

Prehumous 6

Foundational Prayer III

1. Introduction

This is the third in the series of reflections on spirituality and prayer, and the question at its heart is, Where is it to go? Why is that a heart-question? The new perspective on questions and metaquestions is a calling to bend luminously towards the beauty of efficiency. That beauty, as surely some of my readers know, is, in foundational reaching, to be objectified in this next century by a move towards the global collaboration of functional specialization, giving the international visibility of what I call *The Tower of Able*. Previous nudgings of mine towards that beauty have not been seriously efficient: there was the broad effort of the *Cantowers*, and such lesser efforts as the series - about 200 pages in this Website - that circled round the single brilliant page of Lonergan, *Method in Theology* 250, a page that offers a concrete strategy for getting theology out of its sad effeteness.

That 200- page effort was an effort in a dialogue that failed¹, but here already I have interlocutors who find the topic relevant. And surely it is, if only privately: "What am I doing when I think about or talk to something 'that is commonly named God'²?" . Immediately we have the distraction of the footnote, inviting us to pause over what are popularly called *Thomas' Five Ways*. Are they ways to prove the existence of God? Or might one not better consider them as Ways to appreciate the God of Faith? So, we are

¹The very normal circumstance of lack of time and energy on the part of my collaborators was a key factor. But also I was moving at too advanced a level as I proceeded, week by week, to move through the pages now available on the Website as 8 SOFDAWAREs and the first dozen *Quodlibets*. Still , they are there illustrating the difficulty of reading that single page of genius with its terrifying demands for self-exposure and communal critical honesty.

²The phrase recall s the manner in which Thomas ends each of the five Ways in the *Prima Pars*, q.2., a.3. A useful presentation of Thomas compact considerations here is given in *Cantower XIX*.

invited into a puzzling about prayer. Indeed, are we not invited to pray, if we are “**resting and questing in the real**”³? What are U, cosmic friendliness, and how do U do those works of friendliness? **U**? It has the obvious meaning of you or ye, but it can stand for either Unknown or Understanding. But the very questioning of U subtly assumes a possible Minding.

So, our topic easily pulls us into some shore of dark oceanic personal depth. And, perhaps for many of us, there are the global oceans of academic interest.

In the long run, the longer cycle of incline, the Ways, the *Tao*, the *Cantowers*, are to merge in a transposed dervish whirl, a cyclic patience of the cosmos speaking to itself. But, as with the *Cantowers*, so here we have a problem of beginning.⁴ It is to be a scattered beginning, but one that may be nudged towards a dance in the round, twice or twenty times,⁵ of a later millennium.

We begin, of course, where you and I are, or where you are after musing, to the best of your ability, over my two previous essays. It seems best, within that context, to add here some comments or suggestions of my interlocutors so far. This I do in the following section. Then, in section 3, I pause over some basic difficulties that handicap our efforts. In section 4 I make a beginning of what seems to me to be the central problem in praying about, (about)³, prayer.⁶ Would that not seem enough for this

³This was my brief description of prayer, given thus in the sixth paragraph of *Prehumous* 4.

⁴*Cantower I* began from Eric Voegelin’s question of his final volume of *Order and History*: “Where does the beginning begin?”

⁵See note 10 (p.166) of the Prologue to my *Lack in the Beingstalk: A Giants Causeway*, Axial Press, 2007. The phrase above recalls the Zulu proverb, “The *isisusa* wedding dance is always appreciated by being repeated”, but it also points to the consideration of generations of cycling that is dealt with in chapter 4 of the book.

⁶The odd phrase “(about)³” has appeared many times before this. See section 2 of chapter 2 of *ChriSt in History*. It refers to methodology as a study of methods in their geohistory, where each method is **about** spontaneous performance.

present short essay? So, a section to follow that I had envisaged, section 5, would have pointed back, or forward, to the need for the collaborative humble sifting of past and present regarding metaprayer that would parallel what I attempted forty years ago for metamusic.⁷ Then one might glimpse the need to ask, as a collaborative community, what was going forwards or backwards in the kataphatic prayer of John the evangelist, or Augustine, or Guido II, or Richard of St. Victor, and so on beyond Aquinas towards the next 2 billion years,⁸ and on into the everlasting surprise of the Holy-saying within the Word.⁹

