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EPISTEMOLOGY AND PASTORAL PRACTICE: APPLICATIONS IN MELANESIAN CONTEXTS

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Abstract

The paper treats how we know what we know, epistemology, engaging physical and meta-physical domains in congruence with Melanesian worldviews. The paper thus embraces “what we experience” – phenomena – in both physical and meta-physical realms, leading to a phenomenological approach to “how we know what we know. This entails (1) appreciation of the proper domains for understanding the physical world using the methods of the physical sciences and social sciences, and (2) appreciation of the proper domains for understanding metaphysical worlds. Encounter involving physical and metaphysical as in “The Word became flesh” provides the schema for integrating epistemology with pastoral practice.¹

Keywords

holistic worldview, instrumental worldview, epistemology, physical and metaphysical domains, pastoral practice, Melanesia

I want to open this paper in an unusual way—by a brief autobiographical recount that I believe will illuminate my topic:

The year was 1974, the locality, Bacau in the then Portuguese Timor. The setting a quaint and cheap colonial era hotel, and the time was in the depth of the night. I recall no dreaming as I awakened somewhat suddenly with a sense of a presence; a presence the nature of which was unclear to me, but was uninvited and vaguely sordid. In my mind I used an Australian slang idiom, “Nick off!” In using this idiom, I remain unclear of any consciousness that “Nick” can be slang for the Devil (usually, “Old Nick”). What followed was alarming. I felt that I had a devil on my back (although I was lying on my back). I can’t re-

¹ The paper was prepared for presentation at the 2018 Annual Conference of the Melanesian Association of Theological Schools (MATS) at the Pacific Adventist University, Port Moresby. I wish to thank Brandon Zimmerman of Catholic Theological Institute, Bomana, and the referees and editor of this journal for their assistance in sharpening this article.

member whether there was an odour, but I have never lost the sense that I was under *assault*. My response was to try to cross myself. I found that I could not move my right arm. After further struggling, I decided to try to say the name *Jesus* (whether in my head only, or articulated, I am now unsure). It was an intense struggle to do so, and eventually I was able to say *Jesus*. Immediately, the sense of capture moved away. I regained mobility, and I crossed myself. I don't remember what I next did, although I eventually went back to sleep.

My title includes “epistemology,” a term deriving from *epistemē*, Greek for knowledge, and implying the how and what we know. The second term comes from Latin for pasture in the grazing of animals and the herdsman or shepherd who leads the herd or the flock, with allusion to putting into practice Jesus's saying, “I am the good shepherd” (John 10:11).² The particular autobiographical incident was chosen to evoke a Melanesian religious context, where physical and metaphysical worlds are typically fused, and where indigenous religions tend to represent metaphysical encounters as malevolent, and in response involve ritual protective strategies.³

Clarifying these remarks, I am using the phrase “physical worlds” to indicate whatever we engage through our usual senses, and using the term “metaphysical worlds” to indicate such things that are engaged through ways that do not seem to involve our usual senses. I am using the term “worlds” in an all-encompassing sense like we imply when using the more technical term “phenomena” (meaning “those which are noticed or engaged”). Thus, we can speak of physical phenomena, meaning things that we engage through our usual senses (like all our everyday activities, or like using an instrument to measure the humidity levels in the air). We can also speak of metaphysical phenomena, meaning things that seem to operate outside the usual senses (such as wordless prayer, abstract thoughts, and a sense of a presence that seems not to draw upon senses such as sight or hearing). The term “malevolent” derives from Latin for evil or harmful, in

² All Scripture quotations are from the RSV.

³ As soon as the word “tend” is used it necessarily evokes a different perspective. The spontaneous rise of cargo cults is an example where ritual performances evoke spiritual powers to bring material blessing. See, for example, the section on “Wishing and Explaining the Extraordinary” in G. W. Trompf, *Payback: the Logic of Retribution in Melanesian Religions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 269–71. The manners of obverse dealing—with the malevolent—are more difficult to generalise as they are various in patterning across Melanesian cultures. Trompf gives Wahgi examples of sorcerers challenging malevolent powers in respect of various sicknesses (pp. 136–39).

contrast to “benevolent” (such as a “guardian angel”). Thus, to speak of physical and metaphysical worlds as being “fused” indicates a collapsing of sharp differentiation between these different natures of encounter, so that they in a manner of speaking “overlap.” This perspective could be named as a “holistic” engagement with material and spiritual phenomena.

