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Let It Be: Wellbeing As Fiat for a Life That Gives Birth to the Divine

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LET IT BE: WELLBEING AS FIAT FOR A LIFE THAT GIVES BIRTH TO THE DIVINE

In many ways, the Feast of the Annunciation¹ is an announcement of wellbeing to the Duquesne University Community. It is a message to be delivered to those who will hear, to those who are present, not just in form but also in spirit. It is a forerunner to a kind of “good news” or gospel of health that has its origin in the divine, with the Holy Spirit as its inspiration. I meditate here on the Annunciation to Mary, in which wellbeing is shown as a response, a “let it be” (“*fiat*”) to the messenger’s call. A life of wellbeing is none other than one in imitation of Mary, the Mother of God. The Mother we are attempting to imitate is described for us in Luke 1:26-38, the annunciation passage in sacred Scripture.

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin’s name was Mary. And he came to her and said, “Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you!” But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and considered in her mind what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there will be no end.” And Mary said to the angel, “How shall this be, since I have no husband?” And the angel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And behold, your kinswoman Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For with God nothing will be impossible.” And Mary said, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.

God’s Call and Personal Fulfillment

There is here call and response, vocation and fulfillment. The angel relayed God’s call, Mary responded with “let it be.” Here is the pattern of a life of wellbeing. We are all called to a

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life of wellbeing, but few of us know what wellbeing is or how to pursue it. Wellbeing is often thought of as “happiness.” If we pursue wellbeing as a form of happiness do we not run the risk of pursuing a state of consciousness, an ephemeral, transient state that is subject to change, a radical impermanence that we pursue with the hope of being satiated but never ultimately fulfilled? When Gabriel called Mary to her destiny, a destiny that she could have refused, was he calling her to a life of happiness? If we imitate Mary, we begin our “let it be” by saying “no” to the promise of a life of endless happy states, which is in fact, an illusion. While we all know this intellectually, our lived experience tells us otherwise, as we often run in search of that which will make us happy, attempting to satisfy one craving after another. Responding to the call of wellbeing through the imitation of Mary is a “let it be” to the call that allows us to give birth to the divine in our own lives and to help others do the same.

What is Wellbeing?

So, what indeed is wellbeing? Wellbeing is wholeness; it is ultimately your true nature. It is that part of you that cannot be reduced to a particular function; it is the irreducible subjectivity that cannot be transformed into an object. What often occurs is that there is an initial summons or call, with wholeness being first awakened as one’s true identity, or authentic self. Here, the Holy Spirit is present, leading the called person to his/her vocation. The unfolding of and response to the call is not a static process in that there is a formulaic response to the call that puts an end to the call itself. Even not responding to the call by ignoring it or suppressing it is in a way a response that further ignites the Holy Spirit’s felt presence within the person. Subjectivity is irreducible because the Holy Spirit him/herself cannot be reduced to either structure or function, but can point toward a vocation whereby one’s life is a manifestation and openness to God via work, family, relationships, etc. Ultimately, it is that which brings a sense of aliveness to your life. As wholeness, it is the practice of honoring yourself and others as mind, body, and spirit. It is a way of being; it is profundity, depth, in response to all forms of life. It is deepened love; it is the widening of care and compassion to include the welfare of all beings. It is a kind of interconnected contentment in the sense that you no longer pursue fulfillment at the expense of others. In essence, the other is no longer a means to an end because only that which can be reduced can be thought of as “means.” The Divine indwelling prevents and resists this kind of reduction. In vocation, God is *true means and true end*. The Divine is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, with only the Way of the Son leading to the Father. The “Way of the

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Son,” as I’ve described it, also the Way of Mary, Mary’s fiat, is the way of openness and responsiveness to the Holy Spirit’s Call. Wellbeing is the path of lived wisdom where the great ideas of the past and present become part of an overall ethic of love. It is the power of community, social justice, and the art and science of caring for yourself and others in a world of engagement. It is the miraculous that abounds in everyday life making everyday life itself miraculous. It is the possible when we are faced with the impossible.

