Summary of Material

Review and Elaboration of Image as Symbol, Sign, and Mystery.

Images always situated within a flow of acts and contents (some pattern of experiencing).

The Known Unknown: we ‘know’ (but not in Lonergan’s strict, technical sense of knowing) of something ‘unknown’ through our unanswered questions.

“Intellectual and Psychic Operators.”

Concreteness of being human.

Succession of levels of higher integration.
Principle of correspondence between coincidental manifolds and systematizing forms.

Relationship between Lonergan’s account of human development and religious symbolism:

Need for a harmonious correspondence between the different levels for sustained human development.

The Intellectual and Psychic Operators: the levels of higher integrations are dynamic; there is a correspondence between their respective operators (= what is doing the transforming of the lower level).

The operator on the intellectual level is the unrestricted desire to know, oriented towards the unknown.

It can operate fully only if there is something at the psychic level that makes it possible for the intellectual level to pursue all further questions — something that enables the flow of images to keep up with the unrestricted orientation of the intellect.

“Intellectual and Psychic Operators.”

Concreteness of being human.

Succession of levels of higher integration.

Principle of correspondence between coincidental manifolds and systematizing forms.
Dynamism of higher integrations.

Lonergan proposes that what fills the role of this psychic operator is something in human feelings.

Discussion of the nature of the latter psychic operator:

The intimation of ‘unplumbed depths’ accrued to feelings, emotions, etc. ([CWL 3, p. 555]).

Rudolf Otto’s *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*.

How images come to embody religious sentiments: human feelings are integrated with “affect-laden images” which are oriented towards the “second sphere” of the ultimate unknown, strange, mysterious and mythical.

Not so obvious that this element of feeling *must* be that which fulfills the role of the psychic operator that collaborates with the intellectual operator of the unrestricted desire to know.

Student question about the “affect-laden images” and their relation to art vs. religion.

— Discussion of human thought evolving over time. i.e., the shifting boundaries between religion/art, philosophy/myth, and the emergence of the intellectual tools for metaphysics. The ‘affective’ images serve to keeping our psyche ready for the work of intellectual development.
Student question about the relation of Lonergan to Bultmann with regard to demythologization.

— Lonergan is like Bultmann in acknowledging that there are associations with religious symbols that are misleading and distorting, and so are in need of some kind of interpretation done with the tools made available by the evolution of human thought (i.e., on the basis of self-appropriation).

Student question about the “ulterior unknown” and its relation to the “known unknown”.

— The former stresses the affective dimension, whereas the latter pertains to the intellectual one.

“Symbol.”

Lonergan has thus staked out the parameters for an interpretation of the religious symbol.

The image as symbol bears a link to the “known unknown”.

“Sign.”

Image as sign:

The image as sign is linked to some interpretation of the image’s import.

Signs not limited to religious images.
Example of a sign and its interpretation (insights, conversations, judgments, memories, etc.) that constitute the sign as meaningful.

Why Lonergan thinks symbols and their mystery are a general, permanent feature of human culture.

Unlike Comte and Bultmann, who saw demythologization as the elimination of images-as-symbols and images-as-mysteries, Lonergan holds that some such images are essential to human existence.

Lonergan sought rather to eliminate only the distorted symbolic images and the distorted myths that interpret the symbols only insofar as they are the products of counterpositions.

The Cosmic Tree — an image-as-symbol to which other images are added as interpretation.

Eliade’s words as additional interpretation and constitution of it as sign.

The symbol of the Cosmic Tree is also situated within and interpreted by rituals (bodily movements).

Symbolic artifacts (e.g., totem poles) of Cosmic Trees are imperfect replicas of ‘the’ archetypal Cosmic Tree — how they are interpreted.

Cosmic Tree understood as bringing order to chaos.
“Mystery” §1.6

Image as Mystery:

Mystery is a dynamic image that is partly symbol and partly sign, where the interpretation acts to preserve, clarify, elaborate the ulterior strangeness of the “known unknown”, not to eliminate it.

Connection of religious symbols to finality: where is finality headed?
Symbols do not prove that there is an end toward which finality tends.
Those are further questions beyond the images as mysteries or symbols.

Symbols simply keep alive the orientation of finality in human consciousness; they generate further questions which are to be answered not by symbolic modes, but by theology and philosophy.

Student question about the tension between the permanence of mystery and the heuristic anticipation of the future date when all explanations would be known. What is left of mystery once answers to all explanatory questions have been reached?
— Lonergan says there will still be further questions even if all explanatory answers about proportionate being have been reached.
— He later argues there is more to being than proportionate being (i.e. transcendent being).
Religious symbols are interpreted in various ways: e.g., as naturalistic, psychoanalytic, Darwinian, etc.

Lonergan will claim that many of the reductionistic interpretations of religious symbols are rooted in counterpositions.

Some part of the background Lonergan brought to his interest in religious symbolism comes from his participation in Catholic sacraments.

“Mystery and Sacrament”: sacramentum is the Latin term used to translate the Greek mysterion.

The Catholic sacraments as images and signs (interpreted rituals), full of mystery.

How Lonergan’s view relates to the Catholic tradition.

“Mythic Consciousness” §1.3

The image, symbol, sign as mystery is to be distinguished from the mythic.

Because an image with the “known unknown” is open to so many interpretations, it is also open to interpretations distorted by the counterpositions of polymorphic consciousness.

What happens when stories that interpret the “known-unknownness” of religious symbols are taken as literally, already-out-there-now, real.
Mythic consciousness misconstrues images and symbols in all their mystery, it fails to recognize fantastic element in myth as fantastic, as a result of the polymorphic modes of consciousness.

Mythic consciousness is distorted consciousness of the “known unknown”, which does not even know that it is distorted.

Mythic consciousness lacks critical self-awareness of the ways in which other patterns of experience can interfere with serious intellectual inquiry.

“Mythic Consciousness and Dialectic,“

The self-understanding of metaphysics has to take into account how it arose, and this includes the role that religious symbolism and its distortions in mythic consciousness played in the emergence of explicit metaphysics.

Mythic Consciousness and Dialectics: metaphysics is concerned with its own genesis and thus cannot “prescind entirely from the historical phenomena of mysteries and myths.” (CWL 3. p 560).
Student question about bias in the mythic consciousness.

— There is bias in mythic consciousness; the bias is not in the images laden with the sense of the “known unknown”; the bias is in the interpretations.

“Myth Revisited”

Lonergan’s regard for the term, ‘myth’ revisited.

At the time of *Insight* Lonergan used the term ‘myth’ only for the anti-intellectual distortions.

Later he acknowledged that what most scholars now refer to as ‘myth’ is not just the distortions, but also to what he referred to as mysteries.

*End of Part One.*
Review and Elaboration of Image as Symbol, Sign, and Mystery.

Images always situated within a flow of acts and contents
(some pattern of experiencing).

Welcome back to our class on “Insight and Beyond.” And today I’m going to finish up where we left off in our last Class, talking about Section One, “Metaphysics, Mystery and Myth” (CWL 3, pp. 553-572) in chapter Seventeen entitled “Metaphysics as Dialectic” in Insight (CWL 3, pp. 553-617). And then we will go on — And also chapter four on “Religion” in Method in Theology,¹ and Frederick Crowe’s article, “Lonergan’s Universalist View of

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Religion”; and then we’ll go on to talk about what Lonergan has to say about interpretation, the truth of interpretation.

So first just to review, but also a bit of elaboration. We ended up briefly looking at what Lonergan means by image, symbol, sign, and we barely touched on what he means by mystery. So image is the sensible content as seen, or by extension as heard or as touched. So the image is a sensible content, on the sensitive level.

And as such, image as image, it functions within what he calls “the psychic syndrome” in chapter seventeen of Insight (CWL 3, “Metaphysics as Dialectic” in Insight (CWL 3, pp. 553-617, at p.557). I’m pretty sure that that means “pattern of experience.” “It is the image inasmuch as it functions within the psychic syndrome of associations, affects, exclamations, and articulated speech and actions.” (CWL 3, p. 557). What he’s getting at there primarily — since he’s going to be focusing primarily on images that are used in religions — is that a great deal of religious imagery is associated with ritual, with movements, and with speaking and

The “Known Unknown”: we ‘know’ (but not in Lonergan’s strict, technical sense of knowing) of something ‘unknown’ through our unanswered questions.