2. Four Prayerful Pointers.

My first interlocutor is a sincere woman of devoted prayer and devoted apostolate. She is earnest in her reach for meaning. From one of her lengthy communications I selected two pieces, asking her to write further on their meaning. I may ask you the same, in the discomforting manner that I pause over in the conclusion of the next section. Might you join here in brooding over such things? And if so, are you “in a position”¹⁰ to communicate in a lengthier and refined fashion the meaning? “....attentiveness to that experience [feelings of emptiness and questions of meaning] before God in faith.... “

⁷The essay, “Metamusic and Self-Meaning” was written in 1969 and presented at the International Florida Conference of Easter 1970. It appeared later as chapter 2 of McShane, *The Shaping of the Foundations*, now available on the website.

⁸The earth may, in fact survive longer than that, depending on the Sun’s dynamics.

⁹There are hints of a fuller eschatology in my writings of the last few years, but I do not wish to go beyond that for the present. The concluding two words of *Wealth of Self and Wealth of Nations*, written in the early seventies, were “Infinite Surprise”.

¹⁰*Prehumous 3* gives an initial account of the simple position. *Prehumous 7*, “Positional Nomology” pushes the issue further. The deep problem is, not the axiomatics discussed in those two essays, but the problem of slow personal growth, such as is considered in, say, *Cantower IX* or *Joistings 3*.

"....alert to habits of thinking and feeling that are incompatible with the "marker" (*Jer* 31:21) of self-presence before God, which is our reference point and known only through prayer...."¹¹

You, like her - I write this prior to receiving her reply - may meet the self-as-self¹² as intimately as possible to quest about both the meaning and the accuracy of the two phrases. What might you mean by attentiveness and feelings of emptiness? What habits are compatible, even necessary as markers, for a foundational searcher?¹³ Most importantly, what is your meaning of "before God", or would you use that phrase at all?

My second interlocutor, a gentle man of serious prayer wrote to me in marvelously luminous terms, but in a way that puzzles, puzzles us, I hope, creatively. "One thought I've had about prayer recently is the notion of a real assent, which I would complement with a notion of a "real consent." Essentially, it's a prayer that has no image, no affect, no concept. It is letting myself realize (the real assent part) that, yes, it is true. We are in a divine order. God gives himself to us without reservation through Word and Spirit. I pray this with eyes open to let everything I see and hear and feel be the palpable evidence. It's simple, and can be elusive, but it's very restful. I wonder if this is what some mystics unfamiliar with interiority analysis experience: just this real assent."

Again, the issue is a discerning self-intussuscepting meeting and greeting: might I assent, ascend, to this assent, or move away from parts of its suggestions? Is the prayer

¹¹The text she referred to in *Jeremiah* can be taken as a slogan for our enterprise, "Set up road signs: put up guideposts. Take note of the highway, the road that you take"

¹²See the index to Volume 18 of Lonergan's *Collected Works*. There are tricky questions here of concrete self-attention and of the third definition of generalized empirical method described in *Joistings* 21.

¹³It is worth noting that the foundational searching is of two basic types: there is the learning from tradition which certainly is a creative effort, but there is the front-line work of creating that is the task of the few.

without image, affect, concept, or is there some sense in which “all we know is somehow with us”¹⁴ and I and all are rooted in a context?¹⁵ And eyes, I, sensitively open: is that not a possibility and probability of a fresh lift to a “Contemplation for Obtaining Love”, a contemplation that would radiate the globe?

My third interlocutor here is a lady who is endlessly startled by the simple suggestion that prayer is thinking, thinking towards “possessing, and being possessed by, my word of The Word, that word being the Theory of God.” Her struggle has carried her painfully and slowly out of common sense to a deeply sensed respect for the world of *theoria*, of serious understanding. What does she and you mean by this possession? Does one really benefit, in being with God, to have reached into one’s own fundamental lonelineses and to do so in some comprehending resonance with the little all that we have come to know through the millennial growth of the understanding of the practical focus of that Eternal Theory on finitude and on you?