INTERPRETING THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL INCIDENT

At the time of this incident, I had little formal sense of epistemology, and limited comprehension of two pervasive errors of theology and of our manner of conducting our lives. One is the error that we fall into when we think that of ourselves we can do what is good and make ourselves acceptable to God (what is termed “Pelagianism”).⁴ The other pervasive error is what we fall into when we think that it is what we know that is the basis of our living a spiritual life and being acceptable to God (what is termed “Gnosticism”).⁵ When our thinking and acting are outside grace, our thoughts and actions are Pelagian; and where our thinking and action draws upon our understanding, and the “what we know” becomes a substitute for faith, then our thoughts and actions are gnostic. Of course, this manner of typifying is somewhat crude, but to avoid errors in theology and in our manner of conducting our lives, grace and faith must take priority over what we do (our acts or enactments) and priority over our understandings.⁶

I suppose that evil spirits and the devil were formal categories in my worldview, but I did not have any pervasive sense of a malevolent meta-

⁴ The term derives from Pelagius, a fourth-century monk who was presenting spiritual and everyday exercises as effectual means for salvation in a manner that diminished the role of grace in human salvation.

⁵ This term derives from the Greek word for “knowledge,” and involves the notion that we are saved by our knowing in a cognitive sense of knowledge.

⁶ This dichotomy is sharply made by the present Roman Pontiff in terms of neo-pelagianism and neo-gnosticism in his Letter to Bishops, *Placuit Deo* (February 2018), and again in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Gaudete et Exsultate* (signed 19 March 2018 and published in April 2018). I was overseas when the Letter was published and only read it after completing this paper; the Exhortation was published after the completion of this paper. That is, the emphasis that I make seems to be my own recognition that was independent of these reinforcements from the Magisterium. Some recent commentators on *Gaudete et Exsultate* argue a misuse of the term “gnostic” on the grounds that it originally referred to esoteric religious knowledge. Such criticism fails to recognise that terms evolve in their usage. If I were to pretend that I have a better standing before God because my religious knowledge far exceeds my students, this in contemporary usage would be gnosticism.

physical world. Then, as now, my worldview predominantly locates malice in the human person and in human society as is captured by the words, "... each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire" (Jas 1:14). Yet, although in a day-to-day sense this was and remains my worldview, the astonishing thing for me – and still astonishing so many years later – is just how sharply this incident has formed my life and ministry. And I say this in the face of the fact that this is the first time that I have committed this event to public writing, and the first time that I have spoken about it publicly.

I of course understand that events, our understanding of events, and the ways that we respond (our enactions) occur in complex contexts that include a present, a past, and a future. And my response in this event at some level encompassed a worldview conveyed in the apostolic memory of Jesus's words, "Now is the judgement of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out" (Jn 12:31). My point of emphasis, however, is that the continuing force of this event in terms of the how and what we know resides not firstly in cognition nor firstly in my enaction (not firstly in my knowledge or understanding, nor firstly in my acted responses). If this were otherwise, my enactions would entail a life and ministry that is Pelagian. If this were otherwise, my cognitions would entail a life and ministry that is gnostic. Rather, the continuing force of that event was and remains an encounter. In formal terms, the event was phenomenological, with phenomenology understood in peculiarly Christian terms that are most profoundly captured in John 1:14, "And the word became flesh," and as the writer of the first epistle of John writes, "That which we have seen and heard we proclaim to you" (1 John 1:3).

