

**SURF 3:****Saving Grace and Wisdom**

Perhaps some of you will recall a previous essay, "Saving Grace."<sup>1</sup> Grace was a young girl at the bottom of a well in a picture on the wall of the Church Office of my wife, Reverend Sally. Various folks lean over the well in the process of rescuing the child: surely exercising their Wisdom. All helpful imaging of our task in this surfing series. We have as yet to begin, since these first three essays appear on the Website on December 1st, 2009, with a fourth essay that seems in another world: SURF 4: "The Financial Crisis".

The four essays are preludes to the Halifax Conference of July 6<sup>th</sup> - 10<sup>th</sup> on Global Functional Collaboration. If the conference is a success the series may take quite other directions through participations in a stumbling seeding of collaboration. Meantime it seems useful for me to add here another context to our challenge. It is a context that relates to the need for "the eighth functional specialty, communications. It is a major concern, for it is in this final stage that theological reflection bears fruit. Without the first seven stages, of course, there is no fruit to be borne. But without the last the first seven are in vain, for they fail to mature."<sup>2</sup>

The context is provided by the efforts of two gallant people, Cynthia Bourgeault and Diarmuid O'Murchu, who struggle to save grace and wisdom. I have to hand their two most recent books, the titles of which led me to the title of this SURF. Cynthia Bourgeault has brought forth *The Wisdom Jesus*<sup>3</sup> and from Diarmuid O'Murchu there is

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<sup>1</sup>*Field Nocturne 16*, "Saving Grace in Biology Class".

<sup>2</sup>*Method in Theology*, 355.

<sup>3</sup>Shambhala Publications, Boston and London, 2008. The subtitle of the book is *Transforming Heart and Mind - a New Perspective on Christ and His Message*. I refer to this work below as **The Wisdom Jesus**.

*Ancestral Grace. Meeting God in Our Human Story.*<sup>4</sup> Let me pause over these two books separately, then in section 3 I shall move to a fuller context, and in section 4 add an odd context pointing towards both our pilgrim search of **What** and the eschatological search that haunts that **What**.

### 1. Saving Ancestral Grace

Not that O'Murchu does not offer us a refreshing large context, reaching back as he does seven million years and bringing us towards a glimpse of Africa and "Mitochondrial Eve."<sup>5</sup> In such reaching, as in the reachings of his other works, he is meeting a present global need for a larger vision, a grounded hope. But I must be brief; at all events, summary too easily creates the illusion of understanding, and what is important here is a non-understanding glimpse of need and of how it might be met.

It is a need for an escape from the narrowness of a dominance of a few millennia in our visioning of humanity. It is met by a sketch of our ancestry that invites us to pause in fantasy and wonder over those 7000 millennia of ancestral grace. "I want to suggest that the divine creativity (what I am calling 'ancestral grace') has been at work *at every stage* of our evolutionary becoming, and therefore all the stages deserve our discerning attention."<sup>6</sup> But the suggestion, he would hold, is an autopoetic suggestion, grounding with hidden dynamic subtlety an emergent hope. "One does not even have to postulate God as the source of this future hope; it is an imprint of the cosmic process itself, described in the scientific literature as *autopoiesis*, or the capacity for self-organization."<sup>7</sup>

But the suggestion, brilliantly, invites the self to twist out of and round about the

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<sup>4</sup>Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 2008; referred to below as **Ancestral Grace**.

<sup>5</sup>**Ancestral Grace**, 16.

<sup>6</sup>**Ancestral Grace**, 17

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, 213.

self in order to meet a “Communal Challenge.”<sup>8</sup> “‘Realignment’ is the word that springs to mind. We are out of tune with our true purpose, because we have disconnected ourselves from the universal web of cosmic and planetary life. Robust individualism is our great sin; cultural isolation is our curse. We are programmed for intelligent cooperation, not for individualistic competition.”<sup>9</sup> And we have disconnected Jesus from that web of cosmic and planetary life, enveloping Him in a tight Western rationalism.<sup>10</sup>

What is to be done? “Dreaming an Alternative Future”<sup>11</sup> is part of the realignment solution, and that dreaming tunes us forward towards evolution’s solution to our dilemma: “the new reality will be different from the old, so new in fact as to be virtually unrecognizable”.<sup>12</sup>

