though the formulations develop and change. However in sections 1-3 on communications, the kind and function of meaning emphasized the most is not the cognitive meaning proper to dogmas. Rather, and in line with "the church constituting herself," it is especially the constitutive and effective meaning Lonergan emphasizes in chapter 14.<sup>32</sup>

The constitutive function of meaning has a prominent role in chapter 14. Meaning, Lonergan notes, "constitutes part of the reality of the one who means."<sup>33</sup> As common, meaning "constitutes community," and community as the achievement of common meaning "is the ideal basis of society"<sup>34</sup> that constantly needs repair and healing to reverse the decline ever introduced by bias. The message of Christ, broadly understood to include his person, deeds, initiatives, and impact, is common Christian meaning. As common, it is "constitutive inasmuch as it crystallizes the hidden inner gift of love into overt Christian fellowship."<sup>35</sup> The church is "a process of self-constitution occurring within world-

<sup>32</sup> See Note 10 above.

<sup>33</sup> Lonergan, *Method*, 356.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 360-61.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 362.

wide society."<sup>36</sup> Lonergan framed and initiated chapter 14 in terms of chapter 3 on meaning, especially constitutive and effective meaning.

Section 1 on 'The Ontology of Meaning', section 2 on 'Common Meaning and Ontology', and section 3 on 'Society, State, Church' proceed from a starting-point more closely associated with chapter 3 on meaning(s) than with that of chapter 13's goal of "an ultimate clarification of the meaning of doctrine."<sup>37</sup> An alternative, conceivable possibility would have been to frame chapter 14 in terms of chapter 2 on the human good, which figures among the objectives aimed at by communications but only within the priority of meaning.<sup>38</sup> The effect of a return to meaning at the beginning of chapter 14, and especially to constitutive and effective meaning, is to undermine the singular pre-eminence that chapter 13 accorded to dogma and the cognitive function of meaning. Lonergan's transition to chapter 14 becomes clearer and smoother in light of Doran's analysis of Christian constitutive meaning and his theory of history. Guided by Doran's refined method, systematics will have explored and articulated some Christian constitutive meaning and not only the meaning of dogmas. This wider goal for systematics provides a smooth passage to sections 1-3 of communications.

Communications as a specialty flows thematically and with greater clarity from the systematics undertaken in light of Doran's heuristic than from Lonergan's centering systematics on dogma. Doran's historical focus more easily surfaces the multi-dimensional aspects of Lonergan's 'message of Christ'. The historical focus likewise more clearly links the message of Christ with Christian constitutive meaning and with the Church's mission understood as a participation in the divine missions of God's self-communication. Doran's development of Lonergan succeeds in opening a direct path from systematics to communications, a path that without history becomes construed solely as constitutive meaning already part of systematics. The significance of this improved transition lies not only in the clearer logic of the sequence of the specialties but also in its evidentiary value as supporting the validity of Doran's revision as a genuine development and not a departure from Lonergan's overall thought.

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36 Ibid., 363-64.

37 Ibid.

38 On the human good in communications see Lonergan, *Method*, 359-361.

#### 4. COMMUNICATIONS: DIFFERENCE AND OPTIONS

Another consequence of Doran's proposed unified field structure pertains to the difference between systematics and communications. The specialties laid out in chapters 13 and 14 respectively are unmistakably distinct, and the distinction pertains to a division of labor that divides each task into manageable functional specialties. The difficulty is that Doran's methodological development already establishes the proximity of human decision and action into systematics. Indeed he states that "...there is a praxis orientation to systematic theology...a relation to 'historical action,' to 'the data as produced,' that is the concern of communications."<sup>39</sup> He expects that "this component will be more pronounced in future systematic theologies than has been the case in the past."<sup>40</sup> This placing of praxis within systematics also blurs a difference from communications, not only as the return to experience, but as active in making history.

