

*Joistings 23***Teaching, Preaching and Cherishing A Triune God****1. A Final Shot at Introducing some Final Statements**

My section title may seem strange, but it helps me be up-front with regard to what I am attempting here as I close out the 27 *Joistings*.

This essay began, in the Summer of 2006, simply as a brief reflection on the sermon that is given in Part 3 below. The Summer moved on through the refinements on Quantum Mechanics suggested in *Joistings 24* and *25*, through the struggle forward of the Vancouver Conference of August contextualized by *Joistings 21, 22* and *26*, through the struggle of trying to envisage directions of my own and others' ongoing searchings, to the challenge of writing the final, fourteenth, chapter of the book, *Lonergan's Standard Model of Effective Global Inquiry*. The title of the essay was at that stage simply "Preaching the Trinitarian God", and at that stage this section was just a muddle of pointers, while section 2 was as it is now, and is deliberately left so.

Today's early morning darkness brings me light on my previous strange hope here - "such attempting is very human" is a key phrase in the first paragraph of section 2 here - and on the deep billion-year oddity of the meaning of *Introducing* in my title. For, the introducing has been the task of the Triune God since They banged forward the inweaving of energy's dispersedness fourteen billion years ago. What might my little print add? Might it be a footnote to Lonergan's print regarding scriptures intimations of Them?¹ Perhaps even the pointing to that print is sufficient final introduction? In this my 75th year I am weaving, being inweaved, towards the escape velocity that will lead to the larger circumincessional inweaving that was to be a topic in later, unwritten, Cantowers, and I recall now quite vividly walking a Wicklow beach forty five years

¹I am referring to the final section of thesis 5 of Lonergan's *De Deo Trino I, Pars Dogmatica*, where he moves us back, in self-discovery, to the scriptures. The translation is to appear shortly.

ago, reading Susanne Langer's *Feeling and Form*, and bubbling with the idea that one might well abandon writing in favour of pointing to print worth reading, preying on, praying over.

But is not that the "catch of history",² mentioned in section 2, mentioned in that famous Epilogue of Lonergan about meeting Aquinas' minding of the Trinity?³

At all events that old beach bubbling stands me in good stead now, in that my introducing is simply a pointing to a book to be preyed on and prayed about, (about)^{3,4}. It is forty two years since Lonergan sent me his two volumes Titled *De Deo Trino*. I had, of course, been brooding over the first version of the second volume during the previous years.⁵ That volume 2 remained, remains, for me a mainsail of minding, a battered loose-page mess of common prayer. It is now, providentially, emerging in English - and gradually, I would hope, on into other languages. So, with a bow or indeed a flourish, I introduce you to volume 9 of the *Collected Works* of Lonergan.

But, of course, we are still caught in "all sorts of mortmain."⁶ Is it a further help to view the book as a cherished mountain-speak of a 64-year-old searcher? To talk of Cezanne's reach for Mt.St.Victoire or Nadia Boulanger's cherishing of music? Yes, many

²The context here is "the catch of history" that lurks in the final chapter of *Topics in Education*.

³The key point is what one brings to reading. A new culture depends on the Tower People, a creative minority, lifting global meaning, including common sense, to a sensibility of the remoteness of authentic reading. But that key point, or pointing, is towards the massive cultural changes I described most recently in *Lack in the Beingstalk*, Axial Publishing, 2006.

⁴The curious expression, (about)³, has been discussed in various other places: most recently in chapter 2 of *Christ in History*., section 2. It relates to the third order of consciousness that establishes methodology as a histogenetic science of methods.

⁵The early version of Lonergan's systematic treatment of the Trinity was available in 1957 from Gregorian University Press: *Divinarum Personarum Conceptio Analogica*.

⁶I am quoting here from Ezra Pound's *Commission*, a poem quoted at length on page 13 of what is a lengthier earlier sermon on the Divine: *Music That Is Soundless. A Fine Tuning for the Lonely Bud A*, Axial Publishers, Cape Breton, 2006.

further helpful hints bubble up.

But my few words here and in section 2 seem enough for the moment. And the sermon in section 3 is a final simple help, asking for whatever level of self-appreciation a body might muster in their search for an answer to the question, Who are These Three that focus on me as a “Song of the Adorable”?⁷ I have now only a final Joistings to write, Joistings 27, “In the Twenty Seventh Place”, and there I continue - giving the lie to my present section-title - my effort to weave words into the total cosmic introduction that is a weave of vestiges and images of the Triune God.

