Article

The Grace–Nature Distinction and the Construction of a Systematic Theology

Neil Ormerod
Australian Catholic University

Abstract

The author considers the ongoing significance of the grace–nature distinction for systematic theology, the role the distinction has made historically, and current debates on its validity. He proposes that two developments advanced by Bernard Lonergan, the scale of values and the four-point hypothesis, can reinvigorate the distinction and ground new developments in systematic theology for the future.

The question of the grace–nature distinction is an enduring theme for theological investigation. The implications of this distinction stretch across a range of theological discourses concerning, for example, the relationship between faith and reason, philosophy and theology, social sciences and ecclesiology, natural law, and specifically Christian ethics. Indeed Lonergan goes so far as to suggest that the distinction is the basis for the development of a scientific or systematic conception of theology in the Middle Ages.[1] While others may contest such a claim, it is indicative of the

---

1. "Now in the writings of St Albert or St Thomas, the *supernatural* is a scientific theorem: it has an exact philosophical definition; its implications are worked out and faced; and this set of abstract correlations gives the mere apprehension a significant, indeed fundamental,

Corresponding author:
Neil Ormerod
Email: neil.ormerod@acu.edu.au

continuing significance of the debate around this question. This is especially the case for Catholic theology, with Pope Pius XII teaching that the distinction has continuing theological validity.[2] Despite this teaching, much current Catholic theology is less than convinced of the importance of the distinction, stressing the impact of divine grace to such an extent that the construct of an underlying human nature, or at least its useful-ness, is called into question. Theologies that promote a disjunction between church and world, for example, often lead in this direction in their efforts to emphasize Christian distinctiveness.[3] Nonetheless the distinction, which first achieved a more precise elucidation in the writings of Philip the Chancellor (ca. 1160–1236), has served Catholic theology well for close to a millennium. The questions to raise are what will be the continued role of the grace–nature distinction, and what form will it take for theology in the present millennium?

My purpose here is not to seek to abolish the distinction or to call into question its utility. Rather, I propose that the writings of Bernard Lonergan offer new and impor-tant developments for the distinction. I would suggest that these developments can provide systematic theology with a new grounding and new resources for the next millennium. The two I have in mind are Lonergan's notion of a hierarchical and nor-mative scale of values—further developed in the writings of Robert Doran[4]—and sug-gestions found in Lonergan's writings on the Trinity and the grace of a relationship between the trinitarian relations and created participations in the divine nature.[5] With these developments Lonergan achieves two major advances on the traditional

position in an explanatory account of the nature of grace" (Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Grace and Freedom: Operative Grace in the Thought of St. Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran [Toronto: University of Toronto, 2000] 15).

2. "Others destroy the gratuity of the supernatural order, since God, they say, cannot cre-ate intellectual beings without ordering and calling them to the beatific vision" (Pius XII, *Humani generis* no. 26, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xii/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_12081950_humani-generis_en.html). See also Pius's defense of Scholastic terminology and method (ibid. nos. 17–18). The encyclical was largely seen as a response to proponents of the *nouvelle théologie* who denied the validity of the grace–nature distinction. All URLs referenced herein were accessed March 3, 2014.

3. As in the work of John Milbank and Radical Orthodoxy, for example; see Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1991). Milbank identifies Henri de Lubac as a significant influence on his thought. See Milbank, *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate concerning the Supernatural* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005). Similarly the work of Hans Urs von Balthasar tends in this direction.

4. Most expansively in Robert M. Doran, *Theology and the Dialectics of History* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1990).

5. Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *The Triune God: Systematics*, ed. Robert M. Doran and H. Daniel Monsour, trans. Michael G. Shields (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2007); *Early Latin Theology*, ed. Robert M. Doran and H. Daniel Monsour, trans. Michael G. Shields (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2011). Also Robert M. Doran, "Addressing the Four-Point Hypothesis," *Theological Studies* 68 (2007) 674–82.

grace–nature distinction. The first is to unpack the relatively compact notion of human nature, transposing it from its predominantly metaphysical origins, to conceive of a human subject constituted by and located within history; the second is to unpack the notion of grace, to provide distinctions within the order of grace that bring together doctrines of the Trinity, incarnation, beatific vision, and grace. Taken together these developments have the potential to ground a renewed systematic theology.[6]

My argument first exposes the history of the distinction beginning with the theological struggles of Augustine against Pelagius. It then moves to the medieval systematization of the distinction in Philip the Chancellor and more specifically Aquinas's use of the distinction to disengage himself from the earlier Augustinian position. I then consider the ways in which Aquinas's carefully worked-out distinction became a separation under the impact of extrinsicism. This position dominated theology until the present era. Next I attend to the more recent attempts to overcome extrinsicism in the work of Henri de Lubac and Karl Rahner. Finally I consider some of the more contemporary contributions to the debate on the grace–nature distinction. From this platform I consider the significance of the two contributions found in Lonergan's writings and their potential to provide a foundation for systematic theology in the coming millennium.

History of the Distinction

Grace is certainly a central theme in the New Testament, especially in the letters of Paul. However, the very nature of these writings—occasional letters to meet the pastoral needs of quite different church communities—means that we do not find in the New Testament a complete unpacking of the implications of the term or of the difficulties it might cause for later generations. As with other doctrinal issues that find their origin in the New Testament witness, such as belief in the Trinity, it will take centuries and a context of controversy before the ramifications and difficulties will become apparent. Where trinitarian doctrine would find its impetus in the conflict over the teachings of Arius, in the area of grace, Pelagius would spark the debate.

Augustine of Hippo (354–430)

Augustine's interest in questions of grace and its relationship to human freedom, of course, predate his dispute with Pelagius. Augustine wrote early philosophical essays on the notion of the freedom of the will. However, with his conversion to Christianity the category of God's graciousness begins to dominate his mental landscape. By the time of his writing the *Confessions*, key elements in a theology of grace have emerged. There we find a strong assertion of a natural desire for God—"Our hearts are restless

---

6. As Doran argues in Robert M. Doran, *What Is Systematic Theology?* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2006) and *The Trinity in History: A Theology of the Divine Missions*, vol. 1, *Missions and Processions* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2012).

until they rest in you" (Book 1.1, paraphrased), though this desire may be "perverted by pride, clouded by curiosity and encumbered by libido."[7] To overcome this perversion, God's grace is absolutely necessary.

In the *Confessions* we can find a number of elements that will become key issues for any development of a theology of grace. We find, for example, a very strong sense of divine providence, wherein Augustine discovers the hand of God in the many chance events of his life. In his struggle to overcome the Manichean position and his own basic materialism, he develops the notion of evil as privation (Book 7). This gives metaphysical weight to his more psychological exploration of sin in Book 2 where he seeks to uncover the motivation for robbing the pear tree. The metaphysical nonbeing of evil is matched by the meaninglessness of his actions.[8] We get a strong sense of the bondage of sin that Augustine expresses in the modern language of addiction.[9] We also get a sense of the pervasiveness of sinfulness, even in the newborn infant, marking the beginning of a notion of original sin that will come to dominate later debates.[10] Finally we get a strong sense of divine sovereignty in the phrase that will later draw Pelagius into controversy: "give what you command, and then command whatever you will" (Book 10.40). We can only fulfill God's commands through the gift of grace that God gives us.