In Chapter 10 of *What Is Systematic Theology?*, Doran addresses topics such as "The Constitution of Society," "Collective Responsibility and Social Grace," and "Theology as Praxis," all which might seem to better fit communications than systematics. Since history is potentially all-encompassing and its theological analysis equally comprehensive and oriented toward making as well as interpreting history, one may wonder what is left for communications to do. Does Doran's systematics insofar as it incorporates history as mediated object overtake and extend into communications, thereby losing the benefit of a division of labor? Once systematic theology identifies Christian constitutive meaning, along with the church dogmas, as subject-matter for systematics, and once it has begun to interpret history from a Christian perspective as the locus of divine presence, it becomes clear that the mediated object of systematics has no boundary to divide it from the contemporary context, an arena of human decision and action – the arena of communications.

The result is that Doran's systematics changes, but does not replace, communications. For the purpose of discussion, a proposal on several aspects of that change follows without claiming to have exhausted the possibilities. The proposal addresses the question "What is the basic

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 197.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

task of communications once history has become the mediated object of systematics according to the analytic method Doran develops from Lonergan's theory of history?" First, I think communications does everything Lonergan spells out in chapter 14 of *Method* but in such a way that it is prioritized by three options that underline certain themes in chapter 14. I do not argue that these options are logically necessary consequences of a systematics of history, or that they simply extend Doran's heuristic from systematics to communications. Rather, each option is like an elective affinity between Doran's development of systematics and a specific theme in Lonergan's communications.<sup>41</sup> What guides the option in each case is Doran's methodological advance.

In light of Doran's work, the affinities between themes then steer communications in a certain direction by establishing priorities for its many tasks. The options prepare a contemporary agenda for communications. The three options are: 1.) communications, informed by systematic understandings, relating theology to determinate cultural contexts; 2.) communications informed by systematics, adopting a pragmatic orientation that contributes a theological perspective to theoretical and practical problems blocking progress and redemption; and 3.) communications, competent in systematics, engaging in interdisciplinary dialectic/dialogue with historiography, the social sciences, philosophy, and the natural sciences.

The first option highlights *Method in Theology's* change from the revelational vocabulary of chapter 13, the 'mysteries of faith,' to the missionary language of chapter 14, 'the message of Christ,' as content directed to all nations and not simply an object for theological exploration and the church's contemplation. In *The Dialectics of History* and *What Is Systematic Theology?*, Doran develops Lonergan's situating of systematic theology within a cultural matrix and context. Doran emphasizes mutuality in the mediation between the contemporary

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41 In sociology an elective affinity is a nondeterministic coinciding of components from different socio-cultural systems (e.g. the protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism) favorable to each and generative of social change. See William H. Swatos, Jr., "Elective Affinity," in William H. Swatos, Jr., ed., *Encyclopedia of Religion and Society* (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 1998), 163. Analogy here means a contingent, not logically compulsory though not arbitrary, linking of themes from systematics in light of Doran and themes in communications.

situation and the Christian heritage, with theology learning from the analyses of the situation as well as offering insights to it.

The second option draws attention to the schema of progress/decline/redemption in sections 3 and 4 of chapter 14. Doran made the redemptive purpose of the divine economy a motif in his development of systematics. That purpose is a reason why understanding the mysteries of faith does not come to fruition in systematics. The mysteries of faith have a redemptive finality as divine initiatives *pro nobis*; while not all dogmas explicitly affirm, they all presuppose it. This finality, biblically expressed in Acts by the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the church at Pentecost, belongs to the constitutive meaning of Christ's message continually received into the church, lived through the centuries, and functioning as an effective meaning in Christian mission.<sup>42</sup> Without this finality the mysteries of faith are less completely understood by systematics. The focus on redemption in communications with the implication of *pro nobis* fulfills systematic understandings.

The third option picks up the description in chapter 5 of communications as interdisciplinary and links it to what chapter 14 says about integrated studies and collaboration for the common good of both church and society. In *What Is Systematic Theology?*, Doran went into greater detail than Lonergan about how and why systematic theology has an obligation to work with both general and special categories. Doran's treatment of general and special categories offers communications an invaluable impetus toward the characteristically theological priority of revelation and faith in yoking general with special categories. Theology need not adopt a method of correlation in order to carry out this combination and Doran explains how to avoid reductionism.<sup>43</sup>

These three options complement Doran's proposal for systematic theology. His analytic of three dialectics (person, community, and culture) has a universal and comprehensive scope as part of an approach grounded in the universal human operations of intentional consciousness. Each dialectic is open to divine transcendence and, in fact, the divine potentially enables each to be and become an integral dialectic,

<sup>42</sup> On the constitutive, not dogmatic, meaning of the *pro nobis*, see Doran, *What Is Systematic Theology?*, 19-27.

