

# Response

## Michael Dummett's 'Theology and Reason'—Joseph Fitzpatrick replies

From Professor Dummett's article, 'Theology and Reason' (May, pp. 237—245), which he wrote in response to my article, 'Lonergan's Method and the Dummett-Lash Dispute' (March, pp. 126—138), I learn that I encourage hostility to reason, I attack and decry the use of deductive reasoning, I disparage and abhor it, I consider it superfluous and unnecessary, and I suppose that one can simply ignore logical argument. And that is not all. I even 'jeer' at reason and I call in question Professor Dummett's life-long dedication to scholarship. I am, in short, a thoroughly bad egg. This is an interesting view but not necessarily one Professor Dummett would expect me to share. My own view is that Dummett sets up a straw man in order to knock him down. The views he attributes to me are not mine but inventions of his own.

The statement of mine that seems especially to have incensed Professor Dummett is that Lonergan 'demotes' logic relative to insight. Dummett makes much of this; much more than a Professor of Logic is entitled to make. He seizes on the word 'demotes' and combines it with an erroneously 'strong' interpretation of the word 'dubious', in the phrase 'dubious deductive reasoning', in order to furnish the grounds for the litany of accusations he hurls against me. Rather meagre grounds for the elaborate case Dummett makes, and hopelessly misconstrued. Had Dummett played fair he would have cited my other statement that Lonergan 'assigns logic an essential but subordinate role within the movement from question to answer' (p. 134). The word 'essential', meaning 'necessary' or 'indispensable', is sufficient to refute the view of deductive reasoning Dummett ascribes to me. It is clear from my article that I am making a comparative judgment, comparing the merits of two components of reasoning as assessed by Lonergan. I am not making an either/or judgment—either logic or insight—but a both/and judgment while attempting to place the role of one component of reasoning in relation to the other, within the context of theological method. Since Dummett's case against me rests mainly on a grossly mistaken interpretation of my views on deductive reasoning, that case can now be seen to be seriously weakened.

Closer inspection reveals Dummett's response to be nothing less than a tissue of misinterpretation, a systematic misrepresentation of my views. Dummett accuses me of 'rigid segmentation' of faith from reason—'first reason with no acknowledgement of faith, then faith with no appeal to reason' is how he puts it. *Not so*. I twice say that doctrines are grounded on conversion *together with* the four functional specialities' of research, interpretation, history and dialectic (pp 129, 135).

And I make it abundantly clear that understanding and judgment play a vital role in both phases of theology. Dummett imputes to me the claim that I—and Lonergan—possess a reliable method for the direct apprehension of theological truths. *Not so*. Professor Dummett wishes to learn from this discussion. In that case I suggest he reads p. 6 of *Method in Theology* where Lonergan disowns any ‘assembly line’ mechanism for the discovery of truth. Dummett portrays my view of conversion as one that excuses theologians from the obligation of supporting their claims by reason. *Not so*. I speak of conversion being ‘the natural ally of right thinking’, I claim that conversion ‘does not interfere with the freedom of the researcher to research, of the interpreter to interpret’ etc. and I state clearly and simply that ‘conversion upholds and promotes the search for truth in every field of inquiry’ (p. 130—1).

Dummett also considers my view—or rather Lonergan’s—that because the methods employed in theology’s positive phase are empirical the positive work ‘can be done by anyone’, and concludes: ‘in other words its results will be as acceptable to unbelievers as to believers’. *Non sequitur*. There is an immense difference between procedures and results. My point is that many of the differences between scholars can be sorted out at the level of scholarship, by pointing, for example, to parts of the text overlooked by a particular scholar (as I have done in the case of Professor Dummett); that it would be misguided, as a matter of procedure, to attempt to control or pre-empt scholarly discussion by appeal to some doctrinal norm such as ‘the paramountcy of unity’. This—and not the elaborate and laboured red herring about deductive reasoning—is the central issue standing between Michael Dummett and me. Dummett proposes an external norm that would interfere with the proper procedures of empirical inquiry and drive a wedge between Catholic scholars and others. I insist on the autonomy of these procedures for all scholars. Differences of interpretation will nevertheless result because of differences in the interpreters—hence the importance of conversion. But such differences will *not necessarily* be along the lines of church allegiance. Dummett’s treatment of my article is, in fact, a powerful vindication of the notion of conversion. For it is, after all, the whole person who interrogates the text, interprets, judges and makes claims.

Bernard Lonergan’s house is not built upon sand. It was too carefully planned over many years to be vulnerable to intemperate and ill-judged attack. Lonergan’s method will continue to promote and guide the important work of scholarly investigation, doctrinal development and ecumenical encounter in a calm, unhurried way for as far into the future as the theological eye can see.

**Joseph Fitzpatrick**