

## CHAPTER III DISCERNING LIFE: SUFFERING AND DEATH

### Suffering

Scott Peck, in *The Road Less Traveled*, begins:

Life is difficult.

This is a great truth, one of the greatest truths. It is a great truth because once we truly see this truth, we transcend it. Once we truly know that life is difficult -- once we truly understand and accept it -- then life is no longer difficult. Because once it is accepted, the fact that life is difficult no longer matters.

What Peck is addressing is the tendency to assume that somehow life should be different than it is, that it should be easy. Life is difficult and fragile. As human beings we are particularly equipped to interact with and experience this in a very personal way, for we react with a full spectrum of feelings, experience the sensation of pain, remember our experiences, and are able to reflect upon them. Memory and reflection compound our experience of life. No experience is solely momentary and solitary, but continues to bring forth its effects upon the shore of our consciousness while reflection, and more subconscious processes, weave the experience into new patterns and meanings.

The human need for meaning, to understand "Why?", is more than a desire to avoid future problems by understanding causes. Victor Frankl has clearly indicated that most any suffering can be tolerated if there is meaning.<sup>99</sup> Meaning not only provides interpretation of experience, but gives the person a place within the web of meaning, and thus dignity and value. What cannot be understood may not only destroy the body, but the spirit of a person as well.

Oliver Sacks, a New York neurologist who has written sensitively on the neurologically damaged,<sup>100</sup> well illustrates this drive to meaning in an autobiography of a leg injury suffered while mountain climbing: *A Leg To Stand On*.<sup>101</sup> It is especially the story of a pilgrimage: the discovery of the spiritual dimensions of life and a new appreciation for life. As he describes his experience:

Between the last full moon and this, in the space of a single lunar month, I have come near to death, and been saved at the last moment; had had my mangled flesh sewn together and united; had "lost" my leg (for an eternity?) [he for a while lost all awareness of his leg] in a limbo of non-feeling; had recovered it, as by a miracle, when recovery seemed impossible. I had had the foundations of my inner world shaken -- nay, I had had them utterly destroyed. I had experienced "reason's scandal," and the humiliation of mind. I had fallen into an abyss, with the breaking apart of my tissues, my perceptions, the natural unities of body-soul, reborn,

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<sup>99</sup>. Frankl developed a type of therapy called "Logotherapy" which came out of his experience in the Nazi concentration camps. *Man's Search for Meaning*, Pocket Books, Beacon Press, 1963, is one of his primary texts.

<sup>100</sup>. He is especially known for *The Man Who Mistook His Wife For A Hat*, NY: Summit Books, 1985.

<sup>101</sup>. Oliver Sacks, *A Leg To Stand On*, NY: Harper and Row, 1984.

reaffirmed, by powers beyond my understanding and reason. I had been shaken and foundered -- but mysteriously saved.<sup>102</sup>

Sacks is Jewish. He describes attending synagogue on a visit home, which happened to be a Sabbath, from the convalescent home:

And this, to my surprise, was an inexpressible joy; for behind my family I felt embraced by a community and, behind this, by the beauty of old traditions, and, behind this, by the ultimate, eternal joy of the law. The portion was from Genesis, near the beginning, most appropriate to a man who felt reborn; for shortly before, on Simchat Torah - The Rejoicing of the Law - the year-long reading of the law had come to its end, and restarted, and the shofar had been blown, followed by a great cry: "Now the world is new created."

The service, the ceremonies, the Bible stories, now made sense - in a way which they had never fully or truly done before. A pantheistic feeling had infused the past month, the feeling that the world was God's gift, to be thanked back to God. Now, within the religious ceremonies and stories, I found a true parable of my own experience and condition - the experience of affliction and redemption, darkness and light, death and rebirth - the "pilgrimage" which fortune, or my injury, had forced upon me. Now, as never before, I found relevance in the scriptural symbols and stories. I felt that my own story had the shape of such a universal existential experience, the journey of a soul into the underworld and back, a spiritual drama - on a neurological basis.<sup>103</sup>

The web of meanings that one weaves, or at times is woven for one, is created from the warp of one's own experience and the woof of one's traditions: here Judaism, neurology, and Western civilization and thought. Sacks' experience compelled him to go beyond neurology as it had been to a "neurology of the soul",<sup>104</sup> and gave him a new appreciation for Kant who "restored what Hume had removed, the center, the concept of self -- the self as the center of experience and action"<sup>105</sup>

The drive to meaning has always caused the creation of theories to help explain and bear suffering and to help to maintain and affirm one's self in the face of suffering. Because the literature of the early church was produced within a relatively short period of time (49-125 CE), a time very unsettled for the church, there is little specific treatment of and development of theories about suffering in general. However there are significant ideas within the New Testament literature from which one may theorize. The Old Testament, originating in oral and written form over a thousand years, contains more specific treatments of suffering, as does the Intertestamental literature, particularly Wisdom literature.

## The Old Testament

To understand life peoples have their traditions and observations. What decidedly affected the Old Testament interpretation of suffering was:

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102. Sacks, *A Leg To Stand On*, p. 169

103. Sacks, *A Leg To Stand On*, pp. 189-190

104. Sacks, *A Leg To Stand On*, p. 219

105. Sacks, *A Leg To Stand On*, p. 220

- *the experience of being a people in covenant with God* whom, so they understood, had made them certain promises which would be realized if only they were faithful, as expressed in Deut. 5:9b-10, in the Ten Commandments:

...for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the father upon the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

- *the understanding of God as manifested in power*, particularly the acts of the Exodus and their later history. Their God was understood as more powerful than all others, and that he was in control of history. Therefore whatever happened was interpreted monistically, i.e. in terms of one primary cause: God. Thus tragedy and suffering meant that one did something wrong to deserve this and success and prosperity meant that one had done right. Many of the Psalms embody the suffering of the righteous, but the supposition of most is that God is a God to whom appeal can be made to remedy the inequities of the present, and in support the powerful actions of God in the past are rehearsed.

- *the creation "myths"*, the stories which explain human existence and the origin and nature of the world. Usually they attempt in some way to explain why the world is the way it now is, often seeing this as due to human failure with subsequent loss of an utopian state originally created by God. Thus the power and goodness of God is maintained. The creation stories of Genesis 1-3 are usually understood by scholarship to be later additions to the Hebrew tradition, affirming that the God who delivered them in the Exodus (the primary tradition of their experience of the transcendent) was indeed the God of the whole world. The stories also supported Jewish and contemporary interpretations of the world and human existence.

### *Creation*

Let us first deal with the Creation stories. There are several in the Old Testament. In Genesis there are what is usually described as the older Yahwist tradition in Gen. 2-3 and the later Priestly tradition about creation in Gen. 1:1-2:4a. Besides this there are what one might call more primitive stories describing creation as a battle between God and primal beasts (e.g. Ps. 74, Job 26, Is. 27:1, 51:9). These stories are reflected upon and reinterpreted within the Old Testament and Intertestamental literature. Mention should also be made of the tradition of Jewish Wisdom where Wisdom is a personified extension of God and God's agent in creation. Though this is developed most significantly in Intertestamental Wisdom literature, it is clearly stated in the Old Testament in Proverbs 8.

Though the two creation stories of Gen. 1-3 must have had some meaning as a whole, as they were placed together, each has its own significance. Jewish exegesis in the Intertestamental period did recognize their differences and often interpreted the story in Genesis 1 as describing the creation of an ideal heavenly "man" while Gen. 2-3 described the creation of the earthly "man".<sup>106</sup> In Gen. 2-3 God, at the beginning of the creative process, creates "man of dust from the ground, breathed into his nostrils the breath of life", and made a garden, commanding that man not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Then God makes a helper, a woman from man's rib. The serpent then tempts the woman who eats of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and shares the fruit with man. Consequently, God curses the serpent,

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<sup>106</sup> Philo of Alexandria, a Jewish contemporary of Paul and Jesus, interpreted Gen. 1-3 in this way using Platonic philosophy as a model. This may also be the origin of the "Son of Man" or the "Man" in Jewish Apocalyptic. The two terms are equivalent in Aramaic and Hebrew. Apocalyptic often speaks of a "Man" who will come from heaven to bring God's plans to completion. This term also appears in the New Testament, frequently on the lips of Jesus, though Jesus joins with it his concept of the mission of suffering.

multiplies woman's pain in childbirth, places woman under man who should rule over her, and curses the ground so that it will not bring forth as man would want.

In the sweat of your face  
you shall eat bread  
til you return to the ground,  
for out of it you were taken:  
you are dust,  
and to dust you shall return.

There are many exegetical attempts to soften the patriarchal and primitive nature of this narrative. Personally, I would rather face it as it is, for then we can be clear about the damage it has caused. Man and woman are created separately, and woman is derivative, from man and for man. The responsibility for the fall is placed on woman, who in turn tempted man. Thus she is placed under the authority of her husband (note how this is developed in I Timothy 2:8-15). The sin man and woman have committed is the desire to know good and evil, to become mature, to be responsible for their own lives. The judgement of God places them back again into clear lines of authority: God, then man, then woman. It indicates that God does not desire maturity for his creation. Death is the consequence of the fall because man and woman are excluded from the Garden, where there is the tree of life and the immediate presence of God who is the source of their life. Consequently much of the world's suffering is explained. God made it all good and there was a perfect garden for a while. However, humans wanted too much and so were punished. This is whence comes suffering, the difficulties of producing from the earth, and death. Humans continue to want too much, and later were again punished in the attempt to build the tower of Babel.<sup>107</sup>

Later Judaism, in the Intertestamental period, added to the fall of humans the fall of angels. They used the story of Gen. 6 where angels looked at women and found that they were fair, came down, had intercourse with them, and gave birth to a race of mighty men. Since this was located in the same chapter as the story of the flood in Noah's time, Jewish exegetes put two and two together and assumed that the actions of the angels had something to do with the evil of the world in the time of Noah. In Jewish mythology these angels were then imprisoned in the underworld because of what they did, something reflected in the New Testament in I Peter 3:19.