2. Contexts

Part 3 here is simply a sermon which I preached on Trinity Sunday 2006 in Knox United Church, Vancouver, the Church where my wife, Sally, serves as minister. The sermon may be taken, read, as it stands, in your present context. So, you may well move to Part 3 immediately. Indeed, that could be a good start to the struggle with this *Joistings*. But I do hope that there is an increasingly strange, self-stranging, element of struggle, both with the sermon and with these suggestions on contexts. An adequate contextualization, is and is to be, a massive affair. In my first venture here I nonetheless attempted a sketching of contexts: such attempting is very human, especially in this axial period in which a hope of communication has crystallized into a truncated

⁷See [on the website www.philipmeshane.ca] *Process: Introducing Themselves to Young (Christian) Minders*, chapter 1 section 4, “Bhagavad Gita: Song of the Adorable” and section 4 of chapter 5: “Song of the Adorable”.

acceptance of *haute vulgarization*,⁸ a solid component in “the catch of history.”⁹ But the problem is to be solved, not by summary sketchings, but by a massive shifting of culture. “What is lacking is a cultural mileau, habituated to the use of abstract concepts.”¹⁰ But what are abstract concepts? And do you associate the reality of rich hard-won abstract concepts with our reach for the concrete total concept that is the Word, the Spoke of God? So, finally, I clean away my various efforts to sketch, and now simply draw attention to that sad statement of Lonergan that follows shortly in the text already quoted. “Most of all, what is lacking is knowledge of all that is lacking and only gradually is that knowledge acquired.”¹¹ Gradually? Here and there, perhaps, in this century, but in the longer cycle of incline it is a distant hope of hodic reaching, of that “specialized auxiliary” that is pointed to in hope’s mood of the 31st place in Chapter 20 of *Insight*, to be realized in what was then unknown to Lonergan, the hodic structure of collaboration.

But I cannot resist a comment on the final context that I included in previous drafts of this preliminary section, since it brings you and me back to that puzzle about “abstract concepts” and forwards to the pointing of the sermon. The central abstract

⁸Lonergan, *Collected Works*, vol.6, has two relevant considerations of *haute vulgarization*, on pages 121 and 155, which are worth brooding over. There is the irony of Lonergan being trapped, as it were objectively, into such vulgarization by the circumstances of audience and occasion. This volume 6 itself is a good illustration of the entrapment, as are the reflections on education in volume 10, cited immediately.

⁹*Topics in Education*, 236, introduces: the problem of general history, which is the real catch”. Section 3 of that chapter on “history” is seven pages that move around the problem in a suggestive but incomplete manner. Here, certainly is not the place to tackle that issue, an issue intimately connected with the *schizothymia* of *haute vulgarization*.

¹⁰*Insight*, 535[559]. This section 1.2, “The Genesis of Adequate Self-Knowledge,” blossoming out of the needed attending to the sick exclusion of mystery touched on in the first sub-section of chapter 17 of *Insight*, is the key pointer towards the grounding context associated with Socrates but also with oddities like Jeremiah and MoTi..

¹¹*Insight*, 536[559].

concept that is sought, not just by the theologian, but by all searchers in the world of theory, is “A Synthetic Structure,”¹² “large enough a structure to include both subject and object, to unite the subjective and the objective.”¹³

The synthetic structure is a grip on the good of order, a grip on the order that is and is to be. And on that page just quoted, Lonergan adds a reflection on Aquinas that gives an immediate, but so distant, context for the invitation of the simple sermon presented in section 3.

“In one place in the first part of the *Summa theologiae* (q. 47, a.1) he states that the good of order found in the whole universe is the closest to divine perfection. But in another place (q. 93, a. 2 ad 3m) he states that the order in the soul, on which is based the Trinitarian analogy, provides the most intense, concentrated image of divine perfection.”¹⁴

Lonergan notes an apparent conflict here, but does this not lift our efforts to a search for a fuller synthesis, in which our words of God’s Word circumincess into a clasp of history?

3 . Trinity Sunday 2006 Speak, Spoke, Clasp

My title says it all in three words. But obviously it does not. But at least perhaps some of you guessed that the three words refer to the Three in God that we celebrate today? Our Faith has us clinging to, clasping, the conviction that there are Three in God that are named conventionally Father, Son and Spirit. The convention, a patriarchal one, nudges us to view the Three as male, but there has been recent efforts to get beyond that. The Father is also Mother; only the Son as incarnate is male; and perhaps the Spirit

¹²*Topics in Education*, 40.

¹³*Ibid.*

¹⁴*Ibid.*

is easiest to rescue from the convention: what sex is a flame or a wind?

So I offer three other names. It is for you, for us, to see whether they are a help. The names say that God is one yet three: and this morning we will try to think of them as the Great Speak, the Great Spoke, the Great Clasp.

Where to begin? Well, I begin with the beginning and the end of Sally's sermon about the Spirit last Sunday. She began with those dangerous words "I was thinking this week", and she ended by mentioning Paul's list of the gifts of the Spirit and concluding with the words:

"To receive all these, embrace all these, discerningly: that is to receive and to be and to become in the Spirit."

Let me begin from her concluding words, worth repeating immediately. **"To receive all these, embrace all these, discerningly: that is to receive and to be and to become in the Spirit."** Notice the word *embrace* there. Love is an embrace, and the Spirit is an embrace in God and of God that is the one of those Three that holds the Word, the second Person of God, in an Eternal Clasp.

