For a certain generation of those who studied theology, Bernard Lonergan’s *Method in Theology* (1972) was a book that was constantly referenced. For my generation of theologians, when one mentions the text, it is all too often looked at askance. For many, Lonergan is neither fish nor fowl. For some, he is not sufficiently radical enough, considered too indebted to Tradition. To others, his thought is considered not sufficiently Thomistic, far too eclectic. And still, there are others who point to him as the one providing the blueprint for the philosophy behind a relativistic theology of pluralism with his development of the concept of historical consciousness. I have been asked if my interest in Lonergan is merely a historical curiosity, a desire to look into a period of time in Catholic theology that has since passed. I have been questioned, continually, in some circles, asked if Lonergan has really anything to offer in an all-too fractured theological world. My response to those who want to know specifically what Lonergan can offer theology today is to examine *Method in Theology*. For me, it is his most significant work.

This 20th Century Jesuit philosopher and theologian has as a running theme throughout his work the thought that the one trying to be a theologian must be in the process of becoming an authentic human being. In his text, *Insight: A Study in Human Understanding* (1957), Lonergan writes:

> The solution has to be a still higher integration of human living. For the problem is radical and permanent; it is independent of the underlying physical, chemical, organic, and psychic manifolds; it is not met by revolutionary change, nor by human discovery, nor by the enforced implementation of discovery; it is as large as human living and human history. Further, the solution has to take people just as they are.1

It is precisely this call to authenticity that is necessary for the theologian to embrace in his or her own personal journey that lies at the root of a true method in theology. Lonergan writes:
The crucial issue is an experimental issue, and the experiment will be performed not publicly, but privately. It will consist in one's own rational self-consciousness clearly and distinctly taking possession of itself as rational self-consciousness. Up to that decisive achievement, all leads. From it, all follows. No one else, no matter what his knowledge or his eloquence, no matter what his logical rigour or his persuasiveness, can do it for you…

Personal commitment is essential for the theologian to the process of theology, if it is to be authentic. Lonergan, in *Method in Theology* (1972) writes:

Despite the doubts and denials of positivists and behaviorists, no one, unless some of his organs are deficient, is going to say that never in his life did he have the experience of seeing or of hearing, of touching or smelling or tasting, of imagining, or perceiving, of feeling or moving; or that if he appeared to have such experience, still it was more appearance, since all his life long he has gone about like a somnambulist without any awareness of his own activities. Again, how rare is the man that will preface his lectures by repeating his conviction that never did he have even a fleeting experience of intellectual curiosity, of inquiry, of striving and coming to understand, of expressing what he has grasped by understanding. Rare too is the man that begins his contributions to periodical literature by reminding his potential readers that never in his life did he experience anything that might be called critical reflection, that he never paused about the truth or falsity of any statement, that if ever he seems to exercise his rationality by passing judgment strictly in accord with the available evidence, then that must be counted mere appearance for he is totally unaware of any such event or even any such tendency. Few finally are those that place at the beginning of their books the warning that they have no notion of what might be meant by responsibility, that never in their lives did they have the experience of acting responsibly, and that least of all in composing the books they are offering the public.

Be attentive! Be Intelligent! Be Reasonable! Be Responsible! Be in Love! These are the precepts that underline *Method in Theology* and the creation of what he will come to call the functional specialties.

*Method in Theology*

Lonergan’s *Method in Theology* (1972) grows out of his previous accomplishment in *Insight: A Study in Human Understanding*. It is a work, according to Charles C. Hefling, Jr., that “…is a lifetime’s patient reflection on what theologians do, can do, and ought to do.” *Method in Theology* is described, along with *Insight*, by Frederick Crowe as Lonergan’s *novum organon*. What Crowe means by the term, *organon* comes from Greek antecedents, and, in his lectures on the importance of Lonergan’s contribution, he builds on the importance of *organon* according to both Aristotle and Francis Bacon. Crowe describes *organon* in the following manner:
At certain momentous points in history, the term “organon” has been used to designate an instrument of mind: not an instrument of the hand, like a hammer or nutmeg grater, or even so precious an instrument as a Stradivarius violin, but rather a developed talent of an incarnate subject a way of structuring our conscious activities, that has been of immense importance for the human race.6

Francis Bacon develops the Aristotelian concept of organon further as “a new set of philosophical tools.”7 Above all, this novum organon is not just conceptual for Lonergan and has an absolutely practical role in the future of theology. Crowe writes:

There is a clue here, and more than a clue, to Lonergan’s specific contribution to the intellectual enterprise, that enables us to recognize a fact quite central for assessing his thought and locating him in history. Namely, that whatever else his lifework may be, however penetrating his analyses and however impressive his ideas, his thought is ultimately orientated to the practical and is programmatic for the future. He has provided us with the instrument that is to be used, not just contemplated, and the real Lonergan of history is not so much the Lonergan studied and analyzed, discussed and debated, located and evaluated, but the Lonergan whose achievement is still to be applied to the urgent tasks of the new age that we facing.8

In the creation of an organon for the study of theology in his age, Crowe posits that “…Lonergan, like Bacon, has very clearly seen that the need of the times is not so much for a new set of answers to the problems of the day, as it is or a whole new beginning.”9 This was the work of a lifetime for Lonergan. Crowe writes in 1979: “So it was that for thirty-four years, from the start of his doctoral dissertation in 1938 till the publication of Method in Theology in 1972, Lonergan labored to create an instrument that would do the job.”10

Describing the monumental task that bringing Method in Theology to publication, Crowe states:

These bits of history are quite inadequate to convey the Herculean effort of thirty-four years that produced Method in Theology. To speak of going to the drafting-board three times at intervals of sixteen and eighteen years gives little idea of the courses, lectures, institutes, sets of notes and published materials that mark the stages of the struggle. But perhaps I have at least highlighted the fact that Lonergan’s great work was indeed the end product of a lifetime of thought. It is on that work of a lifetime that his position in history will stand or fall.11

Method in Theology: Key Advances over Insight

Before an examination of the structure of Method in Theology, it might be wise to determine exactly to whom this text is addressed. Without a doubt, Method in Theology is not a beginner’s guide
to theology. Crowe states that “(i)t is a book about those special tasks that fall to that special group within the church whom we classify as theologians.”\(^\text{12}\) Acknowledging the limited appeal of such a book for non-specialists in theology, Crowe explains: “To make the point by negation, *Method in Theology* is not a record of Christian living, or a manual of Christian piety, or a set of instructions on Christian doctrine and practise, or a book of poetry, songs, and praises celebrating the Christian experience. It is a specialized contribution and deals with theological specialization.”\(^\text{13}\)

The structure of the book itself is rather simple. Divided into two parts, Lonergan entitles Part 1 as “Background,” and it consists of five chapters. Each of these chapters is devoted to questions of theological foundations, including “Method,” “The Human Good,” “Meaning,” “Religion,” and “Functional Specialties.”\(^\text{14}\) Part 2 is entitled “Foreground” and directly discusses each of Lonergan’s eight functional specialties.

**Functional Specialties**

In order to grasp the concept of the functional specialties, it is necessary to understand exactly how Lonergan came to the full realization of the functional specialties. Frederick Crowe describes the year 1957 as a key moment in Lonergan’s theological development. While a professor of dogmatic theology at the Pontifical Gregorian University, Lonergan for his Class on the Trinity began to supplement his notes with a section on theological method.\(^\text{15}\) In his study on the development of doctrine, Lonergan, aware of the oft-times “awkward” nature of this analysis, begins to use modern historical research methods.\(^\text{16}\) Describing the situation in which Lonergan finds himself, Crowe writes: “The fit is awkward…without full recognition of the role of history as a factor prior to analysis.”\(^\text{17}\) The areas to which Lonergan specifically applied historical research included both Christology and Trinity, namely the developing understanding of the Person and natures of Christ from Sacred Scripture and within Sacred Tradition and the development of systematic theology in medieval scholasticism.\(^\text{18}\)
Using ideas coming to him from his study of Wilhelm Dilthey, Lonergan makes a shift in his class presentation from the predominance of analysis and synthesis to a growing appreciation of the historical. Coming from Dilthey’s notion that one who interprets history has the desire to influence the present, Lonergan realized that, for the historian (and in his own thought), self-authenticity is essential. Commenting on this aspect, Vernon Gregson notes:

What is true about seeking truth and value in general is also true about seeking truth and value in the area of religion, and, specifically to our point here, in the area of theology and in the work of theologians. Theologians are men and women who study in order to understand the origins and sources of a religion to the culture in which they live, or to which they direct their concern...Theologians are, therefore, mediators between the riches of the past and the riches of the present. But that mediating must also be a discerning and an evaluating, for not everything in the past of a tradition is something to be treasured, sometimes far from it, nor is everything in the present culture something to be treasure, again sometimes far from it.

No less than the individual interpreter does the community in which the interpreter lives has to be authentic. Gregson notes: “It is very difficult, if not close to impossible, to personally Be attentive, Be intelligent, Be reasonable, Be responsible, when the community that one is a part of consistently violates any or all of them...The achievement of truth and value, then, is not only a personal but a communal achievement.”