My fourth and final interlocutor is Lonergan himself. His published and unpublished words push me forward remarkably, making my present self a stranger to myself of last week, month, year.¹⁶ Over the years, too, I have had the advantage of Fr.Crowe’s sharing with me perspectives and letters, and I wish to add now a hint from a letter of Lonergan to Crowe, dated 27th of December, 1955. It is a hint that seems to me to open up massive fantasies regarding the future of discernment and prayer and the sciences that would mediate them in the future. It is within a personal advising of Fred that I omit, but with remarks of powerful generic significance that I may quote:

“Incidentally, re anxiety, what the Freudians call the Super-Ego is Aquinas’ cogitativa: just as the little birds know that twigs are good for building nests and the little lambs know that wolves are bad, so little human beings develop a cogitativa about

¹⁴The conclusion of chapter 9 of *Insight*.

¹⁵See *Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas*, p. 238, on the full meaning of **context**.

¹⁶There is the reality of slow growth referred to above, note 10.

good and bad; it reflects their childish understanding of what papa and mamma say is good or bad and in adult life it can cause a hell of a lot of trouble.”¹⁷

I suspect that Lonergan here is recalling his benefitting from the suggestive writings of Peghaire,¹⁸ but I would also suggest that his context had changed massively, quite beyond summary intimation here. Think, for instance, of his own published and unpublished sublation, into the “come-about”¹⁹ context, of the meaning of anxiety in Freud and Sullivan and others. But perhaps what is more startling is the massive context he already had, from twenty years earlier: but that is a topic, a relevant topic, for another day, and another *Prehumous*.²⁰ It helps us, in so far as we are serious in this fresh kataphatic move, to cope with the incline of our own loneliness in this prevalent cycle of declining God.

¹⁷The letter is no. 13 in a collection of 129 letters. No doubt the collection will eventually be edited and published. In the present context I find it worthwhile to recall another piece from a letter Fr. Crowe shared with me decades ago: it is a central reference point in my recent book, *Lonergan’s Standard Model of Effective Global Inquiry*, where I bring the issue of descriptive inadequacies in theology and philosophy to the fore. It is from May of 1954, and I suspect that Fred found the piece, as I still do, quite mind-boggling; “The Method in Theology is coming into perspective. For the Trinity: Imago Dei in homine and proceed to the limit as in evaluating $[1 + 1/n]$ ^{nx} as n approaches infinity. For the rest: ordo universi. From the viewpoint of theology, it is a manifold of unities developing in relation to one another and in relation to God.”

¹⁸See the index to *Verbum*, under *Peghaire*.

¹⁹I refer here to the key paragraph of chapter 16 of *Insight*: p. 514[537], which identifies, asks for a self-identification in, heuristic explanatory competence.

²⁰*Prehumous* 7, “Foundational Prayer IV: Positional Nomology and the Heart of Jesus”, which provides a set of contexts, might have become that *Prehumous*. That essay was originally intended to be a push towards a fuller axiomatics of the positional challenge of *Insight* (388[413]), building in axioms of intentionality, of infinity, of incompleteness, etc. If you like, doing a Hilbert on Lonergan’s Euclid. But that, certainly, would have been a stumbling block to broader dialogue. However, sections 1 and 4 there will give hints regarding the long-term challenge, intimacy with the ultimate integral pragmatic Axiom that is the molecular Word.

3. Some Elementary Difficulties in Moving Forward Together

Obviously a key elementary difficulty is that we do not start together, but let us view this optimistically. There is to be a togetherness, in a hundred years or so, of a tower community, who share what I have called a Standard Model of foundational prayer.²¹ The analogy - I know I am repeating myself here, but is that not part of the problem, since some have not heard this previously? - is with present particle physics, and with the possibility of an undergraduate theology in a hundred years time that would parallel a present good undergraduate physics. Further, that possibility moves towards the central zone of a Bell-curve probability in so far as those struggling express components of that needed basic perspective: the little book *Faith and Insight* immediately comes to mind.²²

