

THE EMMAUS PILGRIMS

A Phenomenological Reading According to the Mahoukou Law

Call — Response — Resonance in Luke 24:13-35

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Prelude — The Text and Its Phenomenological Question

"And it came to pass, as he sat at table with them, that he took bread and blessed it, and broke it, and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognised him; but he vanished out of their sight." — Luke 24:30-31

The Emmaus narrative is one of the most studied, most commented upon, and most cherished texts in the entire New Testament. It has traversed twenty centuries of theology, spirituality, liturgy, art and literature. And yet it remains mysterious — not obscure, but inexhaustible. Each generation finds in it something it had not seen before.

This text poses a question that is not merely exegetical or theological — it is phenomenological in the most rigorous sense: *how can someone be present without being recognised?* How can an encounter be real without either party being aware of it? And how does the moment of recognition transform retroactively everything that preceded it — revealing as Resonance what had not yet been received as a Call?

It is to these questions that the Mahoukou Law — the triadic structure Call-Response-Resonance — brings a precise and original answer. Not by reducing the evangelical mystery to a philosophical schema, but by revealing the phenomenological structure that renders this mystery intelligible without dissolving it. The Emmaus narrative is not merely a testimony of the resurrection — it is a phenomenology of encounter in all its complexity: the veiled Call, the obstructed Response, the deferred and sudden Resonance.

I. The Road to Emmaus: The Veiled Call

A. Two Pilgrims in Flight — The Obstruction of Response

The text begins with a state of obstruction. Cleopas and his companion *were going* (v.13) — they are walking in the direction away from Jerusalem. This movement is not incidental: it says something about their interior state. These are men in flight — not from cowardice, but because what happened in Jerusalem destroyed the horizon of meaning within which their hope was inscribed. "*We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel*" (v.21): the imperfect tense says everything — hope is in the past, it collapsed with the cross.

In the vocabulary of the Mahoukou Law, these two pilgrims are in a state of obstructed Response. Not that they had never received the Call — they had followed Jesus, heard his words. But the Call had been, in their consciousness, annulled by death. And it is precisely this state — the Call received and then apparently denied — that produces this movement of flight. One does not flee what one has never encountered. One flees what has disappointed one's deepest expectations.

Luke specifies a phenomenologically crucial detail: "*their eyes were held from recognising him*" (v.16: *hoi de ophthalmoi autōn ektratounto tou mē epignōnai auton*). The Greek formulation is remarkable: it is not that they cannot see — they see. It is not that he is unrecognisable — he is there, real, present. It is their capacity for recognition that is *held*, restrained, obstructed. Something in their interior state — their grief, their despair — renders them incapable of receiving what is nevertheless there. Suffering contracts receptivity.

B. The Call That Comes — and Veils Itself

It is into this state that the Call arises. "*Jesus himself drew near and went with them*" (v.15). The Lukan formulation is of admirable phenomenological precision: he *drew near* — he takes the initiative. And he *went with them* — he enters into their movement, he accepts their direction, he does not force them to stop. The christological Call is not an injunction — it is a presence that inscribes itself in the other's rhythm.

But this Call is veiled. Jesus does not reveal himself immediately. He poses a question — "*What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?*" (v.17) — which is itself a form of Call: not a question seeking information, but an invitation to say, to formulate what is happening in their hearts. A Call that reveals itself too soon, before the

Respondent is capable of receiving it, cannot produce authentic Resonance. The veiled Call creates the path that makes the Response possible.

C. The Scripture Explained on the Way — the Burning Heart

Jesus' explanation of the Scriptures (vv.25-27) is the work of the Call upon the availability of the Respondent. Jesus connects the event of the cross — which seemed to them a definitive defeat — to a longer and vaster coherence. He does not say to them: you were wrong. He shows them: what you have lived is inscribed in a Call more ancient and more vast than you thought.

And something happens within them. They will say it afterwards: "*Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?*" (v.32). This *burning heart* is Resonance in the process of being prepared — an interior transformation of which they are not yet conscious, but which works within them like a fire they cannot yet see. Resonance, sometimes, precedes recognition.

II. The Invitation — The Response That Opens

A. "Stay With Us" — The Response as Hospitality

They arrived at the village. "*He made as though he would go further*" (v.28) — another phenomenologically precise gesture. The Call never imposes itself. It offers the possibility of letting the occasion pass. It respects the freedom of the Response to the end.

And it is there that the Response emerges: "*Stay with us, for it is towards evening and the day is far spent*" (v.29). This sentence speaks simultaneously of hospitality, urgency, and desire — these two men do not want the stranger who has set their hearts burning to disappear. The Response is not yet full knowledge — but it is already commitment. It creates the conditions in which Resonance can occur. Without this invitation, Jesus would have continued — and nothing would have been accomplished.