The Need for Functional Specialties

The need to have functional specialization is due to the fact that theology today is far too complex, too extensive, for one theologian to perform all the needed tasks well. Gregson notes:

Each theologian does not necessarily engage in all the tasks, at least to any full extent, because the field of religion has become too extensive for any one person to do all the tasks well. Theology has become a collaborative effort...The eight tasks that Lonergan delineates for the theologian, then, are principles of collaboration.

Lonergan, in *Method in Theology*, explains his idea of the functional specialties by clarifying that it is not what is meant by modern academia’s field and subject specialization. He uses Husserl’s thought, describing field specialization as a way in which experts are constantly “dividing and subdividing the field of data to be studied,” and department and subject specialization as that
which “classifies the result of the investigation.” Crowe defines field specialization as that “…which marks off an area by using a kind of material principle of division.”

Lonergan writes: “…functional specialization distinguishes and separates successive stages in the process of data to results.” In subject specialization, areas are delineated by a more formal principle. Crowe notes that: “This kind of specialization is more open in principle to some conceptual unity, though that very phrase suggests that any unity achieved would be rather abstract.” Crowe warns, however, “Besides, such a unifying principle is not apt to be widely accepted. For in subject specialization, especially that the theological empires emerge, take shape, grow to power, and set forth on their imperial march to manifest destiny: hegemony over all lesser kingdoms.”

These two types of specialization are distinct in the fact that the former looks to the data collected and the latter looks to the results of that data. Breaking this distinction down further, Crowe explains Lonergan’s third option: examining the process itself from the data result and from there further distinguishes the functions which one moves from data to result. Noting that these functions are grounded in the dynamic operations of a consciously operating subject, one can then “anchor it (the functions) on firm ground and allow it to develop spontaneously from a naturally given base.”

With this in mind, Crowe notes that, for Method in Theology, “(T)he focus is on the functions of theology, rather than divisions in the material object or the formal object.” There is a two-phase reality in this project for Lonergan: a mediated phase and a mediating phase. The mediated phase focuses on retrieving on what past theologians have formulated within their own theological disciplines; the mediating phase is focused on communicating and articulating the data results from the past in a current cultural context. Thus, Lonergan’s definition of theology is concretely manifested in these two phases of theology: “A theology mediates between a cultural matrix and the significance and role of a religion in that matrix.”

It is essential to realize that, with these distinctions, Lonergan is calling for a tremendous interdisciplinary effort. It is also essential to recall that the theologian is not a neutral observer in this effort. He or she must be an involved participant who bears the weight of a tremendous responsibility. Crowe articulates Lonergan’s view of this responsibility by stating:

This difference between the two phases is sharply accentuated in theology. I may indeed study “objectively” the religious past of my community, and do so with the same standards of science and scholarship that govern the neutral observers who work alongside me and investigate the same data. But I cannot stop there. A responsibility has been laid upon me which I may not shirk, a responsibility toward my own and later generations to hear sympathetically, to evaluate critically, to adapt intelligent, and to hand on conscientiously the heritage of my people. The difference is effected by my commitment as a believer; it results from my accepting, through conversion or the
personal adherence which is the equivalent of a conversion, the beliefs of my community along with its ways and precepts and practices. 33

Explanation of the Functional Specialties

Each of the two phases of theology has four, distinct functional specialties. This is related to the act that intentional consciousness has four distinct levels. Lonergan writes:

The proper achievement and end of the first level, experiencing, is the apprehension of data; that of the second level, understanding is insight into the apprehended data; that of the third level, judgment, is the acceptance or rejection of the hypothesis and theories out forward by understanding to account for the data; that of the fourth level, decision, the acknowledgment of values and the selection of the methods or other means that lead to their realization. 34

Lonergan acknowledges that each of the first four functional specialties is analogous to a level of consciousness. They are a specific implementation of each level of consciousness and build upon one another. 35 Describing the first phase of theology and relating each phase to a level of consciousness, Lonergan writes:

In assimilating the past, first, there is research that uncovers and makes available the data, secondly, there is interpretation that understands their meaning, thirdly there is history that judges and narrates what occurred and, fourthly, there is a dialectic that endeavors to unravel the conflicts concerning values, facts, meanings, and experiences. 36

Also in correspondence to each functional specialty is one of the four levels of conscious intentionality. Raymond Lafontaine analyzes Lonergan’s schema in the following manner:

…the four levels of conscious and intentional operations…which demand as their ethical imperative the fulfillment of the transcendental precepts…are enacted in the two phases of theological inquiries…yielding eight…functional specialties. The first four specialties reveal the religious situation: they mediate an encounter with persons who have committed themselves within a religious tradition. Although they do not necessarily presuppose an explicit faith-stance on the part of the inquirer, the presence or absence of that foundational choice will have a major impact on the way of its tasks (of research, interpretation, history, and dialectic) are performed. Inevitably, though, properly theological inquiry demands of the inquirer a foundational decision, which involves the choice to commit oneself (or not) within a particular faith tradition. 37

Thus, one may say research (the first functional specialty) is related to experience (the first level of consciousness) and the precept: “Be attentive!”; interpretation (the second functional specialty) is related to understanding (the second level of consciousness) and the precept: “Be intelligent!”; history (the third functional specialty) is related to judging (the third level of consciousness) and
the precept “Be reasonable!”; and dialectic (the fourth functional specialty) is related to deciding (the fourth level of consciousness) and the precept “Be responsible”. These four tasks, as mentioned, ultimately are all about retrieving the data of the past. Gregson, in his interpretation, gives a masterful, practical application of this analogous relationship:

The first four tasks principally concern the retrieval of the past: gathering ancient artifacts and texts (Research); discovering the meaning of what one has gathered (Interpretation); constructing a history of the time (History); and evaluating the significance of what one has arrived at in the first three levels (Dialectic). The relationship of these four operations to the levels of consciousness should be relatively clear. The goal of Research is data gathering or Experiencing. The goal of Interpretation is Understanding. The goal of History is arriving at what really happened in the past, which is an exercise in Judging. And the goal of Dialectic is considering the significance of what the past had to offer and determining when there are conflicting views of the significance of the past, which is the most accurate and valuable; this is an exercise of Deciding. Although the goal of each of the specialties is one of the levels of consciousness, in fact, all of the levels are used in each specialty. For instance, the researcher must use his or her understanding, judgment, and decision to arrive at the goal of Research, establishing accurate data.

Vernon Gregson gives a practical example of how these first four functional specialties are used in the study of theology. Using an example coming from biblical theology, Gregson explains:

A scholar might be interested in the original meaning of the passage in Matthew’s Gospel in which the following words are attributed to Jesus: “I say to you that whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another, commits adultery” (Mt 5:32). Research would involve establishing the accurate Greek text of a passage, and comparing it with other parallel passages in the New Testament. One would discover that Mark’s Gospel does not make any exception for remarriage, even for immorality. Interpretation would involve understanding the meaning of the words during the first century A.D. and their use in Matthew’s Gospel. Precisely what type of immorality justifies divorce? Is there a different standard for men and women implied in the passage- whoever divorces his wife? Can the wife initiate divorce? History would involve placing the statement attributed to Jesus in the context of the Jewish, Greek, and Roman views of the time which would further clarify its meaning. Is Jesus’ statement going against the current of the time or is it in accord with other Jewish or Greek or Roman views? Does it continue a tradition of does it begin one? Dialectics would involve discerning the specific value or values the passages is seeking to affirm. How does the passage relate to the other teachings of the Gospel? Is the value of fidelity the point of the passage? Is Jesus seeking to raise the status of woman by limiting the reasons why a man can divorce her? When the further question is asked, “Is this a teaching that has relevance only to Jesus’ time or to the time of the writing of the Gospel, or to our own time as well?” on has moved on to the second four specialties.

In the second phase of theology, each functional specialty is also in analogy to a level of consciousness, albeit in a reversed order. Foundations (the fifth functional specialty) corresponds to deciding (the fourth level of consciousness) and the precept: “Be responsible!”; doctrines (the sixth functional specialty) corresponds to judging (the third level of consciousness) and the
precept: “Be reasonable!”; systematics (the seventh functional specialty) corresponds to understanding (the second level of consciousness) and the precept: “Be intelligent!”; and finally, communications (the eighth functional specialty) corresponds to experience (the first level of consciousness) and the precept: “Be attentive!”.

