

***Longing to Know* and the Complexities of Knowing God**

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ABSTRACT Key Words: *Longing to Know*, Polanyi, Scripture, the authority of Scripture, the modern higher critical tradition, religious exclusivism, principled pluralism, knowing, epistemology.

This response to papers on my 2003 book, Longing to Know, presented at the Polanyi Society's November 2004 meetings, addresses two primary concerns about the book's argument: first, that the book's argument depends on an inappropriately unquestioned commitment to the authority of Scripture that falls short of the adjustment required by modern higher critical biblical scholarship; and second, that the book's argument implies a religious exclusivism that overlooks the fact that the model of knowing it defends suits competing religious positions equally well. I argue that LTK's strategy is more sophisticated than has been represented, and that the commitment to Scripture as an authoritative guide in knowing God, as over against the commitment to modern higher critical scholarship, may be reasonably justified as a consistent elucidation of the Polanyian model of knowing. I argue that, indeed, the Polanyian model of knowing may be applied to or by competing religious claims, where the claim that we must treat all such claims as having equal validity must itself be treated as a religious claim. In fact, Polanyi's argument about competing scientific claims makes more sense of how we may (yea, must) maintain the rightness of our own position while acknowledging respectfully the disagreements of others.

I am delighted to have this opportunity to profit from the response of my Polanyi Society compatriots, people whom I class both as friends and authoritative guides, to my work in *Longing to Know: The Philosophy of Knowledge for Ordinary People*.¹ Dale Cannon from the beginning has seemed to understand my vision and aid it with characteristic gracious resourcefulness. And I am happy now to invite David Rutledge and the rest of you more deeply into the conversation. My hope is that together we may move our Polanyian approach forward to farther ranges of application and value, and that our discussion at this juncture will be part of that.

While many helpful issues have been raised by Cannon and Rutledge, I have chosen to focus on what I believe to be the respondents' primary concerns regarding *LTK*. These are, first, the role that the author's implicit commitment to the authority of Scripture plays in *LTK*'s main argument, and second, the implications of the *LTK* argument for the author's religious exclusivism. To this I append a few shorter comments. In light of the professional orientation of this group, not to mention a proper sense of the limits of my own expertise, I will attempt in my answers to keep close to a Polanyian and philosophical analysis.

But first, I want to tell you a little of what has developed since the book's publication, in order to invite your good counsel about next steps I might take.

A Call for Conviviality Regarding the Future of LTK

Cultural healing. Since the publication of *LTK*, I have grown in conviction concerning the value of these proposals concerning how knowing works for aiding people in the Western tradition who are often "blinded" by a default misimpression concerning knowledge that keeps them from cashing in on their own

human inclinations and best insights when it comes to knowing. I think this affects every domain of life that involves knowing—which is of course every domain. After all, I reason, I got into philosophy because I believed that its influence on all of us is pervasive. So it stands to reason that something like a faulty vision of knowing would have a pervasive and unfortunate effect; and it stands to reason that people in all their avenues of knowing/living need epistemology therapy; and that therefore such an offered corrective holds the prospect for even something so grand as cultural healing. I do not mean to be presumptuous. But I, with most of you, believe with passion in the value of what Polanyi was doing.

What I have found most delightful has been the evolving challenge to try these proposals out on every skill group I can get my hands on. My belief is that if you—artist, counselor, teacher, engineer, business person—will give me an hour to sketch my proposals and to tell me about your line of work, I can start to help you do what you do better and with greater delight. Case in point: David Finnamore, a recording engineer in Nashville, became enthralled with *LTK*, to the point of blogging his proliferating *LTK* insights.² He writes that as a result of *LTK* he does his job better, faster, and has more fun. Or another, a professor of psychiatry at Loma Linda University, Dr. William Roth, wrote that *LTK* offered the best description of the psychotherapeutic act that he has found in 35 years of reading psychological literature.³ Or dermatological surgeon and artist Dr. David Clark, currently on leave from University of Missouri Columbia to pursue his interest in painting, who testifies that *LTK* explains better than anything else what he does when he teaches surgery, and helps him connect it with his art.⁴ Jere Moorman, on reading *LTK*, found that it revived his excitement for the prospect of applying Polanyian insights to the business industry; under his guidance I actually debuted a pilot business seminar called *Epistemology for the Workplace*, with 50 people in attendance. I have yet to pursue this exciting avenue further, but I do have a request to teach an Epistemology in Business course this summer. I have the growing rudiments of a series I am calling “*LTK* and...” which I hope I may profitably develop at some future point. Any Polanyian knows and delights in the wide applicability of the Polanyian model; what I hope you may help me with is further connections and applications, so that together we may extend the healing cultural impact of this vision of knowing.

Next books. I also am interested in your guidance concerning next stages beyond *LTK* for me as an author, and for this message. One thing that makes *LTK* such an odd book is the number of things I combine in it: exegesis of the Polanyian epistemic model, attempt to engage ordinary people in philosophy, and work in what is called preevangelism.⁵ I can imagine that you like I sometimes wish that these could be broken apart. If they were, what would be the next step, developing which aspect, how would it be packaged, and to target what audience? I covet your guidance in answering these questions.

One such book would be a sort of Polanyi-meets-the-road book. It would feature my lived explication of the Polanyian model sans the explicit and thematic application of the model to the question of knowing God. I wonder how to package such a book to make it a powerful resource for philosophy and people in many different disciplines. I welcome your guidance in this.

