

*Eldorede 11***Spirituality in the Third Stage of Meaning****1. A Preliminary Context**

The title of today's talk must seem very strange, granted that this is an introductory talk on spirituality as I would claim it is to be influenced by the work of Fr. Bernard Lonergan S.J. (1904-1984). Yet I choose it very carefully in the hope that it would help us break through to a glimpse of a new direction, perhaps for our own efforts in prayer, but certainly for the future of humanity's romance with God.

On March 24th we approached the topic of that future in a long day of lectures.¹ The lectures were an effort to rescue the meaning of the word *understanding* from centuries of mis-information. We were not, and we are not here, merely trying to rescue a word, but trying to rescue ourselves. The rescuing belongs, as we shall see, to God, but it is to be done with our collaboration, and bringing that collaboration to light, making it luminous to us as we do it, is part of the challenge of climbing into the third stage of meaning. It would be a mistake to venture here into the stages of meaning as Lonergan portrays them, yet a very simple time-map would help us along and give us hope in our struggle. So, here you are:

_____2,500 B.C._____2,500 A.D._____

The time-line represents human history, of if you like, the time of all creation. If you think in terms of humanity, then the line going back stretches 3 million years. If you think in terms of the cosmos, the line goes back 13.7 billion years. In either case you have a wonderful nudge towards thinking about the patient divine preparation for the

¹Five sessions, of which the previous four *Eldorede* were the content of of the first four sessions.

Incarnation of the second Divine Person. The three pieces of the line separated by the two dates represent the three stages of meaning. There is a presence of spontaneous wonder in the first stage, something like the wonder of a small child. There is a period where wonder is muddled, confused, fragmented: the character and characters of our times. And there is the hope of that later break-through. Will it occur around the date I suggest? That depends on you.

Why these numbers? We can talk about that when I finish the short presentation. But I would note here that I am adding footnotes to that presentation that I skip over as I present our common problem. They will be helpful later, even later in these two hours.

My next preliminary comment is the drawing of a parallel between spirituality and space-time. The parallel comes from a suggestion of Lonergan which he made in a story he told in the first of a series of lectures which he gave in Dublin, Ireland, during Easter week of 1961. It was the first time I heard him speak, fresh in my memory this Easter time of 2007. The story is of a lady who invited Einstein to tea, and as they enjoyed the meal the lady remarked, "You know I have always wanted to understand what you say about space and time and relativity, but I have no head for the equations. Could you just tell me now, without the equations, in simple words?".

Lonergan did not go further with the story. But he had left us with a message. It is a message for humanity. It is a message that was not needed in the first stage of meaning, when mystery surrounded our distant ancestors. When language emerged the tale of the tribe could be told by an elder woman around the fire, but it could be repeated the next night, for the tribe sensed that it had not heard it yet. It is a message that has been battered out of humanity in this middle period, when talk's tone turned to stone, so that now newspapers tell us all everyday, and we expect to understanding what goes on, in ourselves, in the world, fairly effortlessly. In the third stage of meaning there is to be a new humanity, sensitive in and to its small grasp of the mystery of history, willing in each and all to climb slowly and patiently towards understanding.

Perhaps not many of you recognize here an echo of a project named in the

Second Vatican Council of the Catholic Church.² The project was, and is, that there grow in each of us and in all of us through the ages a most fruitful understanding through our slow, sedulous, pious, patient exercise of what the document, written in Latin, calls *ratio*, a word with an Indo-European root that means fit or join, but which we take now to mean reason.

We will talk more of this word, and its equivalent in Korean, when we come to discuss, to reflect together on, the third part of my presentation, but at least I can call attention to the Latin word for prayer, which simply puts an *o* in front of ratio to give *oratio*. If you associate, as you can,³ the *o* with mouth then you reach a suggestive image of prayer as **speaking forth reason**.

But now I wish to go back to the story told by Lonergan. It amused us, I hope. But the lesson that we have to push towards, is a lesson about ourselves and about our present attitudes, attitudes of this stage of meaning. Is there not some parallel between our expectations here and now, regarding spirituality, and the expectations of the woman who invited Einstein to tea? Have we not - we must ask ourselves honestly - somewhat the same expectations regarding spirituality that the lady had with regard to space-time?