Augustine's position became increasingly dialectical through his controversy with Pelagius and his followers. Without going into debates as to Pelagius's actual historical position, Augustine's account of that position indicates an opponent with a strong sense of human autonomy, of the freedom and capabilities of the human will to do the good. Unaided human freedom is capable of pleasing God and attaining the goal of salvation. Talk of God's grace in the New Testament is simply a reference to human freedom, or the giving of the law, and so on.[11] For Augustine, on the other hand, human

---

7. J. Patout Burns, *The Development of Augustine's Doctrine of Operative Grace* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1980) 50.

8. For the relationship between this development and Augustine's intellectual conversion see Neil Ormerod, "Intellectual Conversion in Book 7 of Augustine's Confessions," *Pacifica* 25 (2012) 12–22.

9. "The truth is that disordered lust springs from a perverted will; when lust is pandered to, a habit is formed; when habit is not checked, it hardens into compulsion. There were like interlinking rings forming what I have described as a chain, and my harsh servitude used it to keep me under duress" (Book 8.10); translation from Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Maria Boulding, O.S.B., pref. Patricia Hampl (New York: Vintage, 1998).

10. "What then was my sin at that age? Was it perhaps that I cried so greedily for those breasts? Certainly if I behaved like that now, greedy not for breasts, of course, but for food suitable to my age, I should provoke derision and be very properly rebuked. My behavior then was equally deserving of rebuke, but since I would not have been able to understand anyone who scolded me, neither custom nor common sense allowed any rebuke to be given" (Augustine, *Confessions* 1.11).

11. For Pelagius grace was "(1) the original endowment of free will by which one may live sinlessly, (2) the moral law of Moses, (3) the forgiveness of sin won by Christ's redemptive death and mediated through baptism, (4) the example of Christ, and (5) the teaching of Christ, as a new law and as wisdom concerning human nature and salvation" (Stephen Duffy, *The Dynamics of Grace: Perspectives in Theological Anthropology* [Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1993] 89).

freedom has been mutilated by sin, particularly original sin, and is no longer capable through its own effort to attain salvation. Because of sin human nature has been rendered *non posse non peccare* (not able not to sin). Grace is an inner transformation that liberates our freedom to do the good once more, whereas without grace it is impossible to do the good at all. Without this inner impact of grace, taking out our heart of stone and putting in a heart of flesh, humanity is a *massa damnata*, a damned lump. Given this state, Augustine also turns away from his earlier notion of a natural desire for God to the view that in a state of sin there is no longer a "natural" orientation to the divine.[12]

While Augustine has a conception of human nature in his writings, it is not a metaphysical construct found in later theologies, but an empirical account of how human beings actually are. So for Augustine there is a human nature prior to the Fall; a different nature after the Fall; and another nature brought about through redemption in Christ.[13] Thus, while Augustine might use the language of grace and nature, we cannot equate it with the way this distinction will unfold in later theology. Moreover, it is this very tension between an empirical and a metaphysical conception of human nature that will cause problems for later generations. For example, if we want to say that Christ took on our human nature, to what type of human nature does this refer? And given the obvious examples of virtue among the pagans, must we insist that apart from grace it is impossible to do the good? Augustine's core insights were the absolute priority of grace (as operative, taking out our heart of stone and putting in a heart of flesh) and *gratia sanans* (grace as healing). However, without a clear metaphysical conception of human nature, his theology contained unresolved tension that would later be resolved in one way by the Scholastics and another by the Reformers.

Phillip Chancellor (ca.1160–1236)

The tensions between empirical and metaphysical accounts of human nature were becoming increasingly clear as theologians sought to develop more systematic accounts of grace and its relationship to human freedom. Consider the question, Is it possible to please God without grace? If the answer is yes, then Pelagius would seem to be correct, and grace is not necessary for salvation. If the answer is no, then God requires of us what we cannot achieve. Augustine would respond that we require grace because of our fallen nature, because of original sin. But then, what of Adam and Eve

---

12. As Burns notes, "Throughout this period [of the *Confessions*] he placed a trust in the natural endowments of the human spirit which he would firmly reject during the struggle with Pelagius" (Burns, *Development of Augustine's Doctrine of Operative Grace* 49).

13. As Lonergan notes, "The whole problem lies in the abstract, in human thinking: the fallacy in early thought had been an unconscious confusion of the metaphysical abstraction 'nature' with the concrete data which do not quite correspond" (Lonergan, *Grace and Freedom* 17). And as Roger Haight observes, "For Augustine the concept of nature is concrete, existential and historical. For him, human nature stands for what human beings are at any given period of history" (*The Experience and Language of Grace* [New York: Paulist, 1979] 56).

prior to the fall? Did they require grace in order to be pleasing to God? And what makes one pleasing to God? Is it simply fulfilling the Law? Or is more required? And can those without grace (pagans) do good deeds, or are all their actions sinful, all their virtues simply vices in disguise? Indeed can they even know anything? As long as one seeks to address such questions with only an empirical account of human nature, one runs into theological difficulties.

The decisive step toward a resolution was taken by Philip, chancellor of the University of Paris (1218–30), who introduced "the theory of two orders, entitatively disproportionate: not only was there the familiar series of grace, faith, charity, and merit, but also nature, reason, and the natural love of God."[14] The distinction made it possible simply "(1) to discuss the nature of grace without discussing liberty, (2) to discuss the nature of liberty without discussing grace, and (3) to work out the relations between grace and liberty."[15]

Lonergan refers to this development as the theorem of the supernatural.[16] By using the term "theorem," he sought to indicate the theoretical nature of the development. It was not as if earlier theologians did not have a concept of the supernatural. Their problem was to distinguish the supernatural from everything else, with the subsequent dangers of either making everything grace or labeling what is not grace, in particular the actions of pagans, as sinful—a position I will refer to as the grace–sin dialectic. The introduction of the notion of nature establishes the "validity of a line of reference" in relationship to the supernatural.[17] It is a theoretical construct, but it is nonetheless an important one to make. If I may draw an analogy: just as heat and cold as felt differ from temperature as measured by a thermometer (the former taking into account humidity, wind chill, etc.), so the human beings we encounter never quite align with human nature conceived as an explanatory construct. However, without a notion of temperature, one cannot do thermodynamics. Similarly without a notion of human nature (as a theoretical construct) one cannot develop a proper science of theology. The theorem of the supernatural provides control of the meaning of two key terms, "grace" and "nature," needed for the emergence of a theoretical exigency that drives the development of systematic theology.