### The Known Unknown

“But in fact our questions outnumber our answers, so that we know of an unknown through our unanswered questions.” (CWL 3, p. 555).

But before making a transition to talking about symbol, I wanted to dwell a little bit more on this phrase: “the known-unknown” (CWL 3, pp. 555-558, 569-572). Lonergan himself actually used to tell the story about somebody coming to him and saying: “Well, we’ve been talking in our discussions about the known-known, the known-unknown and the unknown-known!” Lonergan never talks about the unknown-known!! But he does say —

He talked about the known-unknown; it is to talk in a kind of paradoxical fashion. Clearly the word ‘known’ in this case is not functioning in his strict technical sense of knowing by correctly understanding one’s experiencing. So the word ‘known’ has got a fuzzier quality to it, which is part of the point here. And the known-unknown — In what fashion is it that we know the unknown when we don’t know it in the strict and full sense? It’s through our questions! Our questions outnumber our answers! So that we
know of an unknown through our unanswered questions, most of which we manage to repress most of the time.

The fact that we are all infants in the realm of being is something that is scary; and even the most humble of us don’t spend an awful lot of time saying: “What I know is like a grain of sand in the universe that is fifteen billion light years across!” That’s a very depressing thing to think of! But we have a knowing about all that is unknown in virtue of the fact that we are aware of unanswered questions. And as we saw back when we were talking about chapter twelve on “The Notion of Being” (CWL 3, pp. 372-398), even the person who would claim “I have no desire to know everything!” Lonergan’s response is “How do you know that you don’t?” So there is a kind of knowing that is associated with a persistent presence, the nagging presence, of our unanswered questions.

Intellectual and Psychic Operators

The concreteness of being human “involves

(1) a succession of levels of higher integrations, and

(2) A principle of correspondence between otherwise coincidental manifolds on each lower level and systematizing forms on the next higher level.” (CWL 3, p. 555).

Now the known-unknown is going to be key to how Lonergan, in Insight, thinks about religious expression, and at least implicitly is going to think about the problem of interpretation of religious expressions.
“Intellectual and Psychic Operators.”

Concreteness of being human.

Succession of levels of higher integration.

Principle of correspondence between coincidental manifolds and systematizing forms.

Dynamism of higher integrations.

But in order to get the fuller context of what he means by how religious expression or symbol or mystery were meant, he takes a little bit of a detour. And he reminds us of something that he went into great depth about in chapter fifteen on human development (CWL 3, “Elements of Metaphysics” pp. 456-511): that developments by what he calls “the principle of correspondence” (CWL 3, p. 555) require certain kinds of integration. So for development to occur when there’s a significant change in the underlying material of cells or organisms, the organic structures have to alter to incorporate them, or they will perish. That’s the simplest version of the principle of correspondence. Here Lonergan is going to invoke it in a somewhat different fashion or a somewhat related fashion. So as he says: The concreteness of being human “involves (1) a succession of levels of higher integrations.” (CWL 3, p. 555). The organic, what he calls psychic, and the intellectual are the three he identifies in chapter fifteen (CWL 3, “Elements of Metaphysics” pp. 456-511). It also involves

(2) A principle of correspondence between otherwise coincidental manifolds on each lower level and systematizing forms on the next higher level.” (CWL 3, p. 555).

So we talked about that.

\[^3\] Pat uses the term ‘correlation’ here, but this may be a lapsus linguae for Lonergan’s term ‘correspondence’.
Relationship between Lonergan’s account of human development and religious symbolism:

Need for a harmonious correspondence between the different levels for sustained human development.

The Intellectual and Psychic Operators: the levels of higher integrations are dynamic; there is a correspondence between their respective operators (= what is doing the transforming of the lower level).

The operator on the intellectual level is the unrestricted desire to know, oriented towards the unknown.

It can operate fully only if there is something at the psychic level that makes it possible for the intellectual level to pursue all further questions — something that enables the flow of images to keep up with the unrestricted orientation of the intellect.

Explanatory Genera and Human Development

Slide of three colors depicting Birth, Sensorimotor Development, and Intellectual Development.

But then he goes on to say — So we’ve seen this that there is a correspondence between transformations on the organic and even more transformations on the chemical giving rise to transformations on the organic, and transformations on the organic calling for integrations on the psychic level and then on the intellectual level.
Intellectual and Psychic Operators

The concreteness of being human “involves

(1) a succession of levels of higher integrations, and

(2) A principle of correspondence between otherwise coincidental manifolds on each lower level and systematizing forms on the next higher level.

“Moreover, these higher integrations on the organic, psychic, and intellectual levels are not static but dynamic systems; .....

But he adds the following remark: after reminding us of what he talked about in chapter fifteen (CWL 3, “Elements of Metaphysics” pp. 456-511) about the three integrated levels of human development, he goes on to remark that these higher integrations of the organic, psychic and intellectual levels are not static, but dynamic.

“Intellectual and Psychic Operators.”

Concreteness of being human.

Succession of levels of higher integration.

Principle of correspondence between coincidental manifolds and systematizing forms.
Dynamism of higher integrations.

What he means by higher integration he uses the phrase ‘operator’ (CWL 3, p. 555). So a higher integration is a way that a cell organizes chemicals into patterns of metabolism, and reproduction, and reorganization, rebuilding and repair. That’s a higher integration of the lower manifold of the organic. And likewise when, in Lonergan’s account at least, at the psychic level, the patterns that you establish, the higher integrations that you establish — for your sensation, your ability to concentrate, your ability to balance, and so on — that those bring about reorganizations also on the level of the organic. So we’ve got this correspondence; and that the changes in one — that the higher integration isn’t just integrating, it’s also changing its underlying basis so as to bring about a new way of organizing. So your psyche is organizing the electrical impulses that are coming — that are getting repeated — so as to make it possible for you to have different kinds of sensation.

Intellectual and Psychic Operators

“On the intellectual level the operator is concretely the detached and disinterested desire to know …. orientated into the known unknown.

“The principle of dynamic correspondence calls for a harmonious orientation on the psychic level.

… (CWL 3, p. 555).

And here’s what’s new at this point. So there has to be a correspondence between their respective operators. There has to be a correspondence between those things that are doing the transforming of the lower, so as to bring about a new way of operating on the higher level. So there has to be a correspondence between the operators.
“On the intellectual level the operator is concretely the detached and disinterested desire to know …. orientated into the known unknown. The principle of dynamic correspondence calls for a harmonious orientation on the psychic level. … (CWL 3, p. 555).

So if we go back to this diagram:

Explanatory Genera and Human Development
Slide of three colors depicting Birth, Sensorimotor Development, and Intellectual Development.

If we go back to this diagram: what he’s saying is that the unrestricted desire to know that we’ve been so familiar with, familiarized with, over the past several weeks, it can operate, it can really be what its dynamism intends to be only if there is a corresponding dynamism on the level that promotes neural organic activity to psychic representation that is in aid of the unrestricted desire to know. So there has to be, for human development to happen, there has to be something at this psychic level that makes it possible for the unrestricted desire to know to pursue all further questions. So that’s his fundamental thesis in chapter seventeen, (CWL 3, “Metaphysics as Dialectic” pp. 553-617, section one, “Metaphysics, Mystery and Myth” (CWL 3, pp. 553-572) that he is going to use as the point for interpreting religious expressions.

And then the second thing that he’s going to say is he’s going to make an identification of what he thinks that operator on the psychic level consists of. And in other words, we’ve got sort of a formal correspondence between these two operators that has to be there; otherwise human unrestricted inquiry can’t get very far. Now, he’s going to say what he thinks that psychic operator and its correspondence consists in.
Intellectual and Psychic Operators

“From the nature of the case such an orientation would have to consist in some cosmic dimension, in some intimation of unplumbed depths, that accrued to man’s feelings, emotions, sentiments.” (CWL 3, p 555).

Lonergan proposes that what fills the role of this psychic operator is something in human feelings.

Discussion of the nature of the latter psychic operator:

The intimation of ‘unplumbed depths’ accrued to feelings, emotions, etc. (CWL 3, p. 555).

Rudolf Otto’s mysterium tremendum et fascinans.

How images come to embody religious sentiments: human feelings are integrated with “affect-laden images” which are oriented towards the “second sphere” of the ultimate unknown, strange, mysterious and mythical.

