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# Method in Theology and Theological Methodology<sup>1</sup>

“But what of Thomas in the modern world?” Bernard Lonergan lists five transitions needed for the Thomism of tomorrow: from logic to method; from the conception of science in Aristotle’s *Posterior Analytics* to the modern conception of science; from soul to subject; from human nature to human history; and from first principles to transcendental method.<sup>2</sup>

Christianity is an historical religion; it is a statement of the meaning of human living; it is a redeeming statement that heals decline and fosters progress. Comparing the above with Lonergan’s 1954 essay, “Theology and Understanding”<sup>3</sup> shows how far the 1968 article, “The Future of Thomism,” advanced beyond the previous essay.<sup>4</sup>

I hope that this quotation from the valuable work of F.E. Crowe, a disciple from the beginning and a faithful friend of Bernard Lonergan, could make the principal aim of this contribution better understood: (1) the aim of the essay, (2) “a question only apparently secondary;” (3) from method to methodology; (4) method: its Greek origin and its anthropological base; (5) conclusion; (6) an example: the two methodological schemes and their academic origin.

### *1. The Aim of the Essay*

After many years of personal study and of academic work on the innovative methodological proposal of Bernard Lonergan, I think that both the time and the conditions are right to differentiate and integrate the transcendental method (or GEM) with its multiple specifications in various, diverse and differentiated methods.<sup>5</sup> My proposal is a more precise and shared terminology regarding the transcendental method.<sup>6</sup> In short, I propose a distinction between the following terms: both the nouns 'method' and 'methodology' and the adjectives 'methodical' and 'methodological.'

### *2. "A Question Only Apparently Secondary"*

I believe it would be instructive to undertake a lexicographical investigation into the various forms used by Lonergan to name his courses and conferences on method and theology during his time of teaching time in Rome (1953-1965).<sup>7</sup> The general intention of Lonergan is, without a doubt, clear: *Insight* is a study of the human mind operating in different areas of knowledge. Intelligent and rational activity, however, is precisely that because of its capacity to distinguish, to collect, to articulate, to compare and rank the materials on which it works. In this way the index of *Insight*, edited F.E. Crowe, needs about two columns to show the uniqueness and multiplicity of the word "method." But our interest here and now is to look at the use of "method" in connection with theology. In fact, it was at the beginning of his teaching at the Gregorian University (1953-54) that Lonergan involved himself deeply in the study and application of method to theology. It is here that he discovered a curious and interesting result: the identity and the reciprocal relationship between method and theology. In a 1959 course "On Intellect and Method" - of great interest to the present discussion, as Crowe brings out - the encounter between 'method' and 'Christology or theology' must be noted.

It will help to understand the transition if we look ahead to the point of arrival:<sup>8</sup> not, perhaps, the arrival of the new Christology but of the theology that will generate new Christologies, and not so much the arrival of a new theology *in facto essere* but the arrival of a new theology or theologies *in fieri*.<sup>9</sup>

Between the years 1954 and 1965 the sharp mind of Lonergan was intensely occupied with the problem of what might be the most suitable theological method both for the wide range of theological specializations and for the fundamental need to replace the Thomistic method<sup>10</sup> and its Aristotelian architecture with the authentic Thomist method, tried and tested in every detail in Lonergan's two studies *Gratia Operans*' and *Verbum*.<sup>11</sup>

Considering both the individual titles of the academic courses held by Lonergan at the Gregorian University between 1954 and 1964, including those of other conferences and courses held outside of Rome in that same period, one notes the multiple use of different titles: *Method in Catholic Theology*, *De Intellectu et methodo*, *De methodis universim: inquisitione teoretica*, *De methodo theologiae*, *De systemate et historia*. It is useful to have in front of one's eyes the complete list of these courses held by Lonergan on the subject of method and theology:

-*De methodis universim: inquisitione teoretica* (Gregorian, 1955); in fact, a course on the methods present in *Insight*

-*De intellectu et methodo* (Gregorian, 1959, repeated in 1961) with a clear connection both to *Insight* and to the review in the *Gregorianum* (1954) "Theology and Understanding"<sup>12</sup>

-*Method in Catholic Theology* (Nottingham 1959)

-*De systemate et historia* (Gregorian 1960)

-*De methodo theologiae* (Gregorian 1961)<sup>13</sup>

-*The Method of Theology* (Regis College, Toronto 1962)

-*De methodo theologiae* (Gregorian 1964)

-*Method in Theology* (Dublin 1971)