Now thinking out that last sentence of mine: there's the problem, and it brings us back to Sally's dangerous suggestion at the beginning of her sermon, about **thinking**. We have to think, brood, for months and years, like John did before writing his Gospel, before we begin to glimpse something of that Clasp of the Word. I am thinking now of what John wrote in verse 11 of chapter 16 of his Gospel, "he will lead you to the complete truth, since he will not be speaking of his own accord". Our fundamental Christian vocation is, **to think**. Why? Because we are called to be like God, and God is thinking in its fullness. Is that not what we mean when we rejoice at God's understanding of us? For God, thinking is loving understanding: for us thinking is the road to understanding and love. We say of someone, "she is a very thoughtful person" because she actually thinks, is really on the ball when she thinks. And when she talks, she is not just flapping her lips: she is mindful. She is like God, the father the mother, or - to come now to my first name in the sermon title - she is like The Great Speak. The

Great Speak is the first person of the trinity, infinitely mindful of all being, and that infinite minding results in just one great word, one great Spoke: the Word that John names in the first line of his Gospel. And that Great Spoke is heard infinitely, listened to by the Great Listener that is the Spirit, what I have called here, The Great Clasp.

Now if we had time to return to that verse 11 of John and carry on through verses 12,13,14,15, we would find that we are making sense of John's words. The Spirit does not speak of herself or of her self, but cherishes what is spoken in the Word by the Father, the Speaker. Our problem is to have time, to take time, to follow Sally's suggestion about thinking. And, in her final statement, consider "all these" to be the Divine Three, something that fits in with those verses of John. We take a small step by following a homely hint, a homely exercise. It is matter of twisting and turning in our own experience to get clues to what goes occurs when the Father Speaks the Eternal Word and that Word is Eternally Cherished.

So, let me give you what I call "the menu exercise". It is an exercise in thinking about thinking, and that in itself is a puzzle. But it surely makes sense that if you are thinking about God you are thinking about thinking? Is that not what God is, what Peter Faber so eloquently suggests in his hymn? "There's a wideness in God's mercy like the wideness of the sea ... and the love of God is broader / than the measures of man's mind, / and the heart of the Eternal / is most wonderfully kind". Recall, then, what I said about the thoughtful person, and then let us turn to ourselves when we are thoughtful in order to find out what it is to be thoughtful.

You will find my exercise odd: it is not an exercise in being thoughtful about your neighbour but in being thoughtful about your dinner. So, imagine yourself gathered with friends at a table in some restaurant. The menu has been handed out and then there emerges what we might call a sacred space: we are taking thought, thinking, imitating the Divine Care. We read the entrees, slowly home in on the top possibilities, where the homing in is fullsome enough to reach considerations of budget and diet and digestion, well-being in a whole life- style. Thoughts, inner words, bubble up, and in

that inner speaking we are like the first person of the Trinity. The inner thinking blossoms into an inner spoke, which is to become an outer spoke when the waiter comes round. You have got it: yes, Beef Wellington, Chicken Kiev or Lamb Korma. And when you have got it, yes, part of that “got it” is contentment. You embrace that inner word, and when the time comes to make the noise of ordering you may do so with a flourish of contentment. The contentment is the clasp, the gift of the spirit, the fruit of discernment. We are back with Sally’s final sentence, but with a fresh strange twist. She concluded : **“To receive all these, embrace all these, discerningly: that is to receive and to be and to become in the Spirit.”** But I suspect that you had not thought this way before, about dining with friends, each quietly bringing forth an image of the Trinity? There is inner speaking that brings forth the word of a meal that is clasped as good.

But this, I know, is all too much for a Sunday morning. It is just one suggestion towards thinking about the Speaker and the Word and the Listener that are the Three in One God. I recall now the first time I made such suggestions in a Sermon. It was back in the late 1960s, and Paul Simon was writing songs about dangling conversations and loneliness, singing about people talking without speaking, hearing without listening. I recall that I was preaching in a convent to an audience that was 1/3rd nuns, 1/3rd unwed mothers and 1/3rd retired prostitutes, but they all sensed what was meant when I talked about the problem of having a conversation, even with oneself.

In God there is a fullness of Understanding that burst out in an Infinite Person that is the Speaker. The Spoke is the Eternal Word, but not an eternal word in isolation. Eternally the Father speaks from the menu a particular selection, and the Spoke spans space from Bethlehem to Betelgeuse, a star 427 light years away from Galilee but close to the heart of Jesus and part of his seamless robe. And the Spirit reaches in and out to embrace each of us, to bring us to embrace the Word Eternal and Incarnate, so as to find the home of the Father’s many-mansions. The Father’s menu-selection includes each of us in magnificent singularity and so - in taking thought of that - we can come to read freshly those words of the book of **Revelations** (2:11): “Let anyone who can hear listen

to what the Spirit is saying to the churches: to those who prove victorious I will give some hidden manna and a white stone, with a new name written on it, known only to the person who receives it" That hidden manna is with us today, each and all, as we clasp the menu-selection of Jesus, the supper of the Lord.