Wellbeing can be understood as an English translation of what Aristotle referred to as *eudaimonia*. *Eudaimonia* has been translated as “happiness” or “contentment,” among other terms. Yet, it is more all-encompassing. The term itself is active rather than static in nature. It is a movement of the “*eu-daimon*,” literally, the “good spirit” (in Christian terms, it could even be conceptualized as a movement or inspiration by the Holy Spirit). It implies virtue (or excellence), also a practical or ethical wisdom, a wisdom that is lived from the source, which is the Spirit. When such a wisdom is lived, what occurs is flourishing, which is the idea that I believe corresponds best to wellbeing as *eudaimonia*.

When that messenger of wellbeing comes into our lives, as with Mary, fear is often our first response. It challenges everything you know to be true, from your chosen occupation, career path, relationships, and often your very sense of who you are. The unheeded messenger can come in the form of a symptom – depression, anxiety, confusion, despair, anger, etc. It lets you know that the path you are on is not the path you were destined for, is not the path that was meant for you. At the point where the messenger appears as symptom, wellbeing has been repressed, blocked out of conscious awareness through repeated denial and self-disavowal. Through our own fear, and not away from it, we have to listen deeply to hear, “Do not be afraid,” for the fact that you are called to a life of wellbeing - away from a particular career path and toward another, dropping one academic major in favor of one that is more meaningful for you, leaving a relationship for the sake of pursuing a true love that is not currently known, or realizing who you are regardless of how late in life your realization arises, etc., we are consoled by the fact that all of this means that we are, like Mary, favored. Yes, those that are called in this particular way, like no other, are actually favored, even though a struggle or a wrestling with the messenger might ensue, as it did for Jacob before he realized, through the message he struggled with, that he was Israel, he who “struggles with God.” It was through the struggle itself that Jacob realized his true identity, his wellbeing, which allowed him to flourish,

but not be free from future struggle, as the name “Israel” suggests – he who “struggles” and not he who “struggled.” Jacob became Israel, Mary, the betrothed of Joseph, became the Mother of God, all through struggle, by ultimately “letting it be.” Who are you called to be? And, how can you let your calling come to be by getting out of your own way?

Well Linked to Personal Call

Regardless of whom we are called to be, we are called to be well, with our paths being individuated and unique. What if Mary remained the “betrothed to Joseph” by saying “no” to Gabriel’s call? What if Jacob would have continued to wrestle with the angel carrying his namesake? Would the call to wellbeing have disappeared? No, for the divine would have continued to call them in different ways all throughout their lives, nagging them, troubling them, interfering with their “plans,” disrupting their desires, personal goals and objectives at every turn, sometimes quietly and at other times loudly, but never to cease altogether. Jacob was to become Israel, whether he wanted to or not, Mary was to become the Mother of God, whether she wanted to or not. While each was free to say “no” and not “let it be,” and therefore live lives as both Jacob and Mary, the wife of Joseph, they would have been bound for a lifetime of struggle with the messengers and messages they ignored. One wonders whether Jesus was free in the Garden of Gethsemane to say “no” to what he was being called to do (of course, being fully human, he was free to opt for one or the other option, otherwise there would be no merit in his sacrifice; but human freedom is not merely the ability to say yes or no, rather the capacity to respond to the higher demands from outside and authentic urgings from within). Ultimately, it was Jesus’s own “let it be” that allowed him to say, “Not my will, but thy will be done” that led to his own transformation into the Christ. Would Jesus Christ, Israel, and Mary the Mother of God have been happier if they would have refused the call? Jesus would have certainly suffered less, in avoiding the betrayal, scourging at the pillar, and crucifixion, but to what end, as he was called to do something that transcended the mere avoidance of pain, he was called to flourish and create opportunities for others to do the same. Jesus was called to be the Christ; thus, in avoiding his call by way of resolving his agony through refusal, he would have denied the resurrection itself. His life following such a refusal would have been a profound act of denying his real vocation and self. This would be marked by psychological, spiritual, and psycho-somatic anguish that would have extended his agony far beyond the “Garden,” forever transforming space and time into suffering and death without life eternal, both in

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this world and in the world to come. On a personal scale, we are no different in our responses to the various messengers that have called us to our own paths of individuation.