The will to make the Sign of the Cross was not first rooted in Gnosticism, nor first rooted in Pelagianism. The will to make an action of faith with the Sign of the Cross was first rooted incarnationally, because the bodily manual action was a claim on the life-saving and life-giving work of God in the Passion of Jesus Christ. The enduring force of that event was and is an encounter. In formal terms, it was phenomenological. And that encounter was complex. The encounter was multi-layered involving past, present, and future contexts, and fused elements that were physical and

metaphysical. And that encounter sharpened in an enduring way my overarching paradigm for the how and what we know.⁷

HOLISTIC PERSPECTIVE INVOLVING PHYSICAL AND METAPHYSICAL WORLDVIEWS

Why have I so laboured this? And why and how does this labouring relate to epistemology and pastoral practice in Melanesian contexts? I need again to clarify some terms before using them. When I say “restrictive,” I mean that the line of enquiry is approached with sharply defined borders that require a particular manner of thinking. When I say “rationalist,” I mean a line of reasoning that begins with something sharply defined (begins with a “premise”) that becomes the basis for tight reasoning of consequences (with “syllogistic” reasoning). When I say “reductive,” I mean a line of reasoning that, so to speak, dissects what is being considered, and examines the parts, and then reassembles the parts. Such a manner of approach differs from looking at what is examined as a whole, looking holistically, with a holistic perspective that encompasses both physical and metaphysical understandings.

By so clarifying these terms, it becomes clearer that my laboured recount of that encounter was presented as basis for a shift in our perception of epistemology away from the restrictive rationalist and reductive cognitive approach that since the late classical period of Greece has largely dominated philosophical epistemology and theological epistemology across the Christian era. An example of this is the Ship of Theseus exercise that is typical of the mindset in what is now termed Analytical Philosophy.⁸ Before proceeding, in explanation, Analytical Philosophy treats words as having defined meanings (“denotative” only meanings, and not also “connotative” meanings)⁹ that capture the supposed factuality of that which is exam-

⁷ By “paradigm” I mean the overarching perspective by which I understood my knowing and my acting as a person and as a Christian.

⁸ For a technical discussion, see David Rose et al, eds., *The Ship of Theseus Puzzle: Oxford Studies in Experimental Philosophy 3* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019). For a simpler summary of the Ship of Theseus exercise, see. Online: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ship_of_Theseus.

⁹ The terms “denote” and “connote” may be clarified by thinking of the way “cool” has been introduced from the USA into the language of popular media and popular usage to mean “I like” or “with-it/fashionable.” This is a “connotative” meaning, and is a metaphor of a meta-

ined, and where reasoning proceeds tightly from premises through consequences (reasoning regarded as being syllogistically valid) to supposedly sure defined conclusions. Such an approach reads language only in its denotative sense and attempts to shed multiplicity of perceptions and ambiguity to generate “valid” conclusions.

A mindset that is Christian does not restrictively operate in this manner, because Christian thinking understands the human person in terms that are both somatic and spiritual. The term “flesh,” when properly understood in Christian and Jewish perspectives, encompasses the whole person: body (*somata*), mind (*nous*), and spirit (*pneuma*).¹⁰ Similarly, when properly understood in Christian terms, the created order encompasses physical and metaphysical.

I again need to explain some terms that I am about to use. Typically, when we use the term “scientific” we mean understanding that is built on a system of understanding that may be verified in fieldwork or in experiments or in quantitative data analysis. So, for example, the development of hydrocarbon resources in Papua New Guinea depends upon complex scientific understandings and competencies. These include—to take just two examples—geological understanding of the earth’s surface and experience in geological exploration, and engineering understanding and experience in engineering design and implementation. With understandings such as these, it is possible to have an “instrumental worldview” that allows the identification of hydrocarbon resources, and the engineering constructions necessary to transform hydrocarbon resources into marketable products. That is, just as one uses an axe to cut wood and, say, construct a house, one needs complex scientific understandings for complex uses of hydrocarbon resources. Whether the instrument is an axe used for forming a wooden object, or complex scientific understandings and competencies that enable us to transform hydrocarbon resources into marketable products, we are dealing with instruments (some simple, some complex, and some complex sets of instrumentality).