<sup>43</sup> Applying the method of correlation sometimes neglects the priority of the special categories. See *What Is Systematic Theology?*, 47-51, 82-88.



thus preventing a one-sided distortion of the person, the community, or the culture. Hence, it would seem that systematics more or less has to work through the dialectic of community (developed by Lonergan) and the dialectic of culture (a contribution of Doran) at the universal level of intentional consciousness and, religiously, in terms of divine presence. However, people live within various concrete contexts, i.e., specific languages, cultures, eras, conditions, etc. This is where Doran's methodology bears fruit especially for communications.

### 5. A DETERMINATE LOCAL CONTEXT

It does not seem feasible or productive for systematics to develop a theological theory of history for every local, cultural context of church and society, and after that go on to seek the integration of all their diverse insights for the whole church. Such might be an ideal, but it would be a Herculean task. One way of limiting the task of systematics in regard to history is for systematics to retain a formal connection with: 1) the unity of the church amid the evident, blessed diversity, 2) the unity of the manifold gospel, 3) the unity within historically-conditioned church teachings, and 4) the unity-to-be-discovered among systematic theologies originating in many contexts. That would delineate a main task for communications as moving back and forth between systematic theology and the local context. It would leave detailed, local specification and interpretation in light of Doran's three dialectics to communications. It also would respect dogma, doctrine, and the four-point hypothesis as important to the life and thought of the whole church.

An example clarifies this division of labor. In anticipating a substantive application of dialectical analysis, Doran looks to the mission of the Holy Spirit. In a brief synopsis he states:

The theory of history based on the interrelations of the levels of value – from above, religious, personal, cultural, social, vital – proposes that the recurrent intelligent emanation of the word of authentic value judgments and of acts of love in human consciousness (personal value) is due to the grace of the mission of the Holy Spirit (religious value) and is also the source of the making of history, of historical progress through schemes of recurrence in the realms of cultural, social and vital values.<sup>44</sup>

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44 Doran, *What Is Systematic Theology?*, 77.

The Holy Spirit influencing people toward authentic value judgments and acts of love thereby continually acts in history to affect human agency in the making of history.

Systematic theology can elucidate and articulate the presence and influence of the Holy Spirit, but it need not monopolize such reflection on the Spirit as active in local cultural and historical contexts. Demarcating more clearly how systematics differs from communications lets systematics concentrate on the universal reality of the mission of the Spirit, so that communications can focus primarily on the charismatic element in the local church and on the divine influence on human authenticity and cooperation in each specific cultural context. For example, systematics would bring the three dialectics to bear on Vatican II as an event of the whole church while communications would examine the appropriation of the multi-dimensional meanings of the Council from within local churches and contexts. This would alter the agenda of chapter 14, elevating theological reflection on the mission of the Spirit as "the inner gift of God's love" to a task for communications.<sup>45</sup>

The difference is one of moving the Spirit from the background to the foreground. Lonergan states in chapter 14, "The Christian church is the community that results from the outer communication of Christ's message and the inner gift of God's love [Holy Spirit poured out]." When it comes to defining the scope of communications, however, he urges that "practical theology is concerned with the effective communication of Christ's message rather than the inner gift of God's love that opens hearts to the message."<sup>46</sup> The reason for a certain Christocentrism is that "God can be counted on to bestow his grace [the Holy Spirit poured out]," so this can be taken for granted while human efficacy in communication cannot be thought to be independent of education and theology. This understandable selection of priority has the effect of removing the mission of the Holy Spirit from among the realities with which practical theology (communications) is concerned except insofar as the dogmas on, and a systematic theology of, the Holy Spirit belong to Christ's message.