Jews did not understand the human fall to have produced a transmitted guilt which humans then bore, a view that was later developed in the Christian church. Rather, Paul probably reflects the view of most Jews in Rom. 5:12: because of Adam's sin both sin and death came into the world and, as Jewish exegetes discussed, many distortions were introduced into human existence: particularly the loss of the glory of God that was in humanity.

The Gen. 1-2:4a Priestly tradition is quite different. God creates humanity at the end of the creative process (on the sixth day), not at the beginning. All creation was beheld by God as "good". There is no story of a fall, except as this material is joined to Gen. 2-3. "Man" is made, not of the dust of the earth, but "in our image, after our likeness". One can only capture the full meaning of this by reading Psalm 8 which is an interpretation of Gen. 1. The male is not created before the female, but "man" is created male and female. Woman is in no sense derived from the male. Humanity is then given authority over the earth and a task: to "be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it." Creation is brought into being out of chaos and darkness, for it was without form and void. Thus the first act is the creation of light and the

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<sup>107</sup>. Genesis 11.

creation of "firmaments", to separate the waters above from the waters below and let the dry land appear. Creation then moves from chaos to the creation of humanity, made in God's image, and there is a charge expressing human responsibility. It is then left there. If there is anything wrong with creation, which might explain its present predicament, it could be that there is still some chaos, some darkness, the light has not penetrated everywhere, and the human charge is not yet fulfilled. It is important to note that this is exactly the way the problem is described in John 1 (which is an interpretation of Gen. 1 that pays no attention to Gen. 2-3) and in some of the Jewish Wisdom literature. Except in the modern creation spirituality, e.g. that advocated by Matthew Fox, and renewed study of the creation narratives in our day, the Christian church has not adequately heeded the understanding of creation in Gen. 1 and its interpretation in Ps. 8 and John 1. Hebrews 2 does not help because it sees Psalm 8 as speaking of Christ rather than humanity. Thus we have primarily, as did much of Judaism, understood the world in the light of the fall.

### *Covenant and Power*

In regards to the understanding of the covenant people in the Deuteronomic interpretation of history, God will punish those who disobey and reward the faithful. God is faithful to God's promises if we are faithful to the covenant and the Law. Suffering may be due to the sin of the suffering individual or the sins of their "fathers", but it is always due to sin. Some of the prophets speak of a day when it will no longer be true that children suffer because of their parents:

In those days they shall no longer say: The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge. But every one shall die for his own sin; each man who eat sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge. (Jer. 31:29-30, see also Ezek. 18:2-32)

The presuppositions of a God who is powerful and who is willing and able to reward if one has been good, produces the natural conclusion that suffering is the result of sin. If God were not all powerful, had not made the promises and the covenant or was not always able to deliver on them, then the conclusion might be different. Suffering means someone must have been at fault.

### *Job*

The book of Job, though often viewed as representing a radical change in the perception of suffering, really does not. It tells of an "exceptional" case where Satan, then the district attorney in God's court, was allowed to test Job's faith to see whether he would be faithful if things did not go well. The general relationship between suffering and sins is not really denied (the perspective of Job's "friends"), though this is not true in Job's case. The book ends with an affirmation of God's power, as Job says: "I know that thou canst do all things, and that no purpose of thine can be thwarted." (42:2) Then all is restored to Job and everything comes out as it should - the good are rewarded. Job's protest is countered by God's "Shall a faultfinder contend with the Almighty? He who argues with God, let him answer it." (40:2) And Job apologizes. The real value of the book lies in the struggle of a decent man with his fate.

### *Ecclesiastes*

As the consciousness of the individual developed within Judaism, in some segments a type of pessimism develops, because it was realized that at least for individuals the matter of just rewards for faithfulness, honesty and decency may never be realized within their life-time. Ecclesiastes, an inveterate pessimist, concludes that because of death, even if things come out all right in this life, all is ultimately vanity:

Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had spent doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun. (2:11-12)

### Intertestamental Judaism

In the late Old Testament period the idea of individual life after death developed, thus providing for further opportunity to set the scales right. This was expressed in Intertestamental Judaism both in the idea of the resurrection of the body and an expanded idea of Sheol/Hades, the place where people went when they died.<sup>108</sup> Wisdom literature gives a great deal of attention to the problem of suffering. The wicked are chided for neglecting the reality of Hades, assuming that they will die and thus escape what they have done in life.<sup>109</sup> They do not realize that after death they will face punishment, while "the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God".<sup>110</sup>

Whereas the Old Testament view might be interpreted as simplistic or monistic (God being the primary causative factor in history), in the Intertestamental period Judaism came to see the world as more complex. Because they had been exposed to Persian and Hellenistic thought and because they experienced so much tragedy in history, they had begun to question the reasons. The story of the fall of humans in Gen. 3 and that of the fall of the angels, as interpreted from Gen. 6, explained much. Particularly, the fall of angelic beings was now used as a basis for a developing dualism. Satan changed from God's district attorney to a fallen angel. Satan now became the ruler of this world, and demons and evil spirits were his emissaries. The world was seen as failed and fallen, degenerating until, as in Apocalyptic literature, God would destroy all and make a new heavens and new earth. While early ideas of the resurrection of the body spoke of a physical, fleshly resurrection, Apocalyptic literature moved in the direction of a spiritual body, like that of the angels. To restore the old body would only lead to the same problems. Flesh, if not evil, was seriously problematic.

Judaism, by the time of Jesus and Paul, had probably also adopted the idea that there were other powers within the world, represented by the stars, nature, and political systems, which were essentially neutral but often opposed God. This is very clearly stated in the Pauline literature.<sup>111</sup>

This period was also a time of heightened interpretation of the Law, to "build a fence" around the Law so that it would not be broken. All of the Jewish sects of the time of Jesus understood themselves as in some way guardians of the Law, and the Pharisees particularly became responsible for the transmission, development and collection of the oral interpretation of the Law that was later to be included in the *Mishnah*.<sup>112</sup> The concern of the Pharisees and Essenes for radical righteousness and purity can be

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108. Sheol in Hebrew and Hades in Greek are equivalent terms for the place where people went when they died, like Tartarus in Latin. In Intertestamental Judaism this had developed from the place of the grave in the Old Testament to a place of meaningful existence after death, divided into various sections for the good and bad. A good place to read about this in Intertestamental sources is in II Esdras 7, which is a part of the Old Testament Apocrypha. Here the journey of a soul after death is described. With life of the individual provided for after death, there was then no way to escape retribution for the way one lived.

109. Wisdom of Solomon 1:16ff.

110. *Ibid.*, 3:1.

111. See the section on Paul for a discussion of this.

112. Tradition traced the development of the oral tradition, interpreting the Law, to Moses and Ezra. Its origins are probably to be found in the period of the Babylonian exile, but especially from the late second century BCE when the Jewish sects that we know in the New Testament formed. These oral traditions were selectively treated and expressed in written form in the 2nd

understood as analogous to avoidance reactions of a person who has suffered greatly. When one suffers greatly and tragically, one asks why. If one presumes a moral order to the world, a powerful God, and understands that God has made promises to oneself, then the fault must be with oneself, not with God or the world. Thus if one only tries harder to do what is asked, one will avoid further tragedy. The same thing happened within Intertestamental Judaism. It was said, if all Judaism only obeyed the Sabbath law for one Sabbath, the Kingdom of God would come. Thus it becomes clear how serious a matter it was when Jesus disobeyed the Sabbath law. In Jewish eyes, Jesus not only jeopardized himself but the future of his people.

## New Testament

### *Persecution*

There are two types of suffering dealt with in the New Testament which really cannot be used for the construction of a general theory of suffering:

1. The persecution of Christians for faithfulness to Christ is a common theme. Note that the Matthaean form of the Beatitudes has two for persecution.<sup>113</sup> Initially persecution was experienced at the hands of Jewish communities, and then by the 60s CE some Christians were already being punished by Roman authorities. After 70 CE, the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman armies, persecution was primarily through Roman officials. We know that at least by the early second century it had become illegal to be a Christian.
2. Somewhat related to this is the period of Great Tribulation expected as part of the eschatological scheme of both Judaism and Christianity. This was a time of intense persecution, but different than general persecution. This time was a consequence of the struggle between God and Satan within history, of history's degeneration, until finally in the last stage of history this terminal struggle between good and evil would break out. It is well described in Mark 13 and parallels (the "Little Apocalypse"), it is the reason for Christians not to marry in I Cor. 7, and it is the origin of those who have made their robes white in the blood of the Lamb in Rev. 7:14. As described in Mark 13:19-20:

For in those days there will be such tribulation as has not been from the beginning of the creation which God created until now, and never will be. And if the Lord had not shortened the days, no human being would be saved; but for the sake of the elect, whom he chose, he shortened the days.

