

Prehumous 8

Foundational Prayer V: Placing Mysticism

I have had to pause over the two essays, *Prehumous 7* and *Prehumous 8*, in that they began to lift off into complexities unhelpful in our initial efforts at communal foundational struggling. So I have cut back in both essays. This was evident in the conclusion of the previous essay, in regard to the need both for a full axiomatics and for advice on the slow cultivation of foundational prayer. Indeed, both these tasks remind me, in different ways, on Hilbert's response to being asked, "Why don't you tackle Fermat's Last Theorem?" His reply: "it would take me three years to do the preliminary work". This certainly is true of the contextualizing of Mysticism, and even its international character brings to mind parallels in the merging of e.g. Japanese and Western mathematics in the handling of Fermat's claim. But now I am rambling towards obscure, if legitimate, parallels. So let me simply point to what I do here in two sections.

The first section carries forwards from the previous Prehumous in that it helps us to come to grip with the minding of Jesus. But it also helps us towards a basic clarification needed if we are to grapple with the problems of anaphatic and kataphatic prayer. The second section heads us towards the sort of work that I would hope to initiate at the Halifax Conference of 2008. But it has its focus on the broad scatter of problems associated with mysticism. The scatter is there in present practice and study; the focus comes from noticing how it cries out for functional specialist collaboration. But where does one begin? One answer to which we shall attend in Halifax is given in the beginning of *Prehumous 9*: might you and I do our own little honest version of the task set by Lonergan on page 250 of *Method in Theology*, objectifying our horizon in some elementary fashion? Of course, there is the honest response of rejecting that page. That certainly would be better than just dodging it. But let us venture into Lonergan's help towards understanding mysticism to be found in a single thesis of his 1964 work,

De Verbo Incarnato.¹

1. Pointers in Lonergan

My focus here may seem peculiar: it is on aspects of the graceful knowing of the Divine Incarnate, aspects dealt with in Part Four of Lonergan's work, *The Incarnate Word*. The focus has a dual purpose. First, does it not seem that clues to the mystic life, where "the gift is itself a differentiated realm,"² would be had through attention to that consciousness where the differentiated realm is the Ultimate Luminously Present? Secondly, the character of that attention becomes, for a cluster of reasons, a topic in "Foundational Prayer VI".

My compact pointings here are evidently doctrinal, pointing to tasks to be tackled, or tasks being done, patiently, painfully. So, I may begin by aligning myself with Lonergan when he wrote, of the climb we are envisioning:

"In my opinion, the radical problem is the same today as it was in the middle ages: it is from one's own experience that knowing of human knowing may be draw. Those who do not achieve this successfully have neither the beginning nor the foundation from which they can proceed by analogy to think clearly and distinctly about other knowing. Absent an analogy, it can only be that divine knowledge, Christ's ineffable knowledge, Christ's effable and supernatural knowledge, and Christ's effable and natural knowledge will merge into one big hazy fog. And from the fog a wailing is heard: This is a hard thesis, and who can grasp it?"³

¹This was the last edition of Lonergan's treatise in Latin on *The Incarnate Word* (Gregorian Press, 1964), one in which he revised substantially Thesis 11, on Christ's knowledge, the one that concerns us here. The English translation has as yet to appear, so I give references below to sections and sub-sections.

²*Method in Theology*, 266.

³The 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. I have to hand a translation of Charles Hefling Jn. of 1990, which I would

Let us pause over oddments of the thesis just quoted, Thesis 12, on the Knowledge of Christ, and then turn back to a similar skimming of the previous thesis, on the Graces of Christ.

The pause yields, for a beginner, at least nominal distinctions that relate to mysticism. One moves from that nominalism in so far as, self-as-self⁴, one comes, to grips - a metaphor certainly - with the complex reality of puzzling, of wonder, of loneliness, a reality nesting in our neuromolecules which are meshed into "the dynamic joy and zeal"⁵ of the groaning 14-billion- year-old cosmos.

That sentence invites a pause, a pause that could - and should it not? - be repeated daily in an adult life. It is a pause in the presence of the ineffable: "What is ineffable in us, what our life is the expression of, is the light in which all knowledge is imparted to us, the light by which we naturally desire to know being, and therefore to know God by his essence."⁶

But, always mediated by our glimmer of this in ourselves, our focus is to be - but not here - on the pilgrim living of Jesus. "What was ineffable in Christ the man, however, and what Christ's human and historical life expressed, was the divine Word itself, immediately known. Thus where we operate from intention of the end to attain that end, Christ the man diffused goodness from an end achieved, beheld and loved.