Why do we laugh at the story? Because our culture recognizes that physics is not easy. No doubt there are those who imagine that it can be simplified, its essential presented more or less as the lady required from Einstein. But university courses in physics are a part of the culture that stand against this message, and we can profitably pause over this fact. A first year student knows that in a good course, day by day, he or she is climbing through exercises to understanding. The courses of the second or third year are quite beyond them: they have only to wander into such a class to find the topic

²Quoted and commented on in Lonergan, *The Triune God: Systematics*, section 4 of chapter 1.

³See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, *Secunda Secundae*, Q. 83.

entirely obscure. Why, may we ask, is this not accepted as equally true for the topic prayer or the topic spirituality? Indeed, the real situation is that it is altogether more true of these. Understanding a person's progress in prayer is a massively more difficult task than understanding the progress of a particle through space-time.

I do not wish to delay over the fact that the view presented here is that of Bernard Lonergan. The footnotes and considerations in those notes should be sufficient indication. But one point is worth making immediately. It regards Lonergan's search for understanding as a clearly focused search which nonetheless acknowledges mystery and non-knowing as being at the centre of human understanding.⁴ He identifies mystery's place in various ways, but he insists, as Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas did, on our wonders scope in reaching for an understanding of mysteries that is a growing reality. But is that growing a luminous challenge? That is the question of the third section here.

What of the second part?

The second part of my presentation is, quite simply, a sermon that I preached while preparing these various lectures on prayer, spirituality, education. I was tempted to add notes, such as would help our puzzling both today and in our future reach for the larger meaning lurking in the sermon.⁵ But that would spoil the presentation with its muddles and metaphors. What, you may ask, is the strategy of the sermon? Yes, there is method in its oddness, a method which is a shadow of the larger enterprise not only of opening common sense to mystery, but of becoming luminous about that opening: but it has not been thematized.

⁴See his precessions in Thesis 5 of his systematic treatment of *The Trinity God*. I treat the problem more fully in the beginning of chapter 4 of *ChriSt in History*, where I contrast Lonergan's precessions with the obscurities of Rahner.

⁵I should at least add a note here that the Sally referred to is my Reverend wife, who is minister at Knox United Church in Vancouver. I occasionally preach in her stead. You may find it of interest to check *Joistings* 23, where there is a previous sermon on the Trinity that is continuous with the present effort.

What should be evident is the unfinished character of this short reflection. So many questions may bubble up from this or from any audience. What is the relation of the focus here to that of Meister Eichart, Julian of Norwich, the Zen Master Dogen, the searchings of the Upanishads, of ancient China, of the aboriginal peoples of the Americas, Africa, Australia? And so on. But I wish only to point in one direction: the direction of growing understanding that is at the heart of the ontogenetic and phylogenetic reach for God. On that I invite, in the final section, a troubling pause, an echo of our efforts in *Eldorede 6*, nursing a question about Lonergan's presentation of John's long climb.

2. Jesus Our Pilgrim Pacemaker

I wish to return to where Sally left off last Sunday, but first I certainly owe you some light on my strange title. It is the title of one a series of essay written to help an academic in a course she was giving on the Incarnation. If you are curious you can find it on my website as *Joistings 6*. Now the odd word *Joistings* is relevant to what I wish to add to Sally's reflections. I wont get into all its odd shades of meaning but you can note two: beams that support a floor; stings of joy: and this connects with the push of faith towards fuller, more abundant, understanding. Then there is the meaning of *Joyce Things*: bu we wont get into James Joyce in our fifteen minutes today.

Now, where did Sally leave off? Her key concluding statement was "We will follow Jesus into abundant life", but the lead up to that statement is a wonder-filling legend, which I repeat.

An old creation legend tells a story about a bunch of birds sitting around complaining as they looked at their wings. What can you do with these things?" they asked God. "You can't walk with them. You can't pick up things with them. And they're ugly and awkward to carry around."

'You can fly, " God says.

"Fly? What is fly?", The birds demanded.

"Spread out your wings. Spread them out as far as they will spread. Wider. Now move them up and down. Harder. Work at it. Faster. Now, jump."

"Jump? Jump?" , they screeched, hopping around in great agitation.. "Jump?"

One little bird jumps. The wind picks up her wings and she soars. Soars into the rainbows. Soars into the misty clouds. Soars into creation.

And the rest? Having been shown the way, they follow.

And so, Sally concludes, "We will follow Jesus into an abundant life".