One next step I have in mind I want to call *Covenant Epistemology*. In it I wish to make the case for taking the interpersonal relationship, intrinsically covenant-shaped as it is, as paradigmatic for all knowing. This would be to develop my Chapter 22 in *LTK*: “The Ethics of Knowing.” Obviously I mean it to be compatible with the biblical theological claim that all that exists does so in covenant relationship with a personal and interpersonal God, but again, I want to make the case that we will unleash our effectiveness in all instances of knowing if we craft each more along the lines of interpersonal relationship. I want to move toward claiming that

interpersonal knowing is actually life giving and healing, in addition to being the way that we may more responsibly approximate an accurate understanding of the known. If *LTK* shows that knowing God is like knowing your auto mechanic, *Covenant Epistemology* hopes to show that knowing your auto mechanic is like knowing God.

I value your insight on these matters. I do sincerely want to further Polanyi's popularity and the interests and appeal of this Society along the way. My respondents concur in affirming what I do with Polanyi, which makes me very happy. Now let's think together about where to go from here.

The Problem of Commitment to the Authority of Scripture

Cannon's concern. Dale Cannon construes *LTK's* primary purpose as showing "how it is possible to claim with reasoned confidence that one can know God" (p. 7). In light of this construal Cannon argues that "the assumption of the authority of Scripture as the principal reliable means of access to knowledge of God is the kingpin on which Meek's central argument for how we can know God hangs" (p. 11). Cannon notes that I devote practically no attention to the relative merits of this claim, to the "serious counterarguments [that] have been or might be made" (p. 8) in response to what he terms my "taken for granted assumptions" (p. 7), and to "the enormous body of modern critical biblical scholarship that is widely presumed to have undermined confidence in the divine authority of Scripture" (p. 11). He indicates that commitment to the authority of Scripture is "specially vulnerable to the critical challenge." (p. 8). Thus, Cannon believes, the strength of the *LTK* is only that of its kingpin premise, which is a weakly supported premise. He also notes that this oversight prevents persons who take modern critical biblical scholarship seriously from profiting from the book.

Cannon further suggests that *LTK*, though displaying "apparent mastery of the self-absenting ironies of the modern critical intellectual ethos" [I do not feel confident that I know what he means by self-absenting ironies], has perhaps not "really fully confronted and fully realized the disturbing and disconcerting impact of the modern critiques of faith," (pp. 9-10) and thus perhaps is not fully post-critical but rather is still "in fundamental respects still pre-critical" (p. 10). If this is true of *LTK*, he argues, then *LTK* is not true to Polanyi's own post-critical vision.

I feel it important to address two things at the outset in response to assumptions I sense lie behind my respondents' comments. First: the understanding of Scripture as God's authoritative self-revelation that I wished to exemplify I took to be, not distinctively evangelical, but rather the historic position of the church. Second: I also took Scripture to have a fundamental underlying coherence. This means that some of the problems I sense that my respondents' have with *LTK's* use of Scripture are not problems we share. I believe that one's stance on the integrity of the biblical text is shaped by the philosophical commitments of the sort I allude to in this response, so perhaps what I do say here may help a little with what I don't.

LTK's agenda is more specific. To begin with, I believe Cannon's construal of *LTK's* purpose fails to represent the more sophisticated and specific approach of the book. In light of its actual purpose, my implicit commitment to Scripture as an authoritative guide, while it is indeed something that I mean to model and recommend, does not play the kingpin role in *LTK's* primary argument that Cannon attributes to it.

LTK's targeted audience. First, *LTK* explicitly targets people who are interested in believing what

Scripture has to say concerning God but who are prevented, as I was, by a certain set of epistemological issues that I now can help resolve utilizing Polanyi's insights. Thus I do address people most like me, and cherish the perhaps fragile hope or thoughtless arrogance to believe that in "doing me" well, I can also help others. My concern in this book from the outset is explicitly not concerns regarding textual criticism, biblical hermeneutics, the case for the veracity of Scripture, or even the merits of it as an authoritative divine self-revelation per se, but only as these profit from a liberating Polanyian reconstrual of knowing.

I chose also to target a younger audience. I have many former students now serving on college and university campuses, talking daily with 20-somethings. My former students report that the burning questions are epistemological. But these take the form of: Whom can I trust? Will you be there for me? and How may I live authentically? For these younger people, some of the questions that concerned me at their age don't concern them. Into this category, I venture to suggest, falls the need to address the questions associated with the modern critical tradition.⁶

LTK's approach. Had the book been a professional philosophical paper, it would have properly "fenced the thesis," as I call it: I would have named explicitly those perhaps even intimately related domains and applications which I take to fall outside this work's thesis. In light of my effort both to write popularly and also to offer a philosophically reputable work, I agree that in another edition I would do well to offer this sort of qualification, along with suggestions of possible lines of response and avenues for further study. But *LTK* is one aid in the journey of coming to know; it naturally leads to further questions that fall outside the domain of the book, questions that readers will have thereby been awakened and liberated to pursue. People with live questions about the relative merits of the findings of modern higher criticism with respect to Scripture need to move beyond *LTK* to study with the experts in that field, both the ones in the modern higher critical tradition, as well as the work of "anti-intellectual, close-minded" evangelical scholars.⁷ Careful further work concerning the veracity of Scripture will have to include also the philosophically sophisticated work of numerous evangelicals in both biblical studies and philosophy.

LTK's purpose. *LTK*, then, is first of all concerned to remove a specific epistemological barrier that unnecessarily prevents people from further considering Christianity. The barrier is a "default mode," a metaepistemology, among ordinary Westerners, that sees knowledge as "statements and proofs" from which knowledge of God is excluded. This metaepistemology has divorced not only faith from reason, and science from faith, but science from art, mind from body, knowing from doing, knowing from both knower and known. We in the Western tradition suffer an angst directly stemming from these disconnects, and appropriately painful, as well as prohibitive not just for considering Christianity but for effective knowing of every kind.