Great care has to be taken when reading the New Testament materials about persecution. Persecution was, of course, real. With Judaism it was provoked by the fact that Christianity had at first been a Jewish sect, diverged from the rules of Pharisaic Judaism, included Gentiles without requiring obedience to the basics of the Law, and above all tried to convert other Jews to its perspective. However the tradition within Judaism, and consequently within early Christianity, of the persecution of God's faithful and of the coming period of the Great Tribulation led many Christians to expect persecution theologically. It is interesting to read the letters to the seven churches in Rev. 2-3 in this light. Great persecution is expected,

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century CE, the commentary on the Law in the *Mishnah* and the running commentaries on O.T. books in various *Midrashim*. In the fifth and sixth centuries CE the oral commentaries on the *Mishnah*, known as the *Gemara*, were collected into written form, place side by side with the *Mishnah*, and the result was known as the *Talmud* (one Babylonian and one Palestinian). Since then the *Talmud* has been interpreted and such commentaries collected.

<sup>113</sup>. Matthew 5:10-12.

but only one person is mentioned as having died. This "theological paranoia", coupled with the Apocalyptic attitude towards the world as being Satan's place, created an "enclave" Christianity, separated from and hostile to the world. This can particularly be seen in the Johannine literature (the Gospel, Epistles and Revelation).

### *Historical and Cosmological Complexity*

The New Testament continues to view the world as complex, as did the Intertestamental period. The neutral spiritual powers receive a great deal of treatment, especially in the Pauline letters. In Gal. 4 the elemental spirits (literally "elementals") are also guardians of humanity before its maturity, just as was the Jewish Law. In Rom. 8:37ff they are part of the spiritual powers which cannot separate us from the love of God in Christ. In I Cor. 2:6ff there are the "rulers of this age" who crucified the Lord of glory because they did not understand what God was doing. In Col. 2:15 they are disarmed at the cross and led in triumphal procession. The struggle of Jesus with Satan and demons in his temptation and exorcisms takes the power of evil seriously. Paul in I Cor. 5:5 speaks of removing a serious offender from the Christian community and delivering him "to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." What Paul means is that being removed from the church, he is placed back into the world where Satan rules and thus comes again under the power of Satan. I Peter 5:8 warns: "Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." Thus when one asked the question "Why?" in New Testament times, one would need to answer in terms of the complexity of cosmos and history. Is it due to God, the human, the demonic, the neutral and astral powers, nature, or what?

### *Jesus and Suffering*

The way Jesus frequently alleviated suffering is instructive, as is the integration of the ministry of healing into the mission of his disciples. In several cases he seems to separate suffering from a connection with sin (e.g. John 9, Luke 13:1-5). At least he clearly identified with sinners and told a parable about God's love for sinners.<sup>114</sup> Where sin and suffering seem still to be connected in the Gospels, we will never be able to be sure how much this perspective was retained by the early church in spite of Jesus' attempt to disassociate himself from this. It is amazing that both in Judaism and early Christianity often the idea of the strong God who will reward as one deserves, and wherever there is suffering it must somehow be deserved, persisted even with the recognition of the complexity of history and the world. The simplistic connection of sin and suffering must be dissolved by the church.

Whatever one concludes about the relationship of suffering and sin in the New Testament, particularly instructive is Jesus' taking of suffering upon himself as part of his mission and his refusal to give the sign of power expected of those who represent God by his contemporaries. Jesus' Temptation experience is really a denial of the Messianic mission understood in traditional terms as a manifestation of power, as in his discussion with James and John in Mark 10:35ff concerning privilege and power. Jesus concludes:

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<sup>114</sup> Luke 15 records Jesus as telling three parables in response to the Pharisaic accusation that he associated with sinners. The first two, the parables of the lost sheep and coin, conclude with heaven's joy over a repentant sinner, something that the Pharisees might agree with. However, in the final parable the father accepts his younger son (the "prodigal") before he has had a chance to speak his rehearsed repentance. The older brother also fails his father by not going in to the feast to function as master of ceremonies and by disobeying his father. There is no repentance voiced by the elder brother. In fact the story ends before we are told what happened, thus leaving the Pharisees to finish the story of the brother who represents them in the story. Thus the story makes clear that in God's loving initiative repentance is not a prerequisite.



You know that those who are supposed to rule over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you; for whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

In the passages where Jesus speaks of his mission, he always accompanies it by a forecast of his suffering, regarding it as of his mission's essence, not accidental or peripheral. He seems to interpret his mission in the light of the Servant in Isaiah 40ff, as a sin offering, bearing the sins of the people (see particularly Is. 52-53). This mission of Jesus ran contrary to all human expectation, as Paul perceived it. In I Cor. 1 Paul says that Jews wanted a sign (a display of God's power), Greeks wanted wisdom (that the Gospel fit their religious and philosophical scheme), but God gave a cross. The cross is foolishness and a stumbling block, but is powerful to those who are open to it and are in the process of being saved. When Paul speaks of Jews and Greeks, from his perspective he is speaking of the whole world. The only way the Gospel is understandable is when persons are open to the different way God did it, i.e. the cross, and their own presuppositions are allowed to come into question.

Consequently, Jesus takes upon himself suffering in a way that places it at the heart of the Christian understanding of life. When Paul speaks of the imitation of Christ, it always includes suffering besides experiencing the power of God (see I Thess. 1:6ff, 2:14ff)

### *Paul and Suffering*

Paul has worked out, perhaps more clearly than any other New Testament writer, an understanding of suffering, forged in his own experience, and reflected especially in II Corinthians, a letter that comes to grips with suffering and the limits of human existence, balancing hope with reality.

It is usually true that the opening prayer of a letter telegraphs its concerns. In this prayer, which in II Cor. is in the form of a "Benediction," Paul says:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. (II Cor. 1:3-5)

This must have been a difficult time in Paul's life. He says, "we were so utterly, unbearably crushed that we despaired of life itself." (1:8)

Paul believed in the Gospel and the possibility of human transformation. He knew the reality of the Spirit and the resurrection of Jesus. But along with believing in these "powers" which could effect human change, he knew that the Gospel was "veiled" (not believable to all) (4:3) and that spiritual treasure was possessed in earthen vessels (the weakness of our humanity) (4:7). Paul and other early Christians were undoubtedly tempted to "oversell" or "hard sell" the Gospel, making it more powerful, persuasive and eloquent than it was. But, he says, "we have renounced disgraceful and underhanded ways; we refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word..." (4:2). So he had previously commented in I Corinthians 2 which contains his explicit theory for communicating the Gospel: "...I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified." (I Cor. 2:2)

What can then be expected of the "power" of the Gospel as we face circumstances in life which might make us also "despair of life"?

In II Corinthians 4:6 Paul speaks of the significance of the Christ event in the light of language borrowed from the creation story:

For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

Or as he previously said in 3:18:

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another ...

Jewish theology had indicated that in the fall humanity lost the glory of God which had been part of its original nature. To speak of the restoration of glory is to speak of the restoration of creation.

It is likely that Paul, following his conversion experience, had figured that the power of this experience would completely transform his life and rescue him from suffering and the limitations of human existence. He soon learned this was not true. Chapters 4 and 5 of II Corinthians are Paul's most mature presentation of the limits of human transformation and the reality of suffering, knowing still the power of God. Paul's solution is to see God's power as present within our human limits, transforming our human situations but leaving us human. It is only when the body itself is destroyed and we are given a body by God (5:1) that the conditions of human existence will be changed. For the present time the Spirit is given us as a guarantee, a down-payment of the future (5:5). Though longing for our "heavenly dwelling" (5:2), "we are always of good courage" (5:6). Even our perspective on life has changed, for "from now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; ... if any one is in Christ, he (she) is a new creation ...". (5:16-17)

The way of living in the present, within our limitations but with firm faith in the reality of the Transcendent, is well expressed in that jewel of a passage for which most of II Cor. 1-9 seems to be a setting:

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For while we live we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh. ....

Since we have the same spirit of faith as he had who wrote, "I believed, and so I spoke," we too believe, and so we speak, knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence. ....

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed every day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, because we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen; for the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. (4:7-18)

To grasp the meaning of this passage for us we need to come before it with the same awareness of the paradox of human limitation and transcendent power which was Paul's experience. We each bring to this passage our own pain, our own struggle to exist, our longing for transformation and healing -- and our awareness of the Transcendent, of the presence of God in the midst of our limits. Most of us would like a theory of suffering, a map and techniques for human transformation, special direction or intervention to regain health -- so that we can live more easily and realize the ideals of our society (health, wealth, success, enthusiasm and joy) characterized by the mask-like smiling faces and images of success that meet us on billboards. Though there are successes and transformations, much of life is not like that. Theories and wild heroics seem to make less sense than the quiet but firm affirmation that our bodies are earthen and life is limited, but alongside this we experience the Transcendent. In the mystery of life what is more meaningful than to be able to assert that though we cannot grasp it all, God is there -- even though it seems that God, as life, has limits? And so perhaps our best reaction is to love life as it is -- and to worship rather than to think, praying with Paul:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. (1:3-4)

And having so prayed, "to comfort those who are in any affliction."

