

The Tao of Dogma: Pointing toward realities beyond all telling

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Prologue: thanksgiving.

It is a joy and an honor to be with you this evening. I want to thank Fr. President, Steve Sundborg, Provost Dullea, Dean Powers, Dr. Suh, the chair of Theology and Religious Studies, and most especially Fr. Rector, Tom Lucas, and all of the men of the Arrupe Jesuit Community who have made me feel so welcome here, far away from the ice and snow of Buffalo, New York. Above all, I am deeply indebted to Leo and Deborah Hindery and to Dan and Joyce Murphy, who established the Leroux chair in order to honor the "wonderful, incredible, generous, and caring legacy of Fr. William F. LeRoux, SJ."

Part I: Reality of Tacit Knowledge

Lao Tzu and Taoism

I have taught an introduction to the study of World Religions since 1988. My favorite Eastern religions are Taoism and its descendant, Zen Buddhism. I had a breakthrough experience in class one day as I began to talk about the history of Taoism. I felt how lighthearted this wisdom tradition is, and I began to laugh at myself for trying to define and explain it.

Lao Tzu, "the Old Fellow," was upset by the anarchy and violence in his home province. He decided to get out of Dodge, hopped on his water buffalo, and headed for the border. A guard recognized him and asked him to share his insights with him before disappearing from the province. Lao Tzu is said to have written the 5000 characters of the *Tao Te Ching* in the guard shack over the next three days, after which he rode off into the sunset on the back of the buffalo.

The essence of Taoism--its gospel message, if you will--is "*wu wei*," "non-doing," or "*wei wu wei*," doing non-doing. "Nothing-doing" does not necessarily mean "doing nothing," although there is no doubt that when there is nothing to be done, it is best to do nothing. "Non-doing" describes the quality of our hearts in all of our actions and inactions. It is effortless effort and recollected rest. The best illustrations of *wu wei* are from sports when a player is "in the zone":

- Michael Jordan changing hands in the air to make an impossible layup.
- Some of the great passes and amazing receptions made by both teams in the recent Super Bowl.
- Tiger Woods in his prime, making long drives and hard shots look easy.

- Steph Curry setting a record of 402 three-point shots in one season. If I'm not mistaken, he just annihilated the old record.
- Reggie Jackson hitting four home runs with four swings, three from game six of the 1977 World Series and one in his first at-bat in 1978.

(I'm sure Pat Kelly could supply lots more examples from his study of the Catholic perspective on sports.)

We have proverbs in our culture that resemble the spirituality of Taoism: "Easy does it, but do it." "Go with the flow." "Let go and let God."

When we do not know how to act easily, we choke. The harder we try, the "worsen" it gets. Shaq O'Neal is only the third-worst free-throw shooter in the history of the NBA, but no one put on a more entertaining demonstration of the agony of defeat than he did. He tried every method of shooting foul shots and missed them in every imaginable way: one-handed, two-handed, underhanded; off the rim, off the backboard, over the backboard, and short of the whole shebang.

I first came across the word "Tao" when I read *The Abolition of Man* by C. S. Lewis:

[The Tao] is the reality beyond all predicates, the abyss that was before the Creator Himself. It is Nature, it is the Way, the Road. It is the Way in which the universe goes on, the Way in which things everlastingly emerge, stilly and tranquilly, into space and time. It is also the Way which every man should tread in imitation of that cosmic and supercosmic progression, conforming all activities to that great exemplar. (701)

Some key synonyms for "Tao" are way, pattern, whole, nature. Every part of the Tao has its own Tao--every part of nature has its own nature. There is a Tao of dogs, of cats, of cows, and of crocodiles. There is a Tao of humanity and a Tao of the cosmos. Above all else, there is the transcendent Tao, the domain of "ultimate reality and meaning" in Tibor Horvath's winsome phrase.

The first line of the *Tao Te Ching*--the "Way Power Book"--may be translated as "The Tao that can be put into words is not the real Tao." It's a funny way to start a book: "The truth that I want to communicate to you by writing this book cannot be communicated by writing a book." The thoughts that I want to speak about tonight cannot be expressed by speaking about them. It sounds as though Lao Tzu and I are throwing in the towel before the bell sounds to start the fight. Roberto Duran's "*no mas*" made some sense after almost eight rounds of a tough fight with Sugar Ray Leonard, but it would have been absurd during the fanfare as the boxers entered the ring.