My purpose therefore was to address this epistemological barrier with my Polanyi-informed epistemic proposals. For me this doubled as a specific kind of preevangelism, rising to the challenge thrown down to the Christian church in the West by the late missiologist Lesslie Newbigin. Newbigin argued that people in the West were not able even to hear the message of the good news of Jesus Christ unless first their ears were unstopped through a radical epistemic preevangelism. Here in his own work Newbigin appropriated Polanyi's critique of doubt (with additional and explicit application to the hidden modernist assumptions underlying higher critical biblical scholarship, by the way), Polanyi's epistemic proposals, and his realism.⁸ But the point is that *LTK's* goal is preevangelism, not evangelism: with the success of this epistemological and also minimal (in the philosophical sense) effort, the deed in view is done. So the primary argument and mission in *LTK* is preliminary, and it is philosophical.

The structure of LTK's argument. In my primary argument for a Polanyian understanding of knowing as superior to and dismissive of the prevailing Western default mode, I appeal repeatedly and by copious examples to everybody's epistemic experience in every area of life. My respondents seem to agree that this has been effectively managed.

To this argument *LTK* appends the persistent personal application of the model to knowing Jeff the auto mechanic and to knowing God. With regard to both, and in contrast to my elucidation of the model itself, the author consistently speaks in the first-person. This is important to note. Concerning both Jeff and God, I am offering a description of the relevant features of my own epistemic acts to make the simple point that they conform to the *LTK* model of knowing. This I take to be profoundly consistent with my preliminary and philosophical agenda. In applying the *LTK* model to knowing God, I illustrate its application in my life. I describe the way I rely on Scripture as an authoritative guide in the act of coming to know God. I employ the illustration of how I use Scripture as a guide as much to confirm the *LTK* model as to employ the model to elucidate the lived experience of knowing God.

The role of examples of personal use of Scripture as an authoritative guide. Cannon generates a list of quotes from *LTK* in description of my "taken-for-granted assumptions" (p. 7). Virtually every quote he has lifted from a context in which each was deeply embedded both in a personal application and with thoughtful intentionality compared to a key epistemic element of the *LTK* model. I believe Cannon would acknowledge that in context each appeal to this Scriptural authoritative guide is as situated and embodied and for this reason epistemically legitimate and thoughtful as my trusting my car to Jeff. But the disembodied list can't help but suggest that the author exhibits an irresponsible devotion to this out-of-vogue authority. And it also suggests a less philosophically sophisticated, and more carelessly managed argument for knowing God than I believe is to be found in *LTK*.

Some of my rationale for this approach to Scripture in LTK. But now, *why* do I employ this first-person description of my use of Scripture, as opposed to a formal defense? First of all, it is to make the case of the similarity to my trust in my auto mechanic, or in any other ordinary acts of knowing in which we always encounter, at some level, implicit trust in some authoritative guide. On the one hand, people often feel that relying on a book to tell you about an intangible God is defective and suspect epistemologically, falling outside the default ideal of knowledge as authority-free, adequately supported, empirically based statements. In this respect I wanted to *raise* the perception of Scripture to the level of "ordinary."

In another respect, I wanted to *lower* the perception of Scripture to the level of "ordinary." I hoped to address, in the alignment of trusting Scripture as an authoritative guide with my reliance on testimony in other cases, the sometimes extreme skepticism which assumes the Bible is speaking only "mythologically" or "theologically" (i.e., not truly or historically) until proven otherwise. This skeptical approach does not comport with the vast span of ordinary acts of knowing. In most of our ordinary affairs, we trust guides implicitly with nowhere near the scrutiny and suspicion that many people feel obligated to maintain uniquely and inequitably regarding Scripture. To be sure, when one is considering embracing Christianity, the stakes are much higher, the risks and rewards are out of this world. Scripture itself indicates that the centrality of the human heart, bent as it now is toward rebellion against God, inclines us to find ways to avoid submission to God. But my epistemological point remains: knowing God is an instance of ordinary human knowing.

Secondly, I did so to show how we do indeed employ and have to employ the matrix of authoritative guides *from inside the matrix*.⁹ However we may have responsibly or irresponsibly arrived at our reliance on such authority, however risky may have been our decision to trust it, in order to utilize that authority we have to trust ourselves to it wholeheartedly. I think the modern era's philosophical suggestion that we are true to our epistemic obligations if we rely on our claims only in measure proportional to the strength of our evidential support for them is, from an ordinary life point of view, naïve. How my husband could have followed this with respect to his prostate surgery I have no idea. How do you have a 50% prostate cancer surgery? Life is full of situations in which you cannot hedge your bets.

Thirdly, within a coherent Scriptural vision, consistency requires making epistemological sense of-and obeying even you can't make epistemological sense of-Scripture's claim concerning its own authority. God and not I, Scripture and not I, says and has the right to say that God sets the standard, that Scripture testifies to and has the authority to testify to its own authority.

Fourthly, these last assertions, viewed from the outside, can't be expected to make the sense that they do only from the inside. Following Polanyi, I think we could helpfully delineate a focal and a subsidiary approach to the authority or veracity of Scripture or any other authoritative guide. The whole point of the Polanyian approach is to call attention to and entitle us to the subsidiary inside approach, and to show why the focal one doesn't fit aptly with human experience, except in the temporary mode of destructive analysis. I was seeking to do justice to and model this Polanyian approach in *LTK*.

Fifth, the Polanyian understanding of knowing as the lived trajectory of wholehearted, risky, unqualified confidence in God's promise actually opens the Bible-reader's eyes to note things the Bible indicates about knowing God, to which the prevailing epistemic model has blinded us. To give you just one example: I finally feel I appreciate how the gift of eternal life with God is in any way proportionate to my belief. I'm not talking about my meriting eternal life; I'm talking about finally seeing why it isn't so ludicrous that "just believing" is something God would want to honor. For the act of believing is the risky, responsible orientation and integrative struggle of our whole lives toward the partially hidden focus of Scripture's God, the sketchy pattern we then submit to as a token of reality. Fruitful resonances such as this, when we juxtapose the Polanyian model alongside the Scriptural text, confirm the Polanyian model.