However, as Doran argues, the mission of the Spirit is coextensive with history and has not come to a temporal end within the church

<sup>45</sup> Lonergan, *Method*, 361/2.

<sup>46</sup> Lonergan, *Method*, 361/2.

and within other religions and in humanity at large. He states concerning his theory of history, "The discernment of the mission of the Holy Spirit thus becomes the most important ingredient in humankind's taking responsibility for the guidance of history."<sup>47</sup> Presuming that this discernment has a theological as well as an existential dimension, in which specialty does theological discernment occur? The task of discernment seems unable to be fulfilled solely by systematic theology. While the latter can objectify, test, and think through the sending of the Spirit on the basis of the religious experience of receiving the gift of the Spirit poured out, it is too much to charge systematics with the burden of a theology of the Holy Spirit that can take into account each cultural context of the church and the wider global society as well.

## 6. A PRAGMATIC ORIENTATION

Another change in communications due to Doran's development of systematics concerns the promise of theological reflection with a pragmatic turn within a determinate cultural context. This does not refer to the pragmatic criterion for truth, where the criterion of the truth and reality is one of practicality. Nor does it refer to the skills and logistics needed for the management of church facilities, nor to the common sense overcoming of theory, but rather it refers to giving priority to a theological contribution to problem-solving. The problems I have in mind are not especially those already defined as theological but rather, to locate them in reference to the scale of values operative in history, those that present themselves as vital, social, cultural, personal, and religious values. Moreover, the three dialectics move within a progress/decline/redemption dynamic in regard to person, community, and culture. Problems arise when persons, communities, and cultures do not integrate progress in one set of values with progress in other values, or from acute decline in any one set of values, and from ignorance as to how to encourage the love enabling redemption.

Due to its methodological nature and universal scope, Doran's proposal attends to the three dialectics without applying them in detail. Systematics could most easily apply them in regard to large-scale progress/decline/redemption in church and society. That would leave to communications the tasks of attending to concrete, particular, local

<sup>47</sup> Doran, *What Is Systematic Theology?*, 77. I am grateful to John Dadosky for the suggestion that discerning the presence of the Spirit in the Other has a place among the tasks of communications.

problems (speaking for the moment to society) such as distinguishing and engaging each variety of secularization in the West, contributing to support for international cooperation through institutions such as the United Nations and the European Union, and altering the self-understanding operative within the reduction of nonhuman nature to a purely instrumental status in North America.

In particular, Doran's application of Lonergan's insight that problems of decline in social value (the structure of the human good) depend for their solution upon the positive influence of cultural values, rather than only upon changes in social structures, has immense significance for the cause of social justice.<sup>48</sup> However, working this out for a determinate cultural context in consultation with other disciplines probably exceeds what even a praxis-oriented systematics of history can do if it also has the agenda of synthesizing insights from *ressourcement*, Thomistic, and liberation theologies. Theological entry into social problem-solving at the local level could be handed over to the task of communications, thus dividing the labor between the two. Equally, communications would be in a stronger position if systematics made available a systematics of history that dealt with constitutive meaning in light of the three dialectics as well as with the four-point hypothesis. Systematics as proposed by Doran already would have identified the large-scale problems in terms especially of the dialectics of community and of culture, pointing further to the basic dimensions of redemption as well. But communications could handle the fuller more determinate context in detail, and facilitate in a more concrete way the process for love and redemption. Thus, in light of Doran's work, when Lonergan states that the notion of dialectic "can be an instrument for the analysis of social process and the social situation," this can be directed to the local context and situation with a pragmatic orientation.<sup>49</sup>

## 7. INTERDISCIPLINARY DIALECTIC/DIALOGUE

Since historical situations, contexts, and problems are marked by specific social, linguistic, cultural, political, and economic meanings, and these predispose potential parties to such interdisciplinary dialogue, this means that dialogue has to be conceived as a flexible process with stages, of which the first is dialectic and the last is dialogue.