Now, some, or even perhaps most, of my interlocutors are not up to the beginnings of that effort. Nor am I writing here only of beginners that are young beginners: indeed one of our present handicaps is a settled elderhood that is not genuinely elder, clinging to old ways, dodging functional collaboration, setting up subtleties of old-style reflection that block even elementary self-concern. Is this an elementary difficulty? We are, I'm afraid, back at the problem of my first interlocutor of the previous section. Or, on a fuller canvas, we are back with Lonergan's revolutionary view that would leave much of present theological discourse as a matter of dated description, however sophisticated.²³ Cherishing the world of theory, even after centuries of decent efforts in the easiest of sciences, physics and chemistry, is still

²¹The notion of a Standard Model dominates the book, *Lonergan's Standard Model of Effective Global Inquiry*. It is borrowed from contemporary particle physics.

²²The little book needs to be an undertaking, a picking up on a comment of Lonergan in a letter to Eric O'Connor in 1952, that the second part of his work, *Insight*, would possible have been called *Faith and Insight*.

²³See notes 10 and 21 above. The Standard Model has to shake off descriptiveness and control its necessary inclusions. *Cantower XXIII* seeks to reveal the subtle corruption of human reaching by refinements that are principally nominal.

spontaneously alien to our humanity.²⁴ Theologians and philosophers who have never entered the world of theory have almost no chance of sensing that central human vocation. To that I return in the conclusion of the next section.

A third elementary difficulty is the aversion the Lonergan school has to having a shot at functional specialization. Again, we may ask, Is it elementary? Yes. And attempting to get round the aversion is an elementary taking-stock of the need for division of labour: it requires no subtleties of philosophical positioning or theoretic conversion. But what has it to do with foundational prayer? Elsewhere I have written of St. Paul so taking stock: it is a matter of bracketing the charity talked of in *I Corinthians* chapter 13 with a contemporary version of the two chapters 12 and 14. That bracketing lifts us towards a luminous communal imitation of the divine.

I touched here, pragmatically, on three elementary difficulties. But have I touched you? That sort of question is discomfiting, and, as I have found, not welcomed by publishers. I recall Lonergan's amusement when I slipped past a publisher the description of his work as a matter of "getting at you."²⁵ But Lonergan managed to say the same, give the same discomfiting invitation, in that great genius page of *Method in Theology*, page 250. As you move to the end of the page you have to come out in the open about where you stand in your evaluation of being and becoming. You meet, maybe even greet, Bernard Lonergan, a disturbing interlocutor talking of his feelings for Infinite Understanding's Call.²⁶ Might I make the strange suggestion that

²⁴If I were to pick an instance of that alienation I would say that it is the aversion of economists to face the empirical and theoretic challenge of two economic flows. See *Prehumous I* on this elementary challenge.

²⁵The comment occurs at the beginning of my Introduction to the little book, B.Lonergan, *Introducing Bernard Lonergan*, Darton, Longman and Todd, 1974.

²⁶I am recall a comment Lonergan made to me on one occasion, talking of Dante's Beatrice, "That's what life is about: saying Hello'. And I add to that his greeting to us when he wrote "God's love is striving for my heart." (See note 34 below). Lonergan greets us with the foundational challenge of pages 286-91 of *Method in Theology*, a challenge which really belongs

the page replaces nicely, for foundational exercitants, that first page of Ignatius' *Exercises on Foundations*? And might we not all start, however dissimilar we are, however old and tired, however disinclined to get into functional collaboration, with our own version of the honesty it calls for?

4. One Central Difficulty

I may pose this difficulty by returning to my suggested description of prayer as "resting and questing in the real."²⁷ At present I am assuming that I am not writing to the general public but to those who have found leads to life in Lonergan's writings. But, as my ramble about difficulties helps to show, the finding can be disoriented by the talk of what are supposed to be helpers, and this alas includes many of Lonergan's writings.²⁸ His style can invite a disorientation towards verbalism even when it is not pressured by haste²⁹ or by a classroom's craving for *haute vulgarization*.

But this is also true of conventional reading of Thomas' compact prose, as Lonergan pointed out regularly. Still, perhaps it is in Thomas that we might find both our illustration of the central difficulty and the signposts to our climb together out of that difficulty.