-*Christology Today: Methodological Reflections* 1975 <sup>14</sup>

Loneragan held the following conferences or courses on the same methodological subject:

-St. Mary's College, Moraga, CA 1961

-Gonzaga University, Spokane, WA 1963

-Georgetown University, Washington DC 1964

-*De nozione structurae*, Faculty of Philosophy, Gallarate, Italy 1964

-Boston College, Regis College, Toronto 1968

-Milltown Park, Dublin 1971

-*Method in Theology* 1972 <sup>15</sup>

At the conclusion of this present section, a fundamental question arises: if a book like *Insight* was completely written, in substance, in only four years (1949-53) why did *Method in Theology* require a subsequent series of fifteen courses, held both at the Gregorian University in Rome, the historical seat of the Latin theological tradition, and also in the modern academies of the English-speaking nations of Canada, the United States and Ireland? A complete and exhaustive answer to this question would require at least a clarification and a multiple correlation of the following facts:

First, *Insight* is essentially a study of the universal and transcendent cognitive structure. Such a structure has been operative since the human species has had internal neural conditions in their final state of development.<sup>16</sup> Secondly, in the historical period of humanity, the higher civilizations attained two fundamental objectives: the capacity for specialization of activities in the arts and in the diverse and related work of

individuals and social groups; and further, the reflective capacity to be aware of, to categorize and to develop both the differentiated and coordinated activities and also the ways of refining their tools and the ways of using them. In a word, the continuous and progressive development of the operative and cognitive ways of working has brought us, in the second millennium of the Christian era, to the structured and universalized formulation of the sciences and technology.

### *3. From Method to Methodology*

It may be significant to bring together, from as full as possible an analysis of the titles of Lonergan cited above, the diverse and necessary recurrences which connect the two terms “method” and “theology”. Indicating the term “theology” with an x, the theoretical possibilities are three and only three:

- a) method and x
- b) method of x
- c) method in x

From the titles of the courses listed above, we have these frequencies: case (a) occurs three times; case (b) occurs ten times; and case (c) occurs two times. Occurrence (a) indicates, in a general way, the reciprocal relationship of a science or a discipline and its particular method; occurrence (b) indicates the specific method peculiar to each singular science or discipline; occurrence (c) indicates the universal method or the transcendental method (GEM) always operative in all other methods or disciplines.

The conclusion, and also the reply to the question in the preceding section, is that one can assume with confidence that Lonergan was gradually passing from an idea of method conceived according to universal scientific parameters (“method of”) to the idea of method including

both the transcendental method present in all specific methods, and the methodological particularities appropriate to theology as the specifically Christian *unicum* ("method in").<sup>17</sup>

#### 4. Method: Its Greek origin and anthropological base

In the first place, it is interesting to consider the original double meaning of the Greek term **μέθοδος** - both literal and metaphorical. According to La Magna and Annaratone, the meanings are:

- (1) the way to reach an objective, research, inquiry, investigation;
- (2) the way of carrying out research, method, treatment, doctrine.<sup>18</sup>

According to this meaning, Lonergan often reminds the reader of *Method in Theology* that he is not doing theology but rather showing the way to do it.<sup>19</sup> More interesting still is the meaning of **μέθοδος** according to the dictionary of L. Rocci:

- (1) the noun **μέθοδος**: research, investigation, treatment, method, system, science. (Aristotle **τά μέθοδεϊα**: theoretical school of medicine; or **μέθοδικοί** theoretical doctors);
- (2) the verb **μέθοδον ποιείσθαι**: to make an investigation, to determine the method of investigating, way of investigating; to make, to work, to treat in an orderly way, with method (Plato **διαλεκτική μέθοδος** Republic 533);
- (3) adverb **μέθοδώς**: methodically.<sup>20</sup>

As one can note, the Greek term carries two fundamental meanings: the literal one of everyday language; and the metaphorical one of technical-scientific language. The usefulness of this reference is to join ourselves to the Greek roots of the method-methodology discourse. In the context

of the present work, the significance of the learned reference is both to keep in mind the deep classical roots of Lonergan's thought as well as to show the distinctions and the conjunctions of method and methodology.

Secondly, the movement from method to methodology implicit in all Lonergan's inquiry, which this essay intends to make explicit, has its foundations in the basic anthropological structure which I have devised and used for years with the name *Urstruktur*:

### Subject ↔ Activity ↔ Object

The structure visibly synthesizes both its components and their reciprocal relationships.