Aquinas (1225–1274)

While Aquinas was not the first of the medieval theologians to introduce the grace–nature distinction, his work is the most noteworthy exploitation of its potential for the development of a genuine systematic theology. Here I consider briefly his handling of the issue in the *Summa theologiae* (hereafter *ST*).[18] In *ST* 1–2, q. 109, a. 1, Aquinas

14. Lonergan, *Grace and Freedom* 17.
15. Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (London: DLT, 1972) 310.
16. Lonergan, *Grace and Freedom* 17.
17. Ibid.
18. Translations are from Thomas Aquinas, *Aquinas on Nature and Grace: Selections from the Summa Theologica*, ed. A. M. Fairweather, trans. A. M. Fairweather, Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia,: Westminster, 1954).

begins his account of grace by focusing on a very precise point of tension in the work of Augustine: whether a human being can know any truth without grace. After noting objections to the position, drawn from the writings of Augustine and then noting Augustine's own retraction of those objections, Aquinas develops his own response. He acknowledges that to know anything at all requires God's help (*divinum auxilium*), but such help should not be equated with a grace that brings salvation:[19]

> We must therefore say that, if a man is to know any truth whatsoever, he needs divine help in order that his intellect may be moved to its act by God. But he does not need a new light added to his natural light in order to know the truth in all things, but only in such things as transcend his natural knowledge.

Thus there is a "natural light" of intellect proportionate to natural human knowledge, but there is also the possibility of a revealed knowledge that requires something added to this natural light, that is, the light of faith. Here we see the beginnings of the grace–nature distinction.

Aquinas then immediately moves from the intellect to the will, treating the question whether one can will or do any good without grace (*ST* 1–2, q. 109, a. 2). This consideration lies at the heart of the grace–sin dialectic, at least in its extreme form. In this dialectic there is either sin or grace, and without grace nothing good can be achieved. Aquinas initially responds by distinguishing between nature in its pure state and nature in its fallen state. As in the previous response, divine help is needed as much for any motion of the will as of the intellect, but the good proportionate to nature is possible without grace being given to human nature prior to the Fall. What of "fallen" nature? On this question Aquinas departs from Augustine:

> In the state of corrupt nature he [man] falls short of what nature makes possible, so that he cannot by his own power fulfill the whole good that pertains to his nature. Human nature is not so entirely corrupted by sin, however, as to be deprived of natural good altogether. Consequently, even in the state of corrupt nature a man can do some particular good by the power of his own nature, such as build houses. . . . But he cannot achieve the whole good natural to him, as if he lacked nothing.

Aquinas is here asserting that even in the fallen state humans are capable of some good, always with divine help, but not necessarily needing grace. He then makes a classical assertion about the necessity of grace:

> Thus in the state of pure nature man needs a power added to his natural power by grace, for one reason, namely, in order to do and to will supernatural good. But in the state of corrupt nature he needs this for two reasons, in order to be healed, and in order to achieve the meritorious good of supernatural virtue.

---

19. *Divinum auxilium* appears to be a general term in Aquinas for any action of God that moves us to the good. It may refer to general providence, to actual graces, or to cooperative grace, depending on the context. See Lonergan, *Grace and Freedom* 405–6.

By this stage Aquinas has effectively dismantled the grace–sin dialectic through the theoretical construct of human nature ("pure nature"). Human nature is good in itself prior to original sin, and can attain the good proportionate to it, but not the supernatural good of salvation, which requires God's grace. After the Fall, human nature is weakened and can attain the good proportionate to it only in a spasmodic fashion. In this fallen state grace is necessary for two reasons: first, to heal our weakened orientation to the good; second, to elevate our nature to a higher end, to be able to attain God in the beatific vision.

The climax of this line of questioning then comes in *ST* 1–2, q. 109, a. 5, whether one can merit eternal life without grace. Here the grace–nature distinction comes to the fore:

> Now eternal life is an end which exceeds what is commensurate with human nature. . . . It follows that a man cannot, by his natural powers produce meritorious works commensurate with eternal life. A higher power is needed for this, namely, the power of grace. Hence a man cannot merit eternal life without grace, although he can perform works which lead to such good as is connatural to him.

In this material we can see Aquinas's ultimate rejection of Pelagian anthropology. Human nature is here conceived teleologically, as oriented to certain ends, with its own operations and power to achieve proportionate ends, rather than conceived empirically as in Augustine. For Aquinas, human nature is oriented to an ultimate end, the vision of God, which it simply cannot attain through the operations of its own nature. This end is absolutely supernatural, completely beyond the capabilities of any finite nature. Our attaining of this end can come about only through a special gift from God, something that makes us able to attain what we cannot attain through our own powers. This grace–nature distinction, while recognizing that grace is healing, focuses our attention on the elevating activity of grace: grace is "supernatural."

Drawing on Aristotle's virtue ethics, Aquinas then turns his attention to the interrelationship between the virtues, as habitual orientations to the goods of human living, and to the impact of grace on human will. The grace–nature distinction underpins a further distinction between the theological virtues (faith, hope, and charity) and the cardinal virtues (prudence, temperance, etc.); between infused virtues and acquired virtues; and between those virtues that are meritorious and those that attain a merely natural good.[20] Supernatural charity, drawn from our participation in the life of grace, is the key virtue that orders all others toward our final end in union with God. This unpacking of the virtues allows Aquinas systematically to both distinguish and relate the realms of grace and human nature, conceived primarily in terms of the operations of the human will and its orientation to the good.

---

20. See William C. Mattison, "Can Christians Possess the Acquired Cardinal Virtues?," *Theological Studies* 72 (2011) 558–85; and Jeremy Wilkins, "Grace and Growth: Aquinas, Lonergan, and the Problematic of Habitual Grace," *Theological Studies* 72 (2011) 723–49.

While Aquinas's account of the virtues, both natural and supernatural, provides a rich and systematic account of the relationship between grace and nature, the grace side of the equation remains less systematized. There is sanctifying grace and the three theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity, which all in some way are supernatural participations in or orientations toward the divine life during our earthly sojourn. We also need to consider the beatific vision, one of the more difficult and lengthy articles in the *Summa theologiae*, concerning our postmortem encounter with God face-to-face (*ST* Suppl. 3, q. 92, a. 3). Finally we have the two missions, of the *Logos* and the Spirit, that Aquinas considers in his account of the Trinity. These include grace, incarnation, and the indwelling of the *Logos*. Aquinas's lack of complete integration of these various elements is not to deny that it is in itself a remarkable achievement; rather it is to suggest that further development may be possible on the supernatural side of the distinction between grace and nature.

