

## *Joistings 7*

### **The Friendships of the Invisible Man**

Our topic here is the Vision of Jesus, limited<sup>1</sup> but large as 14 billion years and 14 billion galaxies, detailed as each and all of the lilies of millions of years of fields and fells. It is His human mind's hold of Himself, the Spoke<sup>2</sup> of God and of the Wheel of energy's story.<sup>3</sup> In that eternal Spoke, there is, strangely,<sup>4</sup> the Speak and the Clasp that

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<sup>1</sup>The point is made briefly in Aquinas' *Summa*, Question 12, article 7: no finite intellect can comprehend the divine. I note here that I have made no attempt to treat of the complexity of Jesus' human knowledge, the delicate balance in his consciousness between the vision of total history - you and I as beloved - and his slow accumulation of neurodynamic groundings of images and insights, the habits of his Aramaic living. Summary would be silly: Lonergan and Aquinas give some reasonable pointers, but it is to be an zone of subtle development in the next millennium. I would further note that I have nothing to say here about the development of the Christian understanding and imaging of Jesus: a beginner could get a good start from the last essay in vol. 6 of Lonergan's *Collected Works*, especially pp.248-9.

<sup>2</sup>I already raised the problem of searching personally for suitable names of divine reality in note 15 of the previous *Joisting*. Thomas struggles especially with the problem of naming the third person of the Trinity: how about the name Gift? My own struggle leads me to use the names Speak, Spoke, Clasp. They point towards an accurate understanding of the Three. Part of our difficulty of naming the third person is the undeveloped grasp of will and willingness that is part of our axial limitation.

<sup>3</sup>Talk of 'Spoke' and 'Wheel' may help those of the Buddhist tradition. However, the pointing here is towards the development of an explanatory heuristic, something I have found enormously difficult. It should be less difficult for the next generation in so far as a tradition of contemplation and teaching emerges that invites adequate struggling and growth. So, for instance, I expect that what took me 45 years - a sufficient conception of energy - may only take 45 months in future contemplatives. Some hints on conceiving energy properly, in line with Lonergan's brief suggestions in *Insight*, are in Cantower 30.

<sup>4</sup>I have avoided precision on this, but we tackle it in the following *Joisting* in thinking about analogy. The context in Lonergan is Thesis 5 of his doctrinal volume on the trinity.

makes Three Friends One Consciousness,<sup>5</sup> a friendship in which only one Speaks.<sup>6</sup>

Should I attempt to continue this densification of a meaning that I have grown in my mind and molecules from the print-seed of Thomas and Lonergan? I think not.

I recall now my first effort at a densification of Trinitarian theology, and it is both an amusing and a sad story.

It was the summer after my first year of theology. My entry into theology was a huge cultural shock: I shifted from giving courses in mathematics and engineering, planetary motions and relativity physics, to the brutal common sense of first year theology. My annoyance led me to write "The Contemporary Thomism of Bernard Lonergan", mainly to annoy the two of my professors who would have to read it as censors before it could escape towards publication. It survived that ordeal and I sent it to John Courtney Murray, the editor of *Theological Studies*. Understandably, he found it not suitable to the journal, but indicated that what he would really like was a comprehensive presentation of the key message of Lonergan's five *Verbum* articles. It was Spring 1961: I wrote back and told him I would provide it by September. I had been brooding over Lonergan's Trinitarian theology through that year, but tackled the job formally in the summer: the result appeared in the *Theological Studies* of the next year. Fr. Crowe joked with me years later about the fact that Murray would not have dreamed of asking me for such an article had he known that I was a first year theology student who would not be doing the course on the Trinity for two more years. That's the funny side of this. The sad side is that I was able to do it at all. I could not imagine getting a article into a journal of physics or of mathematics at that time, even though I had been lecturing in the field with the background of a graduate degree. Those zones were zones

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<sup>5</sup>This requires subtle contemplation on lines suggested by Lonergan in both his discussion of Christ's consciousness and of the integral consciousness of the Trinity.

<sup>6</sup>The key text of Lonergan for contemplation here is Question 20 of his *Systematic Volume*.

of serious systematic understandings.<sup>7</sup>

At all events, this is a first comment on my “I think not” above. As the years go by, the whole business of summary expression strikes me as massively meshed with axial folly.<sup>8</sup> So, the article is already a summary, pointing you to the need to read those *Verbum* articles in any edition, but also pointing you - as my first notes above do - towards Lonergan’s volumes on the Trinity.

My effort of chapters five, six and seven of *Music That Is Soundless* may well provide a more helpful beginning, first written in 1968 in a creative burst of thirty three days. Indeed, the title burst leaped at me, as I walked Sandymount Strand in Dublin, from the poem of John of the Cross that introduces those three chapters of the book. By the time I had covered the two miles home I had seven chapter titles.

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<sup>7</sup>This is, of course, a huge issue of the non-theoretic nature of present theology, as well as an issue of the stand on doctrinal development. Treating it is obviously way beyond this present short introduction, but I have added, in three footnotes (here, note 12 of *Joisting 6* and note 4 of *Joisting 2*), quotations that help to glimpse a prevalent attitude. The quotations are from within the tradition associated with ‘the Search for the Historical Jesus’. “As you climb down from the Mt.Lekanis foothills, you think about these questions. What were the structural and systemic differences between the God incarnate in Augustus and the God incarnate in Christ? What were the religious and political differences between Caesar Augustus as Son of God and Jesus Christ as Son of God? What were the ethical and economic differences between a world grounded in Caesar and a world founded on Christ?” (John Dominic Crosson and Jonathan L.Reed, *In Search of Paul*, Harper, San Francisco, 2004, 11-12). The authors go on there, and towards the end of the book, to talk of the contemporary relevance of these questions. The issue is the seriousness with which “you think about these questions”. Sophistications of scholarly, archaeological, etc detail meshed with leaps across history do not get one to the relevant and existential systemic core. In contemporary physics the bewildering accumulation of ancient and contemporary data scream for a lift beyond the Standard Model, but the Standard Model is a context of that scream.

