

TWO POINTS OR FOUR?—RAHNER AND LONERGAN ON TRINITY, INCARNATION, GRACE, AND BEATIFIC VISION

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In response to a recent article by Robert Doran, this article compares and contrasts the systematic coherence of Karl Rahner and Bernard Lonergan—how they interrelate the divine mysteries of the Trinity, incarnation, grace, and beatific vision. It argues that on all grounds Lonergan's position provides a more satisfying response to relating these mysteries to one another than does Rahner's. It also examines the possible origins of Lonergan's four-point hypothesis.

IN A RECENT ARTICLE in *Theological Studies* Robert Doran brought to light developments in the work of Bernard Lonergan that move in the direction of what Doran is calling a unified field structure for systematic theology.¹ This structure provides an integration of theologies of beatific vision, grace, and incarnation within a fully trinitarian perspective. Central to this structure is a four-point hypothesis found in a recently published English translation of Lonergan's writings,² which relates the supernatural realities of beatific vision,³ grace, and incarnation to the four inner-trinitarian relations as four created participations of the divine nature:

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¹ Robert M. Doran, "The Starting Point of Systematic Theology," *Theological Studies* 67 (2006) 750–76.

² Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *The Triune God: Systematics*, trans. Michael G. Shields, ed. Robert M. Doran and H. Daniel Mansour, *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan* (hereafter, CWBL) 12 (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2007) 471–73. This is a translation of Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *De Deo trino: Pars systematica* (Rome: Gregorian University, 1964).

³ Throughout this article I refer to the beatific vision and the light of glory interchangeably. According to Aquinas our understanding of "separate forms" occurs through "the separate substance itself united to our intellect as its form, so as to be both that which is understood, and that whereby it is understood. And

There are four real divine relations, really identical with the divine substance, and therefore there are four 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 [created] participation of active spiration, and so has a special relation to the Holy Spirit; that the habit of charity is a [created] participation of passive spiration, and so has a special relation to the Father and the Son; and that the light of glory is a [created] participation of sonship, and so in a most perfect way brings the children of adoption back to the Father.⁴

As the title of Doran's article makes clear, the four-point hypothesis is a "starting point" for systematic theology, a speculative basis for bringing diverse theological topics under a single perspective. My contention here is that this hypothesis is a radical advance on previous theological approaches that have sought a similar unification. To highlight the nature of this advance I will compare and contrast Lonergan's approach with another approach more familiar to Catholic systematians, that of Karl Rahner.

Where Lonergan constructs a four-point hypothesis, Rahner's approach operates on the basis of a twofold communication of the divine nature, drawn from the two processions of the Son and the Spirit. We might call this a "two-point hypothesis" in comparison with Lonergan's four-point hypothesis. Rahner's approach has its origins in the Thomistic tradition but is formulated in his preferred idiom of divine self-communication. Lonergan's approach incorporates those same elements, since two of the created participations of the divine nature that Lonergan identifies correspond to the two processions, but he adds two further elements not found in the usual Thomistic approach. I argue that these extra elements add an important dimension to Lonergan's four-point hypothesis that renders it theologically superior to what has gone before.

As well as comparing these two starting points for systematic theology I will also consider two other agenda. The first is to identify something of the impact on Christology that the four-point hypothesis might entail. Here I will compare that impact with the theological approach of David Coffey, who has pursued a Rahnerian account of the divine self-communications as a basis for his Christology. The second is to speculate on the factors that

whatever may be the case with other separate substances, we must nevertheless allow this to be our way of seeing God in His essence." The beatific vision is "that which is understood" while the light of glory is "that whereby it is understood" (*Summa theologiae* [hereafter *ST*] Suppl. 3, q. 92, a. 1, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province]). They are the objective and subjective dimensions of the one reality.

⁴ Lonergan, *Triune God: Systematics* 471–73.

might have led to the development of the four-point hypothesis in Lonergan's theology.