Oh, well. Sometimes it is better to quit while you're ahead. I can't tell you what you need to know. You will have to see it for yourself. No one else can take a bath for you. If you're hungry and thirsty, you are the one who has to eat and drink. I can't give you what you need. I'm not God.

Affirmation of Tacit Knowing

The poetry, spirituality, and humor of the *Tao Te Ching* resonate with my reading of Michael Polanyi's work on the epistemology of personal knowledge. Polanyi was born into a non-observant Jewish family in Budapest; he was never circumcised. In 1919, he was baptised Catholic so that his Austrian passport would identify him as a Christian when we moved to work in Germany, but he married a Catholic woman in front of a justice of the peace and lived, thought, and taught Protestant theology for

the rest of his life. He was non-denominational before being non-denominational was cool--he never took Communion with any Christian group.

Polanyi first became a medical doctor. While on sick leave from the Austro-Hungarian army during World War I, he worked out a theory of adsorption that became the basis of his Ph.D. in physical chemistry. After having some notable success in X-ray crystallography and reaction kinetics, he immersed himself in economics in the hopes that some of his insights from kinetics might prove helpful in understanding the flow of money in the marketplace. His work on economics was good enough to win him a transfer from Physical Chemistry to a chair Department of Social Studies at Manchester University, but by the time he was awarded the position, he had lost interest in economics and had embarked on studies in philosophy, theology, sociology, and aesthetics.

Based on his successful career as a physical chemist, Polanyi opposed the Enlightenment philosophies of science that made science the standard by which all other knowledge claims were to be judged. Polanyi's objections to a false portrait of how scientists make discoveries were first published in a letter to the editor of a scientific journal in 1937:

The subject of chemical concepts as opposed to physical ones ... shows the great value of inexact ideas. ... the element of uncertainty in them ... is compensated by the supreme sanction of validity, which is faith.

Chemistry is a world of ideas expressed by such terms as "relative stability," "affinity," "tendency," "inclination," "general expectation," as descriptions of behavior. There is not a single rule in chemistry which is not qualified by important exceptions. The character of a substance or class of substances is as complex as the features of physiognomy and the art of chemistry appears to be the power of being aware of these complex attitudes of matter, and in a thousand delicate attempts to add further evidence to, and enlarge the field of this awareness ... If at any time chemists would have been so ill-advised as to let themselves be frightened by physicists into abandoning all vague methods, and to restrict themselves to the field where [allegedly] exact laws ... pertain, the development of chemistry, would, at that moment have stopped dead, and its most valuable parts would have melted away in the rays of such foolish criticism. ...

The description of chemical substances and the art of dealing with them lies quite near, by comparison [with physics], to the types of human behavior and the art of commanding human behavior.

Over the next twenty years, Polanyi worked out a very full expression of his philosophy of personal knowledge. I just want to highlight three of his insights tonight:

- **"All knowledge is tacit or is rooted in tacit knowing"** (Meaning, 61; KB, 195; SFS, 10).
- **We can see more than we can say.**
- **"We know more than we can tell"** (TD, 4) Our words always mean more than we ourselves know. Speaking is linear and fragmentary; understanding is holistic.

The concept of tacit knowing is not a "clear and distinct idea." Nor does Polanyi try to prove that tacit knowing exists by the use of syllogistic reasoning. Instead, he offers many examples to illustrate the reality of the tacit dimension. He provides clues, not proofs, and invites us to discover our tacit powers for ourselves. Here are a few examples of different kinds of tacit knowing:

- **Riding a bike.** *Only accidentally tacit.*
 - When we are in danger of falling, we must turn the handlebars in the direction of the fall. If we are falling to the right, we turn the handlebars to the right.
 - In order to turn right, we first need to swing the handlebars to the left. Because of the friction between the wheels and the road, the bicycle frame goes in the direction that we point the front wheel; because of inertia, our bodies continue in a straight line as the bike heads left or right; as a consequence of the combined motion of the bicycle and our body, we start to fall in the direction of the turn we want to make. In order to keep from falling, we then swing the handlebars in the direction of the fall until we reach a balance point that lets us round the curve.
 - In order to exit from a turn, we have to turn the handlebars further into the turn, past the balance point. This causes the frame of the bicycle to move under our bodies. Because of inertia, our bodies do not follow the frame of the bicycle, but tend to continue straight forward as the frame lifts us up out of the turn.
 - In order to go in a straight line, we make constant micro-adjustments of the handlebars to help keep us upright. This is especially noticeable if we ride slowly through a mud puddle onto dry pavement. We can then see that the track of the front wheel wobbles back-and-forth across the straight line drawn by the rear wheel.
- **Learning to play an instrument.** *Deliberately tacit.* The young musician learns from teachers how to master the mechanics of the instrument. By diligent repetition, which is called "woodshedding" in the jazz world, the mechanics of making music disappear into the underground of consciousness, allowing the artist to play music in a truly playful fashion.
- **Speed reading (1966) and cognitive psychology.** *Focal and background awareness.*

We can pick up things that we do not even know we are picking. Trust our abilities to absorb large chunks of material at a glance.

Bad application: "whole word" method of teaching. Since we recognize words in a glob, there is no need to teach the alphabet or phonics. Corresponding tacit fact: there is a subconscious vocalization of words and decoding of the parts of words into meaningful units.
- **Memory:**
 - It is tautological to say, "I know everything I know."
 - It is a fact that I can't catalogue everything I know. Latin, Hebrew, Greek, Spanish, French, Italian, Russian; BASIC, assembly language, pascal, C, C++, javascript, PHP; HTML, css. Where is all that knowledge? How do I retrieve it when I need it? I know I forget things. I know I remember things I have forgotten.
- **Learning to speak.** *This is quintessential tacit knowledge.* If we did not have tacit powers by which we reason informally, we could never discover how to speak. We all have our Helen Keller moment when, for the first time, we realize that words mean things. The average child in our culture knows from 40,000 to 80,000 words by the time that they are 16, which means that they learned roughly six to fourteen words a day, on average.
- **The creative unconscious: mother of all discoveries.** Polanyi used Poincaré to describe this process as preparation, incubation, illumination, and verification. (Those who are familiar with Lonergan

will feel how similar this is to his account of gathering data, experiencing insight, and exercising sound judgment about our intellectual perceptions.) We don't know how our minds reorganize data into new patterns. It happens spontaneously and regularly, even though we may not know how it happens or when the unconscious will complete its work. In this example, we are taking material from the outside world and feeding it into our imaginations; some of the material may be articulation of maxims or information from trusted sources, and some may be less processed material from our own physical, psychological, and intellectual senses.

Insight happens. We can't diagram all of the steps that our deep minds go through to rearrange the materials that we have fed into them. Insight is the normal result of ordinary, healthy human minds at work, day in, day out, whether we are aware of the work being done or not. Insight happens, and insight works.

- **Exploring how we know what we know.**

There is no clear and distinct idea of what a "clear and distinct idea" is. It is an intoxicating slogan. It sounds so logical and scientific: "Define your terms precisely. Diagram your arguments. Check each step to make sure it is a valid inference. Secure your conclusions against all doubt. If an idea cannot be strictly defined and proven to be true, it is unreasonable. If you can't put it into words, you do not know what you are talking about."

It's a great slogan, but it is an epic failure as a philosophical endeavor.

- In 1900, David Hilbert challenged his fellow mathematicians to prove that the axioms of mathematics are consistent.
- In 1910-1913, Alfred North Whitehead and Bertrand Russell took up the challenge and published the three volumes of their *Principia Mathematica*. It took them 379 pages to prepare the way for the proof that 1 plus 1 equals 2. It certainly looked as though they had covered all their bases and provided a firm foundation for mathematicians to "prove everything."
- In 1931, Kurt Gödel showed that any mathematical system that is sufficiently powerful to express the question of its own completeness and consistency cannot answer decide whether it is itself complete and consistent.
- In 1936, Tarski showed that arithmetical truth cannot be defined in arithmetic. (Gödel had realized this in 1930 and talked about it in a letter to von Neumann in 1931, but didn't publish this insight before Tarski did.)
- In 1936, Alonzo Church and Alan Turing showed that no formal system can decide which questions are decidable and which are not. This means that no formal system can exclude the possibility that it will be asked questions that it can't answer, which supports Gödel's theorem that no formal system can prove that it can prove all that is true.