## 2. Saving Wisdom

Even the first chapter of Cynthia Bourgeault’s book eludes summary. Indeed, it seems to me a good strategy to quote unabreviatedly her first page and the two lines that follow. So here you have it, pretty well as printed, with its footnote shifted from page 191:

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<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>10</sup>This is a deep complex topic, and I begin a weave of footnotes around it here, moving on through notes 16, 22, 29, and 30 to 34. O’Murchu has only one explicit section on the topic, “The Cult(ure) of Rationality” (11-13) but his book is a stand against it. The rationality in question is, as far as I can diagnose it, a nominalism.

<sup>11</sup>**Ancestral Grace**, 222.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, 191.

## “ Jesus as a Recognition Event

*If you are searching,  
You must not stop until you find.  
When you find, however,  
Your confusion will give way to wonder.  
In wonder you will reign over all things.  
Your sovereignty will be your rest.*<sup>13</sup>

The words above are from the Gospel of Thomas, recovered in 1945 amid the Nag Hammadi scrolls in the Egyptian desert and now largely accepted as an authentic teaching of Jesus. The quotation in this version is probably longer than you’re familiar with from the Bible; the other gospels stop with “seek and you shall find.” But here Jesus lays out several additional steps to tell us what the search is *really* like. Seeking leads to finding, yes, but the result of that finding is often to plunge you into confusion and disorientation as the new information rattles the cage of your old paradigm. Only gradually, as you can make room for what this gospel calls ‘wonder,’ does a new universe begin to know itself around you, and you come to rest on a new foundation. Until the next go round, that is.”<sup>14</sup>

Bourgeault goes on to write about “embarking on an exploration”, going against our “twenty-twenty hindsight,”<sup>15</sup> a locked-in conventional rational<sup>16</sup> minding. “In a

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<sup>13</sup>Lynn Bauman, ed., *The Gospel of Thomas: Wisdom of the Twin* (Ashland, Or.: White Cloud Press, 2004), p. 8.

<sup>14</sup>**The Wisdom Jesus**, 1-2.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, 2, 185.

<sup>16</sup> See note 10 above. Like O’Murchu, Bourgeault stands against the type of minding that is “mere reason”, which I would equate with nominalism. We need to rescue the word *mind* that Bourgeault talks of in the next quotation. Genuine minding is a cosmic embrace: and such was

way, it is a pity that Paul chose to introduce his beautiful kenotic hymn with the phrase, 'Let the same mind be in you as was seen in Christ Jesus.' When we hear the word 'mind' we immediately think of some mental construct."<sup>17</sup> Bourgeault's book pushes for a deconstructing of bogus constructing, and that on many levels. There is rich detail on "The Teachings of Jesus" and on "The Mysteries of Jesus" in the first two parts, but the third part turns to the issue of practice, including the practice of *Lectio Divina*, where she uses the goodly suggestive word "ruminating."<sup>18</sup> And does not such *lectio* reach beyond the Bible? So, there is the *lectio* that this book itself requires, a *lectio* that invites a reach beyond the book. How far beyond the book, and what might be meant by *beyond*? Is there a paradoxical sense in which the beyond is here, if the here is lifted beyond the construct that is the egoic operating system?<sup>19</sup> And does not neuroscience nudges us towards new ruminations about the roots of the beyond in the "four-brains-in-one,"<sup>20</sup> that "form a human mind capable of a wide variety of creative and adaptive responses, including the capacity to receive what could be plausibly construed as 'divine guidance'?" Now here is where the picture gets interesting. These interwoven brains are connected with each other (and with the heart) through complex neural pathways ....<sup>21</sup>

### 3. Saving Ancestral Wisdom

Both the previous sections ended abruptly, as if I was just warming up on introducing each of these books. And this is true. There is a sense in which neither

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and is the minding of Jesus.

<sup>17</sup>**The Wisdom Jesus**, 150.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>19</sup>I can only point you to the complex reflections in the book on this by noting the index references under *egoic* and *binary mind*.