RAHNER ON TRINITY, INCARNATION, AND GRACE

Rahner's most programmatic writings in this area can be found in his *The Trinity*, a slim volume that spells out a theological agenda for liberating trinitarian theology from its neo-Scholastic bondage and renewing theological interest in the Trinity.⁵ Rahner has a litany of complaints against the neo-Scholastic approach: that it isolates the doctrine of the Trinity from other major theological themes;⁶ that in relation to the Incarnation it reduces to the position that "'one' of the divine Persons (of the Trinity) took on the flesh"⁷ without attending to the specificity of the Word becoming flesh, to the point that Rahner argues that only the Word could become incarnate in human history;⁸ that its understanding of grace in terms of efficient causality diminishes the personal as opposed to an appropriated role of the Holy Spirit in the life of grace;⁹ that its account of the beatific vision is not trinitarian; and that its deployment of the psychological analogy is purely hypothetical and makes no contact with the Trinity in the economy of salvation.¹⁰ As a consequence Rahner argues that most Catholics are mere "monotheists" in the sense that they have little or no appreciation of the trinitarian dimensions of their faith.¹¹

In developing an alternative approach, Rahner deploys his preferred approach of "divine self-communication" as an entry point for an understanding of the Trinity. This divine self-communication is a communication to humanity in Word and Spirit; God addresses God's Word to us in history and gives us his Spirit so that we may receive God's Word as a true Word of God. Structurally this has many similarities to the trinitarian theology of Karl Barth with his focus on divine revelation. These two forms of divine self-communication constitute the basis for the two supernatural realities of Incarnation and grace. As expressed in the economy of salvation, these two divine self-communications are then drawn back into the immanent Trinity through Rahner's well-known *grundaxiom*: "The 'economic' Trinity is the 'immanent' Trinity and the 'immanent' Trinity is the 'economic' Trinity."¹²

⁵ Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans. Joseph Donceel (New York: Seabury, 1974).

⁶ *Ibid.* 10–15.

⁷ *Ibid.* 11.

⁸ *Ibid.* 28–30.

⁹ *Ibid.* 13, 34–38.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 117–20. For an analysis of the status of the psychological analogy in contemporary trinitarian theology see Neil Ormerod, "The Psychological Analogy for the Trinity—at Odds with Modernity," *Pacifica* 14 (2001) 281–94.

¹¹ Rahner, *Trinity* 10.

¹² *Ibid.* 22.

This axiom of Rahner's trinitarian theology has been subjected to a variety of criticisms.¹³ While its basic intent is antimodalist, in that it asserts that the distinctions encountered in the economy of salvation are true distinctions in God's own being, it has had various less felicitous consequences, including a turning away of interest in the immanent Trinity as a theological reality.¹⁴ Nor has it prevented critics of Rahner's theology from claiming his position is in fact modalist.¹⁵ Further, I have argued elsewhere that Rahner's attempt to "prove" his axiom in relation to the immanent and economic reality of the Word contains a fatal failure to adequately distinguish between the person and nature of the Word.¹⁶ This produces difficulties in the positions of those who closely follow Rahner on this point, as his theology of Incarnation oscillates between Monophysite¹⁷ and Nestorian alternatives.¹⁸

As is well known, Rahner's earlier attempt to formulate his notion of divine self-communication found expression in the category of quasi-formal causality.¹⁹ The origins of this category are themselves significant

¹³ For criticisms of Rahner's axiom, see Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, 3 vols., trans. David Smith (New York: Seabury, 1983) 3:11–16; Walter Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (New York: Crossroad, 1984) 273–77. Congar and Kasper both accept the epistemological claim but have reservations about any possible metaphysical claim that would eliminate reference to an immanent Trinity. See also Nancy Dallavalle, "Revisiting Rahner: On the Theological Status of Trinitarian Theology," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 63 (1998) 133–50; Neil Ormerod, "Wrestling with Rahner on the Trinity," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 68 (2003) 213–27. Most recently from a neo-Scholastic stance, see Dennis W. Jowers, "A Test of Karl Rahner's Axiom, 'The Economic Trinity Is the Immanent Trinity and Vice Versa,'" *Thomist* 70 (2006) 421–55.