48 Doran, *What Is Systematic Theology?*, 188-201.

49 Lonergan, *Method*, 365.

The third option opened up by Doran's work has to do with interdisciplinary dialogue. The history of interdisciplinary scholarship indicates that crossing disciplinary boundaries occurs with two goals in mind: 1) the unity of knowledge and 2) to solve a problem that exceeds the capacity of a single discipline.<sup>50</sup> For example, whereas a systematics of history engages historiography for the sake of incorporating the knowledge of history into a theological synthesis, I have suggested that communications offers the staging area from which theology can relate to other disciplines with an eye to the alternative goal of solving problems of church and society within local contexts.

This approach finds support in *Method in Theology*. One of the beauties in *Method* on communications is the provision Lonergan makes for combining general categories shared with other disciplines with special (theological) categories without necessarily having to integrate or synthesize them. Integrative studies undertaken by theology do serve the redemptive process in the church, and it goes without saying that some integration or synthesis would be indispensable. However, parallel to this and looking to the human good in society at large, another sort of integrative studies is needed for the sake of generating "well-informed and continuously revised policies and plans for promoting good and undoing evil...[also] in society generally."<sup>51</sup> This cooperation includes the tasks of exchanging information, defining and addressing problems, multiple investigations, coordination, and collaboration that are not compatible simply with the model of integrative studies as a synthesis by one discipline alone (i.e., philosophy, theology, historiography, sociology, etc.) either as carried out by an individual or a team in that discipline.<sup>52</sup>

Instead, the implied model is some version of cooperation, dialogue, and consensus formation across disciplinary boundaries that lead the participating experts to find solutions in the form of policy recommendations. Something more could be said about the dialogue be-

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50 See Julie Klein Thompson's *Interdisciplinarity: History, Theory & Practice* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990) and *Crossing Boundaries: Knowledge, Disciplinarity, and Interdisciplinarity* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1996). This record does not include interdisciplinary work between theology and other disciplines but is enlightening nonetheless.

51 Lonergan, *Method*, 366.

52 Ibid.

tween theology and historiography as a way of keeping a systematics of history conversant with the theory and practice of historiography. However, here I will take up briefly how Doran's work could pass from a methodological guidance to a more substantive contribution to problem-solving by inquiring as to how his appropriation of Lonergan's thought can be brought into discussion with post modernity in the work of Gianni Vattimo.<sup>53</sup> Doran's heuristic for a systematics of history contains an extraordinarily rich starting-point for what many might think an improbable dialogue. Though other problems such as marginalization or religious fundamentalism would be equally eligible for consideration, the problem I have in mind is the tension between nationalism and international cooperation in a geo-political world scarred by terrorism. Vattimo is an important contemporary philosopher who, like Doran, looks to a more humane quality of social existence at all levels and supports cross-cultural, international, and multi-disciplinary cooperation.

Bringing the works of Doran and Vattimo into closer proximity has a precedent in the unlikely pairing of Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger and Jürgen Habermas in *The Dialectics of Secularization: On Reason and Religion*.<sup>54</sup> Calling this a precedent does not imply that either Doran and Ratzinger or Vattimo and Habermas hold the same positions. Vattimo, for example, represents an idea of postmodernity at considerable distance from and in disagreement with Habermas. Doran's participation in the tradition of Aquinas differs in certain ways from an Augustinian tendency in Ratzinger.<sup>55</sup>

53 See among others Gianni Vattimo, *The End of Modernity: Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Postmodern Culture*, trans. Jon R. Snyder (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1991; Italian original, *La fine della modernità*, 1985) and Gianni Vattimo, *Nihilism & Emancipation: Ethics, Politics, and Law*, ed. Santiago Zaba, trans. William McCuaig, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004; Italian original *Nichilismo ed emancipazione: Etica, politica, diritto*, 2003).

54 Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger and Jürgen Habermas, *The Dialectics of Secularization: On Reason and Religion*, ed. Florian Schuller, trans. Brian McNeil, CRV (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006). The work was first published as *Dialektik der Säkularisierung: Über Vernunft und Religion* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2005).

55 It should be said that one of Doran's concerns is to prevent fruitless conflict between Augustinian and Thomist positions. See *What Is Systematic Theology?*, 82-88.