LTK's apparent blindness to the implications of modern biblical scholarship. This leads me to consider Cannon's further comments about modern critical biblical scholarship being widely presumed to have undermined confidence in the divine authority of Scripture, and his concern that *LTK* may after all be pre- rather than post-critical. Cannon asks: "Has [*LTK*] really faced the problematic juggernaut of the modern critical tradition?" He describes Polanyi's post-critical initiative as "one that does not attempt to revert to a reaffirmation of some pre-modern faith perspective, nor one that would circumvent the baptism of fire that is the heart of the modern critical 'tradition.' Rather, a post-critical philosophy, as I understand what Polanyi meant, is one that has passed through the searing critiques of modernity, continues to affirm what genuine insights there are in those critiques (those of Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud among them) and yet reaffirms, *with a chastened faith*, and draws upon the original wellsprings of one's intellectual passions" (p. 10).

Cannon and the critical tradition in biblical scholarship. I confess I am mystified by Cannon's reverence for the modern critical tradition in biblical scholarship while at the same time apparently applauding Polanyi's devastating critique of the modern critical tradition. In his very next paragraph, while raising a

question about my fixating on what I call the ideal of certainty (a case of literary metonymy, I may say—nothing more), Cannon says, “According to Polanyi’s own analysis, as I understand it, what makes the modern critical tradition *critical* is not its quixotic pursuit of certainty but its adherence to an attitude of critical suspicion and methodological doubt as the guarantor of respectable claims to knowledge...an *a priori bias* to critically call into question and force any candidate for belief to provide convincing impersonal justification that will defeat and overcome the methodological bias of critical doubt.” He implies rightly that Polanyi saw the need to challenge, and successfully challenged the hidden, controlling, constrictive presumptions of the modern critical tradition. If so, how was the author of *LTK* or anyone else to imagine that this success of Polanyi’s did not pertain to the modern critical tradition in its application to biblical studies? The burden of proof lies with showing why biblical scholarship or, indeed, all things religious, should be excepted from the blessings of the Polanyian critique.

Is LTK pre-critical? Regarding the question of *LTK* being post- and pre-critical: Would we not agree that the Polanyian effort “toward a post-critical epistemology” consists in this challenge of the fundamental philosophical presumptions in the context of which alone the apparently devastating critical scholarly products of the Enlightenment survive? If so, how is it appropriate to cast Polanyi own work as “emerging from the searing critiques of modernity with a chastened faith”? Why “chastened”? Why not rather “restored”? And if restored, why do we have to see them as searing critiques which we pass through in order to be responsible scholars?

As far as being pre- or post-critical, then: I have been suggesting, first, that Cannon must himself choose whether he wants to be critical or Polanyian with respect to biblical scholarship. Second, I deny that Polanyi’s post-critical stance in general has any of the chastened or seared about it with respect to the prevailing epistemological paradigm. “Chastened” and “seared” are of course pictorial. Cannon’s use of them leaves it to me to express their concrete meaning. In the context of his work I believe they indicate having conceded the legitimacy of the enlightenment rationalist assumptions that have exercised such a stranglehold on our knowing in every domain.¹⁰ If so, Polanyi does the exact opposite of acting chastened.¹¹ A postmodern position might deservedly be called chastened, but not a postcritical one in the Polanyian sense. In fact, Polanyi seems to fit Cannon’s description of “reverting to a reaffirmation of some pre-modern faith perspective” in calling us to Augustine’s *Credo ut intelligam*, and is in this respect pre-critical himself. None of us Polanyians take his approach as anything other than liberating restoration to ourselves and to the world.¹²

Compare the approach of reformed epistemology. Indeed we may note the affinities of the Polanyian approach to that of those philosophers of Dutch Reformed tradition who with their continual, “Why suppose that we must...?” questioned the unquestioned tenability of a modernist metaepistemology, and in so doing inaugurated not only reformed epistemology and reaccredited religious belief with rationality, but freed the entire epistemological enterprise to fresh pursuits.¹³

On the assumption that reformed epistemology has shown persuasively that you and I are within our epistemic rights and thus rational in believing in God, my colleague Robert Frazier argues, we may also be seen to be rational in believing that such a God might reveal himself in word and deed, as humans do, and do so in such a way as to ensure that his hearers understand him correctly, as humans do as well. In fact, when we look at what Scripture says about itself and about its status as God’s self-revelation, this is just what we find described and enjoined for our belief.¹⁴ If there is rational room for a straightforward coherent understanding of the text, why should our stance regarding it be guilty in the absence of rigorous proof, rather than innocent until proven guilty?

While my professional training and expertise in regard to modern higher critical biblical scholarship is indeed minimal, I do have a graphic recollection of a visit to Covenant Seminary of German biblical scholar Eta Linnemann, whose early work as a Bultmannian critic, my colleagues reported, had contributed to critical consensus with respect to Scripture.¹⁵ Now in this later period of her life, she was lecturing in the States to retract her earlier claims. A small, rotund woman with the look of a *Hausfrau*, she stood on a stool in order to see over the podium, and read her lecture in halting English. At one point, memorably, she took her Bible and put it over her head, and her wrinkled face broke with the widest of grins.¹⁶ Even from within the complex hermeneutical matrix one may, indeed one must, choose one anchor of normativity over another.