Not so obvious that this element of feeling must be that which fulfills the role of the psychic operator that collaborates with the intellectual operator of the unrestricted desire to know.

“From the nature of the case such an orientation would have to consist in some cosmic dimension, in some
intimation of unplumbed depths, that accrued to [human] feelings, emotions, sentiments.” (CWL 3, p 555).

Okay. Let’ stop there, and just think about that claim. “From the nature of the case” (CWL 3, p 555), the case here being the need of a correspondence between what’s going on in the psychic level and what’s going on in the intellectual level. It would have to have something “accrued to [human] feelings, emotions, sentiments.” (CWL 3, p 555). What do you think of that claim? …. Or what would be some alternative possibilities that might be doing the job that he says needs to be done in giving a dynamic transformation of our sensitive life for the sake of the unlimited pursuit of intellectual inquiry? What would be the other possibilities? …. Byron?

Byron: Would something like psychoanalysis be —

Pat: Well, psychoanalysis would be an intervention. He’s talking about something that has to do with the human subject, where psychoanalysis would be something that would come in to repair perhaps a failure of correspondence between those two operators. That isn’t to say that you’re not right: that a correspondence can be established or re-established or healed by something like psychoanalysis. But Lonergan is trying to talk about what might be — what it might be that psychoanalysis would be addressing. Okay? But his claim here is that the operator and the psychic has to do with “some intimation of unplumbed depths” and that it has to do with “feelings, emotions, sentiments.” (CWL 3, p 555). … Matt?

Matt_ Ah, just the phrase “intimations of unplumbed depths.” (CWL 3, p 555). It’s along the lines of the known-unknown: that you know there are depths. How you know that or why you know that, you might not be able to answer; but you know that they are there. So it seems to be in the order of your religious feeling or experience.

Pat: Right! Okay. Good! … Anybody else? …. Let me just read the rest of what he says on this:
Intellectual and Psychic Operators

“From the nature of the case such an orientation
would have to consist in some cosmic dimension,
in some intimation of unplumbed depths, that
accrued to man’s feelings, emotions, sentiments.”
(CWL 3, p 555).

These “feelings, emotions, sentiments become
integrated in” ... the flow of affect laden images
which orient towards the “second sphere” of “the
ulterior unknown, of the unexplored and strange,
of the undefined surplus of significance and
momentousness.”

“The primary field of mystery and myth. (CWL 3,
p. 556).

He goes on to say: These “feelings, emotions, sentiments become integrated” with
what he calls “affect-laden images.” (CWL 3, p. 556). So remember that the image as image is
situated in a flow of other things; among the flow of other things are going to be these feelings
“of unplumbed depths” (CWL 3, p 555). And if so there is an integration on the level of
sensation, of the feelings that are the operators, and the images that are now integrated with these
feelings, and you get “affect-laden images” (CWL 3, p. 556) that are oriented towards what he
calls “the second sphere”, (CWL 3, p. 556), namely

“the ulterior unknown, of the unexplored and strange, of
the undefined surplus of significance and
momentousness,” what he calls the “the primary field of mystery and myth. (CWL 3, p. 556).

If I go back to the first comment there:

“What the calls the “the primary field of mystery and myth. (CWL 3, p. 556).

If I go back to the first comment there:

“From the nature of the case such an orientation would have to consist in some cosmic dimension, in some intimation of unplumbed depths, that accrued to [human] feelings, emotions, sentiments. Nor is this merely a theoretical conclusion, as R. Otto’s study of the nonrational element in the Idea of the Holy rather abundantly indicates. (CWL 3, p 555).

So he is referring to this book by Rudolph Otto, The Idea of the Holy; and in this, Otto is operating out of primarily a Kantian context, and he’s trying to make the argument for a dimension of human anthropology, which is not reducible to the account that Kant gives, and in particular focusses on the experience of what he calls the “mysterium tremendum et fascinans.” The tremendum makes you shake, makes you quiver!!

This past weekend I had my grandson over, and in a local store he came upon this four foot long stuffed shark, which he then proceeded to drag around the store. So of course after he cleaned the floor with this shark, Grandpa had to buy the shark for him! But it had these teeth of a shark. He actually brought it — this lady was standing — he goes over and has the shark bite the lady!

[Class amusement]

But when he first pulled it out, all he saw was the stuffing — He may have thought it was a dolphin; whether or not — He probably knew it was some kind of great fish or something! And as soon as he saw the teeth, he went — [In one movement Pat jerks his shoulders and arms back, mimicking the action of immediate frightened withdrawal!] That’s mysterium tremendum!

[Class laughter]
“Mysterium fascinans” is that it’s very fascinating too. There’s that great symbol: I think I mentioned this before of Moses and the Burning Bush. On the one hand, it’s a tremendum. The trembling fearfulness and contemplative power represented in that image!!! And on the other hand, it’s also fascinating, it draws you in. You want to sit close enough to the fire to not get burned, but there’s always the fear of being burned by it.

So Lonergan is referring to Otto’s study here as he was working this out. So he must have spent a long time thinking about these kinds of things, and he comes up with this. So Otto is among the people that he thinks is giving some testimony to his interpretation of religious symbolism. He also mentions Paul Tillich and Mircea Eliade, and a couple of other people in there as well. So he’s kind of — He kind of has the sense that it has to be so: that this has to be what it is. You have to have this correspondence between what’s going on in your life of sensible representations and images and your selectivity, so that your sense of the known-unknown continues to stay alive, and not be repressed and so on. So his hypothesis is that it’s this!

All I want to say is it’s not so obvious that that’s the one and only possible answer! This is something that is a little different in Lonergan’s writing. Up until now, everything is sort of clad, iron-clad; he hits all the nails down to the board, and gets all the screws tightened in. This is, although he’s not saying it — he is suggesting here that this is his hypothesis!

So the hypothesis about the source and proper way to think about the interpretation of religious symbolism has to do with the known-unknown. And there is the obvious fact that in religious peoples there is some incredible sense of feeling. And up until now, he has tended to regard feelings as being about everything else; about sights and sounds and tactile sensations as stuff to be organized and integrated into an intelligent and intelligible way of life. Now,

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4 Holy Bible, NRSV, Exodus, chapter three, vv. 1-22.
all of a sudden, we’ve got feelings do something a little different. So his suggestion is that these kinds of feelings, he kind of singles out special kinds of feelings here; and that their role is the role of keeping up with the mind, keeping up the intellectual demand, the intellectual operator of the unrestricted desire to know.

Student question about the “affect-laden images” and their relation to art vs. religion.

— Discussion of human thought evolving over time. i.e., the shifting boundaries between religion/art, philosophy/myth, and the emergence of the intellectual tools for metaphysics. The ‘affective’ images serve to keeping our psyche ready for the work of intellectual development.

Jonathan: “Affect-laden images” (CWL 3, p. 556) sounds like a definition more proper to — I mean, this is a sort of a hazy distinction — but it sounds like a distinction more proper to art than to religious symbolism, or something; because it feels so amorphous to just speak of the thing affect-laden, makes it sound like staying in front of a Mark Rothko painting. That sort of all you get is some sort of affective response to it. I don’t know if that’s very good order against it, but it just seems sort of an odd phrasing.

Pat: Well, one thing that you could argue is that at the earliest stages of human development, there’s not a real sharp clear distinction between art and religious expression; that that develops as human cultures develop. So there’s a lot that’s undifferentiated; which is part — the end of this section — In this section — but I’ve put it at the end of the slides — there are Lonergan’s comments about: “Well, why are we talking about this in a series of chapters dedicated to metaphysics?” And his answer to that is because the ability to do metaphysics based on self-appropriation presupposes human development where self-appropriation is
possible. So that goes back to this problem that I had with the word ‘man’: and there he is talking about the human race having in its emergently probable way put together the resources to be able to do the stuff that philosophy and metaphysics is meant to be able to do. But until human beings get to a certain level of sophistication and differentiation, they’re not going to be able to do that. And his point is that that doesn’t stop people from trying to do metaphysics at points in human history when they don’t really have a development to do it fully and well. And his argument it going to be — and for that reason mythical types of things and distorted types of things get into philosophy and get into metaphysics. And you could say perhaps some of the same sort of thing, where the boundary between religious expression and artistic expression is not yet differentiated: doing one as opposed to the other involves certain kinds of distortions.