It follows that an instrumental worldview is a worldview that enables people to transform resources in ways that make the resource or resources

phor on the “denotative” meaning of “cool,” which is, the temperature as measured on an objective scale below what would be judged as average or warm.

¹⁰ The terms in brackets give the Greek equivalents of body, mind, and spirit for a holistic understanding of the human person.

more useful to them and more valued (enables people to “add value”). As a man of advanced scientific education, I of course understand the proper and necessary domain of an instrumental worldview that is natural in a physicalist sense. The profound mistake is to separate that proper and necessary domain of viewing ourselves and the world in ways that fail to encompass metaphysical domains. Such a separation or cleft in worldview is strange from Melanesian perspectives, where physical *and* metaphysical worldviews form a whole.¹¹

SUSTAINING PROPER DOMAINS FOR POSITIVIST INSTRUMENTAL WORLDVIEWS

I have in my heading just introduced another term, “positivist,” by which I mean an approach that starts out with something or some things supposedly known with certainty, and follows through with processes that are understood with certainty, and results in an outcome (a conclusion or a product) that is known in its specification. In the physical sciences hydrocarbon industry example, one would need all such specifications to capture natural gas, to transport it, and to process it for shipping. Such knowledge and expertise are necessary to that particular activity (what I call a “domain,” i.e., an area of activity or doing). I do not wish to be heard as disparaging positivist and reductive methods of how and what we know in their proper domains.¹² For example, lacking the rudiments of natural science understandings of the earth surface and of the movement of tectonic plates allows misattributions of causality that give rise to awry epistemologies and mis-

¹¹ Over the years I have read somewhat across Melanesian anthropological literatures and write from about fifty years off-and-on on-ground experience, but it is convenient again to quote Trompf, *Payback*. He speaks of the reciprocity in Melanesian life and in Melanesian cultic understandings, and remarks, “A totality is at stake; and to pass decisions over any complex of reciprocity as ‘this part is purely economic’ and ‘that part is religious’, and other components as ‘political’ or ‘secular’, only bring scissors to the seamless fabric of traditional society” (p. 105); and, again, “The traditional inseparability of religion and the pursuit of prosperity still pertain...” (p. 241).

¹² Just to reinforce the way that I here use “domain,” one can think of the clearing of forest and the digging of deep drainage trenches as a men’s domain, and the building of mounds for crop drainage and the tending and harvesting of crops and allocating what is grown for feeding the household and/or feeding pigs as women’s domain. Such understandings of domains necessarily involve shifts with cultural and technological changes, and thus we should understand “domains” both in technological and in cultural terms and in material and spiritual terms.

conceived pastoral practices. This is so in any cultural context, but especially so in Melanesian cultural contexts, where there often are weak or even negligible appreciations of the autonomy and lawfulness of natural phenomena.¹³ Another, and human sciences example, is the significance of roads and communications that act as market supply chains to add value to local agricultural products that in turn instrumentally act to give access to non-local products such as health and educational services.

Within the biblical literatures – and particularly alluding to the Genesis creation narrative – there are the rudiments of lawful and normative understandings¹⁴ with the revelatory text depicting the created order as lawful and purposeful and with humanity set in a relation of dominion and stewardship within the created order. The rudiments of such inductive¹⁵ approaches within revelatory texts¹⁶ are also found in the New Testament, as, for example, where Our Lord makes recourse to what is noticed by the senses and his call to acute observation as seen in the text, “When you see the south wind blowing, you say, ‘There will be a scorching heat’, and it happens” (Luke 12:55). In the human realm, one can notice reference to natural law observations that take normative significance for human con-

¹³ A recent example was the local mis-recognition of causation in Southern Highlands experience of natural law shifts in tectonic plates experienced as earthquake destructions, and failure to recognise that human behaviours did not have a direct causality in that tragic experience.