LTK and the Problem of Religious Pluralism

Is LTK inclusivist or exclusivist? I turn now to consider the second main criticism of *LTK*. Cannon questions whether my epistemic proposals in their application to knowing God allow for the possibility that they might be comprehensively wrong or wrong in significant respects, the kind of error that can arise, as with Polanyi's Azande example, from self-reinforcing systems of belief (*PK* 294). He rightly notes that *LTK* offers little insight concerning how to approach dealing with "the thorny problem of religious pluralism, the problem of the apparent conflict between competing religious claims" (p. 15). What is more, he believes that someone in another faith tradition such as Buddhism or Wicca could mount an exactly parallel argument for knowing the god in their tradition (p. 16). Do not other faith traditions have as much of a claim to know as I defend on behalf of Christians? And how might I say yes to this without this "necessarily entailing the contradiction that Meek believes it must [I 'm not sure of the referent of this contradiction--]?(p. 17). And if I maintain an exclusivist position, how may I do so without giving offense, and without undervaluing the tremendous resources and insights to be had in other religions? (p. 17).

LTK describes all acts of knowing, including defective ones. Although I did not feel it was germane to *LTK*'s targeted purpose and audience to discuss religious pluralism in depth, in fact I do agree that the *LTK* model identifies features common to all acts of human knowing. I have persisted in talking about acts of knowing rather than about knowledge precisely because every act of knowing seems to get part of it right and part of it wrong. If the act has the Polanyian features, I think it is appropriate to term it an act of knowing, even if it is partially mistaken. (Thus, Nash's delusions in *A Beautiful Mind* count as defective acts of knowing.) This means that I take people engaged in other religions as thereby engaged in acts of knowing. I concur with Polanyi's statement, quoted by Cannon, that "the attribution of truth to any particular stable alternative is a fiduciary act which cannot be analyzed in non-committal terms...[T]here exists no principle of doubt the operation of which will discover for us which of two systems of implicit beliefs is true—except in the sense that we will admit decisive evidence against the one we do not believe to be true, and not against the other." (p. 15; *PK*, 294).

The fiduciary nature of principled pluralism. We must realize that in this discussion, however, we speak of not *two* but *three* conflicting sorts of religious positions, stable alternatives that cannot be analyzed in non-committal terms but which highlight the fiduciary nature of all attributions of truth, not just in religious matters. The alternatives are that Position A is correct and Position B is mistaken; that Position B is correct and Position A is mistaken; the third is the position that the rectitude of one position over another is undecidable and that therefore both A and B are equally valid.

I would call this third position *principled pluralism*. I am not sure whether Cannon means to espouse it or not. I do not believe that principled pluralism is uniquely or substantively entailed by the Polanyian approach. Although it carries about itself an air of neutrality and fairness, principled pluralism also could be systematically in error, can be tenaciously held, and when it comes to attribution of truth is in fact not analyzable in non-committal terms. But Polanyi's positive and repeated and post-critical (and pre-critical; also biblical) claim is that the holding of the truth of a position is a fiduciary act. He doesn't say that it can't be decided. He says it can't be decided noncommittally.

The risky responsibility of the epistemic act. One of Polanyi's foremost post-critical (and pre-critical; also biblical) claims is the profound role that human responsibility and risk play in all acts of knowing. Attempts to hide from ourselves the reality of our responsibility as a factor in our knowing are both ignoble and delusional. Yet, Polanyi believes, more often than not in the Western epistemological tradition an ideal of total "objectivity" and personal uninvolvement is something we have sought, perhaps in a continued effort to get ourselves as knowers off this uncomfortable hook.

The *LTK* model implies that both an Azande witch doctor, a Bible-believer, and a principled religious pluralist are engaged in acts of knowing. But having acknowledged the fiduciary nature of attributions of truth, let us not now pretend to avoid the fiduciary act, and let us go about our faithful holding of truth claims with humility and respect. In Cannon's language, all of us have an equally legitimate claim to know, in the sense of being personally responsible for these fundamentally fiduciary acts. But in the spirit of Polanyi, may we not shrink from the "Here I stand: I cannot do otherwise" of the fiduciary act in religion even as we would not in scientific discovery.

In scientific discovery, Polanyi makes the case that people holding conflicting positions can be expected to defend their positions in the heat of intellectual, persuasive passion. This is just a description of what happens, and what we may expect to happen, and for Polanyi points to the fundamentally fiduciary character of scientific claims. I do not see him anywhere say that in the name of sympathy and tolerance a scientist must surrender his/her passionate claim with universal intent unless it is a position of principled pluralism. If this would be out of court in science, why must we suppose it to be different in religion? Why indeed? The burden of proof lies with those who must account for this proposed inequity.

Scripture confirms de facto pluralism, not principled pluralism. I may thus describe the *LTK* model as implying that people in all religious and philosophical and worldview positions are involved in acts of knowing. What is more, the Bible indicates that this plurality of religions is exactly what I may expect to find. I learned from Calvin to see that humans are incurably religious and that one may expect to find an array of mutually conflicting religious positions.¹⁷

If, as Dale suggests, a person of another religion successfully applied the Polanyian model to his/her own act of knowing¹⁸, would this not weaken my case for the value of its application to knowing the God of the Bible? Would it require that I, to be consistent, adopt a principled pluralism with respect to other faith commitments? I think not. But if not, why does the aura of impropriety linger above religious exclusivism?

A Polanyian account of exclusivism's aura of impropriety. I believe we may account for it, once again, utilizing Polanyi's distinction between focal and subsidiary. We may embody a committed position of any sort, including religious, or we may climb outside of it and engage in focal scrutiny of it. But the animal looked at

from the outside ain't the same animal lived from the inside. There's a reason why the temporary status of destructive analysis feels uncomfortable and even contradictory. First, we are scrutinizing focally what is meant to be lived from inside. Second, by inference from earlier paragraphs here, if we truly think that this outside analysis is assumption-free, we are not being honest with ourselves. On the other hand, to embody subsidiarily a risky commitment to the truth of one's claim can feel uncomfortable, perhaps because we in the Western tradition have for so long attempted to deny the risky epistemic responsibility that powers all our claims to know.