Why would such a dialogue be sought and how could it proceed? There is a possibility from Doran's side. His work displays an interest in the work of Martin Heidegger, one not found in Lonergan. In *What Is Systematic Theology?* Doran set aside the "self-mediating advantages in dialogues between Lonergan and, say Gadamer, Heidegger, and Ricoeur" to devote himself to systematic theology.<sup>56</sup> Nevertheless, in subsequent pages of his book (pp.139-143) Doran briefly explores a convergence between his concept of psychic conversion and Heidegger's theme of *Verstehen*, and in so doing Doran is able to mediate between the contrasting positions of Lonergan and Heidegger on truth. My reading of Vattimo is limited. However, his appropriation of Friedrich Nietzsche and Heidegger on nihilism as the dissolution of first principles does not rule out, it seems to me, another way of being and thinking that starts from interiority as opposed to the first principles of theory and theoretical understanding. It is a methodological starting point that respects feelings, art, and empirical facts while also thinking about the decisive significance of the contemporary postmodern context. Both Doran's respect for liberation theology and Vattimo's commitment to the European Union indicate their common hope for a more humane social existence which includes a priority for responding to human suffering.

How might an interdisciplinary dialogue between Doran's theology and Vattimo's philosophy begin? First, I would not presume the universal validity and instantaneous productivity of *dialogue* unless it occurs as a dynamic process. While it may be at times suspected of harboring a pre-commitment that overrides points of substantive conflict or of ratifying the lack of parity between partners, the possibility of dialogue remains a hoped for challenge. Preferably, the initial framework, in order to begin the process, would respect the integrity in the respective thinkers' contrasting statements on metaphysics (e.g., Lonergan's integral heuristic structure of proportionate being and Heidegger's 'overcoming' of metaphysics, humanism, science, and technology), on God (e.g., Christian faith/atheism) and on culture (e.g., redemption/constructive nihilism). I would suggest conceiving the initial relationship between their respective positions not as a dialogue *per se*, but as a dialectic of opposed views, with the view perhaps

56 Doran, *What Is Systematic Theology?*, 6. In *Theology and the Dialectics of History*, he remembers, "Twenty years ago I was haunted by the question of the relation of Lonergan's work to Martin Heidegger," 11.

of what Lonergan called "an ecumenical spirit, aiming ultimately at a comprehensive viewpoint...."<sup>57</sup> This would be an interdisciplinary dialectic out of which dialogue may or may not come to fruition.

However, the "ecumenical spirit" and "comprehensive viewpoint" I have in mind would differ from Lonergan's by virtue of a location in civil society and in view of religious and philosophical pluralism. The "ecumenical spirit" can be transposed to civil amity, and the "comprehensive viewpoint" can be that of a pluralistic democracy wherein sincere contradictions may not move toward resolution by intellectual, moral, or religious conversion. This would mean adopting postmodern recognition that an irresolvable plurality of interpretations exists as the factual and legally protected condition of most societies if not also the truest situation of human thought. An outright declaration of adherence to the pragmatic yet ethical principle of democratic social peace would be the most appropriate starting-point for the interdisciplinary dialectic/dialogue. Doran's dialectic also could underscore democratic initiatives toward cooperation in the common good, especially on behalf of those presently marginalized or oppressed.

The Doran/Vattimo dialectic would likely lead to dialogue away from any narrow nationalism but without dissolving cultural heritages, and to thought about how cultures affect cooperation among nations. However, I do not refer primarily to a *viva voce* dialogue between the two thinkers but more to a way of studying their work which seeks guidance from both perspectives as to what changes in social, cultural, political, and religious life are most needed in order to prevent nationalistic attitudes from corroding international cooperative efforts that can benefit the marginalized.

In sum, Doran's development of Lonergan's method for systematics affects systematics delineation from, its transition to, and the options for, the functional specialty communications. The delineation is marked by mutuality, the transition between the two becomes clearer, and the options include the priority of a determinate local context, a pragmatic orientation, and interdisciplinary dialectic/dialogue.

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57 Lonergan, *Method*, 130.