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. I shall do this whenever I use the text. In the Latin version, published in 1964 by Gregorian Press, this thesis was substantially enlarged.

⁴I would recommend that the struggle here be associated with the final chapters of Volume 18 of the Collected Works. Check the index on *self as self*. The meaning of *as* is peculiar here: it does not involve an impoverishing abstractive process.

⁵*Insight*, 702[722].

⁶See note 3. The reference here is to page 65 of my translation. It is in the section titled "The argument: apart 6" under subsection 8, "the unity of human consciousness". This is a powerfully important claim, to which I return in the final section of *Prehumous 11*.

This diffusion was first his own human and historical life; but it further includes everything Christ operated through his life.”⁷

Here we are seeking clues to the mystic life, and the first clue is the simple nominal distinction between effable and ineffable knowledge. The distinction loses its simplicity and indeed becomes the problem of finite being when we venture beyond the naming.⁸ But let us, for a start, get the names right by venturing back to the beginning of Lonergan’s lengthy thesis on Christ’s Knowledge. So, distinguish effable knowledge from ineffable knowledge. *Ineffable* is a normal English word with a normal meaning of **unutterable**. It is, in the present context, **unutterable** because it was not acquired by the normal process of moving, under the dynamic of ineffable light, from neuromolecularly of image to idea, form, concept. Not being so acquired it lacks the channels of effective utterance.⁹ The opposite is the effable: but let us pick up on Lonergan.

“Effable knowledge can, in itself, be manifested in a human way. It is this knowledge alone that immediately attains the intelligible in the sensible. For it is where the intelligible is intrinsically referred to the sensible and corporeal, and only there, that you have the corporeal and sensible which are in themselves related to the intelligible, and which therefore in themselves manifest the intelligible.

Ineffable knowledge cannot in itself be manifested in a human way, through corporeal and sensitive operations. It is this knowledge that immediately reaches the intelligible that is separate. For where the act of understanding is not produced by the sensible, where the intelligible is reached without any concomitant, corresponding

⁷This is simply a continuation of the previous text.

⁸A relevant text here is the reflection on intentional existence and finitude on page 162 of *Verbum*. There is the large issue of the natural desire for God: see note 22 of *Prehumous 11*.

⁹This is a far more complex topic than one might at first suspect. There is the world of neuromolecular dynamics that, for example, was the background to the searchings of Betcherev and Durand. There are issues here of the mesh of cultural and transcultural aesthetics.

operation that is corporeal or sensible, there the corporeal and the sensible cannot manifest the intelligible.

Note that the sense in which knowledge is being called *ineffable* is technical and not rhetorical. To the extent that anyone exercises ineffable knowledge **and this alone**, he neither needs nor uses his senses; without these, he exercises no human action composed of body, sense, intellect, and will; he moves neither hand nor foot nor tongue, but is withdrawn from, his senses in rapture (ST, II-II, q.1 175, a. 4). Thus, just as it is not in any human way that one learns ineffable knowledge, or expresses it in words, or manifests it in works, so too it is not in any human way that one lives by it."¹⁰

Does this throw light on the oddness of the mystic life? Does the mystic live by something that is not manifest, even if the strangeness of the life is manifest?. That strangeness, then, would play the role, to self and others, of sign or invitation, inarticulate regarding the ineffable, yet enchanting or cautionary or terrifying.

Its core would be unutterable. But we must qualify this. In the first place, after all, we are thinking of a role played, in that sense a manifestation. Might we not think of that manifestation as complementing the manifestation in nature of the unutterable?¹¹ But the second place brings the possibility of utterance. For, what occurs to the mystic may be, partly or wholly, a by-passing in acquiring effable knowledge in that the mode of acquiring is supernatural. Then the mystic may indeed speak, but only through creative reaching through natural channels,¹² though the creativity may be boosted supernaturally in its molecular flow or its linguistic output.

¹⁰*The Incarnate Word*. See note 3 above. The reference in my translation is to pp.18-19, so it is just a page away from the beginning of thesis 12.

¹¹There are issues here of the distinction between images and vestiges of the Trinitarian reality. See Aquinas, Ia, q.45, a.7.

¹²The foundational thinker must lift the meaning of *channels* into an explanatory heuristic such as was pointed to in *Prehumous* 2. One is thinking then very much in terms of the neurodynamics mentioned in note 9 above.