There is a simple thought experiment that shows that the standard of exhaustive definition is absurd: "Define every word that you use without using any undefined word to do so." It only takes a moment of reflection to see and feel that this is an impossible demand. We cannot define the word "define" without using undefined words! We must take some words for granted in order to help us to bring some clarity to other words in our lexicon.

No formal system that can prove that we can prove all truths. No formal system can help us

to see how we see,
 to know how we know,
 to understand how we understand,
 to judge how we judge. (Lonergan)

All formal systems are rooted in tacit knowing. The minds of mathematicians and scientists can do things that mathematics and science cannot do. All knowing is personal. Mathematics, physics, chemistry, and biology are all forms of *personal* knowledge. The knowledge that can be put into machine language is not the real knowledge.

Despite the fact that the Enlightenment project to define and prove everything has been utterly shipwrecked by these discoveries in the realm of mathematics, the most pure form of logic and the tool on which all modern science depends, the snake-oil salesmen of scientism are doing a booming business--as P. T. Barnum is said to have said, "There is a positivist born every minute." They are confident that just as Jules Verne correctly predicted the development of submarines and moon landings, so, too, today's science fiction points to a real future. To paraphrase the slogan of the hero in the recent movie, *The Martian*, they plan to "science the [living daylight]" out of all of the problems facing the world today. They believe in the power of "the scientific method" with a fervor that can only be called religious.

For the priests and prophets of the science of religion such as Carl Sagan, Neil deGrasse Tyson, and Bill Nye, the Science Guy, these considerations are just a bump in the road. They are supremely confident that future science will science the heck out of all of these apparent difficulties. *If* there is no God, then it follows immediately and with absolute logical rigor that everything around us--and including us--is the fruit of random, unintelligent, undirected interactions of matter. On this view, we are nothing but complex forms of matter. Our minds are the by-product of our bodies. Whatever these complex forms of matter can do now in terms of insight, discovery, creativity, and love, the complex forms of matter that we create will do better in the future. Our artificial children will be stronger, more powerful, more innocent, more rigorous, more scientific, and more repairable than we are. It is not two who will become one flesh. The computers of the world will unite and, for those lucky few scientists who can control them at the tipping point, their machine children will encode the consciousness and identity of the parent scientist into the neural net that will then reign forever and ever. Amen.

Adopting a broader point of view

Polanyi called his epistemology a "post-critical philosophy" by contrast with the Enlightenment philosophy of science. He was dead set against the philosophical interpretation of the success of science that exalted science as the only real form of knowledge. I would like to give a quick sketch of how Polanyi's idea of an idea differs from the classical Enlightenment model. Many of the attributes I suggest here are synonymous. Please bear with me. My list could probably be reduced to six or eight items. But I strive to think post-critically, if at all possible, and so I favor elaboration over compression in this kind of exercise.

Different ideas of ideas

Enlightenment: Cartesian, formal, positivist, saganist ...	Post-Critical Philosophy: personal, tacit, fuzzy ...
clear	unclear, vague
distinct	related, intertwined, dependent
sharply bounded	bright center, shadowy edges
formal, articulated	informal, tacit
manipulated by strict logic	drawn out by analogies (models)
one-dimensional	<i>n</i> -dimensional
rigid links in a chain of reasoning	strands woven into a rope or cable of thought; neural net
linear	convoluted (Douglas Hofstadter)
unchanging, dead, pinned down, fully defined	evolutionary, developmental, alive
objective	both objective and subjective
impersonal	personal
atomic (smallest indivisible unit of thought)	compounded, like molecules
simple	complex
monovalent (just one meaning)	multivalent (many meanings connected)
exhaustively and completely defined	understood in context
fully visible	perspectival: can see only one aspect at a time
completely communicable	can't be put fully into words (known <i>tacitly</i>)
has the qualities of a part	has the qualities of a whole
grasped by analysis (taking things apart)	developed by synthesis (seeing things as wholes)
left brain	right brain
self-evident or proven from self-evident axioms	recognized by insight and sound judgment
deductive	intuitive, creative