¹⁴ As found, for example, in the writings of Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991); and Roger Haight, *Jesus, Symbol of God* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1999).

¹⁵ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God: The Doctrine of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM, 1981) 144–48.

¹⁶ Ormerod, "Wrestling with Rahner on the Trinity" 214–20. See also John M. McDermott, "The Christologies of Karl Rahner," *Gregorianum* 67 (1986) 87–123; 297–327.

¹⁷ David Coffey, "The Theandric Nature of Christ," *Theological Studies* 60 (1999) 412.

¹⁸ Conservative Cardinal Giuseppe Siri, in his *Gethsemane: Réflexions sur le mouvement théologique contemporain* (Rome: Éditions de la Fraternité de la Très Sainte Vierge Marie, 1975), condemned Rahner's Christology as Nestorian. A more balanced but critical appraisal can be found in Raymond Moloney, *The Knowledge of Christ* (New York: Continuum, 1999). Moloney notes that Rahner's account of Jesus' immediate vision of God as Jesus' human soul knowing the Word, "raised the spectre of a Nestorian duality of subjects" (128).

¹⁹ Karl Rahner, "Some Implications of the Scholastic Concept of Uncreated Grace," in *God, Christ, Mary, and Grace*, Theological Investigations 1 (Baltimore:

for the present discussion. Rahner derives the category from Aquinas's discussion of the beatific vision:

The separate substance itself [is] united to our intellect as its form, so as to be both that which is understood, and that whereby it is understood. And whatever may be the case with other separate substances, we must nevertheless allow this to be our way of seeing God in His essence, because by whatever other form our intellect were informed, it could not be led thereby to the Divine essence. This, however, must not be understood as though the Divine essence were in reality the form of our intellect, or as though from its conjunction with our intellect there resulted one being simply, as in natural things from the natural form and matter: but the meaning is that the proportion of the Divine essence to our intellect is as the proportion of form to matter.²⁰

Here we can identify the difficulties that Aquinas is facing in relation to the beatific vision, which is reflected in Rahner's use of the qualifier "quasi." Taken in its usual sense, the use of "form" would imply the formation of "one being simply, as in natural things from the natural form and matter." Without proper qualification this term would compromise both divine transcendence and our personal identity in death. Hence the use of "form" is at best analogous, and would be misleading if its analogical character were neglected.

What is significant for the present argument is that Rahner uses Aquinas's theology of the beatific vision as a template for his understanding of grace and incarnation.²¹ The beatific vision is understood as the completion of the life of grace, and hence provides his starting point for understanding grace in terms of quasi-formal causality. This is then extended to also account for the incarnation as well. In his appropriation of Rahner's approach, David Coffey has further extended this analysis to understand grace in terms of an "accidental" quasi-form and the incarnation in terms of a "substantial" quasi-form, though Coffey himself prefers to drop the qualifier "quasi."²² Indeed as we shall find later, Coffey pushes his analysis further to suggest that the incarnation also be considered as a type of limit case of the life of grace, notably in his development of a "Spirit Christology."²³

Helicon, 1961) 319–46; see also Rahner, *Trinity* 36, though the term "quasi-formal causality" is less prominent in this later work.

²⁰ *ST* Suppl. 3, q. 92, a. 3.

²¹ Most evident in Rahner, "Some Implications of the Scholastic Concept of Uncreated Grace."

²² David Coffey, *Grace: The Gift of the Holy Spirit* (Sydney: Catholic Institute of Sydney, 1979) 63–65; see also Coffey, "Theandric Nature of Christ" 413.

²³ See in particular David Coffey, "The 'Incarnation' of the Holy Spirit in Christ," *Theological Studies* 45 (1984) 466–80; "A Proper Mission of the Holy Spirit," *Theological Studies* 47 (1986) 227–50; and "Theandric Nature of Christ."

