

The first book contains eleven lectures on philosophy and theology given by Lonergan from 1956 to 1964. They were delivered in a free-wheeling style in circles of close friends at Regis College (Toronto), Gonzaga University (Spokane) and Georgetown University (Washington, D.C.). The editors are to be congratulated for their success in putting these lectures in readable format and enriching them with a wealth of explanatory footnotes that reveal an impressive amount of dedicated labor and scholarly perception.

The editors perceive that these six years were critical years for Lonergan and constituted a time of important transitions. For example, they point to the development of his eight functional specialties churned out from the materials of these lectures. The churning may have been helped by friends who challenged him with questions at the end of lectures 6, 9, 10 and 11, questions that Lonergan himself invited.

The editors were tempted to trace new ideas going forward beyond 1965 but resisted the temptation. This reviewer cannot
resist such a temptation as regards “displacement towards system” mentioned on pages 207-8. The two examples of such displacement given by Lonergan are economics and Christology.¹ The term “displacement” now seems to have been dropped probably because it could imply decline, whereas a move towards system is clearly not decline but progress in Lonergan’s seventh functional specialty.

Move towards system is not necessarily progress in Balthasar’s theo-drama. One commentator has observed Balthasar’s “constant polemic against the potential idolatry of systematizing Christian revelation.”²

The book of Bishop Angelo Scola begins with a chapter on the “Style and Form” of Balthasar’s writings. This chapter 1 looks like a serious effort to discover Balthasar’s system of objectifying the beautiful. The effort must have been difficult. On page 3, he distinguishes primary form and exterior form and equates system (of objectifying the beautiful) to exterior form. Then in chapter 4, he wonders (on p. 36) why “historically speaking, the beautiful is the last to appear in the sequence of transcendentals and . . . its status is still a matter of dispute.” Scola’s unsolved problem with system as an exterior form (that objectifies the beautiful) may soften his praises for Balthasar’s “kneeling theology” (p. 8).

The beautiful is best exteriorized in drama. This seems to be basic in Balthasar’s “Theo-drama.” It is in chapter 7 that Scola highlights drama when he says (on p. 66): “It is in the sphere

1. These were the two options faced by Lonergan in 1972 when he was nearly seventy years old and faced with health problems. He opted for economics instead of Christology. Why? See “Bernard Lonergan and Liberation Theology,” in The Third World and Bernard Lonergan, ed. Walter L. Ysaac, S.J. (Manila: Lonergan Centre, 1986) 10-11. But were there other reasons? Did Lonergan foresee that, unlike the case of economics, a christological “displacement towards system” could hardly be completed in his lifetime?

2. Edward T. Oakes, S.J., Pattern of Redemption: The Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar (New York: Continuum, 1994) 135. (Emphasis added.) In an unpublished communication dated Aug. 7, 1996. Antonio de Castro, S.J., points out that “it is not so much system that Balthasar opposes, but in so far as system tends toward ‘a methodological closure’ and no longer allows the free play of freedoms involved (the absolute divine freedom and the relative creaturely freedom) to trace its own story; this is the reason why the category of the dramatic is so central to Balthasar’s thinking; by its very nature, drama forestalls any attempt at theoretical or systematic or methodological closure.”
of the Dramatics that the Player can reveal something of himself and of his mission” and follows this up with a footnote that Theodrama is the principal locus of Balthasar’s Christology. He does not explicitly say this of Balthasar’s Trinitarian teaching in chapter 6, but it is not difficult to infer from Scola’s view that there is dramatic interaction among the three divine Personae and the human personae.

This reviewer finds it easier to follow Scola’s presentation of Balthasar’s theo-drama with the aid of Lonergan’s eighth functional specialty: communications. If drama can communicate revelation to more people than can systematic theologizing, still dramatic forms are culturally conditioned and dramatic audiences are culturally diverse. Furthermore, any inauthenticity in systematics and in the six preceding specialties can infect the dramatic forms of communication that flow from it. On the other hand, communication becomes authentic if it evokes new faith experiences or new interpretation of ancient experiences that research, history and dialectics may yet retrieve; these can promote a self-correcting spiral of revision towards foundations, doctrines and systematics. (See diagram.)

The concept of an upward movement in theological development may be symbolized by an ascending spiral of which one loop is sketched above. This is based on Lonergan’s account of emergent probability in which “a series of positive conditions for an event might coil around in a circle.” (Insight, 141)