<sup>20</sup>**The Wisdom Jesus**, 175.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, 176.

author, nor their books, need an introduction to a certain group of serious searchers. The books complement each other in dealing with cosmos and core self, and meet a contemporary global need. But here precisely I identify a snag: the snag of meeting the long-term global need.

Before venturing into that topic, however, I must caution my readers, most of whom are involved with Lonergan studies. My cautioning regards something that concerns both those authors: a dominant type of rationalism, conceptualism, or what I prefer to call simply nominalism.<sup>22</sup> Lonergan studies is plagued with it: so, a not-too-profound identification of elements of meaning pointed to by Lonergan can lock us followers into “twenty-twenty hindsight. The real problem is that when we do that, we get lulled into ‘ordinary knowledge’ and nothing spiritually real can happen there.”<sup>23</sup> There is something spiritually real happening in the world that O’Murchu and Bourgeault share with those who read them, and themselves, seriously. Do they perhaps, indeed, meet a contemporary global need better than those aligned with Lonergan? A discomfoting suggestion.<sup>24</sup> And now back to that snag, but with a twist. For those interested in Lonergan there is the snag of not meeting the long-term global needs.

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<sup>22</sup>At a recent conference I heard a Lonergan expert talk of the richness of descriptive knowledge as a power beyond mere explanatory knowledge. He raises here a massive issue which I dealt with in a skimpy fashion in *Cantower XXIII*, “Redoubt Description”. Rich description, rich artistry, is the opening of a door. The door is to the many mansions that image God’s Explanation, which is a Person.

<sup>23</sup>**The Wisdom Jesus**, 7.

<sup>24</sup>The discomfort is to be identified positively. I shall have a shot at that, with the help of feedback from readers and collaborators, in these next months, in an essay to be webbed on March 1<sup>st</sup>: SURF 5, “Fancy Moving beyond Ghetto Theology?”. There a strategy will be suggested regarding the Lonergan community’s collaboration in the two “end” specialties that are linked in the circuit: research and communications. SURF 4, “The Financial Crisis” illustrates the strategy.

I return to O’Murchu within that context, and note a mix of pessimism and obscurity. He brings us up through 7 million years to the present but leaves us in the end with the question that titles his final chapter “Will we actually make it?” Certainly he sees evolution on the side of the cosmos, but perhaps in the genesis of a new layer of life.<sup>25</sup> For our “global village” to make it “a new global strategy is urgently needed.”<sup>26</sup> But what is it? On my view the earth can run another four billion years before being cooked by the sun: might evolution have a few new good turns within that decent span?

In an odd symmetry I turn now to Bourgeault’s final chapter, titled “Eucharist”. “It may seem curious,” she writes, “to end our exploration of Christian wisdom practice with a discussion of the Eucharist.”<sup>27</sup> To me, it does not seem odd or curious at all: but that is an eschatological issue. In the little space I allow myself here, I wish to do simpler broader pointings, inviting you to read that statement of Bourgeault freshly.

I began the invitation in section 2, as Bourgeault did, with a quotation from the Gospel of Thomas, the end of which I repeat: “your wonder will reign over all things. Your sovereignty will be your rest”. This seems to me to echo a view of prayer as “resting and questing in the real.”<sup>28</sup> But might not both sayings be spoken of these two books? Might they not even be considered as shared prayer, if readers and authors are “resting and question in the real,” a real in which wonder reigns? But how does wonder reign in these books, and in you as you now read in the real? How did Bourgeault write, and how did you read, the words “curious”, “exploration”,

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<sup>25</sup>**Ancestral Grace**, 234. 191-2.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, 188.

<sup>27</sup>**The Wisdom Jesus**, 183.

<sup>28</sup>The definition is developed the five Website essays on “Foundational Prayer”, *Prehumous 4 - 8*.

“discussion”?<sup>29</sup>

There is lurking in these books the question of the luminous reign of wonder.<sup>30</sup> It is a loneliness lurking in the hearts of these authors and their readers, in the heart of Lonergan and his readers.<sup>31</sup> Established patterns of truncation and neglect and so-called rationality cut us off from this throbbing loneliness.