B. The Response That Does Not Yet Know to Whom It Responds

Throughout the road, the pilgrims' Response was an *obstructed* Response — they responded to a stranger, without knowing they were responding to the true Caller. Their conversation, the account of their disappointment, the formulation of their lost hope —

all this was already a form of Response. But a blind Response, a Response that does not yet know to whom it responds.

This is one of the deepest revelations of the Emmaus narrative: one can respond without knowing one is responding. The Call can precede its own recognition by the Respondent. What was experienced as a simple conversation with a kind stranger was, in its deep structure, a Response to the christological Call. The recognition that comes later does not retroactively create this Response — it reveals that it had been taking place from the beginning. The Call precedes and exceeds recognition.

III. The Breaking of Bread — Resonance and Its Properties

A. The Instant of Recognition

Everything hinges on a gesture. Jesus "*took the bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them*" (v.30). And "*their eyes were opened and they recognised him*" (v.31). The evidence surges — not gradually, not through demonstration, but in the instant of a familiar gesture.

Recognition does not come from argument — Jesus had explained the Scriptures to them throughout the journey, and they had not recognised him. It does not come from his face — they had been looking at him since their departure. It comes from a gesture — precisely the gesture by which, at the Last Supper, he had inaugurated something new. The gesture carries within it a memory that words could not transmit. Merleau-Ponty had shown that bodily memory does not recall: it *recognises*. And this recognition is immediate, pre-reflective, deeper than any demonstration.

B. The Four Properties of the Emmaus Resonance

It is retroactive. Recognition retroactively transforms everything that preceded. The road, the conversation, the explanation of the Scriptures suddenly receive a significance they did not yet have in the pilgrims' consciousness. Their burning hearts on the road was already Resonance — they understand this now. The Resonance does not begin at the moment of the breaking of bread: it *reveals itself* at that moment as having already begun.

It is mutually transformative. The pilgrims are transformed — their eyes open, their despair turns to joy, their flight becomes return. In the Lukan narrative structure,

something also takes place in the risen Christ: he *gives himself to be recognised* — he offers himself to recognition, he accepts existing for them only through this gesture.

It is transformative rather than merely informative. Recognition is not new information. It is a transformation of their way of inhabiting their existence. They "*rose that same hour*" (v.33) — Resonance immediately produces movement, energy, new orientation.

It opens onto a new Call. The Resonance received becomes immediately a Call for others. The pilgrims return to Jerusalem to recount what they have lived. The C·R·R spiral reopens: $C \rightarrow R1 \rightarrow R2 \rightarrow C'$. This is precisely the structure of Christian mission.

C. Absence as Condition of Resonance

One detail must be dwelt upon: "*he vanished out of their sight*" (v.31). At the very moment of recognition, Jesus disappears. The Mahoukou Law allows a precise phenomenological answer. As long as Jesus is visible, the pilgrims can remain in the contemplation of his physical presence. His disappearance compels them to pass from visible presence to interior presence — to inhabit Resonance rather than remain dependent on external presence. Resonance sometimes requires the absence of the Caller in order to unfold in all its depth.

IV. The Return to Jerusalem — The Open Spiral

The narrative closes on a movement: "*they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem*" (v.33). This return is the proof of Resonance. Beginning with a movement of withdrawal — flight, despair, retreat — the narrative ends with a movement of return — joy, energy, mission. This reversal is Resonance in its most visible form: not a silent interior transformation, but a reorientation of existence as a whole.

The Resonance of Emmaus meets at Jerusalem the paschal Resonance of the community. The two Resonances mutually confirm each other, amplify each other, and together constitute a collective memory that will become the foundation of the Church. The Emmaus narrative is not merely a testimony of the resurrection — it is a universal phenomenology of human encounter. Who has not experienced this departure toward Emmaus, this burning heart on the road whose origin one understands only afterwards,

this sudden recognition that overturns existence and sends it in a new direction? The Mahoukou Law shows that these experiences have a structure — and that Luke's narrative is their most accomplished evangelical illustration.

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Note. *This text is the first in a triptych. The second — The Eucharist as Accomplished Triad: Phenomenology of the Gift and the Mahoukou Law — develops the question of the breaking of bread as a universal eucharistic structure, in dialogue with Jean-Luc Marion and the Pauline theological tradition. The third — The Dwelling and the Nourishment: Permanent Eucharistic Resonance and the Controversy over the Real Presence — examines the question of permanence of eucharistic presence and the Catholic-Protestant debate in the light of the Mahoukou Law.*

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