This in outline is Rahner's theological attempt to synthesize the theologies of Trinity, incarnation, grace, and beatific vision. Grace and incarnation are both understood in terms of an analogy drawn from the beatific vision whereby God communicates the "quasi-form" of divinity to the recipient soul. This process can be thought of in two modes of divine self-communication, in Word and in Spirit. The incarnation is the communication of the Word, and the life of grace is the communication of the Spirit, making grace the "gift of the Holy Spirit" as expressed in Coffey's seminal study.²⁴ Working in the other direction, the beatific vision is understood as the completion of grace: "Hence grace, as the ontological basis of the supernatural life, is also an inner entitative principle . . . of the vision of God. . . . Hence the inner nature of grace as a whole must allow of being more closely determined in terms of the nature of the ontological presuppositions of the immediate vision of God."²⁵ However, as Coffey notes, this conception of the beatific vision effectively draws a line between the beatific vision in us (as the completion of the life of grace) and the beatific vision in Jesus (as a consequence of his divine sonship), though both are perfections of one of the two distinct modes of divine self-communication.²⁶

A COMPARISON WITH LONERGAN'S FOUR-POINT HYPOTHESIS

At this stage I would like to undertake a comparison between the approach of Rahner and that of Lonergan as spelled out in Lonergan's four-point hypothesis. I will do this by posing a number of questions, with comments on each.

The first and most obvious question is *whether the beatific vision is the right starting point for the development of a theology of grace?* As Coffey notes, though dismisses as irrelevant, Scripture presents the beatific vision as the completion of the life of faith rather than as the completion of the life of grace.²⁷ This is one reason why the Catholic tradition denied the existence of faith in Jesus, because he already possessed the beatific vision in this life and hence had no need of faith.²⁸ Rahner's account of the beatific vision as the template for understanding grace, with that vision then understood as the completion of the grace, has two consequences. The first, as already noted by Coffey, is that Rahner's approach separates the beatific vision in us from the beatific vision in Jesus. This effectively puts

²⁴ Coffey, *Grace: The Gift of the Holy Spirit*.

²⁵ Rahner, "Some Implications of the Scholastic Concept of Uncreated Grace" 326.

²⁶ Coffey, *Grace* 63.

²⁷ *Ibid.* 62.

²⁸ See *ST* 3, q. 7, a. 3.

Jesus in a different category from us in relation to the beatific vision, and consequently it becomes difficult to see how his experience of that vision can be the basis or model for our own experience. The second consequence is the curious absence of the Father from Rahner's account of the beatific vision. The classical scriptural texts for the beatific vision (1 Jn 3:2, 1 Cor 13:12) infer a direct vision of God, and, as Rahner has painstakingly demonstrated, *ho theos* in the New Testament signifies the Father.²⁹ If this is the case, then the beatific vision should encompass a relationship to the Father, not to the Holy Spirit, as Rahner's position on grace and beatific vision seems to imply.

Here I can identify one advantage of Lonergan's four-point hypothesis. Lonergan speaks of the beatific vision, the light of glory, as "a [created] participation of filiation that leads perfectly the children of adoption back to the Father."³⁰ Through this created participation of filiation we become adopted sons and daughters of the Father and enter into that particular intimacy with him that is the beatific vision. Lonergan's stance here clearly distinguishes the beatific vision from grace while simultaneously making our experience of the beatific vision directly comparable with that of Jesus, a point I shall return to below. The difficulties identified above in Rahner's account are thus resolved.