While Aquinas has removed the tension present in the Augustinian grace–sin dialectic through the introduction of a third term, human nature conceived as a metaphysical rather than an empirical reality, it did raise questions of its own. A metaphysical conception of human nature views that nature teleologically, as oriented to an end. By positing a supernatural end to human nature (the beatific vision), Aquinas seems to identify two distinct ends for human nature, one natural, the other supernatural. Unless some coherent account can be given of how this can be so, or how these two ends relate to each other, there was a constant danger that human beings would be split into two, with two distinct and perhaps competing ends. The situation may be clarified by drawing attention to the paradox that ensues. If grace introduces a new end to human existence that is not closely related to some existing "natural" end, then we are not saved as human beings, but as some substantially different type of being; if, on the other hand, no new end is added through grace, then our ultimate end would seem to be achievable by purely human means (Pelagianism). Grace may then be healing, but it is no longer elevating.

Cajetan (1469–1534)

This issue, which goes to the heart of the grace-nature distinction, came to a head in the theology of Thomas de Vio Cajetan and his analysis of Aquinas's account of the "natural desire to see God." Is this desire truly natural? If so, then is there a natural fulfillment? How does the natural fulfillment of this desire stand in relation to the supposed supernatural fulfillment of human nature found in grace? The options appear to be twofold. Either Aquinas was speaking as a theologian, not a philosopher, and meant in fact a supernatural desire to see God[21]—human beings then have both a natural desire with a natural fulfillment and a supernatural desire to see God with a corresponding supernatural fulfillment in the beatific vision. Or alternatively human beings have a single desire to see God that is intrinsically supernatural with a supernatural

---

21. Duffy, *Dynamics of Grace* 296.

fulfillment. The first option, taken by Cajetan, preserves the gratuity of grace but threatens to split human beings into two, leading to what is often called the *two-story account of grace*, or extrinsicism. Michael Stebbins provides the following summary of the difficulty:

> The crux of the problem seems to be his [Cajetan's] insistence that a natural desire must necessarily be oriented to an end that is not only natural but satisfying. On the strength of this conviction, he sets up a scheme of two desires with two corresponding objects: one natural desire arises from naturally acquired knowledge of natural effects, and its goal is knowledge of God as creator; the other "natural" desire, which is really supernatural, arises from divinely revealed knowledge of supernatural effects, and its goal is knowledge of God *uti in se est*. By this device Cajetan succeeds in protecting the gratuity of grace, but he does so only at the price of obscuring the relations between the natural desire to see God and its ultimate fulfillment in the beatific vision.[22]

With this position, Stebbins concludes, "The claim that grace completes and perfects nature seems to have been drained of all meaning."[23] The second option, that human beings have a single desire to see God that is intrinsically supernatural with a supernatural fulfillment, maintains the unity of human ends but threatens to undermine the gratuity of grace: how can God deny the end to which we have been intrinsically oriented? This would be the option increasingly proposed in more recent times.

Two points are worth noting with regard to this latter analysis of Cajetan's position. The first is that, given his own historical context, it is likely that Cajetan's stance was not grounded simply in a desire to be faithful to Aquinas. He was well aware of the Reformers' appeal to the human experience of grace and the certainty that they claimed to draw from this experience. He had, after all, been asked by the pope to examine Luther's teachings. Cajetan's two-story account of grace effectively nullified the Reformers' appeal to the experience of grace and any certainty they might draw from it.[24] The second point is Lonergan's rejection of the alternatives posited above. Lonergan rejects these options as based in a static conceptualist worldview, and adopts a "natural desire" strictly so called, with both a natural and supernatural fulfillment, within a more dynamic account of human nature and creation generally.[25] We shall note the nature of this solution, transposed into his more recent thought, below.

22. J. Michael Stebbins, *The Divine Initiative: Grace, World-Order, and Human Freedom in the Early Writings of Bernard Lonergan* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1995) 162.

23. Ibid. 163.

24. The Council of Trent condemned the notion that "a person is absolved from sins and is justified by the fact that he certainly believes he is absolved and justified; or that no one is truly justified except one who believes he is justified, and that by faith alone are forgiveness and justification effected" and other "rash presumptions" (Decree on Justification, canon 14, in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 2 vols., ed. Norman P. Tanner [Washington: Georgetown University, 1990] 2:680).

25. Bernard J. F. Lonergan, "The Natural Desire to See God," in *Collection*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1988) 81–91; see also

The Supernatural in Henri de Lubac and Karl Rahner

Dissatisfaction with the neo-Scholastic synthesis escalated during the 20th century as emerging historical and philosophical approaches took hold. Many of the most creative theologians of that time—Henri de Lubac, Karl Rahner, Edward Schillebeeckx, Bernard Lonergan, Hans Urs von Balthasar—developed their thought in a dialectic relationship with neo-Scholasticism, seeking to overcome its limitations through drawing on traditional resources (Scripture, Church Fathers), new historical methods (critical history), and new philosophical approaches (Kant, Hegel, Heidegger, existentialism, personalism). The two thinkers who have most significantly framed subsequent debate on the question of the supernatural are de Lubac and Rahner.

De Lubac's position was spelled out in two works: a historical study of the concept and doctrines concerning the supernatural, entitled *Surnaturel* (1946); and a later, more thorough work entitled *The Mystery of the Supernatural* that sought to respond to some of the criticisms of his earlier work while restating its main theses.[26]

The first major thesis of de Lubac's theology is that we are all endowed with a natural desire for the beatific vision, that this desire is constitutive of our human nature, and that we are freely constituted in this way precisely because God has destined us for the beatific vision. God has willed us to be the way we are, to have a certain "nature" precisely because in the providential ordering of creation we are destined to attain God as God is in Godself. God creates us with a certain finality, and that finality is intrinsic to our nature, to what we are. This position preserves the gratuity of grace because God has freely chosen to create us as beings destined for Godself. Our desire in itself is ineffective, incapable of attaining what it desires. De Lubac is here rejecting a static conceptualist position that would think of abstract natures as existing apart from the totality of creation itself, with detachable or interchangeable finalities.

The minor thesis, which de Lubac draws from this intrinsic account of grace and its gratuity, is that while God freely chooses to create us with a given finality, once that free decision has been made, "God does not renege on completing a tendency freely willed by Godself. The desire is also, therefore, absolutely, unconditioned and unfrustratable on God's part."[27] Therefore God will not deny the beatific vision to beings so constituted. This proposition was a sticking point for many contemporaries. Why? For Aquinas, the natural desire to see God is so clearly linked with the desire to know, and that desire to know is constitutive of us as rational creatures. Consequently de Lubac

Stebbins, *Divine Initiative* 163–76. For a thorough analysis see Brian Himes, "Lonergan's Position on the Natural Desire to See God and Aquinas' Metaphysical Theology of Creation and Participation," *Heythrop Journal* 54 (2013) 767–83.

26. Henri de Lubac, *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1967). For an account of de Lubac's theology of grace and nature see Bruno Forte, "Nature and Grace in Henri de Lubac from Surnaturel to Le mystère du surnaturel," *Communio* 23 (1996) 725–37; and more recently Milbank, *Suspended Middle*.

