

METHOD IN THEOLOGY, by Bernard J. F. Lonergan, S.J. Darton, Longman and Todd, London. 1972. xii + 405 pp. £4.50.

When Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* first began to appear, I remember animated pub discussions between friends who had managed to get hold of proofs of the next volume, or who knew somebody who had. They couldn't wait. Eagerly awaited, that massive saga provoked sharply differing reactions. On the one hand, a most distinguished English academic has been known to refer to Tolkien as 'that most pernicious of contemporary Oxford influences'. On the other hand, something approaching a Tolkien-cult rapidly developed. Meanwhile, when asked to comment on the 'message' of his saga, Professor Tolkien is reported to have said: 'I was telling a story'.

That is, I think, an allegory and not merely a parable. Lonergan has spent nearly twenty years preparing *Method in Theology*. During the last few years, hints were dropped, cyclostyled lecture notes circulated, and a massive international conference was mounted in Florida to discuss the major themes of a book that did not yet exist. A Lonergan cult has developed, whose devotees are irritated by the suggestion that Lonergan has perhaps not solved *all* the methodological problems facing theology today. On the other hand, those who were 'turned off' by *Insight* show little sign of being 'turned on' by *Method*. *Method in Theology*, like the *Lord of the Rings*, gives at least the impression of being a complete 'world'. Like a Chinese puzzle, it all hangs together; the joints seem smooth; there are no loose ends. Yet, like Tolkien, Lonergan's own reaction is disarmingly modest. In an interview last year, he said that 'Doing method fundamentally is distinguishing different tasks, and thereby eliminating totalitarian ambitions'.

If *Method* succeeds in restraining such ambitions, even if they cannot be eliminated, Lonergan will have placed the theological world firmly in his debt. In modern times, theology has lurched drunkenly from one imbalance to another, as different parts of the theological task—systematics, history, exegesis, kerygmatics, hermeneutics—have fought, and lost, the battle to be regarded as the whole: 'the man with the blind-spot is fond of concluding that his specialty is to be pursued because of its excellence and the [others] are to be derided because by themselves they are insufficient' (p. 137).

The key to the book is to be found in the

second paragraph of the Introduction: 'When the classicist notion of culture prevails, theology is conceived as a permanent achievement, and then one discourses on its nature. When culture is conceived empirically, theology is known to be an ongoing process, and then one writes on its method' (p. xi). In other words, the project of the book is the methodological component of that 'complete' set of translations across our contemporary cultural revolutions for which Lonergan pleaded, some years ago, in an essay in which he warned that 'what replaces [classical culture] cannot but run counter to classical expectations'. But does not the belief that this project *can* thus be executed rest on a fatal ambiguity? Is Lonergan's account of method informative or regulative? In so far as it tends to be informative, it runs the risk of disregarding his own warning that what is to emerge 'cannot but run counter to classical expectations'. In so far as it tends to be merely regulative, it leaves us with purely formal prescriptions: 'Our formula is a continuous and ever more exacting application of the transcendental precepts. Be attentive, Be intelligent, Be reasonable, Be responsible' (p. 231). Sometimes one has the feeling that substantial disagreement with Lonergan is only held to be possible in so far as it is the fruit of inattentiveness, unintelligence, irrationality and irresponsibility. Which cannot be quite right.

The two parts of the book are entitled 'Background' and 'Foreground'. The 'Background' consists of chapters on 'Method', 'The Human Good', 'Meaning', 'Religion' and 'Functional Specialties'. The range of topics covered here is exceedingly wide and, in spite of their laconic, almost peremptory lucidity, and of the frequent references back to *Insight*, they cannot (within the covers of one book) be more than a set of brilliant sketches. The heart of the book is the 'Foreground', with chapters on each of the eight 'functional specialties' into which Lonergan has distributed the tasks of theology: 'Research', 'Interpretation', 'History', 'Dialectic', 'Foundations', 'Doctrine', 'Systematics', 'Communications'.