What can be found from the annunciation passage, the story of Jacob wrestling with the angel, and Jesus’s prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane is that after the “let it be” or fiat of each in response to the messenger or message, there is a departure of some sort, whether it be the angel’s departure as in the cases of both Mary and Jacob or the departure/ceasing of internal/spiritual conflict as in the case of Jesus. This departure of either the message or messenger of well-being (flourishing) comes in response to offering one’s own will as a sacrifice to the will of one’s Creator or to a good greater than one’s individual desire – one can call this being aligned with the Will of God, destiny, the *daimon*, the Holy Spirit, or in Buddhist terms, by way of a realization of one’s awakened nature. It is the falling away of self-deception, it is a realization of who one was called to be. Fear dissipates as one recalls his/her original grace, one’s primordial well-being, and one’s call to live a divine life in the Spirit. Original grace *is* the response to the call in eternity, as the response already lived out in un-sequential time. This is akin to the knowledge that God has of each of us before we were born – it is through the realization of this knowledge that God’s knowledge becomes our own, so that we see ourselves and others as God sees us – as realized vocations, as always-already affirmed responses to the Holy Spirit.

Like Mary, we have to be “virginal” to give birth to the divine. This involves going beyond all of our preconceptions of the “who” we imagine ourselves to be, transcending the identities that have been projected onto us by others. It is self-emptying so that only no-thing, no-one is present, it is the very moment when God pretends to find us in the cosmic game of hide-and-see, when God finds himself through us; thus, putting an end to the game itself. For Mary, it was, “How can this be, for I have no husband?” Thinking merely humanly, she could only make sense of the angel’s annunciation only from the point of view of how human beings are conceived; that would be perfectly rational and logical. But it was that very logic and reason that created her doubt, which was part of the game she was playing with God, innocently and unknowingly trying to tell God who she was rather than it being the other way around. Gabriel reminded Mary that the child will be called “holy” as if to assert that the child’s name will be “holy.” In response to the realization of who and what dwelled within her, Mary dropped her preconception of who she thought herself to be, the girl who had no husband,

and realized her true nature as the “handmaid of the Lord.” We can only give birth to the divine child within us if we know ourselves to be children of the divine, or like Mary, “handmaids of the Lord.”

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Wellbeing is Wholeness, Holiness

Wellbeing, in essence, is a life of “holiness,” which is a life of “wholeness.” While this way of living will not exempt you from suffering, it will allow you to remember who you are in the midst of it, which is a way to transform it by way of creating meanings that are both profoundly personal as well as transpersonal. It is the bringing together of mind, body, spirit, and shadow all in an integral embrace. It is the living out of one’s vocation, career, and relationships as manifestations of one’s call to wholeness. While no two people will live out their calling in exactly the same way, each will begin their journey by being called, being summoned by a deeply felt message and/or messenger, an angel. What is important is that we listen, and listen deeply. All are called, but “few are chosen.” I think that this choice is ultimately ours to make. We are at liberty to either “let it be” or “let it not be.” In choosing our vocation, we choose the person we are called to be (the person God calls us to be), we are letting the life of wellbeing, the life of holiness, the life of wholeness, live within us. Only when the divine is given a place to dwell can it then enter the world so that it may become a beacon of light to shine before all. “Let it be” so that when you are seen, your wellbeing as original grace can be seen. No matter how it may appear, this is the life divine, the life of wholeness; this is the life you’ve been invited to live. Embrace it and be well.

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Endnotes

¹First delivered as the Wellbeing Keynote Address on March 25, 2014.