27. Stephen Duffy, *The Graced Horizon: Nature and Grace in Modern Catholic Thought* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1992) 68.

seemed to be concluding that God could not create rational creatures without destining them for the beatific vision.[28]

De Lubac's second major thesis is his attack on the concept of pure nature, an attack that is historical—the concept was unknown to the early Church Fathers, it is a misinterpretation of Aquinas, and the uniform position of the early Fathers is that human beings have a single supernatural end. The attack is also speculative: de Lubac argues that the hypothesis of pure nature, while invented to preserve the gratuitousness of grace, does nothing of the sort. For in the concrete historical order we are in fact oriented to grace, so a merely hypothetical construct that protects the gratuity of grace in a hypothetical order tells us nothing about the gratuity of grace in the historical order. A hypothetical humanity as an order of pure nature would simply not be the same humanity we currently experience.

> Between the man who, by hypothesis, is not destined to see God, and the man I am in fact, between that futurable and this existing being, there remains only a theoretical, abstract identity without the one really becoming the other at all. For the difference between them is not merely one of individuation, but one of nature itself. What can possibly be learnt from the situation of the first, the hypothetical man, in regard to the gratuitousness of the gift given to the second, the man that I am in reality? I can only repeat that ultimately it is solely in relation to me, in relation to us all, to our nature as it is, this actual mankind to which we belong, that this question of gratuitousness can be asked and answered.[29]

This thesis builds on the first, for it takes as given the position that we have an intrinsic orientation to God as constitutive of our nature, and that to remove this orientation would mean a substantially different humanity. However, as the minor thesis above indicates, it is difficult to see how such a nature with this intrinsic orientation removed could in any way be called human, or at least rational.

Among those who responded to de Lubac's position was Karl Rahner.[30] Like de Lubac, Rahner wanted to overcome the extrinsicism of the standard position, in particular wanting grace to impact upon human consciousness.[31] He was far more determined, however, to maintain the grace–nature distinction and hence more careful than de Lubac in that regard. The reach of Rahner's theology of grace is far-ranging and encompasses more than the grace–nature debate, though that debate and the position Rahner develops in light of it is the key to his theology.

Rahner's solution to the problem of extrinsicism is to introduce the notion of what he calls a "supernatural existential." This is a supernatural orientation or desire for

---

28. It is this conclusion that is explicitly rejected by *Humani generis* no.26. Millbank maintains that de Lubac remained equivocal on this issue right up to his final unpublished writings. Milbank, *Suspended Middle* 8–9.

29. Lubac, *Mystery of the Supernatural* 77–78.

30. Among numerous accounts of Rahner's theology of grace are Duffy, *Graced Horizon*, and José Colombo's penetrating evaluation in "Rahner and His Critics: Lindbeck and Metz," *Thomist* 56 (1992) 71–96.

31. Karl Rahner, "Reflections on the Experience of Grace," in *The Theology of the Spiritual Life*, Theological Investigations 3 (New York: Crossroads, 1982) 86–90.

God that nonetheless is empirically constitutive of human nature. What this means is that Rahner holds that every human being has a supernatural desire for God. However, this desire is not essential to human nature as a nature—and so we would still be human without it—but in fact, every concrete human nature has such a desire instilled in them by God. Rahner argues that just because such a desire is supernatural does not mean it cannot also be universal. Grace need not be rare just because it is gratuitous. While Rahner recognizes a natural orientation to God, this is not sufficient for his theological project. While it is an openness, it is not an unconditional ordination for grace, for God. Such an ordination is not part of pure nature, but is supernatural, even though in this concrete historical order it is a universal element of our concrete human nature. It is present as offer, even when we reject it through sin.

On Rahner's notion of the supernatural existential, grace is always and everywhere on offer, in transcendental mode, that is, an offer within human consciousness. This has important consequences, especially in interreligious dialogue. It led Rahner to develop the notion of "anonymous Christians" as a way of speaking about salvation outside the church. Some, however, have questioned whether his notion of anonymous Christians undermines the historical mediation of grace, notably through the church and sacraments.[32] In a sense, Rahner's notion of the supernatural existential seeks to develop a mediating principle between grace and nature by giving the existential qualities of both grace (as supernatural) and nature (as universal). It also raises the question as to why such a mediating principle is needed.

These two major Catholic theologians are significant for the current debate because of the way their work is currently being "received" within certain theological circles, particularly in the claims of the Radical Orthodoxy movement. Milbank, who is favorable to a certain reading of de Lubac, refers to de Lubac's position as "supernaturalizing the natural," that is "one can only specify human nature with reference to its supernatural end, and yet this end is in no way owing to human beings as a *debitum*."[33] Rahner, on the other hand, is rejected as "naturalizing the supernatural":

> By preserving a pure nature in the concrete being, to save the gratuity of the supernatural, one lands up with extrinsicist doctrinal formulas confronting an account of human aspirations and human ethical norms which it thoroughly naturalized. In any case the only remaining way to avoid extrinsicism is to understand Christian revelation and Christian teaching as just expounding, or making "explicit" the universal availability of grace.[34]

---

32. Johann Baptist Metz, Rahner's former student, famously noted that Rahner wins the race without actually running it—referring to Grimm's "The Hare and the Hedgehog." See Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology*, trans. David Smith (New York: Seabury, 1980) 161–63. See also Colombo, "Rahner and His Critics."

33. Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory* 219. For a fuller account see Milbank, *Suspended Middle*.

34. Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory* 222. The two phrases "naturalizing the supernatural" and "supernaturalizing the natural" have an unknown provenance. See Bernard Mulcahy, *Aquinas's Notion of Pure Nature and the Christian Integralism of Henri de Lubac: Not Everything Is Grace* (New York: Peter Lang, 2011) 19 n. 43.

Serious questions can be raised about the accuracy of Milbank's reading of both Rahner and de Lubac. However, in terms of the contemporary debates in the area of grace and nature, the impact of his stance and Radical Orthodoxy more generally should not be underestimated.