¹⁴ By “normative,” I mean that which we take or set-up as the standard by which we make our judgements.” So, for example, the Scriptures convey a sense that humanity is set over the rest of the created natural order, but not simply in a sense of doing as they please with and within the natural order, but with a sense of having responsibilities of stewardship for the natural order. Such a perspective, then, provides a standard or a norm by which we may judge human activities as being in accord with the created order or discordant with the created order.

¹⁵ I say “inductive” here, because from close readings of the sacred texts we can come to understand the sweep of the normative structure of Scripture and the role of humans as stewards in creation. That is, we can come to this normative understanding from the process of attentiveness to the textual witness, rather than a premise as a starting point in approaching the biblical texts. The latter method would be “deductive,” while the method that I favour is “inductive,” that is, we learn from the sacred text, rather than impose our premises upon the sacred text.

¹⁶ “Revelatory text” refers to the ascribing of the biblical text as not simply a creation of human culture, but as a revealing by the Creator, as revelation, and thus revelatory. That is not to deny that the revelatory texts are not also human texts; they could not be otherwise, as they are in human language.

duct, as seen, for example, in texts referring to the matrimonial bond: “But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female’ ” (Mark 10:6; Gen 1:27).

SUSTAINING DOMAINS OF PHYSICAL AND METAPHYSICAL WORLDVIEWS THAT RECOGNISE INHERENT NORMATIVE CHARACTER

My own normative perspective in what I above referred to as the “human realm” emphasises an inherent or “natural law” approach¹⁷ in contradistinction to a “deontic law” approach.¹⁸ In the present context I need to forgo amplification of this phenomenological approach in recognising normative structures.¹⁹ Let me simply say that an observational method as applied to the human realm allows one to discern what is functional for the good order of human society and allows one to discern much that is dysfunctional in the conduct of persons and of human societies. I do not simply speak of dysfunctionality in normative perceptions and conduct in my own Australian society, nor do I simply speak of dysfunctionality in normative perceptions and conduct in Melanesian societies. But I do emphasise the essentiality of our having a widely observant perspective²⁰ in respect of both physical and human realms in order that our how and what we know may be ac-

¹⁷ In saying “inherent” approach, I mean that which is in the nature of the phenomena described (whether physical and/or metaphysical), rather than an approach involving a prior way that is attributed to the phenomena that are being engaged or observed. So, for example, I view monogamy as inherent to a natural law understanding of human society, and I would not so understand polygamy or polyandry (multiple wives or multiple husbands). That is, I find this monogamy example to be inherent to human nature, rather than imposed upon human nature.

¹⁸ “Deontic” derives from the Greek to refer to obligation. For example, “Thou shalt have no other gods but me” (Exod 20:3) is an obligation (is presented deontically). But that there is one God only and that humans should acknowledge only the One God may be derived inductively from the fact that the created order is an order (that is, it is lawful) and the created order displays a unity that leads one to view it as the work of a single Creator. The natural law approach that I am favouring gives emphasis to the inherent nature of the created order, rather than a divine or human imposition upon the created order and upon human conduct.

¹⁹ I have already explained what I mean by a phenomenological approach, and in the present context it means an approach that derives from observation, for example, observing the dysfunctional character of polygamy or polyandry.

²⁰ Here “widely observant” does not mean observing deontic norms (thou shalt; thou shalt not), and, instead, means what has been noticed by careful observations that are both close and varied.

curate. In the sentence just stated, “physical realm” might be restrictively construed as according to positivist scientific method, and similarly “human realms” might be construed in analogous positivist social science terms. I need to reinforce that my language needs to be understood in a perspective captured in my earlier usage where I made *holistic* reference to worldviews embracing both the physical and metaphysical. As I suggested above, such encompassing physical and metaphysical perspectives take added significance in contexts where this holistic perspective is especially culturally congruent, as in Melanesian cultures.