First, the fundamental subject-object relationship is constituted by the operations. Secondly, the operations are operations of the subject aiming at the objects. Thirdly, the subject aims at the objects by means of the operations. Fourthly, while the subject is singular, the operations and their objects are normally multiple. Fifthly, considering the operations with reference to their unique subject, the operative structure is unique, universal and normative. On the other hand, considering the same operations with reference to their multiple objects, the operative structure becomes multiple, specific and differentiated.

In conclusion, from the point of view of an adequate methodological theory, with reference to the subject, we have the transcendental method while in reference to the multiplicity of objects, we have a plurality of methodologies.

### 5. Conclusion

In this essay we have pursued the following itinerary: first of all, we have declared our intention of making clear the twofold character of the methodological activity that it is possible to discern in the work of Bernard Lonergan, even if it is not entirely thematized and realized.<sup>21</sup>

In fact, thanks to the work *Christ and History* by Frederick Crowe, it is possible to follow the whole range of Christological and theological thought of Lonergan, starting in 1948 with the academic course *De verbo incarnato* held at Christ the King seminary in Toronto, and concluding with “Christology Today: Methodological Reflections,” a conference held at Laval University on March 22, 1975.

Secondly, on the basis of Lonergan’s direct methodological interest, we have listed the titles of courses and conferences – published and unpublished – which were used to examine the explicit and, not least, the implicit thought regarding the internal movement of the methodological and theological reflection of Lonergan.

Thirdly, we have noted that from the collection of sixteen titles dealing with the method-theology relationship, it has been possible to bring to light the three-fold relationship between method and theology operating in the mind of Lonergan: method and theology; method of theology; and method in theology. Consequently, we have identified a movement – sometimes implicit, sometimes explicit – of passing from a consideration according to the transcendental method, to its realization in a multiplicity of applications to the various, different, multiple theological specializations which we can rightly call true and proper theological methodologies.<sup>22</sup>

Fourthly, on the basis of a lexical analysis of the Greek term μέθοδος, and above all, on the basis of the anthropological *Urstruktur*, we have shown how it is possible to bring to light from Lonergan’s thought the presence both of the transcendental dimension, and therefore of a unique normative universal method, and of multiple, diversified and specific methodologies.<sup>23</sup>

### *6. An Example: The Two Methodological Schemes and Their Academic Origin*

Therefore, I offer to the attention of students of Lonergan, who are specifically interested in methodological problems, two protocols which I



have formulated, proposed and offered in an academic setting. The first protocol is no more than the visualization in schema of Lonergan's *Method in Theology* in, however, a context, at one and the same time, personal, community-based, cultural, historical, religious, theological and communicative.<sup>24</sup> The usefulness of the schema is certainly not to take the place of the reading and personal reflection on *Method in Theology* but to show concretely its applicability to the work of the teaching and learning of theological knowledge. I emphasize especially the central position of the God-loving believer both as concerns the personal involvement dimension and also as concerns the dimension of the believing community throughout history, so essential to Christianity. The global significance of this schema is that of making clear, as far as possible, the coming together of both the transcendental make-up of the knowing human individual and also the supernatural make-up of the Christian message and practice.

The second protocol is really a project of theological methodology among the program of courses in effect at the theological faculty of an institute of studies at an advanced level.<sup>25</sup> As can be seen in detail on two pages, the intention of the schema proposed does not refer to the transcendental structure which governs the first protocol on method – a unique, universal, normative structure – but to a structure of multiple, differentiated and different methodologies. Thus, this second protocol enters by right into the realm of planning-learning proposals. In fact, one can see that it is composed of three parts: the aims, the origins and the tools of theology. As far as the methodological project is concerned, it has its main foundation in the transcendental structure of human cognition which, however, has been modified in the historical-cultural multiplicity of the requirements both of theology itself and also of the more specific learning needs of students coming from all parts of the world and especially from the East.