So I think your basic point, “affect-laden images” (CWL 3, p. 556) is kind of puzzling term. It’s a real heuristic term, because it doesn’t say what kind of images and it doesn’t say what kind of affects; except that he’s just told us a moment ago that the kinds of affects he is interested in are the ones that have to do with the “unplumbed depths” (CWL 3, p 555) that by definition do the work of keeping our psyches up to the challenges of intellectual development, making us capable of following where our intellectual development takes us. So yeah, the word “affect-laden images” (CWL 3, p. 556) is a pretty fuzzy term, and I totally agree with that.

Student question about the relation of Lonergan to Bultmann with regard to demythologization.

— Lonergan is like Bultmann in acknowledging that there are associations with religious symbols that are misleading and distorting, and so are in need of some kind of interpretation done with the tools made available by the evolution of human thought (i.e., on the basis of self-appropriation).

Pat: Matt?
Matt: This idea also seems to correspond with what we talked about last week with Bultmann’s project of demythologization, and that. But the way they go about it seems — it’s going to be different. Their conclusions will be different. But the impulse is the same as that. There is this element of us that is — That this kind of unrestrictedness that we do experience as the unrestricted desire to know, and we call it that, is a differentiated thing that prior — like in the earlier stages of development we may not have been able to make the careful distinctions that we distinguish between this and then the affect that it does, at last in my experience, seems to correspond with the unrestricted desire. So where Bultmann wants to just say that one is the evolution of the other, and we don’t — we can leave one behind. Like, it’s the same idea; so that the religious impulse for God or for the transcendent has a certain psychic correspondence that also goes towards the unrestricted desire. Does that — ?

Pat: Ah, yes! That’s right! That’s right! So, yes, he is like Bultmann in the sense of saying that there are interpretations, or if you like there are associations with religious — with symbols, where by symbol he means precisely this, that are misleading or distorted. And so some kind of demythologization is necessary! But what he does, as you said, where he goes with that is quite different from Bultmann.

So let’s hold off on that and come back to it after I kind of work through the details of this a little bit more. Okay.

Student question about the “ulterior unknown” and its relation to the “known unknown”.

— The former stresses the affective dimension, whereas the latter pertains to the intellectual one.

Pat: Greg?

Greg: Just a clarification question: the “ulterior unknown” (CWL 3, p. 556) in that third part of your slide quote, is that an unknown appropriate to the religious sphere that’s distinct from the “known-unknown” (CWL 3, p. 557) of intellectual inquiry, or is it — are they one and the same thing?
Pat: Ahm, as I see it, he’s put the word ‘ulterior’ in there to get the affect beside of it.

Greg: Okay.

Pat: So the “known unknown” (CWL 3, p. 557) is an intellectual phenomenon; it’s intellect in the sense of our — We’re being intelligent when we wonder about things, when we ask questions and are puzzled. And that is what he means by the “known unknown.” Why did he replace ‘known’ with ‘ulterior’ here? Because he’s talking precisely about this “intimation of unplumbed depths” (CWL 3, p 555) of ulterior strangeness. And so I think that’s why he did that; because he’s not focusing here on the “known unknown” on the intellectual level, but that on the psychic, psychological if you like, the level of sensation, which is in correspondence with it. So he is trying to get at the affective dimension that is in correspondence with it. Okay? Okay!

“Symbol”

Lonergan has thus staked out the parameters for an interpretation of the religious symbol.

The image as symbol bears a link to the “known unknown”.

So Lonergan has staked out here the parameters that he thinks need to be borne in mind if there’s going to be an interpretation of religious symbols.

Symbol

“But as symbol, the image is linked simply with the paradoxical ‘known unknown’” (CWL 3, p. 557).

So what makes the difference between image and symbol is this link with “the paradoxical ‘known unknown.’” (CWL 3, p. 557).
So, if the tree that I had on the previous slide, which you also saw last week, is more of an image as image, this one as I said last week, I chose because it does have a tendency to take you — to take your breath away! And be not just an image as image, but an image in which some kind of feeling that gives you a sense of the wildness of it all, the ulterior unknown-ness is there.

“Sign.”

Image as sign:

The image as sign is linked to some interpretation of the image’s import.

Signs not limited to religious images.

Example of a sign and its interpretation (insights, conversations, judgments, memories, etc.) that constitute the sign as meaningful.

“As sign, the image is linked with some interpretation that offers to indicate the import of the image.

“The interpretations that transform the image into a sign are a vast manifold.” (CWL 3, p. 557).

So I talked about image as image, image as symbol, and now it’s image as sign.
“As sign, the image is linked with some interpretation that offers to indicate the import of the image.

“The interpretations that transform the image into a sign are a vast manifold.” (CWL 3, p. 557).

I just want to draw your attention to the fact that there is nothing specific about religious images or religious signs here. So let me give you a couple of examples.

**Wheel-chair Sign added to slide**

That’s a sign. If you landed from Mars, or you came from a culture that had never seen that image before, you would be at a loss as to what it might mean. I was trying to look for one that was a little less familiar, but I finally thought this one would be useful. In virtue of our common sense, or at least our common sense of the United States, we do know what that sign means. And that’s what he’s getting at by “linked with some interpretation” (CWL 3, p. 557); that there are things that are combined with the image, in this case understandings, judgments. If you unpack what that image means to you as a sign, there are a lot of acts of understanding, of conversations, there are perhaps some associations with people who are handicapped that you’ve seen; perhaps you have a relative that is going through the process of applying for a handicap sticker so that they can park in a parking space that is associated — That’s all part and parcel of the interpretation that makes it not just be a sensible image, but makes it be meaningful. All the — and what Lonergan means by common sense, or what you read about today when he was talking about symbol interpretation, that vast association, that habitual state of knowing that people have. That is part of the interpretation that they bring to make that sign be a meaningful sign. So “the image is linked with some interpretation that offers to indicate the import of the image” (CWL 3, p. 557), there isn’t anything specifically religious about that. Any questions about that? …. 

**Cross Sign added to slide**

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5 Pat’s use of the term ‘symbol’ rather than ‘sign’ here seems like a “lapsus linguae.”
But, if I have that sign, there’s more going on than what you might call the pragmatic issues that have to do with knowing why you should leave a handicapped spot free, knowing the kinds of needs that people with handicaps have, that give them the right to that special treatment. There’s more and more going on with that sign, as least for Christians and also for non-Christians.

**Why Lonergan thinks symbols and their mystery are a general, permanent feature of human culture.**

Unlike Comte and Bultmann, who saw demythologization as the elimination of images-as-symbols and images-as-mysteries, Lonergan holds that some such images are essential to human existence. Lonergan sought rather to eliminate only the distorted symbolic images and the distorted myths that interpret the symbols only insofar as they are the products of counterpositions.

So Lonergan has this comment here, following on from the displayed text.

“The interpretations that transform the image into a sign are a vast manifold. Anyone who has glanced through a history of religions will be aware of the enormously divergent attitudes and performances that are jumbled together under that single rubric [sign]. But there is no reason for restricting interpretations of the image as sign to the field of religion. The primary field of mystery and myth is both quite general and quite permanent.” *(CWL 3, p. 557).*

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6 Pat’s use of the term ‘symbol’ here rather than ‘sign’ again is possibly a “*lapsus linguae.*”
And I wanted to underscore that remark: “quite permanent.” He’s going to make a strong argument, that ‘symbols’, at least as he’s defined them, and ‘mystery’ as he’s going to define it, is a permanent feature of human consciousness and of human living, of human culture. That contrary to Comte, and contrary at least to one way of reading Bultmann, images as symbols and images as mysteries are not going to be replaced. They are permanent, and they are permanent precisely because there is always going to be more to be understood and to be known, than any finite human mind is going to be capable of doing. And he’s going to give a — We’ll see his argument for that in a moment. So this is one of the big differences between him and Bultmann, as Matt was asking me a little bit earlier on. For Lonergan, the kind of demythologization that he’s concerned with is not the elimination of these affect-laden images, because he thinks they are essential — They are essential to human existence; they are essential to human authenticity. But what he is going to argue for is the elimination of distorted ones; images that arise particularly from counterpositions. So that’s the kind of demythologization he is concerned with. It’s a very very refined kind of demythologization.