#### *Epistle to the Hebrews and "Testing"*

In Hebrews 12 Christians are called upon to endure some suffering, in their struggle with sin, as the discipline of a heavenly Father. Proverbs 3:11-12 is quoted. Often this fits popular views of suffering, assuming that God has some purpose in it. Actually the treatment of this in Hebrews is close to the idea of suffering as a part of growth. Though it is always possible that God brings suffering for a purpose, the Temptation experience of Jesus, viewed by the author of Hebrews as perfecting Jesus as the pioneer of salvation, describes something different.<sup>115</sup> God leads Jesus into the wilderness. Satan is there as the prince of this world. Jesus must grapple with the realities of the world in contest with Satan and thus his faith is tested. Several of the statements Jesus makes to the devil are taken from Deuteronomy 6 and are confessional in nature.<sup>116</sup> God has provided the context for Jesus' testing, but is not the one who tests him. Satan is responsible for that. God also supplies his needs in the testing, as Paul remembered in I Cor. 10:13.

#### *New Testament Creation Stories*

An important part of the New Testament tradition that should be mentioned are the New Testament creation stories. One finds these in John 1:1-18, Colossians 1:15-20, and Hebrews 1-2. Most of these seem to be related to the treatment of creation in Jewish Wisdom literature and interpretive of Gen. 1 and Psalm 8. What they do is to relate Christ to creation so that the meaning of creation is to be found in him, and not in creation itself. The idea of the fall is not used to indicate the present condition of creation. In John 1 the predicament of the world is due to darkness and unwillingness to receive the light. By their own logic each story indicates that creation is to be understood from its creator and not its condition, i.e. creation is

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<sup>115</sup>. Hebrews 2:10ff indicates that Jesus partook of flesh and blood, as do the children of God. Thus as perfect high priest he is able to help humanity since he has suffered and been tempted.

<sup>116</sup>. For the developed narratives of the Temptation see Luke 4 and Matthew 3. The Markan account in 1:12-13 has no detail, but also supports what is being argued above.

to be judged from what we know of God in Christ, not God judged from what we know of creation. Thus the contrast between God in Christ, and creation as it is, presents us with creation's distortions. Creation is not what Christ is. We do not derive our understanding of creation's limits from careful analysis or a listing of creation's problems. It is clear from the difference of creation and creator. Thus the problem of creation is similar to the problem with human nature. We do not speculate and introspect about sin because it is assumed that there is something wrong with humanity because of what God needed to do in Christ. Consequently, pessimistic introspection is avoided, and presuppositions are made based upon the happy fact that God has entered the scene.

Unfortunately, the implications of the New Testament creation stories are not always developed within the New Testament. The affirmation of the relationship of Christ, the "Word", to creation in John 1:1-18, is to be found nowhere else within the Johannine literature. It is almost as if they did not realize what it said. I John 1:1-4, which is an interpretation of John 1:1-18 or parallel to it, completely neglects the relation of the Word to creation.<sup>117</sup> Paul does express the relation of Christ to creation in interesting fashion in Rom. 8. Both humanity and creation experience serious limitations; but creation groans in travail, as do we in the Holy Spirit, waiting the ultimate redemption, freedom, and transformation provided in Christ.

The New Testament affirmation that creation and creator cannot be equated present us with a paradox. God's presence in life can no longer be equated with what happens. The cross and Jesus' suffering presents us with another paradox: God's presence is not to be judged in terms of power and overcoming of problems. God is there in the world as it is: on a cross which symbolically drew into itself the sufferings of the world.

### *The Mystery of the Kingdom*

Jesus deals with the cruciform nature of God's presence when he speaks of the mystery of the kingdom in Mark 4.<sup>118</sup> What is described is this: Jesus is teaching by the sea and speaking in parables. While doing

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<sup>117</sup>. Modern scholarship often sees the Prologue as an addition to the Gospel in the later stages of the Gospel's development. The Prologue is also seen as having undergone development, starting as a Jewish hymn to Wisdom (with affinities to the Wisdom of Sirach, chapter 24), later Christianized, perhaps later still the material about John the Baptist being added. In this process some early Christians at one time affirmed the relationship of Christ, the Word, to creation, but when this was adopted for use with the Gospel of John this aspect of the Prologue was neglected because of the dualism of the Johannine community and its hostility to the world: Jews were children of Satan (John 8:44) and opponents of Christ (in much of John the term "Jews" is used unselectively of Jesus opponents), and the world was not of God but in darkness (note how the world is interpreted in I John 2:15-17, a letter that presents what is supposed to be the "orthodox" interpretation of the Johannine tradition - see I John 1:5). John 3:16 does portray God's love for the world, but this seems to be understood in the rest of John primarily in terms of people as possible converts and not for the world as it is. It is interesting to note that the passage about Jesus' compassion on the woman taken in adultery, John 7:53ff, was not an original part of the Gospel but added much later, a beautiful story about Jesus which had trouble finding a home.

<sup>118</sup>. The term "kingdom of God" primarily meant the "sovereignty of God", and only secondarily the place where God was sovereign. Jesus' emphasis on the kingdom as "mystery" seems to disassociate kingdom from a place, and to say that God can be present where there is not yet a place. In fact, God can be present where God does not seem to be present, in a world which continues as it is. Jesus seems to say the same thing in Luke 17:20ff, which is an Apocalyptic passage quite different from the "Little Apocalypse" of Mark 13 and parallels. This is the famous passage where Jesus says: "The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, 'Lo here it is!' or 'There!' for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you (or within you)."

Though this passage deals particularly with the "kingdom", which is the focus of its parables and Jesus' discussion with his disciples, it also deals with Jesus' reason for speaking in parables: to limit understanding. Scholars have puzzled over this passage and have often seen it as the creation of the church, attempting to explain why more people did not respond to Jesus.

this he tells his listeners the Parable of the Sower, a parable about the problem of hearing and responding. When he is apart with his disciples they ask about the parables which they did not understand. Jesus says to them (my translation):

To you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God, but those outside everything is in parables/riddles, so that they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand; unless they should turn again and be forgiven.<sup>119</sup>

Here Jesus uses the word "parable" with the additional meaning of "riddle". Rabbis of Jesus' time liked to tell stories in the form of riddles. The difference between an ordinary parable and a riddle is that with a riddle the point that was being made was not clear, but was to be discovered. Jesus describes his use of parable (riddle) as intentional so as to limit response to those who have ears to hear: who are willing to accept what he is saying. The reason seems to be, as Paul indicates in I Cor., that what Jesus is saying cuts across all human presuppositions: God is here in a world that does not manifest the change that would be expected to accompany God's presence. One only has to examine the parables in Mark 4 to indicate this. No traditional Jew would describe the Kingdom as a farmer sowing seed which grows by a slow process outside the sower's control -- or a mustard seed which is the smallest of seeds. Jesus was saying that the Kingdom of God was mysteriously present while the world went on as usual, not in some cataclysmic event of the future which would immediately transform everything.<sup>120</sup>

### *The Presence of God and Suffering*

As implied in the previous discussion of New Testament materials, the New Testament affirms a presence of God in a world that is as it is, untransformed. Whereas one might logically say that God, as we define God, and suffering cannot belong together, yet they do in experience. We suffer and we also experience God as there. This is the mystery expressed in the life and ministry of Jesus and the paradox of the cross. God was there in Jesus, but the world was also fully there. Perhaps this is something that we simply need to receive, in full acceptance, rather than seeking to develop comprehensive theories.

It is interesting that not only did Paul struggle with the Corinthians and others in attempting to maintain the cross as part of the paradigm of human experience, but the same issue was faced within the Johannine community. The proto-Gnostic group that broke away, described in I John 2:18ff, wanted to deny that

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However, it has a logic which can be seen in the context of Jesus' own ministry, as expressed above. Matthew modifies his Markan source here, as often elsewhere, and Matthew's perception of the situation is quite different.

119. This translation is faithful to the original, choosing the word "mystery" for the Greek "mysterion" rather than "secret" and understanding the "mepote" of vs. 12 in terms of the possible Aramaic original, thus translating it "unless" rather than "lest". Thus Jesus does not use parables to prevent understanding, but to limit understanding "unless" one "turns".

120. Jesus' hesitation to speak openly, without parable, is part of the Messianic secret. He did not want persons to respond to him who could not share his perspective, who would not "turn again." His parables would puzzle and intrigue, and if they could come to his perspective they would understand.

Verses 11 and 12 quote Isaiah 6:9-10, one of the most frequently quoted Old Testament passages in the New Testament. One finds it also in: Matt. 13:14-15 and Luke 8:10 (passages parallel to Mark 4), John 12:40, Acts 28:26-27. In Mark these verses from Isaiah could come from the Hebrew (which sees Isaiah as carrying a message which will harden hearts and blind sight), but most likely come from an Aramaic Targum (translation) which could have emphasized the need to turn, repent, change, in order to understand (see above note). The Septuagint (Greek OT) changes the theology of the Hebrew and assigns the responsibility for lack of response to the people rather than God. Matthew, in using Mark 4, diminishes the quotation from the Hebrew and adds a longer quote from the Septuagint because he prefers its theology. In Acts 28, Isaiah 6 is used to indicate the lack of Jewish response to Paul's mission, supplying reason for the Christian mission turning to the Gentiles. In John 12 it is also used to explain the lack of Jewish response.