Second, one may ask, *Is the life of grace sufficiently accounted for by the divine self-communication of the Holy Spirit?* This is a more difficult question. The classical text used by Augustine, Aquinas, as well as Lonergan in discussing grace is Romans 5:5, "the love of God poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given to us."³¹ Clearly a distinctive role must be given to the Holy Spirit in any theology of grace. Yet this is not the only voice in the tradition. Coffey criticizes Aquinas for seeking to understand the operation of grace in terms of efficient causality, and hence as common to the three Persons.³² Grace is then simply appropriated to the Holy Spirit. Further, Aquinas evokes the authority of John 14:23 to conclude that "the whole Trinity dwells in the mind by sanctifying grace."³³ Indeed, in this same article Aquinas speaks of an "invisible" mission of the Son as well as of the Spirit. He also states that the "Father, *though He dwells in us*

²⁹ Karl Rahner, "Theos in the New Testament," in *God, Christ, Mary, and Grace* 79–148.

³⁰ Lonergan, *Triune God: Systematics* 473.

³¹ Augustine and Aquinas clearly understand "love of God" as an "objective genitive," that is, the "love of God" is our love for God. See Christiaan Jacobs-Vandegeer, "Sanctifying Grace in a 'Methodical Theology,'" *Theological Studies* 68 (2007) 63–68, for an illuminating discussion of this text from a "methodical" viewpoint.

³² Coffey, *Grace* 55.

³³ *ST* 1, q. 43, a. 5.

by grace, still it does not belong to Him to be from another, and consequently He is not sent.” Is this gracious indwelling of the whole Trinity simply a consequence of *perichoresis*, subsequent to the gift of the Holy Spirit? Or is this indwelling proper to each Person in a trinitarian mode?

Further, a Catholic theology of grace is full of a variety of distinctions in its understanding of grace: created and uncreated grace, actual and habitual grace, operative and cooperative grace. *Does Rahner’s theology of grace in terms of the divine self-communication of the Spirit adequately reflect all the distinctions needed for a proper account of the reality of grace?* Rahner made much of the distinction between created and uncreated grace and was critical of the Scholastic position, which focussed attention on created grace to the neglect of uncreated grace.³⁴ However, there is little in his writings on the debate about the distinction between sanctifying grace and the habit of charity, a distinction that was a matter of dispute between Franciscan and Dominican schools.³⁵ Certainly Aquinas held for a real distinction between sanctifying grace and charity; it is possible, given Rahner’s adoption of Franciscan positions on other issues, that he does so on this issue as well.³⁶

Again we find in Lonergan’s four-point hypothesis a clear response to these issues. While Lonergan identifies sanctifying grace as involving a special relationship to the Holy Spirit, as a created participation of active spiration, he also speaks of the habit of charity as involving a special relation to the Father and Son, as a created participation of passive spiration. The life of grace thus involves the whole Trinity, Father, Son, and Spirit, in a proper trinitarian mode of active and passive spiration. Lonergan’s account also takes a stance on the traditional debate on the real distinction between sanctifying grace and the habit of charity. Again Lonergan’s four-point hypothesis demonstrates advantages over the two-point approach of Rahner.

³⁴ Most notably in Rahner, “Some Implications of the Scholastic Concept of Uncreated Grace.”

³⁵ J. Michael Stebbins, *The Divine Initiative: Grace, World-Order, and Human Freedom in the Early Writings of Bernard Lonergan* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1995) 314 n. 55. Stebbins notes that Scotus “denies a real distinction between sanctifying grace and the habit of charity.” Christiaan Jacobs-Vandegeer notes that the distinction between sanctifying grace and the habit of charity is based on the real distinction between substantial and accidental forms. See Jacobs-Vandegeer, “Sanctifying Grace” 69 n. 72. If this is correct, then Coffey’s attempt to correlate substantial and accidental quasi-formal causality with incarnation and grace is not congruent with the Thomist tradition on this point. Sanctifying grace is already a substantial effect.

³⁶ I have not found any references in Rahner’s writing on this issue, but they may exist. Certainly it is not raised in Rahner, “Some Implications of the Scholastic Concept of Uncreated Grace.”

CHRISTOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The final point of my comparison touches on the question of Christology. Here it is more a question of tendencies or trajectories in Rahner's thought, rather than conclusions he himself drew. Rahner is well known for his development of an evolutionary Christology that views the incarnation as the culmination of the active presence of the Spirit in creation.³⁷ In commenting on Rahner's Christology, Coffey notes that Rahner's approach can appear as a "Monophysitism (from below)."³⁸ Coffey draws extensively on Rahner's Christology to develop his own position of a "Spirit Christology." Coffey's theology of grace and incarnation is motivated in part by his acceptance of the Barthian criticism of the Catholic theology of grace that it separates out the grace of Christ from the grace of other human beings.³⁹ He seeks to unify these by making the grace of Christ a "limit case" of the operation of grace in the rest of humanity. The question is, *Given the compactness of Rahner's approach which, as we have seen, makes no real distinction, apart from one of degree, between grace and the beatific vision, will there be pressure for a further compactness that takes the same approach with Christology?* The outcome, at least in Coffey's work, is what Paul Molnar has called a "Christology of degree."⁴⁰

Indeed, the issue at stake was not unknown to Aquinas and is addressed in *ST* 3, q. 7, a. 13: "Whether the habitual grace of Christ followed after his union?" Aquinas notes the following objection: "But the habitual grace seems to be a disposition in human nature for personal union. Therefore it seems that habitual grace did not follow but rather preceded the union." Basically Aquinas is asking whether the incarnation is the consequence or the cause of Jesus' fullness of grace. Aquinas quickly dismisses any sense that we are talking about some temporal priority here. Rather it is whether "by nature and in thought" one precedes the other. His response invokes the proper missions of the Son and Spirit, the prolongations of their eternal processions. The grace of union arises from the mission of the Son, while habitual grace arises from the mission of the Holy Spirit:

Now the mission of the Son is prior, in the order of nature, to the mission of the Holy Spirit, even as in the order of nature the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Son and love from wisdom. Hence the personal union, according to which the mission

³⁷ Karl Rahner, "Christology within an Evolutionary View of the World," in *Later Writings*, Theological Investigations 5 (New York: Herder & Herder, 1966) 157–92.

³⁸ Coffey, "Theandric Nature of Christ" 412.

³⁹ Coffey, *Grace* 1.

⁴⁰ Paul D. Molnar, "Deus Trinitas: Some Dogmatic Implications of David Coffey's Biblical Approach to the Trinity," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 67 (2002) 33–54, at 35–36.

of the Son took place, is prior in the order of nature to habitual grace, according to which the mission of the Holy Spirit takes place.

The theological logic of Aquinas's position is that of the *filioque*, that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. On this basis the presence of grace as sanctifying, the mission of the Holy Spirit, is a consequence of the incarnation, not vice versa.

It is significant, then, that in pursuing the alternative position, that the grace of union is a consequence of Jesus' fullness of grace, Coffey is forced into a rewriting of traditional trinitarian theology, relativizing the processions and the *filioque* to the status of a model and replacing it with his own favored "model of return."⁴¹ This is not the place to enter into a fully developed critique of Coffey's position, but it is important to note that Coffey's Christology is to some extent the logical unfolding of Rahner's position on Christology and grace, together with a strong application of Rahner's *grundaxiom*.⁴² While I am not suggesting Coffey would ever take the next step, the trajectory of this approach would lead eventually to the elimination of the second Person of the Trinity altogether, as found in the Christology of Roger Haight whose "Spirit Christology" replaces the traditional doctrine of the Trinity with the philosophical distinction of transcendence and immanence.⁴³

While many may find Coffey's christological speculations attractive, in that they lessen the distinctiveness of the incarnation,⁴⁴ his speculations depart from the traditional understanding of the incarnation. However, when we view Christology through the four-point hypothesis, an alternative approach to Coffey's speculations emerges. As Michael Stebbins notes, in the human Jesus we find all four created participations of the divine nature:

Although operations of vision and of charity occur in him [i.e., Jesus], and although

⁴¹ This has been a constant theme of Coffey's writings for the last three decades, but finds its most complete recent expression in his *Deus Trinitas: The Doctrine of the Triune God* (New York: Oxford University, 1999).