I embody the words of Scripture in my longing to know God. Scripture says Jesus alone is Lord. From the inside, how could I imagine calling a being God who was not Lord, who did not call the shots both epistemically and salvifically? It would make no sense to deny to him such authority, especially when he claims it. I do not need to appeal only to Jesus' claims about himself, or that of the members of the early Church. I simply note the first of the Ten Commandments: *No other gods*.

Mission and witness. But also, from the inside, I believe I know God's heart. Scripture says also that he chose me sovereignly and unconditionally, and that if he hadn't, I would be lost. His exclusivity liberates and transforms me. From within the rich matrix of my fiduciary act, I may identify and participate in his mission. His mission is so much more than sympathy expressed in efforts to find common ground between conflicting religious systems, but Christ-like, proactive, unconditional love, that might include answering, not the abstract questions spawned by a non-existent neutral ground, but the live, authentic, and desperately heartfelt questions to which only a lived and passionate response may be seen to be fitting.¹⁹ I am called to witness. "Mission" and "witness" are words that only make sense within and out of the lived trajectory of a fiduciary act.

I firmly believe that it is far more respectful to a person of another faith tradition to acknowledge that he or she believes as he or she does because he or she thinks it is true, and that he or she believes that what I believe is false. I have a problem with the disrespect of trying to tell someone that what they believe is only privately true or as equally "valid" as my own position.

Diamond mining. I also learned from Calvin (and many others in the Calvinian tradition) that the Lordship of Christ even in this broken between-time before all things are restored, means that I can expect to find truth (inevitably tangled up with error) everywhere, because not one inch of the world falls outside his domain.²⁰ This doctrine of "common grace" fuels confidence and delight, not to mention respect and care, in my work in comparative philosophy, as it would for studies in comparative religion. Surrendering this fiduciary biblical commitment would make me worse at showing respect for people who differ from me, not better. It requires humility of me. So does the radical contingency of my own insight: according to Scripture—apart from God's opening anyone's eyes, human rebellious disobedience to him completely prevents us from knowing him—something I hardly mention in *LTK*.²¹

I'm sorry. For all that, I concur that disrespect for persons of other traditions seems grievously to accompany religious exclusivism. I also freely admit both my own failure to represent another's position accurately, as noted by Cannon, and my need to learn from him and others how to improve this. I also admit the bent in my heart that prompts the evil intending of such a misrepresentation (which would be more than a principled pluralist might concede concerning religious exclusivism, oddly enough.) However, I believe all mark-missing of this sort, apart from the telltale oddness of "outside" and "inside" stances, has nothing inherently to do with religious exclusivism, and more to do with selfishness and bad manners, and with the inability to distinguish between disagreement and disrespect.

In summary then: to deny the equally fundamentally fiduciary nature of a principled pluralism is both mistaken and contrary to Polanyi's best lights; to deny or withhold commitment because of the fundamentally fiduciary nature of a religious exclusivism such as is consistent with the reading of the biblical text as a coherent canonical whole is epistemically unwarranted, naïve, and contrary to Polanyi's best lights. Better to bear the reproach of a milieu in which such a commitment is unpopular and often ridiculed, than to believe it philosophically reputable, religiously acceptable, or, in the end, culturally healing, to attempt to do otherwise.

Fiduciary realism. But as a final word: The author of *LTK* has come to be noted for elucidating and championing Polanyi's realism. It is possible so to focus on the fiduciary aspect of all epistemic acts that we lose sight of their realist intent. A Polanyian realignment of our sights, I believe, shifts the fiduciary to subsidiary status, where we experience it as the situated, embodied, lived, risky, passionate, trajectory toward the focal, partially hidden, partially disclosed, ever beckoning objective reality. That we are not in fact deluding ourselves in this is confirmed by key indicators of our successful contact with reality: we experience a wide range of indeterminate future manifestations (just had to get that in here somewhere!). If Polanyi's realist contribution is to use such tantalizing phrases to describe the work of science, perhaps mine may be considered the none-too-creative noting of the aptness of this description for the act of coming to know the objectively real God described in Scripture.

The Tragedy of Knowing

David Rutledge asks me to elaborate concerning the tragedy of knowing and the relationship between knowledge in evil. He argues that the Enlightenment was optimistic about knowledge, but that there is a minor chord recurring in human history: knowledge involves losing innocence and leads to tragic consequences. He wonders, I believe, whether *LTK* does enough justice to this tragedy. He also thinks Polanyi doesn't do enough justice to it either.

To begin with, I think that knowing is a good thing. It is our nature. It's what we were made to do, and we were made to find joy in doing it. I do not apologize for the exuberance of *LTK*. To suggest that knowledge only comes with loss of innocence is to get the original story wrong: knowledge, the best knowledge, is had in innocence. Humans were made to know, and to know joyfully and healingly in the world. The abuse should not discredit the intended use.

It is true that I did not talk very much in *LTK* about sin or about what theologians call the noetic effects of sin. This was a conscious choice in light of my intended audience. I think Polanyi's model of knowing beautifully accounts for the normative dimension of knowing which renders human knowing so vulnerable to human rebellion.