I introduced the odd topic of (discernment)³ previously, best talked of and

on page 250. Further I must add that his tiredness did not permit him to add a (10) in the list on p. 287: that (10) would have pointed to functional specialization. But is that not the entire greeting of the book *Method in Theology*?

²⁷This was introduced in *Prehumous 4: "Foundational Prayer I"*..

²⁸A serious analysis of the circumstances of Lonergan's presentations of his work would reveal how he was regularly - in much of his *Collected Works* - forced into the patterns of presentation that are associated with *haute vulgarization*.

²⁹Letters of Lonergan to both Fr. F.E.Crowe and Eric O'Connor (see note 22 above) talk of the pressure that was upon him to finish *Insight*, a pressure which forced him to cut off his effort short of the half-way mark.

thought of here as a discernment of discernments of discernments.³⁰ What might I possibly mean by this odd tripling? That certainly is a larger question, beyond beginnings. Why not start with some simpler question, like, what might you and I mean by *discernment*?

I would wish to have you notice many things here, but that wish laces into our present difficulty: the notice can all too easily be lifted into some plausible self-attentive context of disguised self-neglect. So, I hold to one pointer that surely has a decent chance of minimal distortion. We are back in paragraph one of *Insight* chapter one, back to apparently little things and to the possibility of a fresh beginning. We go, not with Archimedes, not even with Chef Ramsay, but with yourself and friends round a table, receiving menus.³¹ So there rises the problem of discernment. But there rises, with us here, the problem of a discernment of each of our discernment. And here we are at heart of the matter: the concrete existential rising. Does there rise in me a gentle, adequate, time-demanding invitation to be thus discerning? Culture, the entire culture of decline, is against that rising. "History, heredity, personal experience, all combine to rivet my prejudices upon me. Under their influence, I gradually outdistance the disturbing echo of His words, spoken without reservation to me as to everyone else who should believe in Him, until at least it happens that I hear it no more."³² Nor is this a strange religious distraction. I might twist Hopkins into an annoying pun: "I caught this morning morning's menu". What is it to be caught, to catch, to have rise heartheld the cosmic heart-clasp round a shared table, where, strangely yet factually, "God's love is straining

³⁰I introduced this triplicity first in the conclusion of chapter one of *The Redress of Poise*. It corresponds to the triplicity associated with the expression (about)³. See note 8 above.

³¹I am referring here to the "menu exercise" that I associate with the effort to come to grips with Thomas treatment of the process of decision in qq. 6-17 of the *Prima Secundae*. (See Joistings 4). But there is the other "Table Exercise", that is more elementary yet more disconcerting, referred to below in note 47.

³²H.J.Steuart, *The Inward Vision*, London, 1929, 113.

for my heart"?³³ So we meet, comfortingly or discomfortingly, the prayer book, *Insight*, and the minding of its author.³⁴

But I would have you now consider - discern - a meeting with that other author who was writing at a younger age than the Lonergan of *Insight* about his discernment of discernment. I speak, of course, of Thomas, patching together a decent *Introduction to Ethics* at the beginning of his *Prima Secundae*. And to that consideration I add a discomforting pointing: might you be up to reading freshly, with Thomas, Lonergan's brief invitation to discern your discernment, to evaluate your evaluation? "The good of order with its concrete contents in a possible object of rational choice and so a value."³⁵

If you are up to and for such a reading then you may take a step towards a new appreciation of the dynamics of your own minding, even towards the luminous seeding of a new beginning.³⁶

But should we then not begin the slow and patient menu-reading exercise that would carry each of us, at whatever stage we are at, into a new glimpse of two geniuses at work, at prayer? Lonergan's invitation becomes, in this unwelcoming culture, a task of a month or a decade questing with Aquinas and God. "Can the will be set in motion by sensitive appetite?"³⁷, "is the will moved of necessity by our lower appetites?"³⁸: and so on.

That task is there for you, perhaps, in your morning menu of foundational

³³I quote here a comment from Lonergan's notes of 1937 on the "Contemplation for Obtaining Love", p. 50 of 54 of handwritten pages of his Amiens tertianship retreat.

³⁴Of central importance as prayer-book is the recently-published *The Systematic Trinity*, published in Latin in 1964 (there were earlier versions).