There is much more to be said: recall my initial context regarding Fermat's last theorem. I think, especially, of the meshed ineffable lights within the mystic, of the gracefully lifted - by a light of faith - natural light of intelligence, a natural light that also dances in the community's sharing of truth.¹³ But what I would stress is the serious possibility, indeed Bell-curve probability, of reading the previous paragraph in what I call a standard cultural mode of this axial period. Then the self is not soaked up in its molecular-based loneliness. The datum of light given in consciousness is not seriously adverted to, even if it is talked about eloquently in Lonerganesque fashion. And this state, indeed, of linguistic familiarity or eloquence, is in ways more dangerous and destructive than simple cultural truncation. So perhaps it is as well to give Lonergan the last word in this context and from this same context of his reflection.

"If you do not find this intellectual light in the immediate data of your own consciousness, you can be consoled by two considerations. In the first place, your unhappiness is not yours alone. Most people, when they engage in self-reflection, never get beyond their sensitive consciousness. In the second place, then, you can gather how fanciful and pointless the difficulties are which commonly get raised against acknowledging in Christ an immediate knowing of God. If intellectual light is so unintrusive as to have no place in what people call consciousness and human psychology, surely an immediate knowing of God, which is far more spiritual than intellectual light, is no obstacle to the human consciousness and psychology that they want to affirm in Christ the man."¹⁴

¹³One mush mesh here, with generous self-attention, the analysis of belief in *Insight* with Lonergan's "Analysis of Faith".

¹⁴*The Incarnate Word*. See note 3 above. The page reference to my translation is p.21, so quite early in the Thesis.

2. Some Broad Problems regarding Mysticism

Even if it is not a familiar zone for you, let me recall my comment on Hilbert's view of the broad problem of Fermat's Last Theorem: that it would take him three years to do the preliminary work. At seventy six, I may not have three years before I zoom through death's friendly door. The broadest problem of mysticism is, of course, the problem of lifting it into the system of functional collaboration, but let us weave towards that strategically by attending first to a detail of interpretation and then reaching for a historical and dialectic sweep.

First the detail of interpretation: there is a tradition of mystical writing on the divine spark as grounding "the birth of the divine Word in the soul."¹⁵ How are we to interpret this? Recall the requirements Lonergan expresses in his elementary presentation of interpretation of *Method in Theology*. One must have come to grips with the object being talked about. If one is within the mystic community of such a tradition, still the coming to grips would benefit from the general categories reached from foundational prayer, as the twine round the special categories involved. And if one is not in that mystical tradition, then one would seem to necessarily lean on such general and special categories.

But let me simplify our illustration so that we are less pressed into reflection on special categories and more open to general mysticism, mysticisms of undefined faith. So, I think of the writings of that strange 13th century Beguine mystic, Hadewijch of Antwerp on the topic of **Minne**. "Minne is everything", she writes.¹⁶

¹⁵I quote from note 85, p. 423, of McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, Volume 3 of his *The Presence of God: A History of Western Mysticism*, Crossroads/Herder, New York, 1998. A fuller piece reads: "This mystical theme of the birth of the divine Word in the soul, found in a number of Cistercian authors, such as Gueric of Igny (see *Growth of Mysticism*, pp. 283-4), was richly developed by Meister Eckhart. For an overview, see Hugo Rahner, "Die Gottesgeburt: Die Lehre der Kirchenväter von der Geburt Christi aus dem Herzen der Kirche und der Gläubigen," in *Symbole der Kirche* (Saltzburg: Otto Mueller, 1964), pp. 13-87. [excuse missing accents!]

¹⁶See McGinn, vol. 3, 201.

“O powerful, wonderful minne,
 You who can conquer all with wonder!
 Conquer me, so that I can conquer you,
 In your unconquered power.”¹⁷

In one writing she gives seven names to *minne*, names that point to a condensed meaning: love, light, live coal, fire, gentle dew, living spring, “disquiet and torture without pity.”¹⁸ The second name centres on “enlightened reason” and echos with the meaning of the second line of the poem just quoted. When one allows oneself to be carried forward by her texts, one finds a core within the paradoxes that lifts one towards *minne* as source of revelation of darkly enlightened love. For the interpreter self-searching in the core of the general and special categories that is the mesh of the ineffable light of natural desire meshed with the absolutely supernatural ineffable faith-light, a question must emerge regarding the coincidence of the object spoken of as *minne* with that core. How does one follow that question? How does the mystic reach echo that spark in all of us, lift us to a respect for its darkness, its “hell” on earth? What has it to do with Lonergan’s search in chapter 12 of *Insight*, which is only a beginning, a beguining,¹⁹ of the deeper search, “What, then, is being?”²⁰

Next, the dialectic sweep. Assembly includes, for me, the venture through 1000 years and through 1462 persons identified as mystics summed up in *The Mystic Mind*. The interest of the authors is in the type of person that deviates from the moderate norms of Benedict of Nursia regarding penitential exercises and “the mental ascesis of

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 202.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 204.