1. The *aims* of theology
2. The *sources* of theology
3. The *elements* of theology

## Introduction

(a) the notion of *method*: the image of “the way” (*odos*) and reality (exercise *áskêsis*). A famous example: the speech of St. Paul in Cesarea (*Acts 24, 16*): “So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.” This is a real exercise of a “consciousness examen.” A new notion of *theology*. (B. Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, Darton, Logman & Todd, 1972)

(b) *method* as way to reach the best result: The Wisdom that is the *Word of God*. Four forms of wisdom:

- *human Wisdom* (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, I,1, 980a: “All men naturally desire to know”) (4<sup>th</sup> century B.C.)
- *divine Wisdom* (*Wisdom 6, 16-20* “the love for Wisdom leads to the Kingdom”) (2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C.)
- *ascetical Wisdom* (Philo, *The Contemplative Life*, III, 25: “to grow and to fulfill wisdom and devotion” (first century B.C.)
- *salvific Wisdom* (Clement of Alexandria, *The Protrepticus* VIII, 89, 1-6: “The wisdom, the word of God, brings us back from error to truth.” This is the “first resurrection” (2<sup>nd</sup> century)

## I. The Aims of Theology

We can point out four *aims* in studying theology:

- the *pedagogical* aim
- the *mystagogic* aim
- the *sapiential* aim
- the *missionary* aim

### 1. The pedagogical aim: *to learn*

1.1 Learn to believe: to believe: spontaneous: “verbal” and “personal”

1.2 Learn to discern: among the “culture/biases;” believers:

orthodoxy/heresy

1.3 Learn to reflect: “difficulties,” “doubts,” “problems of faith”

1.4 Learn to communicate: “gestures” “the word” “writing” “the media”

## 2. The mystagogic aim: *to believe*

2.1 To confess the faith: “formulas” and “devotions”

2.2 To celebrate the faith: “mystery” and “rites”

2.3 To live the faith: “acts” and “work”

2.4 To transmit the faith: “example,” “correction” (Mt 18, 15-18), “witness”

## 3. The sapiential aim: to reflect

3.1 Theological “research”

3.2 Theological “comprehension” (*affectus-intellectus fidei*)

3.3 Theological “organization” (sapiential *syn-thesis*)

3.4 Theological “communication”

## 4. The missionary aim: *acquire disciples*

4.1 To announce the word of faith

4.2 To build the Church of believers (in society)

4.3 To cultivate the faith and the Church’s institutions

# II. *The Sources of Theology*

Among the sources of theology four are constitutive: 1) *The Church*; 2) *her faith*; 3) *her doctrine*; 4) *her history*

## 1. The mystery of the Church

1.1 The archetypal and “theandric” *constitution* of Church (*ekklesia tou theou*)

1.2 The *faith* of the Church: “confession” and “profession” (Romans 10, 9-10)

1.3 The twofold *development*: doctrinal and institutional

1.4 The role of *crises* in the ecclesial developments

## 2. The faith of the Church

- 2.1 To receive and to transmit the *faith*
- 2.2 Expressions and incarnations of faith: *a life of faith*
- 2.3 Documents and monuments of faith: the main *hermeneutic criteria*

## 3. The Church's doctrine

- 3.1 Formation and formulation of the *doctrine of faith* (*The Didaché*)
- 3.2 The reflection about faith: "theology" as specifically Christian
- 3.3 Faith doctrines and "theological doctrines"
- 3.4 The stages of "theological doctrines": the relevance of the patristic period (from the second to the seventh centuries)
- 3.5 The unity of faith and the plurality of theological traditions

## 4. The Church in history

- 4.1 The Church in time and space: *Church history*
- 4.2 The history and *redeeming* role of the Church: *The history of salvation*
- 4.3 The sources of theology and history: the historical contexts
- 4.4 Local histories and universal history

## *III The Elements of Theology*

We distinguish elements of theology or useful goods in four categories:

1) personal; 2) cultural; 3) institutional and 4) environmental.

### 1. Personal items

- 1.1 *Fundamental*: faith, a life of faith, love for sacred studies, ecclesial responsibility, time management.
- 1.2 *Necessary*: engagement in study, regular and continuous, collaborative, a sacrificial spirit; participation and sharing
- 1.3 The "holy study" of theology as an ecclesial vocation

## 2. Cultural items

- 2.1 Previous studies (one fills in the gaps)
- 2.2 History (fundamentally general history)
- 2.3 Philosophy (as serious and personal reflection)
- 2.4 Languages: the “three languages of the Cross;” A teaching language and others specialized languages

## 3. Institutional items

- 3.1 The school as *scolé*: the academic community and its articulation
- 3.2 The participation in academic life (that is also ecclesial)