⁴² Another author in the same neo-Scholastic framework who has developed a similar position is Thomas G. Weinandy, *The Father's Spirit of Sonship: Reconceiving the Trinity* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1995). The article by Jowers, "A test case for Rahner's axiom" can be read as a direct critique of the reasoning of Coffey and Weinandy, though he seems unaware of Coffey's work.

⁴³ Roger Haight, "The Case for Spirit Christology," *Theological Studies* 53 (1992) 257–87. Haight expands his case in *Jesus, Symbol of God*, where he eventually dismisses talk of an immanent Trinity as a vestige from dogmatic and Scholastic theology (487).

⁴⁴ Such a position is attractive to those who would use it to promote interreligious dialogue. It is against such tendencies that the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued *Dominus Iesus*.

these have their proximate principles in the light of glory and the habit of charity and their remote principle in sanctifying grace, there is a further principle of all of these, namely 'the hypostatic union, or the grace of union, by which this man, our Lord Jesus Christ, truly and really is God.' . . . In other words, while sanctifying grace relates us intimately but accidentally to the infinite God, in Christ's case the divine nature is communicated in such a way that he actually *is* God.⁴⁵

It is worth emphasizing here that in the humanity of Christ we find all four created participations of the divine nature. In him we find both sanctifying grace, a created participation of active spiration, and the habit of charity, a created participation of passive spiration, for in him lies the fullness of grace. In him we find the light of glory, a participation of filiation, since he enjoys the beatific vision.⁴⁶ In each of these three he is our exemplar and source. Each of these participations unites Christ fully to the condition of our redeemed human nature. However, in Christ we also find a created participation of paternity, making him uniquely the Son of God, not through an elimination or overpowering of his human nature, but through a personal union, "communicated in such a way that he actually *is* God . . . united to the person of the Word."⁴⁷ What Lonergan's four-point hypothesis gives us is not a diminished "Spirit Christology" but an expanded and fully trinitarian Christology in which each of the divine Persons plays a role. As Paul tells us, "For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell" (Col 1:19), and further, "For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily" (Col 2:9). The four-point hypothesis adds new depth to this Pauline vision.

THE GENESIS OF THE FOUR-POINT HYPOTHESIS

The argument so far has been on the advantages present in the four-point hypothesis in comparison with the more traditional approach that has found modern expression in the writings of Karl Rahner. However, one can also ask about the genesis of the four-point hypothesis. What is the theological reasoning behind it, and why did Lonergan develop it? To some extent such questions are speculative, since Lonergan presents only a sketch of his position in *De Deo trino* without further elaboration. Stebbins has noted that in *De ente supernaturali*, written around 1946, Lonergan follows the broadly Thomist position, noting that "besides created communications of the divine nature, there also exist two uncreated communications. . . . The Father communicates the divine nature to the Son and

⁴⁵ Stebbins, *Divine Initiative* 50.

⁴⁶ Traditional Catholic theology holds that Jesus enjoys the beatific vision throughout his human existence; even if one does not accept this, Jesus certainly enjoys it in his resurrected state.

⁴⁷ Stebbins, *Divine Initiative* 50.

the Father and Son communicate the divine nature to the Spirit.” However, as Stebbins notes, Lonergan did not seek to exploit any parallels between the created and uncreated communications of the divine nature in this work.⁴⁸ Stebbins goes on to speculate that while he does not doubt that Lonergan was cognizant of some parallel at the time, “perhaps he had not yet worked out the parallel to his own satisfaction.”⁴⁹