There are many aspects to that abundant life, to the manner in which Jesus is our pacemaker, and here I focus on one to which Sally drew attention: the call of John to take up Jesus' pace of understanding, and to follow that pace through a long life. So, we are left with the pacemaking of his Gospel, a Gospel way beyond the others, indeed I would say way beyond the rest of the New Testament, in his grip on the central pace of Jesus, the pace of Jesus both as pilgrim and as now, exuberantly expanding in his human minding.

Sally remarked, when she read my Prayer of Approach, " you have an awful lot of **mindings**. Yes: and that is because I would like us to attend to that simple word, to that apparently simple activity, **minding**. We might begin by looking again at the Prayer of Approach, and the Assurance of Presence.[some sermon comments on:]

Prayer of Approach

We reach out to you, Eternal Three, as your pilgrim guests, invited to the mystery of Your shared Delight. Our reaching is above all to be an imitation of Your Minding of each and all of us, minding each other and minding You. May we stir our curiosity to mind the wonder of your ways and the wonder of the strange love that made One of

You take the pilgrim walk with us. The Pilgrim Jesus, Eternally Glorious, moved among us, One with you yet one of us, showing us the pace of pilgrim walking. We rejoice in that presence and sing of it, always reaching to remember His real presence in our little hearts and in our great Cosmos. So we walk with Him in Your Triple embrace towards the Joy of Everlasting Surprise. Assurance of Presence "And now I am no longer in the world, but they are to stay on in the world, while I am going to be with you. Holy Father, keep them by the power which you have given me, so that they may be one just as we are." (John, 17 : 11) God, Three Persons, is - are - an extraordinary mystery of Mutual Minding. And that is the mystery that is central to our human vocation and to John's decades of searching. What is this reality of mutual minding that we are called to climb into for all eternity?

With that question, let us go back to the birds of the creation legend.

An old creation legend tells a story about a bunch of birds sitting around complaining as they looked at their wings.

The wings in my sermon are the wings of minding. What is it to mind? The decades of John's minding and their result give us clues. On a larger scale, the slow climb of these past centuries that has been called the emergence of science, properly understood, is a witness to what it is to mind. But this witness in the West has been warped many times over, so that science is shrunk to numbers and names, even in the study of scriptures. And the practice of not really minding calls out both to our bitterness and our humour: think of so-called world leaders like George Bush or the present Pope. Think of global poverty and the great Cuckoo of America.

But the key words in these sentences of mine are not *Bush* or *Cuckoo* but "think of". When I say "think of" do we really take it as a challenge the way John did? Rather, is the tendency not to flop around like the birds, not having any sense that our hearts can take flight in understanding? The flight has many forms, as the reading from Paul today notes. In the essays I referred to already there is one on "Personality Types" which talks of three different Theresa in the Catholic tradition: Theresa of Avila,

Theresa of Liseaux, Theresa of India, all taking flight into minding in different ways. Avila was a robust lady who founded convents; Liseaux, called the Little Flower of Jesus, was a pretty neurotic invalid; Mother Theresa of Indian reached out to minding the poor.

We, each of us, have to find where our heart lies, where the Pacemaker invites us to go. But we have to find it daily by minding, by thinking. That is the ancient covenant of *Jeremiah* chapter 31, about the law in our hearts. Indeed, the same call echos through the Muslim scripture and through all the great Religions. So, the **Koran** invites: "We have revealed the Koran in the Arabic tongue so that you may grow in understanding" (**Koran**, Penguin Classic, 165). Qu'an is the Arabic word for recital, but one does not grow in understanding by merely reciting. John's effort in his Gospel is not just a recital, a recycling of the early witnesses. It is a journey of one who heard that first question of Jesus of his own Gospel in his own special way: "What do you want?" (John, 1 : 38). John twists and turns, searching about searching, glimpsing the **one** that is to be gathered in and up and on eternally, history's harvest. The Choir will sing of being **Gathered** by God but we sense that we have the wings to gather, to take flight in a search for global unity that is a shadow of harvest. And perhaps there is a related symbolism in the final wonderful chapter of John, the symbolism of going fishing.

But what is it to fish for meaning for a life-time?