Vernon Gregson gives his interpretation of the second four functional specialties by stating:

The second four specialties principally concern the present and the future. They involve reaping the fruits from the study of the past to create the present and the future. “Foundations” is articulating the change that has taken place in oneself or in one’s community as a result of seriously confronting the values of the past. “Doctrines” is affirming the values one has discovered. “Systematics” is relating and integrating (making systematic) the values one is now affirming with one another and with the other values and meanings in one’s life. “Communications” is passing on what one has arrived at, and what one values, to others.40

Gregson’s practical application of the functional specialties to biblical theology can assist in coming to an understanding of the second phase of theology. He writes:

…Foundations would involve articulating the ground for the change in one’s own attitude toward marriage and divorce, if it differed from what discovered the Gospel to mean. And if it has not differed, Foundations would ground one’s previous evaluation more deeply. Doctrines would involve affirming the truth of one’s new position. Systematics would be bringing this new truth into relationship with one’s other positions and values. And Communications would be passing on, in as concrete and persuasive a manner as possible, one’s new-found or renewed value.41

Lonergan himself offers a synthetic statement of explanation for his functional specialties. He states:

…experience, insights, judgments of fact, and judgment of value: (i) So research is concerned to make the data available. (ii) Interpretation to determine their meaning. (iii) History to proceed from meaning to what was going forward. (iv) Dialectic to go to the roots of conflicting histories, interpretations, researches. (v) Foundations to distinguish positions from counter-positions. (vi) Doctrines to use foundations as a criterion for deciding between the alternatives offered by dialectic, (vii) Systematics to seek an understanding of the realities affirmed in doctrines.42

The Functional Specialties and the Task of Theology

These eight functional specialties are not separated and unrelated, but are in fact, intrinsically and functionally interdependent. In the estimation of Raymond Lafontaine, “This helps to preserve a necessary unity to the theological task, which is often compromised by the
endless divisions of field and subject specialization. It also helps to ground authentic theological collaboration; the unique contribution of each specialty is vitally important, if one is to grasp the full import of a theological question.”

The division of each of the tasks of theology into the functional specialties is key for four reasons. Longeran articulates the reasons in the following fashion: first, it is more than a matter of simply saying that the matter is too broad and extensive for a single “professor” to teach. He states “…functional specialization is essentially not a distinction of specialists but a distinction of specialties. It is done so as to “distinguish different tasks and to prevent them from being confused.” Lonergan further writes: “Different ends are pursued by employing different means, different means are used in different manners different manners are ruled by different methodical precepts.”

Second, each of the eight tasks has eight different ends and thus possesses eight different sets of methodological tasks to be distinguished. It allows the theologian to have clear and realistic goals for each step in his or her study. Third, Lonergan states “…the distinction and division are needed to curb one-sided totalitarian ambitions.” Each of the eight functional specialties is needed and each has its own “proper excellence.” He reminds theologians that theology suffers when one of the functional specialties is neglected in favor of another, citing the Middle Ages as an example of this one-sidedness in theological studies.

Fourth, the functional specialties are divided and distinguished so as to resist “excessive demands.” No one thinker, no one text, can address every single demand and answer every single question exhaustively.

Lonergan feels that the distinctions of the functional specialties can serve two purposes. The first, a major part, is “to produce the type of evidence proper to the specialty.” He gives the example of the biblical exegete doing exegesis; the historian doing historical research based on historical principles, and so on. The second, a minor part, is that each of the specialties is related to one another functionally. Lonergan writes:
Especially until such time as a method in theology is generally recognized, it will serve to preclude misunderstanding, misinterpretation, and misrepresentation, if the specialist draws attention to the fact of specialization and gives some indication of his awareness of what is to be added to his statements in the light of the evidence available to other, distinct possibilities.49

As important as it is to understand the divisions implied in the functional specialties, it is also important to understand the unity and the fact that “none can stand without the other seven,” and “if all the eight are needed for the complete process from data to results, still as serious contribution to one of these eight us as much as can be demanded from a single piece of work.”50

In order to establish a sure and certain base, each of the steps must be attended to and none can be bypassed.51 Lafontaine puts it well when he states that “(T)he ultimate goal of the functional specialties is not to divide and conquer, but to celebrate unity in an interdependent diversity, for the sake of the coherent development of the Church’s tradition and for the credibility of the Church’s mission in the world…”52

Vernon Gregson points out that the eight functional specialties are basically answers to eight basic questions. For research, the question is “What are the relevant data?” For interpretation, “What is the meaning of the data?” For history, “What does it tell us (verify) about its time? For dialectic, “What value(s) does it reveal? For foundations, “Where do I stand with regard to its value(s)? For doctrines, “What will I affirm about its value(s)? For systematics, “How does this relate to my own or my community’s other values?” For communication, “What and how will I communicate this to others?”53