Knowing for Polanyi is fundamentally a responsible human act of commitment. I mean that knowing is responsible in two ways. The knower is always responsible *for* the act; he or she may or may not always behave responsibly *in* the act. The moral dimension of knowing is ever present—we are always responsible for the act. In fact, I mean to say that without the moral dimension, the act would not be constituted as such, for all knowing involves a fiduciary act. Thus our responsibility or irresponsibility, our wisdom and foolishness, our expertise and our ignorance, our rebelliousness or our submission, radically shape our knowing. It can make us better or worse at knowing. Accordingly, our act of knowing will be better or worse for the object we intend to know.

We in the Western tradition have come to deceive ourselves with respect to this moral foundation of all knowing. We have separated knowing from its moral root, and exalted it to supremacy, unbesmirched (so we thought) by association with things moral. For a long time we did not see the irony of the moralism of modern philosophy's claim that knowledge is and should be *amoral*. To the extent that we recognize our mistake now, it seems to us that epistemic sins committed on such a moral amoral pretext were (and are) that much more horrible for their irony. No matter how in denial we may be of the foundational role of the moral in knowing, the foundational role of the moral in knowing remains operative.

The epistemic act as described by Michael Polanyi is viable precisely because it reincorporates personhood and responsible moral choice as driving factors in knowing.

In his discussion of knowledge and evil, I wonder whether Rutledge has confused evil knowing and knowing evil. It is possible responsibly to know evil things such as death camps and genocides. Such instances of knowing would not themselves be intrinsically evil. On the other hand, if it was irresponsibly motivated or carried out, the act of knowing would indeed be defective. whether the claim in question concerned Mother Theresa or Auschwitz.

Epistemologists, it would seem, are involved with responsibility in knowing at yet another level. To build and promote an epistemic model that authentically represents the fundamental role of morality and stewardship in knowing—that is our responsibility. May we be found faithful.

Mystical Experience and the Hiddenness of God

Cannon believes that I denigrate mystical experience. I apologize for misleading anyone concerning this. I do react to the word “mystical” to the extent that it smacks of an inappropriate epistemic bifurcation of knowledge and other modes of apprehension. The problem is not the practice; the problem is the bifurcation. Having rejected the bifurcation, the testimony of mystics is something I read avidly, expecting and being confirmed in my expectation that they sometimes have more aptly described the epistemic act than have those caught in an alien rationalism. (I see this in the work of Simone Weil, to name just one). I then expect to find similar features in even the most mundane and the most scientific efforts to know. Since Dale has done much to encourage my attention to such writers, I am anxious to clarify this point.

Routledge expresses concern that I do not do justice to God's mystery—this seems connected somehow to what Dale thought about *LTK* and mystical experience. I feel that as a result of my appropriation of the Polanyian understanding of knowing and of reality, I am more attuned to God's mystery, not less. I want to say that there is way more mystery about all ordinary acts of knowing than we have been acculturated to think. I hardly know Jeff, my auto mechanic. The integrative vector of our epistemic acts, ironically, moves us from unknowns to unknowns: It begins with clues that we can only partially name, to which we must relate in inarticulably fresh ways; it moves toward a focus that is yet undiscovered and once discovered is only partially known, ever capable of surprising us with indeterminate future manifestations. When we know God, we lay hold of the hem of his garment, and we can expect to be in for a wild ride. There is plenty of room for mystery here, precisely because he is real.

Soon after my uprooting and move to Western Pennsylvania a few months ago, I was asked to lead devotions at the faculty retreat. My colleague suggested that I do it on knowing God. My immediate reaction was to think *I don't know God*—despite having written a book about it. I was at a stage in the transition where I knew precious little—not my phone number, nor my dentist, my colleagues' names, or even which way was north. I marveled at the interconnectedness of knowledge of God and knowledge of self with which Calvin begins his *Institutes*. But I also realized that it is possible to trust someone, even to sense his presence, in an enveloping fog that obscures much of his character in addition to his plans. We may know that God is good, for example, without knowing much of what that good looks like. My text was the description of Abraham in Hebrews 11. Abraham went out, not knowing where he was going, because he considered him faithful who had promised.

The Safety of the Kitchen Table

My nurturing approach to philosophy is another aspect of my work in which Dale has personally encouraged me. It is quite true that at this age I have given up all pretense to be something other than what I am. I have found it hopeless to try, and much smarter to play to my strength. So, yes—I am a philosopher mom. But I believe we must be alert to and reject an inappropriate assumption that the nurturing safety of the kitchen table implies either mindlessness or professional timidity or philosophical naivete. Both philosophically and pedagogically, and in defense of my gender and home commitments, I object to that hidden alignment.

I am prepared to argue in this vein that we will be better at all of our knowing for the subsidiary anchor of “being at home,”—earthy, embodied, kitchen-table home—a concept of personal presence in which, by the way, I think people in Eastern religious traditions may be our guides. I have gained much from Dale's putting me in touch with Parker Palmer and others who argue for a reciprocity of persons, at once profoundly embodied and profoundly epistemic, as essential to education and knowing. I live this out with as much intentionality as I know how to because it is Polanyian, it is biblical, it is rehumanizing, it is effective, and it epistemologically superior.

For that matter, how could you possibly argue that any twentysomeone²² in these days of globalized communication is or could be protected from either modernism or postmodernism, or diverse worldviews? If my philosophical kitchen table offers a port in the storm, it is hardly in danger of being outmoded by a glutted market.

But I am happy to report that, in connection with my work I see more people going out the kitchen door into further philosophy and scholarly study and engagement of ideas than I do people coming in the door in search of a mindless safe harbor—in fact, there's nobody in this latter category. There is nobody hiding under my kitchen table. Recently I enjoyed a reunion with a student whom I taught in 2000, now a pastor in Charlotte. He said: “You ruined my life! And I'm so glad you did!”²³

Endnotes

¹ Brazos, 2003. Hereafter *LTK*.

² ltkmore.blogspot.com.

³ Personal correspondence.