The difference that I am arguing in such perspectives is the adducing²¹ a natural law lawfulness that encompasses the physical, the social, and the metaphysical; this leads to worldviews that are not simply descriptive,²² but are also normative. Such holistic worldviews are strategically and structurally²³ located in Sacred Scripture. Across five days of the Genesis creation narrative, the text includes the ascription “good,” and for the sixth day makes the ascription “very good.” Please do not hear me as invoking a fundamentalist reading of the sacred text. But do read me as claiming for the created order – physical and metaphysical – an orderliness, a lawfulness that entails an inherent normative character. Turning to the New Testament narrative and schema, this is a divine action of restoration (“God was in Christ ...,” 2 Cor 5:19), a divine action of restoration of persons and of human society or human societies that encompasses a restoration of the whole of the natural order (“Behold, I make all things new,” Rev 21:5). This restoration entails ecclesial action²⁴ in the ongoing restorative process

²¹ The term “adducing” is a cognate of “inducting” or “inductive,” as already discussed.

²² “Descriptive” simply involves noting the way things are, while “normative” also embraces the way things should be” as indicated by induced norms.

²³ By “strategically,” I mean that the location in Scripture is patterned in a way that builds a structure of understanding, leading to a shaping or structuring of behaviour or understanding. Further, such behaviours may be named as strategic because such behaviours act to bring about something desired or some desired understanding of and approach to life. For example, the Cross in the New Testament is the essential structure on which the whole understanding of the redemptive work of God in Christ is proclaimed. That is, the New Testament is structured around the fact of the Cross and the understanding of the Passion of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Without this structure, the New Testament would be incoherent.

²⁴ By “ecclesial action,” I mean the life, ministry, and witness of the Christian faithful, the church, *ecclesia* in Greek.

of bringing about normative integrity²⁵ that is understood in an encompassing sense of natural order. Such is the life and missionary activity of the Church of God to engage the actions of making “good.”

ATTENTIVE EPISTEMOLOGY AND PASTORAL PRACTICE INVOLVING INSIGHTFULNESS

I need now to return this exposition to our understanding of epistemology – the how we know and what we know – and its relevance to pastoral practice. My opening autobiographical event evidently engaged large and complex contexts to induce the incarnational action of making the Sign of the Cross. This implies that I accept the complex enculturation processes that are involved in imparting “the mind of the Scriptures.”²⁶ My aim in this presentation is to induce recognitions and enactments that our how and what we know have to be widely-based and to involve what I have termed encounter.

Perhaps the starting point of a Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) approach to pastoral formation provides one example of such a widely-based encounter, in that the foundation of CPE education is to cultivate observation, and especially listening²⁷ – observation and listening that is not a projection of the worldview of the person supposedly acting pastorally. Of course, the person acting pastorally will bring both implicit and explicit worldviews. But the pastoral attention has first to engage not the worldview of the person acting pastorally, but where the person who is being engaged is “at”—with that “at” understood contextually in a present sense, in a past sense, in a future sense, in culturally-situated senses, and in physical and metaphysical senses. It is attention of this kind that can lead to a how we know and a what we know that is epistemologically sound²⁸ in that it ad-

²⁵ Where there is “integrity,” a manner of action fits together or forms a unity (an integer), as opposed to being a set of disparate manners of action. Thus, does the whole of life becomes Christian.

²⁶ By “enculturation processes” I mean that our how and what we understand and what we do engages the culture in which we are formed, or cultural processes, and thus entails enculturation.

²⁷ There are many available manuals on CPE. A recent one is G. J. Hilsman, *How to Get the Most Out of Clinical Pastoral Education: A CPE Primer* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2018).

²⁸ I use the word “sound” here in the sense that it is not simply cogent syllogistically (philosophers might say “valid”), but is also consistent with phenomenological observation, consistent with our real-world and culturally contextual experience.

dresses not firstly ourselves, but the person or persons with whom we are being attentive.