³⁵*Insight*, 601[624].

³⁶See also note 47 below.

³⁷*Prima Secundae*, q. 9, a. 2.

³⁸*Ibid.*, q.10, a. 3.

prayer.

And is there some worth in pointing to the fruits, indeed *fruitio fruitionis*, of that labour? Good first-year university physics' teachers point ahead, in an encouragement that is also the genesis in students of a humble climb-bent. So here I would note the fresh glimpse of the sacramentality, the *sacra mentalitas*, of the present cosmos. That *sacra mentalitas*, sacred minding, is good will in resonance with the absolutely supernatural: "good will wills the order of the universe, and so it wills with that order's dynamic joy and zeal,"³⁹ in a repentance that carries us humbly towards the third stage of meaning, where the tower people become luminous about "lower faculties spontaneous in their subordination to higher faculties."⁴⁰

"Such appears to be the main line of development in the majestic sweep of St. Thomas' thought on the problem of perfecting man."⁴¹ But those main lines must be lifted and carried forward. At issue here, especially, in this fresh envisaging of the cosmos, is a broad cherishing of the transposition of Thomas' view of "natural resultance."⁴² So, the molecular patterns that are the upper edge of a contemporary re-thinking of *vis cogitativa*⁴³ have a fresh future statistics of success in their twining with

³⁹*Insight*, 700[722].

⁴⁰*Grace and Freedom*, 47.

⁴¹*Ibid.*

⁴²See Lonergan's reflections, pp. 143-8 of *Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas*, on this undeveloped aspect of Aquinas thinking. Add the comment in Thesis 12 of *The Incarnate Word*: "Natural resulting is not an efficient cause but an order of effects. This order is produced by divine wisdom, which is not governed by abstract laws and which we know through abstract laws only imperfectly." [The references to *The Incarnate Word*, not yet published by University Press of America, can only be through context. So, this reference is to the section on 'Development of the Doctrine' after about a page, under number 5. I have to hand a translation of Charles Hefling Jn. of 1990, which I would assume to be close to the final version. Thesis 12 runs from page 17 to page 72 in this translation, and the page reference, 22, gives you another notion of the location. In the Latin version, published in 1964 by Gregorian Press, this thesis was substantially enlarged.

⁴³See note 18 above.

good will. But within that rethinking there are subtleties regarding primary relations and secondary determinations, subtleties that would give a view of virtues and gifts that weaves a new prayerful neurochemistry, reverent both in its astonishment and its collaboration with transhumanization, a transhumanization that lifts us and All to a genetic eschatological perspective.⁴⁴ And grounding that total re-thinking is the seeding of a luminous grip on the distinction between the notion of being that radiates through chapters 12 and 13 of *Insight* and the notion of value that limps through Lonergan's hasty chapter 18. The notion of being, strangely, is indifferent to its organic carrier, "the difference between subject and object", and invites us, in prayer, to glimpse that "God is not an object."⁴⁵ The notion of value, however, pivots on elemental discoveries about self in finitude, within a cosmic call of molecular desire.⁴⁶

And there we find our central difficulty: the difficulty of a stumbling fresh beginning. Are we open to such elemental sacramental stumblings round a table⁴⁷, round a menu? The question itself, in its fullness, rounds us round a fuller menu-feature of collaboration: for, I see no global communal way forward that would be one, efficient and beautiful other than a menu-selection that includes Lonergan's recipe for dialectic suffering and repentance. And that might have been the topic of a very lengthy section 5.

⁴⁴See note 11 above.

⁴⁵*Method in Theology*, 342.

⁴⁶See the conclusion to chapter 2 of *Lack in the Beingstalk: A Giants Causeway*..

⁴⁷I am thinking of the praying and preying involved in doing the exercise that I present in "Undermining Macrodynamic Reading", *Journal of Macrodynamic Analysis*, volume 1 (2001). I am very serious about this, in the mood of the first paragraph of the first chapter of *Insight*. I would say that the general readership of *Insight* in the past fifty years has no serious experience or idea of theoretical thinking. This gives a neat entry point towards appreciating the challenge of explanatory control, such as God has in the Word.