⁴ Clark expressed this in my presence to a couple other M.D.s.

⁵ Preevangelism refers to issues that need to be addressed with a hearer before the good news of Jesus Christ can be communicated to that hearer. I talk about *LTK* as preevangelism a little later in this piece.

⁶ Thus, with reference to my later discussion of *LTK*'s pre- or post-critical positioning, *LTK* may be more post-critical than pre-critical or critical.

⁷ Cannon suggests this prevailing perception without disputing it. (p. 14) However, I note that there are many evangelicals who have more degrees after their name than I do. Two hundred or so of them are meeting concurrently in the Institute of Biblical Research; this past week five or six hundred of them gathered in the meetings of the Evangelical Theological Society and the Evangelical Philosophical Society. *LTK*, by the way, I am told, will have been quoted from extensively by philosophy professor and widely published author J.P. Moreland in one of ETS's plenary sessions. While he may be evangelical, and while I may not be fully sympathetic with his apologetic approach, one can hardly call Moreland anti-intellectual. Perhaps it is we who need to reconsider the relative philosophical merits of an evangelical stance.

⁸ *Proper Confidence: Faith, Doubt and Certainty in Christian Discipleship*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1995.

⁹ I have tried to flesh out our reliance on authoritative guides in "Learning to See: The Role of Authoritative Guides in Knowing," *TAD* (forthcoming).

¹⁰ Cannon also references critiques such as Nietzsche's and Freud's. On the one hand, these critiques challenge the assumptions of modern critical scholarship as Polanyi's does. On the other hand, Polanyi's approach, I believe, offers a helpful and superior alternative to these reductivist and self-undermining attempts.

¹¹ Actually, I believe that Polanyi himself set a precedent for this apparent inconsistency by exercising it himself. I believe that when he himself turns to religion he deserts his own insights; in the realm of religion, he has less of the robust confidence of restoration and more of the seared chastening about him. But in this I would maintain that this stems not from the system but from a failure to apply it consistently.

¹² In this respect, I would like to suggest that the more important term in Polanyi's title is not *post-critical* but rather *personal*.

¹³ I have in mind the work of Nicholas Wolterstorff and Alvin Plantinga, and their formative collection of essays, *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*. (Notre Dame, IN: University Press, 1983). It is important to note, as Wolterstorff does, that Dutch Calvinism offered a "postmodernism" of its own from long before the Enlightenment hegemony. As Vern Poythress, theologian at Westminster Seminary says, we have a hermeneutic of suspicion more radical than any (personal correspondence). What is more, it was commitment to Scripture that prompted scholarly superiority in epistemology. A biblically shaped viewpoint prompted the insight into the fundamentally pretheoretical and religious commitments driving the enlightenment ideal—Plantinga quotes Dutch theologian Herman Bavinck in developing his response (p. 64f) [see also Wolterstorff's recent recounting of the story in "Reformed Epistemology," in D.Z. Phillips and Timothy Tessin, eds. *Philosophy of Religion in the 21st Century*; Claremont Studies in the Philosophy of Religion (Palgrave, 2001), p. 48].

¹⁴ Informal conversation.

¹⁵ These were the comments of New Testament scholars Robert Yarbrough and Hans Bayer, who had done their work in Germany.

¹⁶ Eta Linnemann, *Historical Criticism Of The Bible: Methodology Or Ideology?* Robert W. Yarbrough, trans. (1990).

¹⁷ John Calvin, *Institutes of Christian Religion*, Ford Lewis Battles, trans. (Library of Christian Classics Ed.) Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960, Book I, Chap. 3.

¹⁸ They may not actually be able to do this, for philosophical reasons: my epistemology may suit the biblical worldview in such a way as to prevent it being desirably transferred to another one.

¹⁹ Vern Poythress, Ph.D. Professor of Systematic Theology, Westminster Seminary, Philadelphia, in personal communication.

²⁰ *Institutes*, though the latter phrase is Abraham Kuyper's, possibly his Stone Lectures, 1900.

²¹ Why did I choose not to name the role of the Holy Spirit in the epistemic act? Because I think the Spirit superintends the removal of epistemological impediments or any other sort of impediment. The key thing about the book would not be my mentioning him so much as occasioning his work. Had I appealed to the critical role of the Holy Spirit in knowing, I would not have written the book. But this extreme in reasoning seems counter to Scripture also. God uses even unwilling candidates to further his purposes.

²² My target audience. The term is the title of a book written by one of my students, Doug Serven, who now serves as a campus minister at Oklahoma University. (www.twentysomeone.org)

²³ I am grateful to my husband, Jim, for faithful counsel and editorial scrutiny of this piece. Also, thank you to John Frame, Hans Bayer, Vern Poythress, Byron Curtis, Dru Johnson, and Bob Frazier for lending time and expert counsel in conversation with me on these matters.

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Annual membership in the Polanyi Society is \$25 (\$10 for students). The membership cycle follows the academic year; subscriptions are due November 1 to Phil Mullins, Missouri Western State University, St. Joseph, MO 64507 (fax: 816-271-5680, e-mail: mullins@missouriwestern.edu). Please make checks payable to the Polanyi Society. Dues can be paid by credit card by providing the card holder's name as it appears on the card, the card number and expiration date. Changes of address and inquiries should be sent to Phil Mullins. New members should provide the following subscription information: complete mailing address, telephone (work and home), e-mail address and/or fax number. Institutional members should identify a department to contact for billing. The Polanyi Society attempts to maintain a data base identifying persons interested in or working with Polanyi's philosophical writing. New members can contribute to this effort by writing a short description of their particular interests in Polanyi's work and any publications and /or theses/dissertations related to Polanyi's thought. Please provide complete bibliographic information. Those renewing membership are invited to include information on recent work.

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