THE TEST OF SOUND EPISTEMOLOGY AND SOUND PASTORAL PRACTICE

The “You should do as I have done unto you” was implicitly present in the personal anecdote with which I opened this paper. I gave a holistic account of oppression that was both physical and metaphysical, and a holistic response in the signing of the Cross and calling the holy name of Jesus that was both physical and metaphysical. I recounted an encounter that taught me to align my own responses and actions with the actions of God. Across the years the lessons of that crucial event have led me closely to observe both physical and metaphysical realms. This has involved respecting proper physical domains – such as may be learned from positivist scientific understandings of phenomena – to observe proper spiritual domains, such as are learned in the grace of the Holy Spirit. But also this has involved learnings of the overlay of physical and metaphysical phenomena in human domains, where the goodness and flourishing of human life is seen in an overlaying of material and spiritual welfare. Such human flourishing calls for acute and comprehensive attention, an accurate phenomenological attention to human life as encountered both personally and socially. Such attention leads to accurate understanding of what and how we know – to an astute epistemology.

In Melanesian contexts learning from a phenomenological approach increases the accuracy of what we know and how we know, and a holistic phenomenological approach that embraces both physical and metaphysical realms is more attuned to Melanesian cultural life. Such an astute holistic epistemology forms the ground for our working with Melanesians in ways that divert a projection of ourselves upon persons and societies in our pastoral actions. This enables us better to discern “where they are at,” and better to place those discernments in holistic contexts. Such discernments are not only descriptive; they also engage normative understandings, in that they also engage better understanding of possible pathways to assist persons and communities to move toward what is good or what is better. In brief, this perspective presents a pastoral practice that is epistemologically sound and that involves engagements that lead persons toward what is the leading principle in Christian pastoral practice.

It is this encompassing perspective of epistemology that should inform our pastoral action, our pastoral practice. This may sound subtle and complicated. But it is less so where our approach involves patient encounters that move toward insightfulness, which in turn issues in prudent and faithful pastoral action.

I have a rather simple test of whether the how and the what of that insightfulness and implementation is good. That simple test is to notice whether the pastoral engagement leads toward phenomenological encounters that manifest the “fruits of the [Holy] Spirit” (Gal 5:22–23): love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. We may discern the soundness of our epistemologies by noticing whether the consequent enactments conform to the dominical charge to the church, “I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done unto you” (John 13:15) and “Go, and do likewise” (Luke 10:37).

It follows that where we are unable to observe the “fruits of the spirit” in the one engaged in pastoral enactment, and where we are unable to observe the signs of human flourishing both in the physical and metaphysical realms,²⁹ we may ask, “Has this person really attended to the how we know and the what we know in a learning manner?” And further, “Is this person really putting into action such how we know and what we know? Is our encounter one of authentic epistemology in action and implementation?” Where we are looking at the action and implementation as encountered we may ask: does this have the traits of the Gospel? Does this show forth the fruits of the Gospel? Do we see the authentic human freedom that the Gospel brings? The heartland of the Gospel is, “For freedom, Christ has set us free!” (Gal 5:1). Where we instead see a not-listening, a not-seeing, an imposition of deontic law, a lack of compassion, a lack of mercy, there we are seeing a disjunction in epistemology and pastoral practice.³⁰

²⁹ Alternatively, in material and spiritual realms.

³⁰ In re-reading Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1975), I notice a sentence that captures the conclusion to which this paper leads: “Religious experience spontaneously manifests itself in changed attitudes, in the harvest of the Spirit that is love, joy, peace, kindness, goodness, fidelity, gentleness, and self-control...” (p. 108). Lonergan seems here to be speaking of experience in the sense that I have treated encounter; and in speaking of religious experience, he seems to be treating it as an opening-up that may lead to “spontaneous manifestation in changed attitudes.”

CONCLUSION

My opening personal anecdote closed with my sense of release from capture and the regaining of mobility. In a scriptural text sense, this was an encounter involving the truth, “For freedom, Christ has set us free” (Gal 5:1). Across many years, I have held that sense of freedom in Christ. This leads to the thrust of this article. Pastoral practice that assists release and moving forward for persons and for communities is a manner of working that proposes an exercise of freedom and mobility that is both physical and metaphysical, and is understood holistically. This involves reckonings of the topography and the pathways for human actions that engage accurate and phenomenological epistemology and engage the action of grace in pastoral practice and in the responses and moving forward by those whom we seek to assist in our pastoral practice.