Jesus was really flesh (I John 4:1ff) and that Jesus' death was significant as an atonement (I John 1:5ff).<sup>121</sup> I John says that they lose the essence of their Christianity by doing this. This must have been seen as important, for in the resurrection narratives of John 20 Christ appears with his wounds, inviting Thomas to touch them.<sup>122</sup> Even the resurrected Jesus bears the marks of his cross and death. Because Jesus sends the disciples as the Father sent him, so must his disciples carry with them their woundedness and humanity.

### *Suffering and the Self*

When the heavenly voice comes to Jesus in his baptism and in his transfiguration in the Synoptic tradition, it becomes clear that what is forming in Jesus' ministry is a sense of himself which is not merely derived from his personal history and psychological processes. Jesus moves into his last days, with their immanent suffering and death, knowing who he is. Though one may question the historicity of some of the sayings of Jesus in the Gospel of John, it is striking that they portray a deep self-understanding. These are particularly embodied in the "I am" sayings and his knowledge that he comes from God and goes to God. Thus he is able to move through crises within the Gospel of John as one who is acting, and not merely acted upon. Jesus seems in charge. Thus in John there is no need for the voice to Jesus in his baptism and in the transfiguration, nor is there any need for the question to Peter, "Who do people say that I am?" From the beginning of his ministry he can invite persons to "Come and see" where he was staying. (1:39). The verb "stay" meant more than were he lived, but what his position was, what truth he embodied.

Psychology tells us that the SELF is formed by a number of influences. Freud understood the ego as closely related to the body. The ego is one's self-identification, self-consciousness, self-image, the center of willing. The self is formed by all of the many sensations of the body which become customary and shape its image. If a limb is lost, frequently a phantom limb exists which allows a prosthesis to become in imagery part of one's body.

The ego is the self-conscious part of the self. The self is really much larger than the ego, extending into the unconscious. The self is the basic structure which gives organization to the psyche. Jung regarded it as archetypal. Besides the body-image which is part of the self, the self is constantly assimilating the reactions of others, until there is also a social image of the self. Both the body image and the social image form, by and large, without our conscious involvement. They help us to know who we are physically and socially and give us definition.

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<sup>121</sup>. Gnosticism was a significant Christian movement by the second century CE. The Gospel of John in its narrative material sounds like the Synoptic Gospels, while in the discourses Jesus often sounds like a Gnostic redeemer. The people who broke away from the Johannine community, mentioned in I John, seem to have developed their views from the discourses of Jesus in the Gospel, and were also influenced by tendencies in the Hellenistic world. In the Gnostic view of the Redeemer, he comes down from the supreme God who was not really known until he came. He comes to call persons to the awareness that they possess within themselves sparks of light from the upper regions of heaven. This world is the creation of a lesser God, the God of the Old Testament. Once persons understand their destiny in the upper world, they will escape and ascend at their death, leaving behind their physical nature in which their light had been imprisoned. The Redeemer, though seemingly human, did not really join with human nature because all in this world was evil. When Jesus is described in this fashion, he did not really die because he was not really human. Some Gnostic Gospels describe the divine Jesus watching the human Jesus die. Other accounts have someone dying in his stead (e.g. Simon who bore his cross). Jesus' death, or who or whatever died, did not really produce an atonement for sin, because this was not needed. What was needed was illumination as to the spark of the divine within persons (though not always in all).

<sup>122</sup>. John's is the only Gospel where Jesus appears to his disciples bearing the marks of his wounds.

What then happens in illness? Illness affects our bodies and so ultimately our body image. Illness affects our vitality and our ability to will, and so our self-consciousness. Illness affects how we appear and relate to others, and so our social image. Deeply rooted images from healthier days change slowly, but they do change. Thus with deterioration of health there is also a degeneration of the self.

Oliver Sacks, neurologist, author of *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*, reflects on this:

My work, my life, is all with the sick - but the sick and their sickness drives me to thoughts which, perhaps, I might otherwise not have. So much so that I am compelled to ask, with Nietzsche: 'As for sickness: are we not almost tempted to ask whether we could get along without it?' - and to see the questions it raises as fundamental in nature. Consequently my patients drive me to question, and constantly my questions drive me to patients - thus in the stories or studies which follow there is a continual movement from one to the other. ....

The patient's essential being is very relevant in the higher reaches of neurology, and in psychology; for here the patient's personhood is essentially involved, and the study of disease and or identity cannot be disjoined. Such disorders, and their depiction and study, indeed entail a new discipline, which we may call the 'neurology of identity', for it deals with the neural foundations of the self, the age-old problem of mind and brain.<sup>123</sup>

The personhood of the person is involved in the disease. If this is so, then one must deal with this with clear intention in illness. There must be a voice from outside persons and their illnesses reminding them who they are and calling them to that deeper selfhood which is more than body and social image. The voice from outside may resonate with the deeper voice from inside which represents human transcendence, the soul, the image of God within. There must be a new basis of identity, a SELF by which one may interrelate with one's illness.

Sacks describes the interaction of person and illness in *Awakenings*, the story of the use of L-Dopa with those affected by the Encephalitis epidemic of the 1916-27 (an epidemic which affected nearly five million people world-wide). A number of patients with long-lasting effects of the illness were still alive and residents in the Mt. Carmel Hospital in New York when he came in 1966. The use of L-Dopa was begun in 1969 at Mt. Carmel. Many of the patients for the first time in almost 50 years emerged from lethargy or various neurological limitations into active awareness, but also into the aberrations produced by L-Dopa. This book contains the case stories of these persons, with his reflections on their experiences. It was also made into a film. In his section on "Perspectives" he gives his reflections, including, among others:

-That disease is not only a perversion of our physical condition, but a perversion of our being and our person, and that we interact with our disease: our diseases "can only be understood with reference to us, as expressions of our nature, our living, our being-here (da-sein) in the world." <sup>124</sup>

-That one's condition is an interplay of the dynamics of health and illness.

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<sup>123</sup>. Oliver Sacks, *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat and Other Clinical Tales*, NY: Summit Books, 1985, in the Preface.

<sup>124</sup>. Oliver Sacks, *Awakenings*, NY: E.P. Dutton, Obelisk Paperback, 1983, p. 205

Health and disease are alive and dynamic, with powers and propensities and "wills" of their own. Their modes of being are inherently antithetical: they confront one another in perpetual hostility - our 'Internal Militia', in Sir Thomas Browne's words. Yet the outcome of their struggle cannot be predetermined or prejudged, any more than the outcome of a chess game or tournament. The rules are fixed but the strategy is not, and one can learn to outplan one's antagonist, sickness. In default of health, we manage, by *care*, and control, and cunning, and skill and luck. <sup>125</sup>

As Paul says, "And because you are sons (children), God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying "Abba! Father" [the counterpart of the voice at Jesus' Baptism, "You are my beloved son (child)"]. So through God you are no longer a slave but a son (child of God), and if a son (child) then an heir."<sup>126</sup>

### *Choosing Suffering*

There is suffering which needs to be understood and suffering which needs to be alleviated, but there is also suffering which needs to be chosen as part of our lives. This is not merely a wise decision affecting quality of life, but the summons to choose it is based within the biblical tradition.

#### 1. We are called to choose SUFFERING ON BEHALF OF OTHERS.

As we live our lives we find that there is really no cheap love, it always costs something of ourselves and produces suffering. This is true of our relationships with others and is particularly so of parenting. It is so easy to view children as existing to serve parental needs. Much parental frustration revolves around the fact that the child, as a growing and developing person, has needs and is not so easily able to supply the needs of the parents. Much frustration in interpersonal relationship roots in seeking to use others for our needs and finding them resist, or, in turn, find ourselves being used.

The real nature of love is portrayed in I Cor. 13:

Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.(4-7)

This means that love is not reactive, but proactive. Love is not determined by what love meets in others. It is not so much a feeling, as a decision. As Shakespeare says in a sonnet: "Love is not love which alters when it alteration finds." It is determined by its own will and purpose, and by the human need to love and reach out. It is determined by the pattern established in God's act in Christ.

Where and when we are to choose suffering on behalf of others involves the question of rights. Paul, in I Cor. 8-10, enters into an extended discussion of this in terms of an issue of his times: do Christians have the "right" to eat meat offered to idols. This was an important question, because the answer governed the ability of Christians to associate with non-Christians in social and civic events. Paul begins by indicating that "Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up." (8:3). He then goes on to say that idols and the gods they

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<sup>125</sup>. Sacks, *Awakenings*, p. 210

<sup>126</sup>. Gal. 4:6 Paul's language here is male language because this is the way the discussion was "termed" in his day. Similar discussions appear elsewhere, such as in Philo of Alexandria, as to who is a true son of Abraham and thus a son of God. Paul departs from male language in Gal. 3:28 where he indicates that in Christ there is neither male or female. Thus he transcends his language and here is as modern as we can expect him to be.



represent are nothing and that all the world, including meat offered to idols, is God's. However, there are two groups of which one must be considerate. One is the "weak" brethren to whom this would be offensive (8:7ff), those who don't understand this the way others did. Then there are the non-Christians who might invite one to dinner and raise the question of the propriety of eating such meat. (10:23ff) In either case one must consider what to do with one's rights. Paul gives his surrender of his right to earn a living by his ministry (chpt. 9) as an illustration of how rights should be known, but might be surrendered. Knowing one's rights one may choose to surrender rights on behalf of others.