Some Recent Neo-Scholastic Responses

Some significant writings have emerged from a neo-Scholastic perspective that take on the various sides in the grace–nature debate. Bernard Mulcahy has defended the notion of "pure nature," while criticizing the readings of Aquinas offered by both de Lubac and Milbank.[35] He notes a number of positions of Aquinas that would be meaningless without the supposition of "pure nature," specifically his teachings on mortality, infused virtues, limbo, kingship, natural law, and the sciences. He also argues against drawing too close a connection between the theological construct of pure nature and the emergence of secularization in the West, a position promoted by both de Lubac and Milbank: "An exclusively theological account of secularization is surely simplistic."[36]

Stephen Long argues along similar lines in reaction to the work of both de Lubac and Hans Urs von Balthasar.[37] He is critical not so much of de Lubac's analysis but of the solution he proposes: "It is not the first time that a physician unintentionally has communicated the plague he nobly sought to resist."[38] Long is even more critical of Balthasar's allegedly defective use of the *analogia entis* and his "denial of the abstractive intelligibility of proportionate nature in relation to the analogy of being."[39] Long attends less directly to Milbank than does Mulcahy, but he explicitly rejects the link between the concept of "pure nature" and secularization as asserted by both the *Communio* school and Radical Orthodoxy sensibilities.[40]

While these debates are of interest, they do not actually advance the issue beyond the distinction itself to the need to unpack and give the distinction structure. The new debates rehearse and reexamine the old ones, and while they question and probe, I find

---

35. See Mulcahy, *Aquinas's Notion of Pure Nature.* Mulcahy describes de Lubac's scholarship in these matters as "often flawed" (148), while he sees Milbank's approach to Aquinas as "something akin to an interpretive dance. It displays an inherently subjective approach. . . . Scholarship of an objective kind must be sought elsewhere" (190).
36. Ibid. 141. Mulcahy identifies other factors: effects of war, trade, legal developments, technology, science, urbanization, as well as ecclesial factors such as the Catholic Church's alliance with royal absolutism.
37. Steven A. Long, *Natura Pura: On the Recovery of Nature in the Doctrine of Grace* (New York: Fordham University, 2010).
38. Ibid. 44.
39. Ibid. 93.
40. Ibid. the chapter entitled, "Why *natura pura* Is Not the Theological Stalking Horse for Secularist Minimalism or Pelagianism" (140–99). Long's only references to Milbank appear in a brief mention on p. 10 and in some footnotes.

in them no real development. In some sense they would be as much at home in the Middle Ages as in the present theological climate, or even more so.

Two Developments in the Work of Lonergan

I now give an account of two developments in Lonergan's work that significantly advance the question of the grace–nature distinction. As foreshadowed in my introduction to this article, these developments are the hierarchical and normative scale of values and his drawing a relationship between the four trinitarian relations and four distinct created participations in the divine nature, now commonly referred to as the "four-point hypothesis."[41] It is interesting to note that Lonergan himself did not systematically expound either of these developments. They are both almost by-products of other matters he was working on, but other scholars have found in them major theological resources for future developments in systematic theology.

Scale of Values

In a brief paragraph in *Method in Theology* Lonergan introduces the notion of a hierarchical and normative scale of values:

> We may distinguish vital, social, cultural, personal and religious values in an ascending order. Vital values, such as health and strength, grace and vigour, normally are preferred to avoiding the work, privations, pains involved in acquiring, maintaining, restoring them. Social values, such as the good of order which conditions the vital values of the whole community, have to be preferred to the vital values of individual members of the community. Cultural values do not exist without the underpinning of vital and social values, but none the less they rank higher. Not by bread alone doth man live. Over and above mere living and operating, men have to find meaning and value in their living and operating. It is the function of culture to discover, express, validate, criticize, correct, develop, improve such meaning and value. Personal value is the person in his self-transcendence, as loving and being loved, as originator of value in himself and in his milieu, as an inspiration and invitation to others to do likewise. Religious values, finally, are at the heart of the meaning and value of man's living and man's world.[42]

Lonergan simply states this as a given, without further explication. Patrick Byrne has presented an account of its possible genesis in the work of Max Scheler and Dietrich von Hildebrand.[43] Lonergan's formulation, however, is uniquely his. My argument

41. As Doran (*What Is Systematic Theology?* 48–52) notes, this appellation was originally proposed by Monsour.
42. Lonergan, *Method in Theology* 31–32. It should be noted that the explication of the scale of values is the product of moral conversion and hence belongs within Lonergan's specialty of foundations.
43. Patrick Byrne, "Which Scale of Value Preference? Lonergan, Scheler, von Hilderbrand, and Doran," in *Meaning and History in Systematic Theology: Essays in Honor of Robert M. Doran, SJ*, ed. John D. Dadosky (Milwaukee: Marquette University, 2009) 19–49.

here is that this five-level scale of values—as vital, social, cultural, personal, and religious—can best be understood as an unpacking of the traditional grace–nature distinction, on the "nature" side of the distinction. For the moment I will suspend consideration of the level of religious values that pertain to the order of grace and simply consider the first four values: vital, social, cultural, and personal.

Traditional accounts of human nature have revolved around concepts of "body–soul" or "spirit–matter" dualism versus dualities. Aristotle defined the human being as, for example, a rational animal. Animality corresponds to our bodiliness or materiality, while rationality corresponds to our soul or spiritual dimension. In terms of the scale of values, animality and rationality correlate in some sense with vital and personal values. But a consideration of these two aspects alone tends to bracket out or mask the social, cultural, and historical dimensions of human existence. Lonergan's injection of social and cultural values into his account of human existence expands the more metaphysical consideration of that existence. The latter tended to dehistoricize and individualize human nature, whereas Lonergan's injection gives scope for a human existence that is fully historically (socially and culturally) constituted.

As an illustration of the significance of the scale of values, let me consider the issue of gender. Under the more traditional construct of body–soul, gender was simply a matter of biology (body/animality), and the questions raised in relation to sexual ethics were those of the virtues (soul/rationality) needed to regulate sexuality according to the dictates of reason (e.g., chastity, temperance). Now we are much more aware of the complexity of gender. While biology (vital values) is one important aspect of gender, we also recognize that it also involves issues of social roles (breadwinner, homemaker) built around a division of labor (social values), and the meanings and values (masculinity, femininity) that a culture attaches to gender identity (cultural values). Within such a framework, the moral questions (personal values) surrounding gender become much more complex and more realistic than those framed within the more traditional framework. At the least this illustration calls into question various forms of gender essentialism found within the tradition.

To overcome extrinsicism, however, something more is needed than a simple exposition of a five-level scale of values. Of itself the scale could just as easily fall over into the type of conceptualist extrinsicism that dominated Catholic theology after Trent. Just as conceptualism separated the grace–nature distinction into distinct realms or "spheres" rather than into distinct orders or "dimensions," so the scale of values could become five distinct realms for theology to consider rather than five distinct orders or dimensions of human existence.[44] Lonergan overcomes this difficulty not explicitly in his account in *Method*, but in a later essay on "healing and creating in history."[45] In this

---

44. It is interesting to note how often Milbank in his *Suspended Middle* refers to realms and spheres. The images of spheres and realms give rise to the further image of a "suspended middle" sitting somewhere between the two realms/spheres. The underlying problem here is one of conceptualism, which hypostatizes concepts into distinct realities.

45. Bernard J. F. Lonergan, "Healing and Creating in History," in *A Third Collection*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe (New York: Paulist, 1985) 100–109.

essay Lonergan develops the notion of two vectors operating in human history. The first, a creative vector, moves up the scales of values.[46] Thus the need to ensure a recurrent supply of vital values for the whole community raises questions of social values, which require a rationale, a set of meanings and values that justify and underpin the social order. Problems in the social order—a breakdown in the just distribution of vital values, for example—raise the question of grace about these meanings and values to the level of cultural values. What is the best form of social organization and why? Does our social organization reflect what we truly value? What indeed do we as a society truly value?