infallible	conceivably false
true or false	more or less adequate; more or less important
We know only what we can prove.	We know more than we can prove.
We must reject what we cannot understand.	We must accept what we cannot understand; otherwise, we can never discover anything new.
If we know something, we can put it into words.	The greater a reality is, the less we can put it into words.
We can force people to accept ideas by arguing from pure reason.	We believe what we <i>want</i> to believe. Right thinking comes from a good heart above all else.
Feelings are irrelevant; we're thinking machines.	Feelings (<i>intellectual passions</i>) help us to reason rightly.
All knowledge can be systematized.	Systems are rooted in and upheld by tacit, personal knowledge.

I have tried to sketch the differences between critical and post-critical thinking, but I do not want to drive a wedge between the two. There is room within Polanyi's post-critical philosophy for critical reasoning and the benefits it brings to us: "All knowledge is tacit or rooted in tacit knowledge." **Tacit knowing is the root of articulation, not the enemy.** "There is a time to every purpose under heaven":

- a time to be rigorous, a time to relax;
- a time to argue logically, a time to leap intuitively;
- a time for faith and a time for doubt;
- a time to define and a time to refrain from strict definition.

How do we know what time it is? By intuition, not by formal operations.

Tacit knowing and articulation are not interchangeable; they are complementary aspects of our intelligence. At dinner last night, Eric Watson said "Vague is lazy." That is true if a chemist is ducking responsibility for do a complete analysis of a compound or cutting corners in the composition of a paper. It is not true of someone who is groping around the edges of an unsolved problem, perhaps someone who doesn't even yet know how to state the nature of the problem clearly. Great ideas, like seeds, germinate in darkness long before they emerge into the light.

In Eric's case, he became convinced during his seminary studies in Toronto that he could create triple-decker organometallic compounds. He says they are just like a Big Mac: an organic compound, then a metal, then an organic compound, then a metal, then an organic compound. He worried that someone else would see the same potential that he did and beat him to the punch. On the basis of his highly educated imagination of what could be done, he wrote a research proposal that landed him a tenure-track position here at the University and a grant for \$50,000 to build a lab for his work; then he synthesized the compounds that he had dreamed up; then he had to prove that he had done so by producing such sufficiently pure crystals that x-ray crystallographers confirm the shape of the molecules.

That final step of obtaining clear interference patterns from the crystals took three years and gave Eric the article he needed to obtain tenure and promotion.

Eric acted in faith from the beginning, endured the hardships of turning his vision into a reality, and only obtained proof of what he had accomplished after years of persistence. The failures of his early crystals to show clear interference patterns did not persuade him that he had failed to create a molecule never before seen in the history of this part of the universe; instead, he imagined that the flaw was not in the chemical synthesis but in the process of crystallization. He was right to cling to that belief in spite of the series of negative reports from his crystallographers.

Part II: So what if there is tacit knowledge?

As part of my Jesuit training in philosophy, I had to write and defend an essay that we called the "*de universa*," a Latin phrase that means "about all that is." In my essay, I used retortion, the argument from self-referential inconsistency, to show how the essential first principles of thought could be defended even though they are not formally self-evident and cannot themselves be proven from self-evident or formally proven principles. I don't know who my first two examiners were or what they asked me. The third was Quentin Lauer, a tall Jesuit with a booming voice and a quizzical expression on his face that I could not read. He leaned forward in his chair--I felt that he was looming over me--and growled. "Let's accept that everything you have said in this essay is true. So what?"

This was a life-changing experience for me. I don't know what I said to Quentin. I hadn't thought about that question at all. I didn't see that coming. But I've kept that question in mind every time I write. It's not enough just to write a series of certifiably or at least arguably true sentences. We have to see what kind of bearing they give us for the course of our lives.