The conversation between Jesus and the disciples which results in the Confession of Peter (Mark 8:27ff) focuses on Jesus' need to suffer on behalf of others and Jesus' call to the disciples to come after him, take up their cross and follow him. It is intriguing to explore the First Epistle of Peter as a coming to terms with the teaching of Jesus by Peter. It is in I Peter alone that we find a consciously developed ethic for the behavior of the Christian towards the non-Christian world, based upon the idea of Christ's suffering for the sins of the world.<sup>127</sup>

The story of Peter's confession of Jesus as Messiah also includes an argument between Jesus and Peter (Mark 8:27-38). The argument is over Peter's objection to Jesus' qualification of his messianic mission: that he must suffer, be rejected and killed. This altercation is followed by Jesus' comment that, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." Jesus' words show that the issue was not only what the Messiah would do, but what the people of the Messiah would need to do -- and thus what Peter would need to do. Peter then could not come to terms with the redemptive nature of Jesus' mission and the suffering that it entailed on behalf of the world. However, note the transformation of Peter's views represented by the position in I Peter.

Peter has now accepted the mission which Jesus defined. Christians live within an alien world as "exiles" (1:1, 2:11), "born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead", awaiting an imperishable inheritance kept in heaven for them, while they are kept by God's power. (1:3-5) But they do not separate from their world. Rather do they live redemptively with it. Christian citizens are to be subject to the state and its authorities as a human creation, but to do so because of the Lord, not the state. They are free persons with regard to the state, yet they are to live within it as servants of God. All humans are to be honored, not only the Christian brotherhood.(2:13-17) Christian servants are to be submissive to their masters, not only the kind but the overbearing. "For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps." "By his wounds you have been healed," implying that by your wounds others may be healed. (2:18-25) Christian wives should be submissive to their own husbands (not men in general), and win their non-Christian husbands by their behavior, without a word (i.e. without argumentation). (3:1-6) Christian husbands are then advised to be considerate of their wives as physically weaker and bestow honor on them as "joint heirs of the grace of life, in order that your prayers may not be hindered." (3:7) This last is important in indicating how the code of "submission" normative in ancient social codes was modified by Christian insights.

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<sup>127</sup>. Many scholars argue that I Peter could not be by Peter because it is sophisticated and contains some of the finest Greek in the N.T.. However, the letter itself says that the author wrote through Silvanus (Silas) (5:12). Its strong Jewish flavor (though of a different Judaism than Pharisaism) and its use of the Old Testament indicate its belonging to the early history of Christianity. Thus I understand it as coming from Peter and would like to see it in the light of the issues with which Peter struggled in the Gospels.

Though the ethical section in 2:11 through 4:11 is similar in structure to passages in Colossians and Ephesians (these sections are commonly called the "household codes", because they deal extensively with behavior within the household), it is also unique because it is the only ethical code in the New Testament developed specifically to describe the relationship of Christians to non-Christians. That is why the state is treated here, but is treated separately in other New Testament ethical sections).

This pattern of "redemptive" behavior is summarized in 3:13ff. I would here like to offer my own translation because of difficulties in this passage:

Now who is to harm you if you are zealous for what is right? But even if there is a chance that you suffer for righteousness sake, you will be blessed.(Note how this reflects the beatitudes.) Do not be afraid of what others are afraid of, nor be troubled, but in your hearts reverence Christ as Lord. (This verse is a modification of Is. 8:12-13.) Always be prepared to make a defense to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence, having a good conscience so that when you are spoken against, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing right, if that should be God's will, than for doing wrong. **FOR CHRIST ALSO SUFFERED FOR SINS, ONCE FOR ALL, THE RIGHTEOUS FOR THE UNRIGHTEOUS, THAT HE MIGHT BRING US TO GOD, BEING PUT TO DEATH IN THE FLESH BUT MADE ALIVE IN THE SPIRIT...** (capitals mine)

It is clear then that Peter, addressing Christians in many provinces of Asia Minor (1:1), calls upon them to be towards the world as Christ was. Even though they are exiles within their world they are to be for their world. We should not be put off by some of the language and the emphasis on submission within this ethical section. This code was developed in the context of a world where all relationship was hierarchical. The unique thing is that Peter calls upon the church to be converted to suffering for the world, as was he, while being empowered and formed by a transcendent dimension. This is a theology which recognizes that though the church cannot take its values from the world, part of its mission is to be for its world.

## 2. We are called to choose SUFFERING WHICH IS PART OF THE PAIN OF GROWTH.

Perhaps no one has struggled this through better than the Apostle Paul. One can imagine that after his conversion experience he would have assumed that his human struggles were at an end, but life did not work out this way. In his correspondence one finds a realization that the struggles of life continue for all of life. II Cor. 3-5, as discussed above, is a passage in which Paul discusses the Christian growth process, "from one stage of glory to another", but knows that "we have this treasure in earthen vessels to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us". In II Cor. 12 he sees the "thorn in the flesh" as given along with his "abundance of revelations", not removed by them. The mystical tradition attests to the fact that with spiritual growth comes greater awareness of the problems of human existence and growth -- they don't disappear.

George Benson, a psychiatrist, in his book *Then Joy Breaks Through*, compares the painful growth process of Becky, a despairing teen-age drop out from the drug culture, to Peter's growth struggle.<sup>128</sup> He comments on the human, and often Christian, desire to avoid pain:

This is an impossible task if one believes that being renewed is simply a beautiful miracle for righteous people. Birth, whether physical or mental, is truly miraculous. But it involves continuing tension and pain as well as the joy of new life. Unfortunately, many Christians see tension and anxiety as a sure sign that there is something wrong with their religious life. Contrary to the life of Christ, the history of the church, and the most fundamental precepts of Christian theology, Christians fail to understand that the serenity of new wholeness involves the struggle of new birth. The avoidance of pain and anxiety is not exclusively Christian; it is

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<sup>128</sup>. George Benson, M.D., *Then Joy Breaks Through*, NY: The Seabury Press, n.d. . .

human. It becomes a special fault for Christians only because it stifles the potential of their faith for the constant creation of new life. (p. 70)

This is related to the perceptions of Scott Peck who in his book, *People of the Lie*, comments:

In *The Road Less Traveled* I suggested that laziness or the desire to escape "legitimate suffering" lies at the root of all mental illness. Here we are also talking about avoidance and evasion of pain. What distinguishes the evil, however, from the rest of us mentally ill sinners is the specific type of pain they are running from. They are not pain avoiders or lazy people in general. To the contrary, they are likely to exert themselves more than most in their continuing effort to obtain and maintain an image of high respectability. They may willingly, even eagerly, undergo hardships in their search for status. It is only one particular kind of pain that they cannot tolerate: the pain of their own conscience, the pain of the realization of their own sinfulness and imperfection.<sup>129</sup>

3. For the sake of sanity, survival and meaningful life we are called upon to choose SUFFERING WHICH IS AN UNAVOIDABLE PART OF OUR LIFE.

Victor Frankl, Austrian psychiatrist who was imprisoned in the Nazi concentration camps, developed a therapy out of the fact that people need a sense of some meaning in life to survive, "Logotherapy". He says:

If there is a meaning in life at all, then there must be a meaning in suffering. Suffering is an ineradicable part of life, even as fate and death. Without suffering and death human life cannot be complete.

The way in which a man accepts his fate and all the suffering it entails, the way in which he takes up his cross, gives him ample opportunity -- even under the most difficult circumstances -- to add a deeper meaning to his life. It may remain brave, dignified and unselfish. Or in the bitter fight for self-preservation he may forget his human dignity and become no more than an animal. Here lies the chance for a man either to make use of or to forego the opportunities of attaining the values that a difficult situation may afford him. And this decides whether he is worthy of his sufferings or not.....

Any attempt at fighting the camp's psychopathological influence on the prisoner by psychotherapeutic or psychohygienic methods had to aim at giving him inner strength by pointing out to him a future goal to which he could look forward. Instinctively some of the prisoners attempted to find one on their own. It is a peculiarity of man that he can only live by looking to the future -- sub specie aeternitatis. And this is his salvation in the most difficult moments of his existence, although he sometimes has to force his mind to the task.<sup>130</sup>

Diogenes Allen, in his *The Traces of God in a Frequently Hostile World*, deals in a significant way with those who claim meaning in the midst of the most dire affliction. Particularly striking is the case of Iulia de Beausobre, author of the autobiographical *The Woman Who Could Not Die*, and *Creative Suffering*, who was imprisoned during Stalin's purges in the 1930s. Undergoing extreme suffering at the hands of her jailors, she reflects on how she might redeem what is being done to her, the only power that she has left. She imagines a conversation between herself and "Leonardo", the person she aspires to become:

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<sup>129</sup>. Scott Peck, *People of the Lie: The Hope for Healing Human Evil*, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1983.

<sup>130</sup>. Victor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, Pocket Books, Beacon Press, 1963, pp. 105-115.

A great bond is formed, he says, between the man who is tortured day in, day out, and the man who day in, day out, tortures him. Greater than there could possibly be between the tortured man and a blith free citizen who understands nothing because he does not want to see or know a thing. If you ponder on this you may find the justification for your apparently absurd suffering.

But, Leonardo, surely there is no justification for a crowd of well-fed, reasonably strong men bullying a weary, undernourished, half-demented woman who doesn't even know what it is all about.