Extra evidence lies in Lonergan’s works written between *De ente supernaturali* and *De Deo trino*. In the epilogue of *Insight*, after discussing the limitations of a metaphysics of proportionate being, Lonergan notes that “the theologian is under no necessity of reducing to the metaphysical elements, which suffice for an account of this world, such supernatural realities as the incarnation, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and the beatific vision.”⁵⁰ At around the same time, in his christological work, *De constitutione Christi ontologica et psychologica*,⁵¹ Lonergan deployed an analogy based on contingent predication for understanding the hypostatic union.⁵² Contingent predication refers to the predication to divinity of contingent events, such as creation. Thus Aquinas argues and Lonergan reaffirms that creation implies a real relation on the part of the creature, but only a relation of reason on the part of God. To affirm a real relation to God would imply that God is affected by creation, so that God would change as creation changes. This is, of course, the position adopted by process theology, but it represents a radical departure from classical understandings of divine transcendence.⁵³ In *Grace and Freedom*, Lonergan had thoroughly analyzed the position of Aquinas and reaffirmed his own commitment to this position in the later chapters of *Insight*, particularly chapter 19.⁵⁴ In *De constitutione Christi*, Lonergan extended this analysis to the individual di-

⁴⁸ There is clearly an important linguistic shift from communications of the divine nature (of which there are two) and participations of the divine nature (of which there are four). When and why this shift occurs is not clear to me.

⁴⁹ Stebbins, *Divine Initiative* 53.

⁵⁰ Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran, CWBL 3 (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1992) 756. One cannot be certain, but Lonergan might have in mind the metaphysical speculations of Maurice de la Taille and Rahner.

⁵¹ Published as Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *The Ontological and Psychological Constitution of Christ*, trans. Michael G. Shields, ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran, CWBL 7 (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2002).

⁵² *Ibid.* 77–105.

⁵³ For a critique of process theology from this perspective see David Burrell, “Does Process Theology Rest on a Mistake?” *Theological Studies* 43 (1982) 125–35; also Neil Ormerod, “Chance and Necessity, Providence and God,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 70 (2005) 263–78.

⁵⁴ Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Grace and Freedom: Operative Grace in the Thought of St. Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran, CWBL 1 (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2000).

vine persons as follows: "Proper contingent truths predicated of a divine person add to the subsistent relation only a relation of reason in the divine Person, but imply an appropriate created term outside God that is really related to the divine subsistent relation."⁵⁵ In this work Lonergan applied his analysis only to the incarnation, but the way was now open for the development of the four-point hypothesis, corresponding to the four subsistent relations, paternity, filiation, active and passive spiration.

The logic of Lonergan's position is as follows. To understand how there can be a real relation between a created reality and one of the divine persons, we must understand it in the same manner as the real relation between the creature and God, since "a divine subsistent reality is really identical with the immutable divine essence."⁵⁶ All that is needed for the truth of the relation is an "appropriate created term outside God" that exists if (and only if) God wills to create such a term. Thus the mystery of created participations of the divine nature is an extension of the mystery of creation itself. Created participations of the divine nature "extend" the relationship between Creator and creature by drawing the creature into the inner divine relations. The appropriate created term thus "stands for" each possible term of the relation; since there are four terms, one for each of the four subsistent relations, there are four created participations of the divine nature.⁵⁷

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this article has been to explore the significance of Lonergan's four-point hypothesis through a comparison with the more familiar theological synthesis presented by Karl Rahner. I have attempted to show that on a number of issues Lonergan's position presents advantages over the Rahnerian approach based on the two communications of the divine nature. I have also shown something of how the logic of the hypothesis unfolds in terms of Lonergan's understanding of contingent predication. What we find is a position solidly grounded in the tradition that is also a genuine extension of that tradition into new and uncharted territory. It offers us the basis for a thorough systematization of key elements of the tradition—Trinity, incarnation, grace, and beatific vision—the four fundamental mysteries of faith. For uncovering their basic unity, Lonergan's work deserves the attention of anyone interested in the task of systematic theology.

⁵⁵ Lonergan, *Ontological and Psychological Constitution* 97.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ I would argue that the seeds of such an approach can be found in Augustine's *De Trinitate*. At the end of Book 5 Augustine discusses the problem of how the divine Persons can enter into the created order. In his initial attempts to respond, Augustine develops an account of contingent predication.