These questions can reveal distortions in cultural values themselves that raise further questions of personal integrity or personal values. If such distortions exist, how do I as a cultural agent act to shift these culturally dominant distorted values? This upward movement provides important links between the different levels in the scale of values. However, it also places the question of grace, of religious values, not just in the context of personal redemption but in that of healing the distortions in human history. For the distortions at the level of social and cultural values impact upon, and ultimately have their origins in, the personal values of human subjects. The problem of sin is met by the grace of forgiveness and healing. And so Lonergan identifies a healing vector in history that moves from the higher levels to the lower levels, transforming individuals who become agents of cultural and social change, overcoming the distortions present in history and liberating human creativity to restore humanity to a path of genuine progress. Both creating and healing are needed for a proper restoration of such progress:

> Besides these requirements, intrinsic to the nature of healing, there is the extrinsic requirement of a concomitant creative process. For just as the creative process, when unaccompanied by healing is distorted and corrupted by bias, so too the healing process, when unaccompanied by creating, is a soul without a body.[47]

This notion of a creative vector expresses what, in a more metaphysical language, Lonergan referred to as vertical finality.[48] For Lonergan the metaphysical notion of nature does not present a static and closed system, but always exhibits an openness toward a higher level of integration. And so the atomic gets taken up into the molecular, the molecular into the schemes of operations of the biological, and so on up a hierarchy of being.[49] The scale of values represents such a scheme, whereby vital

---

46. Himes, "Lonergan's Position on the Natural Desire to See God." What Lonergan will later refer to as the creative vector, Himes discusses in terms of Lonergan's earlier notion of vertical finality. While each level of the scale has its own horizontal finality, there is also an openness or vertical finality toward a higher integration within the next level up the scale.
47. Lonergan, "Healing and Creating" 107.
48. For an excellent account of the Thomistic origins of the notion of vertical finality see Himes, "Lonergan's Position on the Natural Desire to See God."
49. Lonergan actually refers to each level as "relatively supernatural," that is, relative to the lower level incorporated. See Lonergan, *Early Latin Theology* 81.

needs are taken up by the higher-level operation of the social, the social into the cultural and the cultural into the personal. The personal too is open to a higher level of integration through the incorporation of schemes of operations (theological virtues/ religious values) that order us to higher-level goals, that is, incorporation into the divine life itself. In this way the operation of grace exhibits the same features already present within the overall metaphysical structure of a higher-level integration that places the lower level within a new and enriching context.

Similarly the notion of the healing vector expresses the ways the operation of vertical finality transforms the lower levels thus incorporated. This too is evident throughout the natural order. As I have argued previously, the fact that a neutron is incorporated into an atomic nucleus modifies the reality of the neutron. Outside the nucleus a neutron has a half-life of about eleven minutes. Within the nucleus this is no longer the case; its reality has been modified by its incorporation into the atomic nucleus.[50] Analogously, human existence is modified (elevated) through its incorporation into the life of God through religious values. Religious values thus transform moral performance, and through this transformation cultures can be shifted and distortions of the social order healed, leading to a just, equitable, and sustainable social order for the good of all. Grace is then not an extrinsic addition to human nature considered as a closed system, but a higher-level integration of human existence that itself modifies (elevates) that system. Grace thus completes, perfects, and elevates human nature. For Lonergan the root problem of extrinsicism is found in its conceptualist and essentialist understanding of natures as pure and closed, which is overcome by recognizing the openness of all structures to higher-level integrations (vertical finality).[51]

The final piece of the expansion of the concept of human nature is not found in Lonergan's writings but in the work of Lonergan scholar Robert Doran. He uses Lonergan's notion of dialectic to introduce further structure into the scale of values, specifically into social, cultural, and personal values. Drawing on an analogy of dialectic based on notions of transcendence and limitation, Doran explicates three dialectics: at the level of (1) social values between spontaneous intersubjectivity and practical intelligence, (2) cultural values between cosmological and anthropological meanings and values, and (3) personal values between unconscious neural demands and the conscious intentionality towards world- and self-constitution.[52] While two of these values, social and personal, have their genesis in Lonergan's *Insight*,[53] Doran's discussion of the

50. See Neil Ormerod, "Bernard Lonergan and the Recovery of a Metaphysical Frame," *Theological Studies* 74 (2013) 960–82.

51. Himes, "Lonergan's Position on the Natural Desire to See God" 769–70.

52. Doran, *Theology and the Dialectics of History* 64–92. Doran refers to this dialectic as the basic dialectic of the subject between unconscious neural demands and existential artistry. However, he also identifies a derived dialectic within consciousness, which reflects the tensions of the more basic dialectic (ibid. 72).

53. Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, ed. Crowe Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1992).

cultural dialectic draws on the work of Eric Voegelin.[54] This introduction of a dialectic of transcendence and limitation is an expansion of the Aristotelian insight that virtue lies in the mean. As Aristotle states, "Virtue is a state of character concerned with choice, lying in a mean, i.e., the mean relative to us, this being determined by a rational principle, and by that principle by which the person of practical wisdom would determine it."[55] Now we can conceive of the human subject as a "system of the move."[56] We move from the relatively unformed responses of a child to the more determined moral responses of an adult who, in a dynamic dialectic of transcendence and limitation, finds ever-new patterns of embodying the good in a dynamically changing world. The mean between transcendence and limitation is never a static once-and-for-all given, but is constantly extended as we grow in virtue to embrace a larger field of responsibilities for the world, particularly the social and cultural dimensions of human existence. For Doran these three dialectics constitute the intelligibility of history. To understand human history is to understand the complex, dynamic, interactive "dance" of these dialectics.

> "The analogy of dialectic" refers to three distinct but related processes with analogous structures: the dialectic of the subject, the dialectic of community, and the dialectic of culture. Taken together these three processes constitute, I believe, the immanent intelligibility of the process of human history. That is to say, history is to be conceived as a complex network of subjects, communities and cultures.[57]

This is perhaps enough to suggest the usefulness of unpacking the relatively compact notion of human nature, available through Lonergan's notion of the scale of values. It allows for a full recognition of the historical constitution of the human subject, beyond the dehistoricizing and individualizing tendencies of the more metaphysical approach; through the interrelationship of the creative and healing vectors in history, it overcomes the extrinsicism that dominated Catholic theology after Trent; and the dialectic structures identified at the social, cultural, and personal levels of value provide a dynamic heuristic structure for the intelligibility of human history. However, it still leaves relatively unstructured the level of religious value. To this I now turn.