The loneliness is our reach to embrace the universe, the universe’s blossoming in us of its own molecular longings, its bent towards circumincession.<sup>32</sup> And, to make an outrageously large final suggestion, might we not expect evolution to bring forth recurrence-schemes<sup>33</sup> of minding as the stable source of a positive answer to the final question of O’Murchu’s book, “Will we Actually Make It?” The answer is Yes, like Molly at the end of Joyce’s *Ulysses*, “his heart was going like mad and yes I said yes I

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<sup>29</sup>The reading, at its best, will be continuous with a habit of reading defined by generalized empirical method in its second definition (*A Third Collection*, 141, top lines). That reading, in a later stage of meaning, is to mesh with a HOW-language - **Home Of Wonder** talk - that is to place conversations in the dynamics of dark cosmic growth. But all this shifting needs the lift of functional collaboration.

<sup>30</sup>Associate this with the reign of the queen of science, *Phenomenology and Logic*, 126-7, 130. The queen is not to be a constitutional monarch, a nominal head (you get the pun, I hope!) but a democracy of luminosity, **whats** that ingest both phenomenology and logic.

<sup>31</sup>Lonergan wrote, in his long retreat notes of 1937, “God is straining for my heart”. This is not a metaphor. Recall the brain-connections mentioned at note 21, and think of the strain in terms of **exigence** (see the *index* of *Phenomenology and Logic*) as well as in terms of “the long-term potentiation” (Rita Carter, *Mapping the Mind*, Phoenix Paperback, 2002, 262, 268) of neural nets.

<sup>32</sup>See **The Wisdom Jesus**, “Dancing the Trinity” 71-2.”The Cappadocians called this complete intercirculation of love *perichoresis*, which literally means ‘the dance around’. See also Lonergan, *The Truine God: Systematics*, University of Toronto Press, 2007, the index under *Circumincession*.

<sup>33</sup>Chapter 10, “Emergence and Recurrence-schemes”, of Philip McShane, *Randomness, Statistics and Emergence*, (Gill, Macmillan and Notre Dame, 1970) identifies recurrences-schemes as the core elements of emergence. The present crisis-lift and ferment-statistics is towards a global collaboration of mindings.

will yes". We might now go round and back to that first chapter of **The Wisdom Jesus**, "Jesus as Recognition Event", and turn towards recognizing and rescuing the mind that is Jesus' and ours.<sup>34</sup> That is a rescue that neither author attempts. We might use of them the comment in that first chapter, "They didn't know this. What said 'yes'?"<sup>35</sup> Yes, it is what that says yes. It is **what** that must reign. But what is this what, reading now this **what**, this **whathere headspaced**,<sup>36</sup> getting or not getting the nudge and the urge to "read the book of oneself"?<sup>37</sup>

#### 4. Grace: The Final Frontier

The title of this final musing on these two sets of pointers is taken from a previous effort of mine to come to grips with the meaning of our cosmic home away from home that in fact is not so far from home.<sup>38</sup> We are acorns with hearts of a single oak.

But is this mere metaphor, or is there lodged here - I use the word in an echo of my essay "Epilogue"<sup>39</sup> - an understanding that is precise<sup>40</sup> and hard won? As precise,

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<sup>34</sup>See the text above at note 21. Here we end the footnote weaving through notes 10, 16, 22, 29, 30. The rescuing of mind must find its way to patterns of a generalized empirical method that respects and cultivates the serious understanding that emerges from scientific climbing, a climb radically different from the climb of rich description, yet a climb that is a felt molecular drive.

<sup>35</sup>**The Wisdom Jesus**, 10.

<sup>36</sup>The later *Field Nocturnes*, 25-41, pushes towards the reading-orientation that gives a psychic-skin identity to the seen print in **boldface**.

<sup>37</sup>A twist on the Joycean, "Reading the book of himself".

<sup>38</sup>The final, seventh, chapter of *The Redress of Poise* - a book of the mid-1990s available on the website - is titled "Grace: The Final Frontier". It gives an added context.

<sup>39</sup>The title of *Cantower XXI*, which parallels the Epilogue of *Insight*.

<sup>40</sup>The precisions require analogies with higher theorems of mathematical logic that are quite beyond the scope of the present sketch.

for example, as writing of the conjoined teenaged twins, Abigail and Britany Hensel, and noting wonderingly that they have a single heart but two heads, two personalities?