...If you want to understand, to know the truth about this sort of thing, you must rise higher and look deeper. If you do, you can transform the ghastly bond into that magic wand which changes horror into beauty .... It is unpardonable that anyone should be tortured, even you - if *you* merely leave it at that. But surely, when you overcome the pain inflicted on you by them, you make *their* criminal record less villainous? Even more, you bring something new into it - a thing of precious beauty. But when, through weakness, cowardice, lack of balance, lack of serenity, you augment your pain, their crime becomes so much the darker, and it is darkened by you. If you could understand this, your making yourself invulnerable would not be *only* an act of self-preservation; it would be a kindness to *Them* .... Look right down into the depths of your heart and tell me - Is it not right for you to be kind to them? Even to them? Particularly to them, perhaps? Is it not right that those men who have no kindness within them should get a surplus of it flowing towards them from without?

The whole of me responds with a "Yes!" like a throb of thundering music. It is so shattering that it makes me stagger. The jailer steadies me: "Take care!" .... Drowsily I think: 'Oh, Leonardo, what if we are both only mad after all, my dear?' 131

### On Making A Difference

The suffering of the world is overwhelming. Modern media bring us so much of it that it is easy to become hardened. It is important to stay sensitized, as much as we can. Sometimes a massive tragedy calls itself to our attention and creates a response. At other times it is the singular suffering of someone close. A friend once wrote of the death of his friend, Stuart:

Your pain is over, friend,  
though the world's sin remains against you,  
and against all who love as you loved.

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Storms rage within our heads  
and within our hearts,  
though the world scarcely cares for  
all the death it fathers,  
as we, who loved you,  
stumble together in shock.

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131. Diogenes Allen, *The Traces of God in a Frequently Hostile World*, Cowley Publications, 1981, pp. 63-64.

God, why? Why in creation ...?  
What bizarre sense of justice  
could you have allowed to allow this!  
Why tear up a beautiful body like Stuart's  
with the cold, destructive metal of a hit-and-run bastard?  
Why take a gentle soul, impassioned for justice,  
from us, when there are so few?

The body on the cross  
was broken for you, Stuart.  
I don't doubt it.  
But who were you broken for?  
For a cruel God who allows the young to be violently killed?  
For being created gay?  
For the world that hates differences,  
rather than celebrates and nurtures them?  
For us, whom you touched and changed?

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Dampen the light.  
Defuse the good intentions of those at the door  
who bear words of comfort.  
Let them enter silently, with sorrow  
in their eyes, and respectful  
of the tremor of the air.  
Stuart is dead,  
and I want to be allowed to mourn  
my roommate, and my friend.

The anger slowly drains away,  
leaving only the gathering sadness of bruised memories.  
The relentless clashing of denial and despair  
slowly gives way to the uncaring movement of reality.

Tears have no comfort in this place.  
They leave only shadows of your presence, Stuart,  
and shadows are not enough.  
Yet somehow, you are here in muted form,  
though the darkness of the world  
cares not for your light.<sup>132</sup>

In whatever way we can, within the limits and possibilities of the contexts in which we live and of human existence, with courage but without guilt for what cannot be done, we need to take to ourselves the mission of him who took up the Isaiah scroll and read:

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132. Poem by a friend.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me to  
preach good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim release  
to the captives  
and recovering of sight to the blind,  
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,  
to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.<sup>133</sup>

and who announced:

Blessed are you poor ...  
Blessed are you that hunger now ...  
Blessed are you that weep now ...  
Blessed are you when men hate you ...<sup>134</sup>

And in the name of the God who entered the world in the sufferings of Christ and identified with the lowly, we need to preserve the dignity of all, whatever their functional level. This is extremely important and is the basis for the ministry of Mother Theresa. Oliver Sacks, in *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*, tells the case histories of the neurologically damaged in a tender and compassionate manner. He gives a whole section to "The World of the Simple". In them he discovered what it was to be human. The story of Rebecca is a good example of the persons whose stories Sacks narrates. She had left/right confusion and was ill-coordinated in all her movements. She had a partial cleft palate, stumpy fingers, and degenerative myopia. She had always been an object of ridicule. She had a deep love for her grandmother who had brought her up and was fond of nature, stories and poetry which brought her into contact with life. Though conceptually inept, she was a sort of primitive, natural poet, giving birth naturally to striking figures of speech. She was a mass of handicaps, "but at some deeper level there was no sense of handicap or incapacity, but a feeling of calm and completeness, of being fully alive, of being a soul deep and high, and equal to all others. Intellectually, then, Rebecca felt a cripple; spiritually she felt herself a full and complete being." <sup>135</sup>

Sacks became aware of this deeper level of her existence when he saw her, not in the clinic, but outside on a bench, gazing at the April foliage, muttering poetic ejaculations: "'spring', 'birth', 'growing', 'stirring', 'coming to life', 'seasons', 'everything in its time'".<sup>136</sup> Sacks found himself thinking of Ecclesiastes.

When her grandmother died, she was devastated, but conducted herself with great dignity. In brief utterances she expressed: 'Why did she have to go?' 'Grannie's all right. She's gone to her Long Home.' 'I'm so cold. It's not outside, its winter inside. Cold as death.' 'She was a part of me. Part of me died with her.' 'Its winter. I feel dead. But I know the spring will come again.'<sup>137</sup>

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133. Luke 4:18-19.

134. Luke 6:20-22

135. Oliver Sacks, *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*, pp. 170-171

136. Sacks, *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*, p. 171.

137. Sacks, *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*, p. 173.

Pressed into workshops in a Developmental and Cognitive Drive, she, as many others, only experienced frustration in the attempts to improve the areas of her limitations. Finally she protested: 'I want no more classes, no more workshops. They do nothing for me. They do nothing to bring me together.'<sup>138</sup>

She loved the theatre, and so they enrolled her in a special theatre group. As Sacks comments:

She loved this - it composed her; she did amazingly well: she became a complete person, poised, fluent, with style, in each role. And now if one sees Rebecca on stage, for theatre and the theatre group soon became her life, one would never even guess that she was mentally defective.<sup>139</sup>

*Perhaps we will not make a great difference, but only some difference. Perhaps only some will understand a little better and the world may change a little as we bring to the present the finest wisdom of our Judaeo-Christian tradition. But the question that is primary to that of our effect is that of our being. We must be what we are called to be, let the effect be what it can.*

### **Death, Life and Resurrection in the New Testament**

Death is one of the fixed existential realities of life. As soon as one is born one is old enough to die. Yet many persons in the western world cosmetize death and hire others to deal with dying (medical institutions, funeral homes, etc.), thus avoiding its reality and being ill-prepared for its event. In some ways, death is the "great suffering", "affliction" (in Simone Weil's sense), which annihilates life and its accomplishments.<sup>140</sup> According to Ecclesiastes, death is the one fate which comes to all (9:2) and so it is better to be a living dog than a dead lion (9:4) -- at least to be alive.

In the Old Testament and in Intertestamental Judaism death is seen in some relation to sin. It is because of Adam's sin that the first couple are excluded from the Garden lest they eat of the tree of life. Since they do not possess life in themselves they are now liable to death. As Paul describes it in Rom. 5:12, "Therefore

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<sup>138</sup>. Sacks, *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*, p. 175.

<sup>139</sup>. Sacks, *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*, p. 176.

<sup>140</sup>. Simone Weil, the 20th century French mystic and social activist, says: "In the realm of suffering, affliction is something apart, specific and irreducible. It is quite a different thing from simple suffering. It takes possession of the soul and marks it through and through with its own particular mark, the mark of slavery." Simone Weil, "The Love of God and Affliction", in George A. Panichas, ed., *The Simone Weil Reader*, NY: David McKay Co., 1977, p. 439. Affliction is ultimately separation from God, but its purpose is the decreation of a person, the stripping away of creaturiness, to open one to God. As Weil says: The man whose soul remains oriented towards God while a nail is driven through it finds himself nailed to the very centre of the universe; the true centre, which is not in the middle, which is not in space and time, which is God. In a dimension which is not spatial and which is not time, a totally other dimension, the nail has pierced through the whole of creation, through the dense screen which separates the soul from God.

In this marvellous dimension, without leaving the time and place to which the body is bound, the soul can traverse the whole of space and time and come into the actual presence of God.

It is at the point of intersection between creation and Creator. This point is the point of intersection of the two branches of the Cross. (p. 453)

Or in another moving passage which concludes this essay:

The man who has known pure joy, if only for a moment, and who has therefore tasted the flavour of the world's beauty, for it is the same thing, is the only man for whom affliction is something devastating. At the same time, he is the only man who has not deserved this punishment. But, after all, for him it is no punishment; it is God himself holding his hand and pressing it rather hard. For, if he remains constant, what he will discover buried deep under the sound of his own lamentations is the pearl of the silence of God. (p. 468)

as sin came into the world through one human and death through sin, and so death spread to all because all sinned..." It does not seem that the creation narrative was portraying an understanding that death was God's judgement on sin, but sin did bring death into the world. Sin was probably understood as separation from God which removed one from the source of life. In Intertestamental Judaism one's own death did come to be thought of as the final atonement for intentional sin, so some causal relationship between death and sin must have been seen.