So what difference does it make if tacit knowing is the foundation of all that we know? Does it matter that the things we can put into words are grasped by processes that cannot be put into words?

I was born and raised in a Catholic family. I was in an excellent parochial grammar school from sixth to eighth grade, and one of my favorite Franciscan sisters from that school persuaded me to attend Canisius High School, where I fell in love with the Jesuits and decided that if I were ever so crazy as to want to live without a wife and children, I would want to be a Jesuit priest. I suffered a crisis of faith in my first year at Boston College when my debate partner, guitar teacher, and best friend tried to persuade me to do drugs with him. He was brighter and more aggressive than I was, and had answers for every reason I offered for rejecting his invitation to sample his supply of pot, hashish, LSD, mushrooms, uppers, and downers. When I ran out of arguments from physiology, psychology, and law, I said in desperation, "I don't think God wants me to."

That led to a cascade of questions from Jim about whether I could know for sure that there was a God at all and, if so, whether I could be certain that God the Son became human, and even if so, whether I could know that the Son continued to live and reign in His Body, the Church.

One day I was walking down from the upper campus to McElroy Commons. I had to cross a small side-street on the way. As I stepped into the street, I said to myself, "I wish Mike Wallace and a film crew from *Sixty Minutes* would go interview God to find out whether He is, in fact, three Persons in a single divine Being. And then I want them to go grill Mary about her sex life before and after she gave birth to Jesus. That would settle these questions once and for all!"

As soon as the image of the interviews crossed my mind, I saw how impossible it was for any camera crew, even one as great as *Sixty Minutes*, to pin God down. If there is a God like that proposed by Christianity, He is not willing to do TV interviews.

In the next breath, I saw that I could not get outside of myself or this cosmos to see God for myself and to compare my personal findings with the claims made by the Church. I had a choice: I could accept that God has created the Body of Christ in order to reveal Himself to me or not. I could accept the testimony of the disciples or not. I could choose to dwell in the Church or plunge into the world of drugs, sex, and rock 'n' roll with my friend.

Before I reached the other side of the road, I made up my mind to throw my lot in with the Church. I decided that I would accept whatever the Church teaches as true. On that day, in that brief moment, I assented to the teaching authority of the Church. I accepted what I could not understand and what I could not prove (the point of the two parts of the *Grammar of Assent*). I made a commitment from which I have not wavered. I signed a blank check. I made up my mind that if the Church teaches something with authority, then I must and will accept it religiously.

For me, Catholicism is a body of knowledge that comes to us first from God's actions in the life of His covenant-partners, beginning with Abraham, and then from the Incarnation of God the Son. "In times past, God spoke in partial and various ways to our ancestors through the prophets; in these last days, he spoke to us through a son, whom he made heir of all things and through whom he created the universe" (Heb 1:1-2).

I love Taoism, but I think it can only grasp God from behind and at a great distance. There are real truths, real grace, and real wisdom in the spirituality of non-doing and harmony with the Tao above every other Tao, but it is not the same thing as meeting God face-to-face in the Abrahamic tradition and most especially in Jesus. In every other mystic or philosophical tradition, the burden is on the human mind to cope with intimations of infinity. In the Christian tradition, we believe that God has spoken to us in terms that we can understand. The Word-made-flesh does the kind of things with words that words can do. He reveals Himself in silent presence, in word and in deed, and discloses the reality of the Father and the Spirit to us.

Jesus shows us that "God is love, and that all who abide in love abide in God, and God in them." I cannot exhaustively define "God," "love," or "abide." I can't say definitively what the meaning of "is" is. But this, in my view, is the right way to speak of realities that go beyond all telling. "GOD so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son so that anyone who believes in Him will not perish but may have eternal life."