Remember that passage I read to you last week from Bultmann. Bultmann gives this kind of quick and simple account of what the world of the writers of the Hebrew and Christian scriptures was like.

That people thought that the universe was constructed in certain ways, and that it originated in certain ways; and now because of our scientific advance, we don’t think those things any more. So this is what you one might call literal interpretation of the symbols and the myths that interpret the symbols. And demythologization is getting rid of the symbols and the myths, because all they were doing is proto-science.

Lonergan is going to argue quite the opposite; that always and everywhere symbols are doing something very different: they are giving us a psychic orientation that corresponds to the insurmountable unrestrictedness of our intellectual orientation; that that’s never going to go away! But what is necessary is to refine those affect-laden images and to separate the wheat from the chaff. The ones that give us a truly authentic orientation from those that give us a distorted
orientation. So that’s what he’s going to be about. He doesn’t actually use the word ‘demythologization’, but that is what he would invite in this context.

So

The primary field of mystery and myth is both quite general and quite permanent. For inquiry and reflection are both general and permanent; the principle of correspondence between the intellectual and the sensitive is both general and permanent; and so some sensitive awareness and response, symbolic of the known unknown, must be regarded as a generally and permanently recurring feature of human living.” (CWL 3, p. 557, emphases added).

So anyone who has glanced at this sign is going to know that this is apart: so for Christians, for Jews, for Muslims, and for many people, that symbol has deep resonances of interpretations; they mean different things for each of those groups. [Some indecipherable words] the history of the uses and abuses of that symbol. And what makes that be more than a symbol, because it isn’t just an image: it gives us an intimation above and from the depths; but it is an image that has those associated feelings, and is surrounded with a lot of interpretation.

The Cosmic Tree — an image-as-symbol to which other images are added as interpretation.

Eliade’s words as additional interpretation and constitution of it as sign.

The symbol of the Cosmic Tree is also situated within and interpreted by rituals (bodily movements).

Symbolic artifacts (e.g., totem poles) of Cosmic Trees are imperfect replicas of ‘the’ archetypal Cosmic Tree — how they are interpreted.
Cosmic Tree understood as bringing order to chaos.

**Constructed Image: Eliade’s Cosmic Tree.**

We saw this image last week, but I ran out of time. So I wanted to — So, this is — If the tree that I showed you before [Pat may be referring to the “Foto of Larger and More Widespread Tree” displayed at end of Class 22] did indeed accomplish its intended purpose of giving you — of being an image which also gave you some sense of the “unplumbed depths” (CWL 3, p 555) of the wonder on the level of your feelings, this image is already itself an interpretation of a tree. This is not a “real tree” which you also res — It’s not just a real tree with which you also resonate in this affective way that corresponds to the known unknown. *This is already a fairly elaborate putting together of images upon images upon images. And what I am going to do now is to add to the images that you’re seeing: words; and hopefully, through the words, insights and possibly judgments which will be a further interpretation. So this symbol, in and of itself, or this image in and of itself, is already a sign in Lonergan’s sense, that it’s already giving an interpretation to some primordial experience of the tree as symbol. And surrounding this are the stories, or if you like myths, that give a further interpretation to it.*

The most widely distributed variant of the symbolism of the Center is the Cosmic Tree, situated in the middle of the Universe, and upholding the three worlds [earth, heaven and hell] as upon one axis. Vedic India, ancient China, and the Germanic mythology, as well as the “primitive” religions, all held different versions of this Cosmic Tree, whose roots plunged down into Hell — ⁷

— and you can’t quite see it because of a blurred image here, but there are these creatures, down there in the bottom of the image where the roots are, that are being confined. The earth — You

can see that the branches are running down into the earth, and beneath the branches are creatures that are in the nether world.

“— And whose branches reached to Heaven. In the Central and North Asiatic mythologies its seven or nine branches symbolize the seven or nine celestial planes — that is, the seven planetary heavens.

You can see that in those various symbols on the trunk as they go up. I don’t know if there’s nine — there’s actually more than nine there; but it’s symbolic of the different ontological layers of the universe.

“We have not room here to enlarge upon the complex symbolism of this Tree of the World. What concerns us now is the part it plays in the “rites of the centre”.

So notice that there’s a couple of things going on here. First of all, there’s the drawn image here, and this is clearly drawn by a fairly contemporary artist, probably a twentieth-century artist, probably not an image that was drawn by someone from Germanic mythology. But nevertheless there would have been such images, and some of them would have been like the totemic poles that you’ve probably seen, at least watered down versions of. And what he’s getting at is that this layering of image upon image and these different levels, is part of not only an image as symbol, but also is situating it in a large set of meanings and other symbols and stories. Now he is going to say that it is also interpreted by ritual, which is to say by things that people do when they move their bodies around. So the image is situated in bodily movement and emotions, in tactile things and so on.

“It may be said, in general, that the majority of the sacred and ritual trees that we meet with in the history of religions are only replicas, imperfect copies of this exemplary archetype, the Cosmic Tree. Thus, all these sacred trees are thought of as situated in the Centre of the World, and all the ritual trees or posts which are consecrated

before or during any religious ceremony are, as it were, magically projected into the Centre of the World.”

Then he goes on and gives some examples of that.

So several things are going on here. First of all, the original experience, whoever had it, of the wonder of a tree going down into the earth and going up into the heavens, and communicating and making that division in the otherwise meaningless homogeneity of the world, of chaos, and giving it a structure, making directionlessness have a center and orientation — indeed a place — and constitute the really real of the universe, that that is getting situated with regard to other stories, other symbols, other rituals. And now, there is something else going on here: and that is that Eliade himself is giving an interpretation. He is situating those images, those symbols, those rituals, those songs, those legends, those myths, within a larger frame of further language and further interpretation.

So ‘sign’ means something quite rich in the context that Lonergan is talking about it. It’s a symbol surrounded by a lot of associations and a lot of indications and a lot of acts of consciousness.

“Mystery” §1.6

Image as Mystery:

Mystery is a dynamic image that is partly symbol and partly sign, where the interpretation acts to preserve, clarify, elaborate the ulterior strangeness of the “known unknown”, not to eliminate it.

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Mystery

“The achievement, then, of full understanding and the attainment even of the totality of correct judgments would not free man from the necessity of dynamic images that partly are symbols and partly are signs. ….

“It is a necessity that has its ground in the very structure of man’s being, in which intellectual activity is a higher integration of the sensitive flow and the sensitive flow is a higher integration of organic performance.

“To such images, then, let us give the name of mysteries.” (CWL 3, pp. 570-571).

Finally, what does he mean by mystery? By mystery he means dynamic images that are partly symbols and partly signs; in other words, symbols in so far as they do carry with them this affect-laden orientation on the sensitive level that is in correspondence with the intellectual level and its unrestricted orientation, but also are signs because they have interpretations. So what he means by ‘mystery’ is an interpreted sign that never loses its contact with this orientation into the ulterior strangeness. So in other words, the interpretation doesn’t interpret away the strangeness; it situates the strangeness, it clarifies the strangeness, it elaborates the strangeness; but in no way does it eliminate the strangeness!
And those symbols have their ground “in the very structure of [being human], in which intellectual activity is a higher integration of the sensitive”; To such images, images, images that are partly symbol and partly signs, “let us give the name mysteries.” (CWL 3, p. 571). That’s going to be his term. But again the important thing is that this affective sense of the correspondence of the intellect with sense of knowing the unknown is not eliminated, but is ingredient in what he means by mystery.

Connection of religious symbols to finality: where is finality headed?

Symbols do not prove that there is an end toward which finality tends. Those are further questions beyond the images as mysteries or symbols.

Symbols simply keep alive the orientation of finality in human consciousness; they generate further questions which are to be answered not by symbolic modes, but by theology and philosophy.

**Mystery**

“But whither finality heads is a question that receives countless answers, pragmatic or conceptual, naturalistic, humanistic, or religious, enthusiastically positive or militantly negative.” (CWL 3, pp. 557-558)

But this is something he says, not really about mysteries, or about symbols for that matter, but about finality. But remember now his focus here is on interpreting religious symbols in the context of finality at the level of the sensitive, human sensation, in all its richness and complexity.
“But whither finality heads is a question that receives countless answers, pragmatic or conceptual, naturalistic, humanistic, or religious, enthusiastically positive or militantly negative.” (CWL 3, pp. 557-558).