In order not unduly to test the editor's patience, there are just three questions that I would like to put on the agenda. The first concerns the relationship between 'Background' and 'Foreground'. The description is, signifi-

cantly, metaphorical. If we say that the 'Background' provides the context for the 'Foreground', we have said something. But not enough. It is in the 'Background' that the cognitional theory first built up in *Insight* is summarized and developed (*Insight* said a great deal about experiencing, understanding, affirming, but comparatively little about the 'fourth level of consciousness': the level of choice, decision, commitment). The eight functional specialties correspond to the four levels of consciousness, operating in each of the two 'phases' of theology. (Without going into detail, the four specialties of the first phase represent stages in 'hearing' the Word; the other four represent stages in 'proclaiming', or 'witnessing to' the Word.) The question concerning the relationship of 'Background' to 'Foreground', therefore, becomes: to what extent is the distribution of theological tasks between Lonergan's eight 'specialties' dependent, for its coherence, on the adoption of a specific cognitional and epistemological theory?

My second question arises from an uneasiness concerning Lonergan's apparent conception of theological autonomy. It seems to be assumed that there exists something called 'theology' which is autonomously generated and articulated (albeit in collaboration with other intellectual tasks), and then 'communicated' to other people. Lonergan conceives of the eight functional specialties as 'distinct and separable stages in a single process from data to ultimate results' (p. 136). That sounds reasonable. But the starting-point is crucial. My question is: what are the data for theology? It is not the case that theological questions, insights and affirmations are generated and tested within the life, language, memory, prayer and suffering of a community? And yet Lonergan seems to take it for granted that the data for theology consists, exclusively, of

texts. Accordingly, he devotes only *two pages* to the 'first functional specialty', 'Research'.

My third question concerns the crucial role played by the concepts of 'conversion', and religious experience. (I would hazard a guess that much of the debate which, it is to be hoped, this book will open up, will concern the move from the first to the second 'phase' and, specifically, the functional specialty 'Foundations'.) 'Faith', says Lonergan, 'is the knowledge born of religious love' (p. 115). But, endorsing Pascal's remark that 'the heart has reasons which reason does not know', he immediately proceeds to generalize this theorem and to acknowledge that, 'besides the factual knowledge reached by experiencing, understanding, and verifying, there is another kind of knowledge reached through the discernment of value and the judgements of value of a person in love' (p. 115). While I welcome the emphasis on decision, on love, on religious experience, as foundational in theology, I confess that—against the background of thirty years of Lonergan's development of his cognitional theory—I am amazed at the almost casual manner in which the admission is now made that 'there is another kind of knowledge' (p. 115). To put it another way: from the point of view of cognitional theory, is it really adequate to describe experiences as fundamental as the love of God and other people as being, respectively, the 'major' and 'minor exceptions' to the principle '*Nihil amatum nisi praecognitum*' (p. 122)?

There is no doubt, in my mind, but that this is an exceedingly important book. To ignore it would be irresponsible. The intelligent thing to do is to accept it as a challenge which, if critically and reasonably met, should—by agreement, disagreement and debate—raise the level of any theologian's attentiveness to his task.

NICHOLAS LASH

BARON FRIEDRICH VON HÜGEL AND THE MODERNIST CRISIS IN ENGLAND, by Lawrence F. Barmann. *Cambridge University Press*. 1972. 278 pp. £6.

Professor Barmann has contributed a fascinating and valuable study to the literature of the modernist movement. He is clear and readable without shirking the complexity of the questions which inevitably arise. He quotes at length, but often in the footnotes so that his account never loses its momentum. At the same time, the footnotes repay careful scrutiny, for there he unravels many points of interest which in the text would have been an unnecessary hindrance. In general the balance between

text and footnotes is most satisfying.

The author states his intention in the Preface: 'Both the limits and the theme of this book are expressed in its title. I have not undertaken to write a comprehensive history of the modernist crisis. I have studied von Hügel's involvement in the movement in its specifically English setting and circumstances, (p. xi). He fulfils his intention admirably. In the process he first outlines von Hügel's intellectual growth. Then he sets the scene,