Bourgeault writes, "Like all mystics, Boehme received his knowledge from direct revelation, and his insight echos the teaching of all the great spiritual traditions: that surrender is an act of spiritual intelligence resulting in a markedly increased capacity for creative response."<sup>41</sup> But in what way does that receiving occur? Is there not some feature of the receiving that is understanding blossoming from Faith? I fancy, for instance, that Dame Julian of Norwich (1342-1413, roughly) did some serious thinking during her illness of 1373, natural insights that grounded elements of her expression of the surrender of "all thing is well".

That is the only preliminary point I wish to make before bringing you, your whatheart, to the expression of that "single oak" theme in the poem of St. Simeon. Is that theme not a goal of being like the First person of the Trinity, speaking the Word of *Theoria* that, molecularized, is Jesus, "Jesus in the Big Picture"?<sup>42</sup> It is a goal, a heart in the world of explanation, of adult growth in the Tower of Able that is the mediation of Cosmopolis. It is a goal, and a heart, that has within it a luminousness of distance: no finite mind can comprehend the ALL, nor come a fraction of the way towards that ALL. So, we may climb with Lonergan to find that, 'in the twenty sixth place, God is personal'<sup>43</sup> but we are to be everlastingly dynamically, genetically poised with Plotinus within joy of the Dark One.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>**The Wisdom Jesus**, 175.

<sup>42</sup>**Ancestral Grace**, 115.

<sup>43</sup>*Insight*, section 9 of Chapter 19. I would note that a twenty seventh place corresponds nicely with Aquinas twenty seventh question in the *Summa Theologica*, about a Speaking God.

<sup>44</sup>The second last essay of the *Cantower* series, *Field Nocturnes CanTower 116*, "Desire and Distance, Part Two: Phylogenesis, deals mainly with the everlasting dynamic. It was written six weeks before this essay, however, and lacks my present refinements regarding everlasting incompleteness.

So let us end with the ? puzzle, “curiosity, exploration, discussion” with which Bourgeault presents us,<sup>45</sup> a puzzle that echos through O’Murchu’s cosmic reaching, the poise of St. Simeon (949-1022).<sup>46</sup> Is this poise not to be an element of the Tower’s Standard Model in millennia to come?<sup>47</sup>

*We awaken in Christ's body  
as Christ awakens our bodies,  
and my poor hand is Christ. He enters  
my foot, and is infinitely me.*

*I move my hand, and wonderfully  
my hand becomes Christ, becomes all of Him  
(for God is indivisibly  
whole, seamless in His Godhood).*

*I move my foot, and at once  
he appears in a flash of lightning.  
Do my words seem blasphemous? - Then*

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<sup>45</sup>Presents .... but might there now be a recognition? Might you not reach towards a larger recognition now of her first page: “Only gradually, as you can make room for what this gospel calls ‘wonder,’ does a new universe begin to know itself around you, and you come to rest on a new foundation. Until the next go round, that is.”

<sup>46</sup>Bourgeault quotes the poem on pages 135-6. Her note there indicates her discovery of it on a small greeting card. It is in fact available in the doctorate thesis of Hierophant Ilarion (Alfeev), a modern Russian Orthodox theologian, defended at Oxford University, published in English in Oxford (2000), and later in Russian. The life and teaching of Venerable Simeon the New Theologian (949-1022) is studied in the context of the Eastern Orthodox Church tradition.

<sup>47</sup>I borrowed the phrase standard model from physics, where a certain perspective holds sway. See the website book, *Lonergan’s Standard Model of Effective Global Inquiry*.

*open your heart to Him*

*And let yourself receive the one  
who is opening to you so deeply.*

*For if we genuinely love him  
we wake up inside Christ's body*

*where all our body, all over,  
every most hidden part of it,  
is realized in joy as Him,  
and He makes us utterly real,*

*and everything that is hurt, everything  
that seemed to us dark, harsh, shameful,  
maimed, ugly, irreparably  
damaged, is in Him transformed*

*and recognized as whole, as lovely,  
and radiant in His light.*

*We awaken as the Beloved  
in every last part of our body.*