## 4. Environmental elements: colleges, cities, academic institutions, etc.

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## Notes

- 1 I have to say that the title of this essay is slightly different from that suggested to me by Prof. L. Guasti and accepted by me at first. I changed from "Method and Theology" to "Method in Theology and Theological Methodology." My thanks to Prof Guasti for having allowed me to propose a title which, without ignoring the shared reflections at Piacenza, allows me to better express the how my thoughts and practice have matured since then.
- 2 Taken with slight modifications from B. Lonergan "The Future of Thomism," *A Second Collection* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1974; reprinted University of Toronto Press, 1996) 50.
- 3 In *CWL*, Vol. 4, *Collection, Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, ed. Frederick Crowe and Robert Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988) 114-132.
- 4 The citation is from F.E. Crowe, *Christ and History. The Christology of Bernard Lonergan from 1935 to 1982*, (Ottawa: Novalis Saint Paul University, 2005) 117.
- 5 See N. Spaccapelo "The Foundations of an Interdisciplinary Method According to the Questionnaire on Philosophy by B.F. Lonergan," published originally in AA.VV. *Gli istituti di scienze religiose nella Chiesa* (Bologna: Dehoniane, 1990) 277-290; afterwards published in my *Fondamento e Orizzonte* writings on anthropology and philosophy (Rome: Armando, 2000) 136-150; finally an appendix in the unpublished *Questionnaire on Philosophy* by N. Spaccapelo, A. Clemenzia, L. Sinibaldi (Rome: Lonergan Archives at Gregorian University, 2007) 182-197.
- 6 In connection with this, I have devised the expression "the universal human invariant" to substitute for the expression "the transcendental structure of human cognition," which is always equivocal.
- 7 The title of chapter 10 of *Christ and History* by F.E. Crowe is already interesting; section 1 is entitled "The Thread: From 'De Methodis' to 'Method;'" see p. 129.
- 8 That is, the development of the theology of Lonergan pre-1954 to that in Rome after 1954.
- 9 Crowe, *Christ and the History*, 90.
- 10 From the beginnings of his studies in the 1940s on *Gratia operans* and *Verbum* Lonergan made a clear distinction between "Thomist," the genuine position of St. Thomas, and "Thomistic," the position considered by Lonergan to be historically altered.
- 11 For an analytical and also historical presentation of the threefold phase of Thomist methodological research, the rescue of the true St Thomas, utilization in the pre-Vatican II period and utilization post-Vatican II period, see G.B. Sala, *Presentation to B. Lonergan, Method in Theology* (Brescia: ed Queriniana, 1972) 11-15.
- 12 See J. Beumer, *Theologie als Glaubensverständnis* (Wurzburg: Echter-Verlag, 1953).
- 13 Of great interest is that such a course was repeated by Lonergan in English in the summer of 1962 at Regis College, Toronto, with the title, "The Method of Theology." The recorded audio recording is available.
- 14 Conference held at Laval University March 22, 1975. See B. Lonergan *A Third Collection*, ed. F.E. Crowe (New York-Mahwah-London: Paulist Press/Geoffrey Chapman, 1985) 74-79.
- 15 This is the title which Lonergan gave to his second great work, which came out in London 1972, Darton Longman and Todd.
- 16 An important light on learning and on the functioning of the human cerebral structure can be found in the article of R. Balbi, "L'evoluzione stratificata," (Naples: *Scientifiche Italiane*, 1965).
- 17 See Lonergan, "Theology as a Christian Phenomenon," *CWL*, Vol. 6, *Philosophical and Theological Papers 1958-1964*. Edited by Frederick Crowe and Robert Doran. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996). 244-272.
- 18 G. La Magna/A. Annaratone, *Vocabolario Greco-Italiano* (Milan: Signorelli, 1955) 792b.

- 19 See B. Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (London Darton Longman & Todd, London) xii and 149.
- 20 L. Rocci, *Vocabolario Greco-Italiano* (Rome: 1943) 1194b, 1195<sup>o</sup>.
- 21 See F.E. Crowe, *Christ and the History*, 165-166.
- 22 B. Studer, *History of the Theological Methodology in the Fathers*, (Rome: Augustinianum, 1989). This is an illuminating example of how theological methodologies specified from an historical point of view are affirmed.
- 23 I have found it more suitable and useable for the modern mind to substitute the expression 'the universal human invariant' for the expression "the transcendental structure of the individual human."
- 24 I proposed this schema in the academic year 1993-4 in the Theological Faculty at Cagliari, at the introduction to the program for the doctorate. Unfortunately I have not been able to trace the name of the zealous student who transcribed my scribbled notes into their present form.
- 25 This schema was worked out for a seminar held at the Theological Faculty – Fathers of the Church Section – in my first year of teaching at the Pontificio Istituto Orientale in Rome in the academic year 2001-2002.