The Challenge of the Functional Specialties for the Theologian

Lonergan is aware that he is not introducing a novelty into theology. Each functional specialty can, in some way, correspond to a more traditional aspect of theology. One might equate the first specialty, research, to textual criticism; the second, interpretation, to exegesis; the third, history, to Church history and historical theology; the fourth, dialectic, to apologetics; the fifth, foundations, to fundamental theology; the sixth, doctrines, to dogmatic theology; the seventh, interpretation, to speculative theology; and the eight, communications, to pastoral theology.54
These functional specialties of Lonergan present a challenge to the theologian. It is a call that Lonergan first issued in *Insight*: “Knowing is not mere looking; it is a carefully experiencing, understanding and judging.” The true task for the theologian is not to simply retrieve the past theological tradition. He or she must then also be certain to be open to using that data retrieved for present challenges and for future possibilities. Gregson writes: “It is the error of stopping at History and not doing an evaluation of the significance of what one has discovered (Dialectics) and performing the other tasks necessary to bring the meanings and values of the past into the present and the future.”

Another challenge for the theologian is “to disregard the first five functional specialties and to begin with Doctrines and to pass on the Doctrines of the Church(es) from generation to generation without the challenge that comes from renewing again, in each generation of laity and clergy, direct contact with the original sources which gave rise to the Doctrines.” It is noted that this is a particular challenge for those who serve as religious leaders within a particular community. In days before the discovery of contemporary critical investigative methods, this tendency was more common. “But in the present state of historical awareness, the attempt to pass on the tradition without the critical study of the originating texts of the traditions cannot help but give rise to the suspicion of defensiveness, or of laziness, or even of bad faith.”

Lonergan writes:

The medieval synthesis through the conflict of Church and State shattered into the several religions of the reformation. The wars of religion provided the evidence that man has to love not by revelation but by reason. The disagreement of reason’s representatives made it clear that, while each must follow the dictates of reason as he sees them, he also must practice the virtue of tolerance to the equally reasonable views and actions of others. The helplessness of tolerance to provide coherent solutions to social problems called forth the totalitarian who takes the narrow and complacent practicality of common sense and elevates it to the role of a complete and exhaustive viewpoint.

The theologian cannot be merely the mouthpiece of an established set of doctrines of a particular denomination of faith. The challenge is always present to broaden one’s horizon, to go deeper, to ultimately move from the first theological specialty, Research, through all the functional specialties, to the final theological specialty, Communications, the end point of all evangelization.
Lonergan himself was very aware of this danger from the very start of his academic career. In his work, *Grace and Freedom* (1940), which served as his doctoral dissertation at the Gregorian University, is trying to live the Leonine adage, *vetera novis augere et perficere*. David Tracy, in his book, *The Achievement of Bernard Lonergan* (1970), describes Lonergan’s intentions in this particular Thomistic study by stating “More exactly, it is his (Lonergan’s) attempt to know precisely what the horizons of the ‘vetera’ were before attempting to transform them in light of the expanded horizons of the ‘nova.” Lonergan dives deep into the question of the very nature of grace, *gratia operans*, and in doing so, necessarily inserts himself into the great debate between the primarily Jesuit-supported Molinists and the primarily Dominican-supported Banezians. In doing this study in historical theology, Lonergan launches into what he would later describe as his functional specialties, as well as keeping a clear eye on the importance of the dialectic of history, of moving from a classicist culture mindset and of looking at the concepts of progress, decline and redemption.

Lonergan, in his study of Aquinas, begins with his first two functional specialties, research and interpretation, in his desire to examine this rather precise theological dilemma. However, perhaps what is more important for Lonergan is not so much an articulation of what exactly is a proper Thomistic interpretation of grace, as much as it is the arrival at a proper theological method to come to that understanding. As impressive as Lonergan’s achievement in the resolution of the issue of freedom and grace (Patrick Byrne states: “Thus, Lonergan was able to achieve what neither the Banezians nor the Molinists could, and was able to resolve a 350-year-old dispute by employing historical methods.”) is the fact that Lonergan determines it is of the most importance to focus on Aquinas’ cognitive theory to fully grasp Aquinas’ theology of grace.

Lonergan writes in *Grace and Freedom*. “Unless a writer can assign a method that of itself attends to greater objectivity than those hitherto employed, his undertaking may well be regarded as superfluous,” and further, “A historical study cannot but be inductive. An inductive conclusion, though it may be certain when negative, can for the most part be no more than probable when
positive.” It is apparent that the themes for which Lonergan would develop in his later works, *Verbum*, *Insight*, and *Method in Theology* were very present in his doctoral dissertation.

