ABSTRACT

CATHEDRALS OF THE MIND:
THEOLOGICAL METHOD AND SPECULATIVE RENEWAL IN TRINITARIAN
THEOLOGY


Marquette University

The aim of this work is twofold. First, it labors to retrieve from the past a normative account of speculative theological method, in protest of the anti-speculative fashions and attitudes that have prevailed among theologians since the Second Vatican Council. Second, and in tension with the first aim, this study outlines the respects in which conciliar and post-conciliar developments in history, anthropology, philosophy, and cultural analysis—the same developments that led to speculative theology’s fall from favor—are the means by which speculative theology might be renewed and made useful in theology today.

The second chapter squares up to speculative theology’s critics by presenting a theory of speculative method—comprised of both formal and operational elements—that can endure their critiques. Chapter three transitions from recovery to renewal by articulating the scientific, philosophical, theological, and cultural transformations in thought that have accumulated since the speculative tradition’s apex and indicates how speculative theology might be itself be transformed and renewed through a commerce with those transformations. The culmination of the second chapter is the notion of speculative pluralism and its fourfold heuristic structure of basic anticipatory elements.

The last of these elements—the dialectical—is the exigence for the four chapter, which provides both a developmental and a synthetic account of the theorem of the supernatural, its elaboration of distinct theorematic domains, and its regulative function over speculative inquiry. The fifth chapter applies the methodical fruits of the first three in order to show that apparently contradictory approaches to the speculative theology of the divine processions—in this case, those of Bernard Lonergan and Hans Urs von Balthasar—can be integrally and constructively related through theorematic coordination. This instance of speculative cooperation serves as a “proof of concept” for more ambitious experimental applications of the notion of speculative pluralism.

Bernard Lonergan is the orienting thinker for this project at nearly every point. His early historical studies of Aquinas, his Latin theology, his essays on culture, his philosophy of cognition, and his work on theological method inform my own reflections and formulations throughout. But the subject of this study is not “speculative theology according to Bernard Lonergan.” Instead, it is a careful application of Lonergan’s thought toward more constructive ends.