The Four-Point Hypothesis

As I noted at the beginning of this article, my interest in the grace–nature distinction is not simply in the distinction itself, but in the way it structures a truly systematic theology. In Aquinas the grace–nature distinction allows us to turn our attention to the

---

54. Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics: An Introduction* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1952).
55. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. and intro. W. D. Ross, rev. J. O. Urmson (New York: Oxford University, 1980) II.6.36–39.
56. "System on the move" is the term Lonergan uses for any entity, such as a human being, who is drawn along a path of development through a dynamic dialectic of transcendence and limitation. See Lonergan, *Insight* 488–92.
57. Doran, *Theology and the Dialectics of History* 144.

level of nature, explicated in terms of Aristotle's account of the natural virtues; and then to the level of the supernatural, notable with the Trinity, the divine missions of the Son and Spirit (visible and invisible), and the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity, culminating in the beatific vision for the blessed in heaven. These are the basic building blocks for the edifice of the *Summa theologiae*. If the scale of values helps us reframe the grace–nature distinction, notably unpacking the relatively compact notion of human nature, can we do more with the level of grace than was present in Aquinas's synthesis?

Recently Doran has been highlighting an aspect of Lonergan's trinitarian theology present in the newly translated editions of some of Lonergan's Latin works, most notably his *De Deo trino: Pars systematica*.[58] In this work Lonergan correlates the four trinitarian relations—paternity, filiation, active spiration, and passive spiration—with four created participations in the divine nature. As I have argued elsewhere, this suggestion by Lonergan is an extension of the earlier Thomistic scheme that correlated the two processions with the two divine missions, notably the incarnation and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.[59] In this version these two communications of the divine nature are expanded to include the beatific vision and the habit of charity together with incarnation and sanctifying grace. Lonergan writes,

> First, there are four real divine relations, really identical with the divine substance, and therefore there are four very special modes that ground the external imitation of the divine substance. Next, there are four absolutely supernatural realities, which are never found uninformed, namely, the secondary act of existence of the incarnation, sanctifying grace, the habit of charity, and the light of glory. It would not be inappropriate, therefore, to say that the secondary act of existence of the incarnation is a created participation of paternity, and so has a special relation to the Son; that sanctifying grace is a participation of active spiration, and so has a special relation to the Holy Spirit; that the habit of charity is a participation of passive spiration, and so has a special relation to the Father and the Son; and that the light of glory is a participation of sonship, and so in a most perfect way brings the children of adoption back to the Father.[60]

Since the publication of this work, more evidence has emerged from Lonergan's Latin corpus, particularly his works on grace, that demonstrates the early origin and persistence of this hypothesis.[61] The mechanics of this hypothesis lie in an analogy Lonergan draws between these created participations in the divine nature and what he calls "contingent predication," the way contingent realities may be predicated of the strictly necessary divine nature.[62] The Creator–creature relation may be contingently

---

58. Available in both English and Latin in Lonergan, *Triune God: Systematics* 12. For Doran's most recent and thorough analysis see his *Missions and Processions*.
59. Neil Ormerod, "The Four-Point Hypothesis: Transpositions and Complications," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 77 (2012) 127–40.
60. Lonergan, *Triune God: Systematics* 471–73.
61. Lonergan, *Early Latin Theology* 631–33.
62. For an account of contingent predication see *Insight* 684–86. The origins of this approach can be found already in Augustine's *De Trinitate*, notably Book 5.16.17, though its potential

predicated of God, establishing the reality of the creature, but not adding to the divine perfection. In the four-point hypothesis a created participation in the divine nature can be realized by an analogous participation in one of the four divine relations. These participations do not constitute a change in the divine relations themselves, but do create a real, albeit created, participation in the divine nature.

In his own creative extension of the hypothesis, Doran has included accounts of the other two theological virtues, faith and hope, within his own framework, and in so doing he links faith to paternity through Aquinas's notion of the invisible mission of the Word, and hope to filiation as an anticipation of the light of glory and the beatific vision.[63] This linkage, then, provides a fully trinitarian account of the theological virtues, extending Aquinas's more limited treatment. Together with Lonergan's four-point hypothesis, Doran's extension is a significant development on the position of Aquinas and greatly enriches the foundations of a systematic theology.

Doran is working to bring this framework into a more expansive and systematic exposition, but already one can grasp here the possibilities of a rich and theologically grounded phenomenology of the graced life. I have made other suggestions in relation to using the four-point hypothesis in relation to interfaith dialogue, ecclesiology, and sacramental theology.[64] This is a rich theological seam waiting to be explored and mined. It is not without its difficulties and disputes, but it is a fruitful expansion of the relatively compact category of grace that commands our attention.

Conclusion

For Thomas Aquinas the basics of his theological system can be summarized as: the grace–nature distinction; a revised Aristotelian metaphysics to account for the order of nature; the divine missions of the Son and the Spirit, visible and invisible, to account for the order of grace; and an analogy of proportion between the orders of nature and grace ("grace completes and perfects nature"). On these foundations a mighty edifice was built. However, it is an edifice no longer adequate for our time. What I am suggesting from the discussion above is not the destruction of the foundations, but their extension to incorporate the scale of values and the four-point hypothesis. The grace–nature distinction remains foundational. But rather than a revised Aristotelian metaphysics to provide an account of the order of nature, I am suggesting that systematic theology should use the heuristic of the scale of values, at least in its first four levels (vital, social, cultural, and personal), and that this heuristic is to be filled with the proper findings of the biological, social, cultural, psychological, and moral science. In addition I propose that for the divine missions we substitute the four

---

was not realized until it was partially exploited by Aquinas in his accounts of the divine missions.

63. For details see Doran, *Missions and Processions*, esp. chaps. 2–3.
64. Ormerod, "Four-Point Hypothesis"; "The Metaphysics of Holiness: Created Participation in the Divine Nature," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 79 (2014) 68–82.

created participations of the divine nature as a unifying framework for the supernatural mysteries of the incarnation, the beatific vision, sanctifying grace, and the habit of charity. Finally, to fill out the analogy of proportion, I propose we draw on Lonergan's notions of vertical finality and the creating and healing vectors in history.

Author biography

Neil Ormerod received his PhD from the University of New South Wales, Australia, in pure mathematics and his D Theol. from Melbourne College of Divinity. He is currently professor of theology, member of the Institute of Religion and Critical Inquiry, Australian Catholic University. With special competencies in Lonergan studies, historical ecclesiology, trinitarian theology, and natural theology, he has most recently published: *Re-Visioning the Church: An Experiment in Systematic-Historical Ecclesiology* (2014); "The Metaphysics of Holiness: Created Participation in the Divine Nature," Irish *Theological Quarterly* 79.1 (2014); and "Bernard Lonergan and the Recovery of a Metaphysical Frame," *Theological Studies* 74.4 (2013). Scheduled to appear in 2015 are two monographs from Fortress Press: *A Public God: Natural Theology Reconsidered*; and, with Christiaan Jacobs-Vandegeer, *Foundational Theology*.