In scholastic theology, “methodical questions were raised and methodological discoveries made, still their properly methodological aspect was not explicated.” Theology and theological method develops in historical circumstances—the Fathers of the Church were attempting to address individual theological questions that arose when the Church had the leisure (more or less) to actually ponder issues like the hypostatic union. The Scholastic doctors were trying to create a worldview to handle all possible theological questions. Manualism, in its conceptualistic manner, developed out of an overuse of a deductive method, a “one size fits all” approach to theology. Therefore, in order to deal with this particular issue in the theology of grace, Lonergan studies what Aquinas actually wrote, rather than what others have written about what he wrote or what others have interpreted what he wrote. David Tracy writes: “For Aquinas at least was not interested in a theological science exclusively concerned with the end products of intellectual inquiry (concepts). On the contrary, he embraced the theoretic attitude and scientific thrust peculiar to the medieval period and employed the method implicit in that period’s achievements.”

Aquinas moves from data to theory to resolution of the theological question. Lonergan writes:

There is a disinterestedness and an objectivity that comes only from aiming excessively high and far, that leaves one free to take each issue on its merits, to proceed by intrinsic analysis instead of piling up a debater’s points, to seek no greater achievement that the inspiration of the moment warrants, to wait with serenity for the coherence of truth itself to bring to light the underlying harmony of the manifold whose parts successively engage one’s attention. Spontaneously such thought moves towards synthesis, not so much by any single master stroke as by the unnumbered succession of the adaptations that spring continuously from intellectual vitality…

Therefore, it is essential to understand the cognitive theory, which ultimately informs the theological method used to investigate the issue of particular issue of the theology of grace, both in Aquinas and in Lonergan.

Lonergan’s functional specialty of research into the issue led him to the second functional specialty of interpretation. In many ways, Lonergan’s approach to the questions of *Gratia operans*, moves from each function specialty, in the sense that he is attempting to retrieve the past while
simultaneously moving into the future. Ultimately, it is more essential for this study to retrieve a proper theological method before tackling the specific question itself. “(T)he content of speculative theology is the content of pure form. It is not something by itself but the intelligible arrangement of something else. It is not systematic theology but the system in theology.”

Lafontaine writes: “Theology invites—indeed, it demands of the theologian—personal engagement, an explicit decision to “take sides”, to commit to a personal journey of faith, and (within Christian theology) to ecclesial belonging, to association with a specific religious tradition.”

Lonergan describes the decision of the theologian in the following manner:

> It is a decision about whom and what you are for, and again, whom and what you are against. It is a decision illuminated by the manifold possibilities exhibited in dialectic. It is a fully conscious decision about one’s horizon, one’s outlook, and one’s world-view. It deliberately selects the framework in which doctrines have their meaning, in which systematics reconciles, in which communications are effective.

For the theologian, it is “not a set of propositions that a theologian utters, but a fundamental and momentous change in the human reality that a theologian is.” The theologian’s objectivity comes from his authentic subjectivity and it entails “a total surrender to the demands of the human spirit: be attentive, be intelligent, be reasonable, be responsible, be in love. (emphasis mine)” It is precisely this aspect, of being in love, that is the role of the theologian. Theology comes out of religious experience and, from the reflection on that experience, the theologian’s understanding, judgments, and decisions follow. Pope Benedict XVI notes, “Knowledge of God is not enough. For a true encounter with him one must also love him. Knowledge must become love.” The functional specialties assist the theologian to articulate religious experience for himself or herself and for his or her ecclesial community.

An Underdeveloped Second Phase—A Need for Completion

Most scholars on Lonergan’s life and work believe that *Method in Theology*, although a theological breakthrough, especially in the creation of the functional specialties, is a text that is
largely incomplete and underbalanced. There are two reasons generally given as to why this is the case. The first is Lonergan’s own interest in the first phase of theology more so than the second phase. Michael Shute comments:

Lonergan was an outstanding dialectical thinker…Beyond this, he recognized the profoundly personal element in dialectic which challenges one’s own corrupted thinking…the later chapters of Method in Theology, however, reveal a weakness with respect to his thinking forward in concrete fantasy towards a future reality…He understood that the withdrawal from practicality was for the sake of a return. He left a sketch of the way back, but overall he left to others the task of working out a strategy of return.73

The other school of thought notes that Lonergan was quite ill when he was writing Method in Theology. Frederick Crowe notes: “Method does suffer in comparison with Insight. It is schematic in style almost to the point of being laconic, and the content lacks the leisurely sweep of its great predecessor…one feels that the Lonergan of pre-surgery times would have greatly expanded them.”74

Regardless of its perhaps incomplete nature, Method in Theology represents a momentous achievement in the history of Catholic theology in the 20th Century. It can serve as a blueprint not only into the mind of a particular theologian during a particular period of time, but as a way forward in the journey of a theologian in being faithful to his unique ecclesiastical vocation.