So Lonergan is not saying that automatically symbols, as he has defined them, or mysteries as he has defined them, guarantee the existence of any transcendent being towards which they are oriented. His focus here is simply on identifying what the source of their meaningfulness is, and the sources of their meaningfulness is this orientation. That’s his understanding at this stage of his life, or this stage of his career, as to what their meaningfulness is.

And about them, we can ask further questions; about them we can ask: “Is there anything more to which they are oriented?” Or “Is there a God?” “Is there a Sacred Reality?” That he does not see as the role of directly interpreting the symbols. That he sees as a question for philosophy and theology, or at least for a theology informed by philosophy. The symbols themselves don’t answer that. In this chapter (CWL 3, chapter Seventeen: “Metaphysics as Dialectic”, pp. 553-617), or in this section of this chapter (§ 1.6 “The Notion of Mystery”, pp. 569-572), his concern is to preserve the meaningfulness of symbols in this very elemental sense of their meaningfulness, and leave for another place in Insight, and for another kind of exercise, whether or not they have a referent.

Student question about the tension between the permanence of mystery and the heuristic anticipation of the future date when all explanations would be known. What is left of mystery once answers to all explanatory questions have been reached?

— Lonergan says there will still be further questions even if all explanatory answers about proportionate being have been reached.
— He later argues there is more to being than proportionate being (i.e. transcendent being).

Pat: Greg?

Greg: I’m wondering if there’s a — It seems to me there’s a conflict between the kind of — what he claims is the permanent — the permanence of mystery, and then this future day he envisions where like, what happens is the totality of correct judgments about the world.

Pat: Uh, huh!

Greg: So I’m just wondering how are these two — What is still mysterious if we know what is to be known about the world?

Pat: Well, actually I’ve got — in a slide or two, I’ve got him saying that; but not to use that as a way of avoiding your question! Ahm, at this stage of the game it is more of an assertion than anything that he has a substantive ground for. As we’ll see in a moment, he is going to say: “Even when — even if we had the answers to all the explanatory questions, we still would not have gotten rid of the need for authentic human existence to have this psychic ‘orienter’, this psychic operator, that keeps us directed on the psychic level towards what our intelligence is directed towards, intellectually; which implicitly says — He doesn’t say this explicitly! — he implicitly says that there still will be further questions.

Now, why will there be further questions? That’s something he’s not prepared at this stage of the development of Insight to give an answer to. I’ll lift up the covers and tell you what’s going on: he’s going to make the argument that there is more to reality than proportionate being; more to being than proportionate being! Up until now, he left that as an open question. When we get to chapter nineteen (CWL 3, “General Transcendent Knowledge”, pp. 657-708), he’s going to make the argument that we can affirm the reality of — we can affirm that there’s more to being than proportionate being; that there is Transcendent Being. And he’ll give his account of what we can know about it, how we can know something about it, and so on. And that would in effect say that even if we knew everything there was to know about the universe and about human beings and about human history, there still would be questions left unanswered; and for that very reason we, to remain true to our unrestricted
intellectual orientation, would need something at the psychic level, and would need these affect-laden images to be properly oriented in a way that respects our intellectual orientation.

So there isn’t really an argument here, because he doesn’t have yet in place what he would need to answer that. But he does make a very strong statement. Well, you know, you get a glimpse of that permanent feature thing, and that’s exactly the right question to be asking right now, namely: “Okay! So why is it permanent? If we can answer all the further questions, what’s the need of that?” — which is a very good question, and he’s implicitly saying: “Even that won’t exhaust the unrestricted desire!” But it’s left sort of hovering here. Okay?

Greg: Okay! Thank you.

Religious symbols are interpreted in various ways: e.g., as naturalistic, psychoanalytic, Darwinian, etc.

Lonergan will claim that many of the reductionistic interpretations of religious symbols are rooted in counterpositions.

Obviously here by ‘interpretations’ he means: what do you do with this set of this rich and varied set of phenomena of images, of affects, of behaviors, of claims that people make through their interpretations of the symbols and the affects and the behaviors, what do you do with that? Well, you can give a naturalistic interpretation, or a Freudian interpretation, or a Humean interpretation, or you can give a God-gene interpretation, that people feel that way and think that way because their genes make them think and feel that way. And you just observe — he draws attention to the fact that there are many ways in which you can go; but the symbols in and of themselves, as symbolically meaningful, don’t settle any of those questions. They just raise those questions!!

You can probably anticipate that he is going to directly or indirectly say that many of the assumptions about, for example, naturalistic interpretations of religious symbolism, are rooted in extrascientific opinions and counterpositions; which is not to say that he doesn’t think that there is a great deal of distortion in religious practices and religious traditions and in religious accounts of the ways in which religious symbolisms are combined and given interpretations. He
clearly does think that! But he’s not going to accept that you can reduce all of their meaningfulness to something like a naturalistic or a humanistic interpretation. But notice he also doesn’t think that enthusiastically religious interpretations are necessarily the best ones either! For what is called for in part is a real sobriety about what intelligence demands.¹⁰

**Mystery and Sacrament**

**Sacrament**: “an outward sign of inward grace, a sacred and mysterious sign or ceremony, ordained by Christ, by which grace is conveyed to our souls.”

Some part of the background Lonergan brought to his interest in religious symbolism comes from his participation in Catholic sacraments.

And it took me a while, a long time, to sort of make this connection: What’s the background of Lonergan’s interestedness? He gives us one account, and it’s an account in which we find him taking seriously Hegel’s concern with the development of religion and the rise of philosophy out of religion, and in some ways in agreement with at least the overview of that.

“Mystery and Sacrament”: *sacramentum* is the Latin term used to translate the Greek *mysterion*.

The Catholic sacraments as images and signs (interpreted rituals), full of mystery.

How Lonergan’s view relates to the Catholic tradition.

But as a Catholic priest, he was very serious about the sacramental, the sacraments of Catholicism. And I kept looking for where I got this: at some point I came across something

¹⁰ Pat’s precise wording of this sentence is not clearly audible, and the version here is largely a conjecture by the transcriber.
that said ‘sacramentum’ is the translation of ‘mysterion’ from Greek into Latin. But I couldn’t find it, and I’m not sure if it’s right, because ‘sacramentum’ actually goes back to the word ‘sacrifice’, the Greek word for sacrifice. But, be that as it may, this formulation on the slide is at least one of the Catholic ways of defining ‘sacrament’. It’s not the only one, it’s not the best one, but it has certain features in it that appear in various places. I went and looked at what Aquinas has to say about sacraments in the Summa, and there isn’t any simple definition which could be used as a sound-bite, like there usually is. I was hoping to come up with that, but I didn’t! But you’ll find Augustine saying things like this, for example:

“A sacrament is an outward sign of inward grace, a sacred and mysterious sign or ceremony, ordained by Christ, by which grace is conveyed to our souls.”

Various kinds of things; I grew up on the Baltimore Catechism, which has a somewhat abbreviated version of this. But I want to emphasize a couple of elements in this. Lonergan himself would have been familiar with that kind of a definition of ‘sacrament’. So notice the presence first of all of ‘sign’. So the sacrament is a sign. So Lonergan wanted to make some sense of what sign might mean, in this context. And that it has to do with ‘mystery’, a mysterious sign. And it’s an outward sign, and that’s what Lonergan means by “image as image.”

So Lonergan has got these various things at play here from his general account of mystery, sign, image. But what’s not in this general account, of course, is the very specifically Christian, or specifically Catholic perhaps, addition that says what makes a sacrament or a mystery be a Christian sacrament is its institution by Christ and its association with grace. So at this point in the development of Insight, he just wants to give a very general heuristic for thinking about religious symbolism, but one that clearly has taken into account things about the

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11 “Sacrament: The word ‘sacrament’ translates the Latin sacramentum and the Greek mysterion signifying one of the seven central liturgical rites of the church through which participants experience the paschal mystery of Christ, are formed into the body of Christ and grow in the life of grace.” (Kevin W. Irwin, article on the term ‘sacrament’ pp. 910-922, at p. 910, in The New Dictionary of Theology, editors, Joseph A. Komonchak, Mary Collins, and Dermot A. Lane (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1993).
sacramental experiences that he himself had and he himself valued through his own faith life, and his own Catholic tradition.

“Mythic Consciousness”

The image, symbol, sign as mystery is to be distinguished from the mythic.