¹⁹I refer to the meaning of *beguine* as **fancy**.

²⁰*Insight*, 642[665].

obedience and humility.”²¹ My interest is in, my assembly would include, the lesser group whose deviance is towards the Greek tradition of *theoria*,²² a peculiar mental ascesis whose prime illustration is Aquinas: more peculiar if one sifts out those with serious self-attentive bent. “Benedict was concerned with creating an environment in which humans could live peaceably in a small community, a task that he realized was extremely difficult.”²³ I am concerned with creating an environment in which humans could live peaceably in a global community, a Tower-ing task of the longer cycle of incline. Is there not to emerge, in that longer cycle, a fresh flowering of mental ascesis that would fulfil soul’s role of cherishing explanatorily self and cosmos?²⁴ And is that emergence not to be lifted statistically, within a factual and a contrafactual history, by “presenting an idealized version of the past, something better than was the reality,”²⁵ by re-viewing, for example, the mystic self-sacrificing deviants to find seeds of kataphatic self-cherishing?

So, detail and dialectic intertwine in cyclic searching. Aquinas’ contemporary, Angela of Foligno (1248-1309), is not found to be a stranger to his mood. One can come - all the better as one grows in the Standard Model - “to see Angela employing language similar to Meister Eckhart’s ‘little castle’ or ‘little spark’ to characterize the divine ground within the soul.”²⁶ And, much the better through standard Tower-torments of

²¹*The Mystic Mind*, 18.

²²See, “Mission and Spirit “, *A Second Collection*, 27.

²³*The Mystic Mind*, 18.

²⁴*Insight*, 469[494], about the “peculiarities of intellectual development”” gives a basic context, but it needs massive enlargement both in relation to psycho-feedback and to the eschatological drive.

²⁵*Method in Theology*, 251.

²⁶McGinn, *volume 3*, 149. See also *The Mystic Mind* 194-96.

initiation²⁷ one can grow to distinguish kataphatic and anaphatic in the writings of Hadewijch or in *The Book of Blessed Angela*, and speak from one's knees and neurons into history's groaning. But the full growth is towards a communal cyclic speaking. "There are varieties of ministry and the same Lord."²⁸ and there is promised the beauty of an effective building of the mystical body: "Let all things be done for edification."²⁹

The promise is distant. We must start with the humble stumbling of description,³⁰ climbing as best we can beyond myth and metaphor.³¹ An illustration helps us to grasp the hell and horror of the task.³² In the previous *Prehumous* I wrote of open-eyed contemplation, and indeed meant open-eyed literally. But the cosmic "order's dynamic joy and zeal," mediating the ineffable divine spark in us through a groaning standard model, would have us climb forward from present efforts:

"Both meditation and 'ordinary' states of drowsiness exhibit EEG alpha rhythms for the alpha rhythm is more stable during meditation. This difference can be picked out by experienced EEG readers blind to the state of consciousness of the subject. A second difference is often associated with altered states of consciousness."³³

The lengthy quotations invites us to brood over the problem of interpreting secondary sources. What, for instance, do the authors mean by "aware of the

²⁷McGinn, vol. 3, 202.

²⁸*I Cor* 12: 5.

²⁹*I Cor*, 14: 26. I have, in recent years, used the symbolism of a new bracketing of Paul's Hymn to Charity through the functional cycling of gifts

³⁰The problem of description is the topic of *Cantower XXIII*, "Redoubt Description", a Cantower built into the general drive of the book *Lonergan's Challenge to the University and the Economy*.

³¹The full context of the task is that of chapter 17 of *Insight*.

³²"Hell is the seventh name / Of this love wherein I suffer"(Hadewijch, quoted in McGinn, vol. 3, 204).

³³*The Mystic Mind*, 45-6.

environment"? Unless we have moved from position to position, as previously described, we are back with the challenge of locating ourselves in our empirical residence. But the central problem that the quotation points to is the come-about challenge that invites us to cherish explanatorily our neuromolecular selves within the cosmos. Cherish explanatory? So we align ourselves with the Explanatory Word, in Whom we are cherished non-descriptively but in the Ultimate Praxis-Theoria. This is part of a future standard model, but it is not part of the perspective of the authors.