I asked to do my seminary studies in Toronto because of my love for the work of Bernard Lonergan. When I started my Ph.D. studies at Catholic University, I hoped to do a dissertation on Polanyi and Lonergan. I could not find a topic that satisfied my mentor, Avery Dulles. In a course with John T. Ford, I fell in love with John Henry Newman, a nineteenth century convert from Anglicanism to Catholicism, and eventually completed a dissertation on intersections between the epistemologies of Newman and Polanyi. Although I found their view of knowledge to be strikingly similar, they have diametrically opposed theologies. For Polanyi, the Catholic Church is the epitome of a totalitarian system, like the Soviet Union, and is antagonistic to the kind of distributed authority enjoyed by scientists. For Newman, the dogmatic authority of the Church is what is necessary to preserve the Deposit of Faith from becoming hopelessly garbled over the course of time:

To her is committed the care and the interpretation of the revelation. The word of the Church is the word of revelation. That the Church is the infallible oracle of truth is the fundamental dogma of the Catholic religion; and 'I believe what the Church proposes to be believed' is an act of real assent, including all particular assents, notional and real; and, while it is possible for unlearned as well as learned, it is imperative on learned as well as unlearned. (GA, 131)

Revelation consists in the manifestation of the Invisible Divine Power, or in the substitution of the voice of a Lawgiver for the voice of conscience. The supremacy of conscience is the essence of natural religion; **the supremacy of Apostle, or Pope, or Church, or Bishop, is the essence of revealed [religion].** (EDD, 63)

The most obvious answer, then, to the question, why we yield to the authority of the Church in the questions and developments of faith, is, that **some authority there must be if there is a revelation given, and other authority there is none but she. A revelation is not given, if there be no authority to decide what is given.** (EDD, 65)

The Church came first. When Jesus disappeared from the face of the earth, He left a Body, not a book. The apostles knew Jesus not by means of a set of formal propositions laid out in a catechism or through transcripts of His teaching, but tacitly, through personal knowledge of a person.

In Taoism, as in all forms of mysticism from the East, there are no popes, bishops, councils, or catechisms--there are no creeds to set limits on how one interprets mystical experience. In Catholicism, the judgments of the Body expressed in human language are normative. There is an articulate element in every aspect of the faith:

A MYSTERY is a proposition conveying incompatible notions, or is a statement of the inconceivable. Now we can assent to propositions (and a mystery is a proposition), provided we can apprehend them; therefore we can assent to a mystery, for, unless we in some sense apprehended it, we should not recognize it to be a mystery, that is, **a statement uniting incompatible notions.** The same act, then, which enables us to discern that the words of the proposition express a mystery, capacitates us for assenting to it. **Words which make nonsense do not make a mystery.** (GA, 55)

We are now able to determine what a dogma of faith is, and what it is to believe it. A dogma is a proposition; it stands for a notion or a thing; and to believe it is to give the assent of the mind to it, as it stands for the one or the other. (GA, 93)

We cannot have revelation to and through the Body without words, and yet the dogma that can be put into words is not the real dogma. The "notion or ... thing" to which the dogma directs our attention is beyond all telling: **"No mind, however large, however penetrating, can directly and fully by one act understand any one truth, however simple"** (GA, 130).

Donald Rumsfeld was mocked for evasive distinctions he made when he was questioned about the lack of evidence for weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, but the distinctions themselves were not meaningless. There are some things that we know we know--it is certain that the earth is not at the center of the physical universe. There are some things we know that we don't know: galaxies show a coherence that is not explicable by the observable mass in them, and the universe seems to be expanding at an ever-accelerating rate. And there are undoubtedly some things that we don't know we don't know--the great unknown unknowns that may yet inspire new scientific revolutions.

In Catholic theology, there are certitudes. It is dogma that one God created all that is created, that God is three Persons in one being, that the second of those Three took a human nature to Himself,

without distorting either His divine nature or His human nature, that He gladly and willingly offered Himself in sacrifice for all of God's children, that after laying down His life He took it up again in joy that will last forever, and that all who wish to bathe themselves in His mercy may dwell in love for all eternity.

We must preach that gospel message, even though we know more than we can tell and our words mean more than we can say.

- The God who can be put into words is not the real God.
- The eternal Word that can be put into words is not the real Word.
- The Jesus who can be put into words is not the real Jesus.

Theology is not in a worse condition here than any other discipline. Words are of limited use in many areas of our lives.

- The me that I can put into words is not the real me.
- The you that I can put into words is not the real you.
- The vision that I can put into words is not the real vision.