And we must ask ourselves, can we share the recital of that meaning without an effort to flap the wings of mind, to rise up like the Eagle John, like searchers in all traditions? I think now of one of my favorite poems from the Hindu tradition, written by A.K.Ramanujan. Let me quote a verse:

"Sixty, and one glass eye,
even I talk now and then of God,
everywhere
to the even and the odd,

see karma
 in the fall of a tubercular sparrow,
 in the newspaper deaths in Burma
 of seventy-one men, women and children;
 actually see the One in the Many,
 losing a lifetime of double vision
 with one small adjustment
 of glasses"

The central fishing for us, as it was for John and as it is for all religious reaching, is a fishing for the meaning of humanity's search. And how better might I end my ramble about meaning and fishing and the adjusting of wings and glasses than by recalling the high point of John's search for the meaning of it all, which concludes with those final supper words of Jesus (I quote from the 1937 translation by Charles Williams, recognized as perhaps the greatest effort to lift John's recital from the Greek to English). And I would note that here Jesus answers that first question to others of the first chapter of John, "what do you want?", with His own answer. You might wonder, for a day or a decade, whether John noticed that, meant that, minded that, said it on a wing and a prayer.

"Father, I want to have those whom you have given me right where I am, in order that they may see the glory which you have given me before the creation of the world. Righteous Father, although the world did not know you, I did know you, and these men have come to know that you sent me, and I will make known to them your very self, and I will make you known still further, so that the love which you have shown to me may be felt in them, and I in union with them." (John 17 : 24-26)

3 A Single Context

Perhaps I can intimate the single context of interest by going back to that point in

the sermon where I connected the struggle of John with the struggle of modern science at its best. I capture the point neatly in the notion that, if you brood over boiling water long enough, you might come up with the steam-engine. Yes, it is a strange parallel: John broods over the bubbling water of early New Testament times and comes up with a trinitarian steam-engine that shifts considerably the pace of later reachings.

I am not here aiming at enlightened precision regarding the community that brought forth the fourth gospel: I am inviting you, rather, to brood imaginatively about John's brooding: do you notice the duplication? And indeed, your imaginative brooding might take quite some time to bring forth a serious appreciation of those decades of Johannine brooding, stewing.⁶ Might you also, then, duplicate that growing appreciation of the centuries?⁷ In these decadent times, only against great odds. But that remark invites your climb into a range of relevant contexts, contexts talked of plainly and obscurely already. Here, I would have you muse over a single context: Lonergan's failure to make the key point regarding Johannine brooding. It is not luminous in his first thesis of *The Incarnate Word*.⁸ Perhaps it is more present in his final reflections of *The Triune God*, on scripture, and especially, on John.⁹ But, on the whole, Lonergan was trapped in a world of axial minding that had, has, no sense of the failure to jump from

⁶I recall here the reflections on study and stewing at the beginning of chapter 3 of *Lack in the Beingstalk. A Giants Causeway*, Axial Publishing, 2007, which carried forward the reachings of *Process*, (see next note) a first-year undergraduate text, to the graduate level.

⁷There is a curious triplication involved in this, way to complex to compact here. See section 2 of chapter 2, *Christ in History*, with curious title "(about)³".

⁸Not as yet published in English. One can get a summary impression of Lonergan's treatment of John in his reflections on modes of apprehension of Jesus of Nazareth in his "Theology as Christian Phenomenon", *Collected Works*, Volume 6, University of Toronto Press, 1996, 248-9. I provide a fuller context in *ChrISt in History* (2006), a book available on the website.

⁹The book is to appear soon in English. I refer to Lonergan's powerful scriptural reflections in the scholion that concludes the first Volume (Doctrinal) on the Trinity. The Original Latin is *De Deo Trino I. Pars Dogmatica*, Gregorian University, 1964, 1959.

flapping wings round words to a soaring within and after the inner words of cosmic embrace.

But you, a solitary contemplative, “Song of the Adorable”¹⁰ may “go against all sorts of mortmain,”¹¹ to wing your lonely way into the Son.

¹⁰The title of section 4, Chapter 5, “Eternal Process” of *Process. Introducing Themselves to Young (Christian) Minders*, a book written to enlarge the perspective of the work mentioned in the next note. The book is available on the website.

¹¹I quote from Ezra Pound’s *Commission*, quoted in full in my *Music That Is Soundless*, Axial Press, 2006, 29. The book is an early reach (1968) towards the attitude of thinking prayer.