Nor are the authors exceptional: indeed they are better than most. Bernard McGinn's Volumes, *A History of Western Christian Mysticism*, already referred to, carry forward an obscureness regarding consciousness and awareness and Divine presence that warps the entire enterprise.³⁴ Go back to the early classic on *Mysticism* by Evelyn Underhill and find, in Part Two, traditional muddles about awareness of self and introversion that haunt both the entire tradition and the roots of our own popular consciousness.³⁵ Whether one turns to issues of gender or of social transformation one finds the same light-weight goodwill.³⁶

And this brings me back to that deepest problem of mysticism, its lifting forward within the cycle of functional collaboration. Such a longer cycling of incline is

³⁴This is a challenging claim that obviously needs collaborative back-up for its justification. McGinn acknowledges possibilities in Lonergan's work (p. x of Vol. 1 of the work referred to in note 15 above: *The Foundations of Mysticism*). See also the name-index to that volume under *Lonergan*, which leads one to other suggestions and to references to various Lonergan authors who have written on Lonergan and mysticism.

³⁵There are many editions of the 1910 book, *Mysticism. A Study in the nature and development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness*.

³⁶I have two books in mind and in hand here, both incidentally by women, to whom we must look for the axial shift. "I don't care what anybody says it'd be much better for the world to be governed by the women in it..."(Molly Bloom's claim in the final chapter of Joyce's *Ulysses*). The books are *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism* by Grace M.Jantzen (Cambridge University Press, 1995) and *Mysticism and Social Transformation* by Janet K.Ruffing R.S.M. In spite of my comments above, these books exemplify what Lonergan remarked of once "There are windows to be opened and fresh air to be let in"(A *Third Collection*, 89)

eventually to bring forth from a large global tradition called, obscurely, *mysticism*,³⁷ a range of foundational directives that shall shift the statistics, positively and significantly, of the geohistorical cultivation of a luminous divine presence in human culture.

That future work demands the emergence of a community, at home on foundational prayer, yet cultivating “the gift is itself a differentiated realm.”³⁸ That cultivation, “exceeding simple and enriching,” shall generate sub-categories of the special theological categories, held in their gently-open control. “There are needed studies of religious interiority: historical, phenomenological, psychological, sociological. There is needed in the theologian the spiritual development that will enable him both to enter the experience of others and to frame the terms and relations that will express that experience.”³⁹ What are these terms and relations? They are, I would claim, as remote from present thinking and talk about mysticism as post-Einsteinian physics is from Newton.⁴⁰

The deepest problem of mysticism is the shift from the random occurrence of broad mystic reaching and, at present relatively-unrelated, foundational prayer to a merging and cyclic mutual mediation that would be a central effective part of the process sketched in the metagram W3. The shift and the emergence and the beauty are, roughly, a matter of the lift from products to sums of probabilities associated with

³⁷See Jantzen, op.cit., chapter 9, on the muddles and possibilities of mysticism.

³⁸*Method in Theology*, 266.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 290.

⁴⁰“about mysticism”. Indeed, I might as well point here to two ways in which the issue is complicated. For *about* read (about)³, something previous introduced (See, for example, *ChrISt in History*, chapter 2, section 2). Then the consider a future practice of mysticism that is mediated by foundational prayer. Without that mediation we will continues to stumble on in the tradition of the past millennia of metaphors and muddles.

recurrence-schemes.⁴¹

Such talk of cyclic statistical emergence is not usual talk in the world either of mystics or of prayer. Yet I am strangely optimistic. Indeed, I cut my rambles here brutally short in that optimism. Forty years ago I faced into the task of showing the need for functional collaboration in the muddled zone of musicology, and spelled the muddle out at some length. Would there be much point in repeating the lengthy showing in the matter of mystic reaching for God? Rather, is it not the case that lurking in all the muddles I have rambled round in the forty years between - in economics, in literature, in mountaineering, in whatever - is the full search for good and for God?

So I look to the good-will of those who both pray and study Lonergan's works - therefore who study themselves at prayer in a context mediated by the reach towards the "come-about"⁴² - to add the penance of a journey through the muddles that would bring forth a real assent to the need for functional collaboration. But I would ask those of such good will to face the challenge of finding themselves through the un-muddled challenge of page 250 of *Method in Theology*. In order that my reaching thus and asking thus be not naive and effete,⁴³ I must now not only digress through the following two Prehumous essays, but bring with me some subgroup of good will who prayerfully suspect the possibility of an intimate self-explanatory alignment with the Word made fresh.

⁴¹See *Insight* 121[143].

⁴²By now this is a familiar reference to *Insight* 514[537].

⁴³The effeteness talked of on *Method in Theology*, page 101, needs to be replaced by talk of a cyclic system that would bring the beauty of efficient unity to metascience. See *Topics in Education*, 160, line 16.