Because an image with the “known unknown” is open to so many interpretations, it is also open to interpretations distorted by the counterpositions of polymorphic consciousness.

What happens when stories that interpret the “known-unknownness” of religious symbols are taken as literally, already-out-there-now, real.

Mythic consciousness misconstrues images and symbols in all their mystery, it fails to recognize fantastic element in myth as fantastic, as a result of the polymorphic modes of consciousness.

Mythic consciousness is distorted consciousness of the “known unknown”, which does not even know that it is distorted.
Mythic Consciousness

“Precisely because of its relation to the known unknown, the image can be interpreted as sign in manners that are as numerous and diverse as human ingenuity and human contrariness.” (CWL 3, p. 557).

“What is lacking is a critical awareness of the polymorphism of human consciousness, of the alternative formulations of discoveries as positions or as counterpositions.” (CWL 3, p. 559).

“Unless one distinguishes between the insight and the presentations, then one is open to the blunder of attributing an explanatory power to the presentations and even to associated feelings and emotions.” (CWL 3, p. 562).

Now, in contradistinction to ‘symbol’ and ‘mystery’, Lonergan uses the word ‘mythic’ and “mythic consciousness” (CWL 3, pp. 560-566). And I just wanted to touch on a couple of the parts of that. And it’s significant to say that he begins with this precisely because of its relation to the known unknown.

“Precisely because of its relation to the known unknown, the image can be interpreted as sign in manners that are as numerous and diverse as human ingenuity and human contrariness.” (CWL 3, p. 557).

An image can be interpreted as sign in “manners that are as numerous and diverse as human ingenuity and human contrariness”, precisely because the image as symbol and the image as mystery is an intimation at the level of sensibility of the unrestricted openness of our intellects.
It’s precisely because of that, that it can go along in different directions. There is an awful lot of unknown-ness about this. It’s not like the sign for the handicap parking that we saw a moment ago: that’s a fairly well nailed-down meaning. That’s not to say it’s perfectly — that it doesn’t have any indeterminateness to it. … There were days when I had my injury earlier in the semester, I sort of wished I could figure out a way to get one of those parking permits, so that I could park more easily. So, you know, is a fractured shoulder a handicap deserving of this facility by law? No! Should it be? Well, I would have made the argument for it!!

[Student laughter]

So, you know, even a fairly well defined symbol like the handicapped parking symbol is open to certain kinds of indeterminacies. But ‘symbol’, in Lonergan’s sense of it, which is intrinsically connected with this sense of the “known unknown”, that has a huge amount of latitude over what to make of it! And his recognition of that huge latitude is a recognition that you can go lots of places with it, and not all of them particularly beneficial or genuine! And that’s his point of departure in talking about what he calls “mythic consciousness”.

Mythic consciousness lacks critical self-awareness of the ways in which other patterns of experience can interfere with serious intellectual inquiry.

Mythic consciousness is — There’s a playful version of it of course in Rudyard Kipling’s “Just So Stories”; “How the elephant got his trunk” [in “The Elephant’s Child”] An elephant went down to the water one day, and the baby elephant had its nose stretched by the crocodile and that’s how the elephant got its trunk! “Why did the rhinoceros have such a bad disposition?” [in “How the Rhinoceros got his Skin”]. Because, when it took its skin off — have you ever seen: there are certain species of rhinoceroses that look like they have kind of buttoned, badly buttoned-up pyjamas. A rhinoceros with that went down to the water one day, took off its outer skin and went for a swim; and a monkey came along and poured crumbs into it, and glued the buttons shut, so it can’t get the crumbs out. So he’s always itching! And that’s why he’s got a bad disposition. The Just So Stories.

Those are myths! I mean those are funny myths. We laugh at them. But what happens when something like that is taken for reality? That’s what Lonergan means by “mythic
consciousness”: when stories are taken to be literally true, and the fantastic-ness of them is not recognized! What’s needed to get beyond that is a critical awareness —

“What is lacking is a critical awareness of the polymorphism of human consciousness, of the alternative formulations of discoveries as positions or as counterpositions.” (CWL 3, p. 559).

So earlier on, Lonergan talks about — introduces this idea about ‘position’ and ‘counterposition’ (CWL 3, pp. 413-415). He makes a big point of saying that the problem is not that people have counter-positional insights; it’s that people formulate their insights in counter-positional forms. It’s not that people don’t have insights into intelligibilities and judgments about realities, but they formulate them on the basis of things like the “already-out-there-now” as the criterion for what counts as the real. They introduce distortions into their genuine discoveries. What is lacking in mythic consciousness, then, is the kind of critical self-awareness of our varying polymorphisms, the ways in which those other patterns of our experience can interfere and take over the job of answering the further pertinent questions in a way that only real intellectual probing can really muster. That’s what he means by “mythic consciousness” (CWL 3, pp. 560-566). Mythic consciousness is not just a story of consciousness; it’s consciousness that doesn’t know it’s a story; and then it’s what will tend to give interpretations of the images as symbols and mysteries in accordance with the counter-positions!

“Unless one distinguishes between the insight and the presentations, then one is open to the blunder of attributing an explanatory power to the presentations and even to associated feelings and emotions.” (CWL 3, p. 562).

So that’s what he sees as a distortion that mythic consciousness will bring to bear, and the reasons why!

“Mythic Consciousness and Dialectic,”

The self-understanding of metaphysics has to take into account how it arose, and this includes the role that religious symbolism and its distortions in mythic
consciousness played in the emergence of explicit metaphysics.

Mythic Consciousness and Dialectics: metaphysics is concerned with its own genesis and thus cannot “prescind entirely from the historical phenomena of mysteries and myths.” (CWL 3, p 560).

And then this is the slide there that I referred to a few moments ago.

Mythic Consciousness and Dialectic

“This conditioning of metaphysics by self-knowledge and of self-knowledge by human development does not imply that self-knowledge and metaphysics are not attempted until a sufficient human development is attained to ensure their accuracy and adequacy.” (CWL 3, p. 559).

“And as metaphysics is not unconcerned with its own genesis, so it cannot prescind entirely from the historical phenomena of mysteries and myths.” (CWL 3, p. 560).

So what Lonergan is concerned to do here is to give an account of how human self-knowledge and human self-appropriation comes about; how we arrive at what he calls “explicit metaphysics” (CWL 3, pp. 416-417) grounded in self-appropriation. But metaphysics has to give an account of the positions, the philosophical positions, that disagree with it; and some of
that philosophizing was happening early on in the context of cultures in which the distinction between mystery and image were not properly sorted out.

And to give — so in order —

“This conditioning of metaphysics by self-knowledge and of self-knowledge by human development does not imply that self-knowledge and metaphysics are not attempted until a sufficient human development is attained to ensure their accuracy and adequacy.” (CWL 3, p. 559).

And that’s why, in this account, he needs to start out with giving some ground for the interpretation of religion, religious symbolisms, and so on. But what’s distinctive of course, as I said before, is that he doesn’t want to eliminate them.

Okay. Let me pause here. We are ready to transition to talking — to looking at what Lonergan has to say about religious expressions in Method in Theology, and in part of what has been described by Father Crowe’s article on Lonergan’s Universalist Viewpoint12.

Student question about bias in the mythic consciousness.

— There is bias in mythic consciousness; the bias is not in the images laden with the sense of the “known unknown”; the bias is in the interpretations.

Pat: Any questions about this much? … Stephanie?

Stephanie: So is there an element of bias in this whole area of “mythic consciousness.” I mean —

Pat: Yes!

Stephanie: — kind of mythical expression, or, you know, do you think biases come out in the origin applications of events and bias?

Pat: Right! That’s right. So it’s the interpretation where the problem is, from Lonergan’s point of view. The symbol as symbol, he has a precise meaning that is not a problem, and it’s not eliminable, and it shouldn’t be eliminated. It’s essential to the authentic existence of human beings. It’s the interpretations that can be the problems.

And the extent to which the images are taken to be the real; particularly if somebody invests in some external object the awe and wonder that they are experiencing by their orientation towards an unseen and un-seeable unknown, then you’ve got something like a mythic consciousness in play. You won’t touch the stone because you’re afraid of the powers that might burn you, or something like that. That’s kind of an infantile type of mythic consciousness. So yeah, it’s the distortions. It’s the distortions with regard to interpretations!