<sup>8</sup>Lurking behind this assertion is the enormously complex problem of popularization, which you might profitably associate with the name Fontanelle. See also Lonergan, *Collected Works*, Vol. 6, index of *Haute Vulgarization*. I introduced this topic in chapter 3 of *Lack in the Beingstalk* and intended to treat it ( in the unpopular brevity of doctrine!) in *Cantower 54*. It is to be a major challenge of the New-speak of the third stage of meaning (not unrelated to the Speak and to the virtue of hope). On summary see my comments in “Systematics, Communications, Actual Contexts”, *Lonergan Workshop*, 6(1986), edited by F.Lawrence, Scholars Press, 147.

But most useful, I would claim, is the compact expression that finds its way into the Preface to the second edition, and is still there in the third edition. It is most useful, because it is in the form of four questions. These questions, again, had a memorable emergence, the year after I wrote the book. I was preparing to say Mass in a convent in Dublin, poised to preach on the Trinity. The usefulness of the expression lies in the absence of answers: they are invitations to a follow-up that could be, should be, lifelong, eternity-long.

My present context of asking you to cultivate the habit of asking these question is, needless to say, larger for me than that naming of the quest of 35 years ago. Should I add refinements here?

I think not.

The refinements will come to you with different subtleties, if you climb slowly, gently, molecular-wise.

That climb will take you out of present theological discourse in a way that parallels the removal, from present botany, of the botanist who asks the sunflower, How **do** you *do*?<sup>9</sup> And in either case you may become like The Little Prince: “The little prince could not restrain his admiration: ‘Oh! How beautiful you are!’ ‘Am I not?’ the flower responded, sweetly. ‘And I as born at the same moment as the sun’ ....”<sup>10</sup>

The Invisible Man is the Spoke, molecularized in history that we might be “swept into the love of the invisible,”<sup>11</sup> so that we would have invisible pilgrim words, heartheld, hearth-held, of Three Friends, Ulti-mates. The Spoke spans the cosmos even

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<sup>9</sup>The context of the reference given in the next note throws light on the meaning of this question. I would emphasize that I am not here in the realm of fancy, but in the zone of hard science, where the word *hard* takes on a quite new meaning.

<sup>10</sup>Quoted from Antoine de Saint Exupery, *The Little Prince*, Harbrace Paperback, 32-3. I would note the relevance of the context of my previous quoting, with comments, from the book, in chapter three of *Lack in the Beingstalk* (Axial Press, Halifax, 2005).

<sup>11</sup>We are in the context here of the notes given at the beginning of this *Joisting*.

with infant fingers, from Bethlehem to way beyond Betelgeuse, clasping each and all Claspwise as beSpoken.<sup>12</sup>

I come, now, to my final *Joisting* of this particular series. *Joisting 9* and those to follow will be oddments of immediate relevance to this or that person, to this or that current topic. But this final *Joisting 8* turns us round (about)<sup>3</sup> the “grief’s gasping”<sup>13</sup> of dark earth’s crossing, mustering seeds.

*“Sun-flowers, Son-flowered,  
Speak to us of growth,  
Seed-cauled, cribbed,  
Kabod yet confined,  
Crossed with dark earth,*

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<sup>12</sup>We are in the context here of the notes given at the beginning of this *Joisting*. I refrain now from given detailed references on the topics reached towards in the sentence above: the Speaking of creation in the Word, the reach of the incarnate Word, the wonders fo the Trinitarian circumincession, the imitation of the Trinitarian community in human community. I shall have something to say about that imitation in the final *Joisting* when I point towards our communal echoing of the Trinitarian community and of the Suffering Servant. But perhaps it is as well, at this stage in our doctrinal reflections, to recall the project named in the first *Joisting*. It is the project of rescuing the Latin works of Lonergan from a sort-of objective study. These books are love-stories. As I finish these notes I have to hand the two worn-out Latin volumes Lonergan sent me in 1964, each autographed, “with every good wish”. I had already spent several years stewing over the systematic volume in its first incarnation: that was my take-off point for the article in *Theological Studies*. You will have them now in the bulky form of a Latin and other language. Do not let the bulk deprive you of rambling contemplation and reading. Break up the books if necessary ( as I do with bigger texts!). But I send you “every good wish” in finding them always a fresh, startling, beginning towards glimpsing the folly and attention of Friends.

<sup>13</sup>I am quoting from G.M.Hopkins, “That nature is a heraclitean fire and of the comfort of the resurrection”. The poem ends: “In a flash, at a trumpet crash, / I am all at once what Christ is, since he was what I am, and / This Jack, joke, poor potsherd, matchwood, immortal diamond, / Is immortal diamond”.

*Light-refined,  
Rill open-ends a thrill,  
Annotaste of Throat.”<sup>14</sup>*

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<sup>14</sup>This poem originally written to bracket Cantower 2, “Sunflowers, speak to us of Growth”, seems to me now to hold together the larger enterprise.