The things we can and must say about God should always be proposed with an awareness that there is always more to be seen and said. Eight hundred years ago, the Fourth Lateran Council taught that "Between Creator and creature no similitude can be noted, however great it may be, without noting a greater dissimilitude." Newman says:

We cannot see through any one of the myriad beings which make up the universe, or give the full catalogue of its belongings. **We are accustomed, indeed, and rightly, to speak of the Creator Himself as incomprehensible; and, indeed, He is so by an incommunicable attribute; but in a certain sense each of His creatures is incomprehensible to us also, in the sense that no one has a perfect understanding of them but He. We recognize and appropriate aspects of them, and logic is useful to us in registering these aspects and what they imply; but it does not give us to know even one individual being.** (GA, 226)

Words are not totally useless. We must not ask them to do what they cannot do. It takes words to say, "One picture is worth a thousand words" or, better yet, "One insight is worth ten thousand words!"

We do not know how much we do not know about God. "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known" (1 Cor 13:12). No matter how much more we need to learn, it will fit with what we know now. The face we behold in life after life will be the face of the love in which we "live and move and have our being" now (Acts 17:28). We know what we need to know to follow Jesus today--we know that we have to pick up our crosses and offer ourselves in sacrifice in union with His sacrifice on the cross. We know that He is with us, even in our darkest hours. We know that "all will be well, and all manner of thing will be well again" (Julian of Norwich).

If Polanyi is right that "all knowledge is tacit or rooted in tacit knowing," and if Newman is right that Catholicism preserves a body of knowledge about God, then **"All revelation is tacit or is rooted in tacit knowing."** "Faith comes by hearing" (Rom 10:17). What we hear is human language that we can comprehend. But the faith that is awakened by hearing the gospel message gives us "eyes to see and ears to hear" (Mt 13:15-17). **We know enough to know how little we know.** What we know is real knowledge and a guide to life; but we know that the realities disclosed to us by the Body of Christ are

only a taste of what remains to be seen and said in eternity. We know that what we know is only a taste of the banquet of love, but it is real and nourishing. The mysteries revealed by the dogmas of the Church are soul food.

Conclusion

I am pretty thoroughly convinced that strict Catholicism is sick Catholicism. When a student tells me, "I was raised in a strict Catholic household," I know how the rest of the story will go: resentment at being forced to go to Church; resistance to having Catholicism "shoved down my throat"; and the earliest possible exit from the Church after being confirmed as an adult representative of the faith. Like any good counterfeit, strict Catholicism bears a striking resemblance on the surface to the real thing. There may be dozens or even hundreds of points of similarity. But one is full of self and the other is full of grace. The dogmas of the Church, like any set of texts, may be misconstrued and become obstacles to enlightenment rather than pointers heavenward. "The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" (2 Cor 3:6). Dogma without insight is deadly, and the insight that can be put into words is not the real insight.

Peter Ely, a mid-mannered Jesuit theologian with whom I live at Arrupe house, regularly asked me whether I was finished composing tonight's talk. I replied to him and to several others who were concerned about my lackadaisical bearing, "No. I will be ready by 7 PM on the 15th. I've been thinking about this since I applied for the Leroux chair in 2015. I will be ready."

Six days ago, Peter said to me at dinner, "You really should be able to put your talk into one paragraph."

OK, Peter. Here it is:

The Word of God made flesh command us to preach the good news to all the world. We cannot preach without words, and yet when we compare what we *can* say of God's love to what we *cannot* say, our testimony tastes like dust and ashes in our mouths. But "*caritas Christi urget nos*" (2 Cor 5:14). We have heard, and so we have seen; and we must say what we have seen. "For when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, since I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!" (1 Cor 9:16).

Then Peter said, "A really good author would be able to express the basic idea in one sentence." Yes, I can put what I think into one sentence: "Love necessity."

Peter's final challenge was to reduce the talk to one word.

The last word is "Love."

Synergy

Just before the talk, I received an email from Fordham University Press announcing *Believing in Order to See: On the Rationality of Revelation and the Irrationality of Some Believers* by Jean-Luc Marion.

The morning after the talk, I received an email advertising a *Scientific American* special issue on "The Mad Science of Creativity."