2 Ibid., 13.
6 Ibid., 7.
8 Crowe, 6.
9 Ibid., 14.
10 Ibid., 15.
11 Ibid., 23.
12 Ibid., 23.
13 Ibid., 24.
14 Whelan, Redeeming History, 143.
This is found present in Lonergan’s notes and is titled “Divinarum personarum conceptionem analogicam evoluit” Bernardus Lonergan SJ. (See Whelan, Redeeming History, 134 and Frederick Crowe, Lonergan (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 86.

15 Whelan, Redeeming History, 134.

16 Crowe, Lonergan, 84.

17 Ibid., 87-88.

18 Gerard Whelan notes the growing influence of Dilthey on Lonergan’s methodological thinking. He states: “Like Dilthey, Lonergan’s study of concrete historical developments begin to help him think more widely on questions of how what Crowe calls ‘history as written’ must be related to an interest in influencing one’s own, current society, i.e., ‘history as written about.’” (Whelan, RH, 135, footnote 15)

19 This shift in Lonergan’s teaching in 1959 is apparent in his notes for his graduate class, De intellectu et methodo, which was later published as “Method in Catholic theology,” collected in Lonergan, Philosophical and Theological Papers, 1958-1964, CWL 6 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996): 29-53. See Whelan, RH, 135 and Crowe, Lonergan, 90-91.

20 Whelan notes that, during this time period when Lonergan is also developing his concept of religious conversion, which fulfills his already established thought on intellectual conversion and moral conversion. (See Whelan, RH, 136.)


22 Ibid., 74.

23 Ibid., 75.

24 Lonergan, Method in Theology, 125-126


26 Crowe, Method in Theology, 126.

27 Crowe, 24.

28 Ibid., 24.

29 Ibid., 25.

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.

32 Lonergan, Method in Theology, ix.


34 Lonergan, Method in Theology, 133.


36 Lonergan, Method in Theology, 134.

37 LaFontaine, The Development of a Moral Doctrine: Religious Liberty and Doctrinal Development in the Works of John Henry Newman and John Courtney Murray, Excerpta ex Dissertatione ad Doctoratum in Facultate Theologiae Pontificiae Universitatis Gregoriana, Romae, (2001): 46. LaFontaine brings up an interesting point, stating: “This decision, is identified as more immediately a religious rather than an intellectual-theological tradition.” (46) He then quotes Lonergan to affirm this position: “In the first phase one begins from the data, and moves through facts and meanings towards personal encounter. In the second phase, one begins from reflection on authentic conversion, employs it as the horizon within which doctrines are to be apprehended and an understanding of their content sought, and finally moves to a creative exploration of communications.” (Method in Theology, 135-136)


39 Ibid.

40 Ibid., 77.

41 Ibid., 77-78.

42 Lonergan, Method in Theology, 349.

43 LaFontaine, 44-45.

44 Lonergan, Method in Theology, 136.

45 Ibid., 136-137.

46 Ibid., 137.

47 Ibid.

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid., 137-138.

50 Ibid., 138.

51 Gregson, “Theological Method and Collaboration I,” 77. Gregson continues, giving a practical example: “To build one’s Foundations on what one would like the past to have been, or on what the past at first sight might
seem to have been, is to build on a shaky foundation indeed. One of the reasons for the development of Scripture studies in the last hundred years is the recognition that a first reading of a text written almost two thousand years ago in a very different culture and in another language and with a community facing far-different problems is not going to reveal its meaning without careful and thorough study. The last four functional specialties depend on the first, therefore, for the integrity and richness. But the first four specialties are barren for the present and the future unless the further questions of the last four specialties are also attended to. To know the past but not to bring its values into the future is a great waste of one’s time and effort. (emphasis mine)"

52 Lafontaine, 48.
54 Lafontaine, 47.
56 Ibid.
57 Ibid.
58 Ibid.
62 Lonergan, Grace and Freedom, 156
63 Tracy, 37.
64 Ibid., 38.
66 Lonergan, as quoted in Tracy, 42.
67 Lafontaine, 49.
68 Lonergan, Method in Theology, 268.
69 Ibid., 270.
70 Ibid., 269.
71 Lafontaine, 49.
73 Michael Shute, Lonergan’s Discovery of the Science of Economics (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 238. Particularly underdeveloped is the eighth functional specialty, communications, which is given only fourteen pages by Lonergan.
74 Crowe, Lonergan, 107.