Okay. Any other comments? …Okay! …

“Myth Revisited”

Lonergan’s regard for the term, ‘myth’ revisited.

At the time of Insight Lonergan used the term ‘myth’ only for the anti-intellectual distortions.

Later he acknowledged that what most scholars now refer to as ‘myth’ is not just the distortions, but also to what he referred to as mysteries.
Myth Revisited

“I have not been moved to change my mind about the first three chapters on metaphysics, i.e., on chapters 14, 15, 16. But in chapter 17 my usage of the word ‘myth’ is out of line with current usage. My contrast of mystery and myth was between symbolic expressions of positions and of counterpositions. It was perhaps justifiable in the context of Insight, but it is not going to be understood outside of it, so another mode of expression is desirable. Further, the account of mystery has to be filled out with what chapter 4 of Method in Theology says about religious experience.”


One last comment here: Lonergan uses the word ‘mystery’ in place of — to be the positive account of this, the symbol and its interpretations, and avoids the word ‘myth’, because he has the same notion about myth that Comte and Bultmann did; that myth is just a story that’s got certain kinds of distortion, and you have to get beyond this.

But in an article that he wrote several years later, called “Insight Revisited,” he said:

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“I have not been moved to change my mind about the first three chapters on metaphysics, i.e., on chapters 14, 15, 16.”

That’s an important observation. The passage continues:

“But in chapter 17 my usage of the word ‘myth’ is out of line with current usage. My contrast of mystery and myth was between symbolic expressions of positions and of counterpositions. It was perhaps justifiable in the context of Insight, but it is not going to be understood outside of it, so another mode of expression is desirable.”

And so — and he particularly had in mind Eliade’s work. He had read Eliade’s work earlier; but a great deal of scholarship in what is now called “Religious Studies” continued to focus on the significance of myths. And myths are the stories about origins and about that which gives meaning and value to the world and to human living. And so he recognized that his tendency to use the pejorative sense of ‘myth’ was out of step with this scholarship; and so he stopped using it that way.

And then he goes on to say:

“The account of mystery has to be filled out with what chapter 4 of Method in Theology says about religious experience.”

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So there are two things there. One is that he is no longer going to use the word myth in the exclusively pejorative sense that would have been inherited in the first half of the twentieth century and from the last half of the nineteenth century probably. But more than that, he is also saying that even his account of mystery has to be filled out. So let’s see how he does that! Okay. Let’s take a break, and then see how he does it.

End of Part One
Insight and Beyond

Class 23, Part Two: March 24th 2010

Chapter 17: “Metaphysics, Mystery & Myth”

“Method in Theology”, chapter four

“Lonergan’s Universalist View of Religion”

“Religious Experience and Religious Expression”

Summary of Material

Myth Revisited. The context of Method in Theology.

From Psychic Orientation to Religious Experience: the new emphasis on feelings.

The question of God as the question about questioning as the new context for his account of religious experience.

Self-transcendence as ‘going beyond’ should not be thought of in spatial terms.

Self-transcendence as going beyond through truly questioning; opens us to being in a way that is “beyond everything we already are”.
Method in Theology, Chapter Four.

Religious experience as the ‘basic’ (or ‘proper) fulfillment of our capacity for self-transcendence through questioning.

He identifies that basic/proper fulfillment as the experience of being-in-love with God — unconditional/unrestricted being-in-love.

Discussion of the meaning of ‘basic’ and ‘proper’.

As basic and proper fulfillment, religious experience brings peace to the “restlessness of our restless hearts” — our unrestricted desire to know.

But that is not the same as saying that religious experience answers all of our questions.

This fulfillment is not a product of our knowledge or choice.

As a dynamic state, it is conscious without being known, and is thus an experience of mystery.

This basic fulfillment is a new kind of conscious activity, and there is not anything analogous to it in Insight.

This new conscious activity calls for interpretation, expression — just as new insights call for expression and formulation.

Lonergan specifically referred to the works of Rudolf Otto and Paul Tillich concerning mystery in support of his interpretation of religious symbols in terms of the psychic operator corresponding to the known unknown.
In *Method in Theology* he cites these same authors in connection with his interpretation of religious symbolism in terms of unconditional being-in-love (i.e., the “basic fulfillment” of human self-transcendence).

This means he has changed his thinking about the approach to the interpretation of religious expressions.

The meaning of religious symbolism to be found no longer as the lower level psychic *auxiliary* or helper of the unrestricted intellectual and rational desire to know. Now it is a higher level conscious phenomenon which is the *fulfillment* of that desire.

‘Being in love’ as a basic fulfillment also brings a new kind of dynamism of its own into play, directing acts of consciousness in its own right.

Student question about the final step on the level of questions of value, and when they are fulfilled so as to ground judgments of value.

— Discussion of differences between the criteria for ethical judgment in *Insight* versus those in *Method in Theology*.

Student question about the falling in love as a level of consciousness, and whether it is a fourth level or some higher level.
Lonergan did indeed talk about a fifth level of consciousness that has to do with the unrestricted, total absorption of being in love. (This point is debated among Lonergan scholars.)

Discussion of the qualitative differences of different levels of consciousness.

Student question about the undifferentiated and differentiated consciousness regarding being-in-love.

— Answer in terms of “mediated immediacy”;
— The world of immediacy vs. the world mediated by meaning
— We mediate our relation to reality by means of our experiencing, perceiving, understanding, judging, etc.
— But our immediate relation to reality comes through our unrestricted desire.
— Yet he has the further notion that there is a return to immediacy that is mediated
— E.g., people have to learn a great deal about art in order to return to the immediacy of the aesthetic pattern of experience. Likewise, spiritual exercises mediate the immediacy of being-in-love unconditionally
— [It is in the mediated immediacy that religious experiences become differentiated.]
Crowe asks, “What does Lonergan mean by Religion?”

Religious experience is not the language used to discuss it, but the “wordless prayer of mystics” is mediated immediacy of religious experience.

Religious experience is profoundly reasonable, because it is intimately related to truly unrestricted inquiry.

Using language about religious experience one moves out of immediacy.

So Lonergan in answer to “What is meant by religion [or religious experience]?” does not appeal to any particular institutional religion.

There is a very specifically Christian mediation (superstructure) in the account of religious experience that Lonergan gives in Method in Theology — e.g. in his appeal to the phrase “love of God” and his citation of Romans 5:5.

The word ‘love’ means different things; Lonergan appeals to his Christian tradition to settle his meaning of the word.

Lonergan also appeals to self-appropriation as a means of mediating and giving interpretation to the pure experience of being-in-love unconditionally — i.e., that religious experience is the basic fulfillment of something we come to know through self-appropriation.
Whether these characterizations are correct and appropriate ways to interpret our religious experience is a question for hermeneutics.

Yet such immediate phenomena are unconditioned, universal experiences, and are found at the heart of all religious traditions.

Expressions of Religious Experience:

Because religious experience is unconditional, therefore in itself it is ineffable — inexpressible.

Difficulties of describing phenomena like religious experience, human love, and unconditional love.

Descriptions, Incarnate Manifestations, Symbols, Artistic, Differentiated and Developed expressions.

Student question about the possibility of explanatory expressions.

In part Lonergan is contributing to interreligious dialogue — because it is unconditional, religious experience defies complete human description, hence every limited human description can be a contribution to understanding religious experience.
Religious experience is first expressed by a spontaneous change of attitudes and behavior.

It is subsequently expressed symbolically, in symbols evoking or flowing from religious experience.

The new definition of symbol in *Method in Theology* and the new definition of religious symbol.

Associating religious experience with its outward occasion another primordial way of expressing it.

Can lead to the mistake of regarding an object present in the associated outward occasion as the proper object of the religious experience itself.

There is a birth or founding of sacred places when religious experience is expressed outwardly: these outward occasions are called ‘hierophanies.’

Discussion of the manifold expressions of religious experience.

These examples do not exhaust the ways in which religious experience and meaning can be expressed.

The Word: any expression of religious meaning or religious value.
As a Catholic theologian, Lonergan did hold that religious experience is an unconditional gift from a transcendent personal God, but acknowledges that this affirmation is not contained in immediate religious experience itself.

How Lonergan handles the charge that religious experience is inner human subjectivity: he recognizes the universal nature of religious experience while not reducing it to immanent subjectivity.

**End of Part Two.**