In the Gospels Jesus does raise a few persons from the dead (the son of the widow of Nain, Jairus' daughter, Lazarus), all of whom still had to deal with death again. In Matthew there is a symbolic raising of the dead with the death of Jesus. (Matt. 27:52) Of course, Jesus' resurrection is itself seen as the great overcoming of death which guarantees the future resurrection of the believer. Paul in his "hymn to the resurrection," I Corinthians 15, portrays death as Christ's last great conquest:

Death is swallowed up in victory.  
O death, where is thy victory?  
O death, where is thy sting? (I Cor. 15:54-55)

However, it must be emphasized that in most of the New Testament tradition the resurrection of the believer is seen as future. Thus it is understood that the fact and hope of the resurrection in no way diminishes the realities of this life and death.<sup>141</sup> Paul includes death first in one of the two catalogues of things that cannot separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:38), yet must be encountered in life.

It is somewhat strange that in the early church death was never viewed as a normal part of life's process and a way of being freed from the limitations of fleshly, human existence. This meant that Christians faced death as enemy, but also with the conviction that the future was in God's hands and with the hope incited by the resurrection of Jesus.<sup>142</sup> As it is said in I Peter:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and to an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (I Peter 1:3-5)

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<sup>141</sup>. In the Mystery Religions one was united with the saviour in his resurrection so that resurrection was part of the believer's present experience which removed him/her from the controlling powers of this world. The death of the saviour in the Mysteries was seen as due to opposing evil powers and not meaningful in the same way Christians saw the death of Jesus as meaningful.

<sup>142</sup>. It is quite possible that the harsh realities of death in the ancient world kept persons from regarding it as less than enemy. It is interesting to speculate that as there is pain involved in the process of birth into this world, so there is pain in the process of birth from this world.



There are several significant contributions to the understanding of death in the Intertestamental period.<sup>143</sup> One is the development of the idea of a resurrection, with consequent individual survival, which was first viewed as quite physical.<sup>144</sup> I would like particularly to discuss one contribution characteristic of later developments in the Intertestamental period, namely the more detailed treatment and modifications made in the understanding of life after death notably in Apocalyptic literature. Then I want to discuss another perspective, represented in tendencies which began in the first century CE and flowered in second century Gnosticism, a reaction to Apocalyptic and expression of new perspectives, in the New Testament found particularly in the Gospel of John.

In Apocalyptic thought one finds not only the belief in the individual's survival of death in a future bodily resurrection, but an expanding understanding of life between death and resurrection. Sheol<sup>145</sup> was no longer the place of the grave, as in the Old Testament, but a sphere of meaningful existence, divided into a place for the good and the bad. II Esdras 7 provides a description of what was commonly understood as the journey of the soul after death. In most of the Jewish tradition the idea of a future resurrection of the body was retained, though in the Apocalyptic tradition's dualism this now became a spiritual body, like the angels, rather than a fleshly body.<sup>146</sup> There are even some traces of the idea of a bodily resurrection being discarded: e.g. in Jubilees and in Essene belief as discussed by some ancient historians. It was also

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143. The Intertestamental period roughly stretches from the second century BCE to the early first century CE. The literature of this period, and the Judaism which it represents, is really the background for the New Testament. The Old Testament is not the immediate background for understanding the New Testament. Judaism, as we know it in the New Testament, really was being formed in the late 2nd century BCE, the period in which the Pharisees, Sadducees and Essenes came into being, and was in process of development into the New Testament period. Judaism after the second century CE was also not the same as Judaism in the first century CE, since only Pharisaic Judaism was left after the first Jewish War with the Romans (66-73 CE) and after the second Jewish War (2nd cent.) Judaism rejected many of the Apocalyptic elements in its tradition and expressed its new perspectives in the writing of the Mishnah. Thus the literature of the O.T. Apocrypha (books that were part of the Alexandrian O.T. canon) and the Pseudepigrapha provide important understandings of Judaism of the New Testament period not always to be found in the Old Testament or in Judaism after the Jewish Wars.

Particularly significant in the Intertestamental period was the ascendancy of Apocalyptic literature and thought. One scarcely realizes its importance by looking only at Daniel and Revelation. Apocalyptic thought and its dualism influenced many of the Jewish sects of Jesus day and impacted much of the early church in various ways. Apocalyptic thought viewed heaven as the present sphere of God's rule, consigned the world to the rule of Satan, and made a sharp distinction between what was spiritual and what was fleshly, ultimately rejecting the idea of the resurrection of a fleshly body. Because of its negative understanding of the world, it believed that God in the end time would destroy this world and make a new one more amenable to divine purposes.

144. The elements of the old physical, fleshly body were seen as restored by God and one was returned to life in this physical world, but a world restored to an idealistic state.

145. "Sheol" in Hebrew is equivalent to "Hades" in Greek connoting the "place of the dead". This has been sometimes translated "Hell" in English, but here "Hell" is not understood as the place of torment. Originally in the Old Testament, before the idea of the resurrection of the dead, "Sheol" was the dark, gloomy place of the grave and consequently underground. As Judaism developed a different understanding of life after death in the Intertestamental period, Sheol changed from the place one was buried to a meaningful place of existence. It then came to be divided into two parts: a place for the good known by various terms, such as "Abraham's bosom", "Paradise", and a place for the bad, known as Gehenna from the Hebrew "Ge Hinnom", "Valley of Hinnom". The Valley of Hinnom was south of Jerusalem, a place where historically human sacrifice had been made and which was probably used as a city dump - thus the imagery of fire. "Paradise" also had other usages and was sometimes seen as being with God rather than in Sheol.

146. Paul speaks of various kinds of bodies in I Cor. 15 and affirms that the resurrection body will be spiritual, not physical. When the Sadducees ask Jesus which of the seven husbands of a woman would have her in the resurrection, he answers: "Is not this why you are wrong, that you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God? For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like the angels in heaven." (Mark 12:18ff)

believed that the especially righteous or the martyred might go directly to heaven rather than needing to enter Sheol and await resurrection.<sup>147</sup>

The Gospel of John presents a modification to much of the New Testament view of death influenced by Jewish Apocalyptic. Rather than being merely sustained by God through life and the period between death and resurrection, to be resurrected in the future, eternal life is experienced NOW. This is the point of the conversation between Mary, Martha and Jesus concerning the death of Lazarus in John 11. They express faith in the ultimate resurrection of Lazarus, but Jesus says that he is the resurrection and the life NOW. Both eternal life and final judgement are experienced in Christ NOW (John 3:16-21), so that death is overcome now -- not in some future time for which one is kept and sustained by God. In the discourses in John, which represent the latest theological strata in the development of the Gospel,<sup>148</sup> Jesus is described as one from heaven who comes down to bring life, light and truth, and who goes back to heaven, there to prepare a place for his disciples that where he is they may be also (John 14:2). Death then recedes in significance, as it does in the Lazarus story, because life eternal, life of the "age to come", is already available.

What may we then say about death? Death needs interpretation to persons both as an existential fact and so that they may handle their own concrete experience of death. Since all are liable to death, it being a part of what one may call the "life design," it perhaps should be reinterpreted as a meaningful part of life rather than as enemy. In the process of its interpretation the relationship between sin and death should be dissolved. The fact that "sin," describing the human predicament, and death are experienced side by side no more indicates a causative relationship than Paul's naive appraisal of the relationship of illness and death at Corinth. (I Cor. 11:30)<sup>149</sup> Death is rather a stage in the development of the person to what is beyond death, a necessary part of the growth process, and an existential limit which causes us to continually look beyond our material world and physical selves to life's transcendent dimension and our own spirituality. As creation groans in travail and waits with eager longing for new life, so do we as we await our adoption, "the redemption of our bodies". (Rom. 8:18ff)

How then may the circumstances of death be interpreted as we are confronted with it? For one thing, it would seem to be important to recognize the complexity of factors in life that lead to death. Death occurs by accident, by natural catastrophe, by disease, by aging and progressive physical deterioration, by one's own choice in suicide. The relationship of psychological programming and dynamics to physical disease

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<sup>147</sup>. Thus it becomes clear that the great difference between Hellenistic and Hebraic thought about life after death talked about by some biblical theologians really did not exist if one compares Hellenistic thought not with the Old Testament, but the literature of Intertestamental Judaism. It used to be said that Judaism believed life was only dependent on God and that the idea of the resurrection expressed this, while Hellenistic religion believed a soul was immortal and lived on by its own dynamics, often in a reincarnative process. Both really believed in a soul that immediately survived death in a meaningful existence. Death in the time of the New Testament was not a falling asleep, though this metaphor is used, to be awakened by the resurrection. In Judaism and Christianity the idea of the resurrection of the body was transformed in a spiritual direction and at times was transcended.

<sup>148</sup>. When one examines the Gospel of John it seems clear that there are materials within which represent different stages in the development of the views of its religious community. Many of the narrative materials, though representing an independent line of tradition from the Synoptics, seem close to the perspectives of the Synoptics. It is in the discourses that the unique perspectives of Johannine theology seem best to be represented. It is interesting to examine such a passage as John 6 with its Feeding of the 5,000, similar to the Synoptics, and then followed by several discourses, each contributing certain theological developments. It seems that what one finds is a creative theological rethinking of the narratives as stated in the Spirit sayings in John 14-16: the Spirit bringing to remembrance the things that Jesus has said and done and leading them into "all truth".

<sup>149</sup>. Paul comments that there is some causative relationship between their unworthy partaking of the Lord's Supper and the suffering and death of some persons at Corinth.

and death is an interesting area for examination. All of these factors may be a part of dying. Thus death frequently seems as little in God's providence as does suffering. And yet we also believe that God is involved in our life process. At times God's activity may relieve us from death, but death still remains an aspect of life with which we all must deal. At times God's graciousness seems to surround the process and moments of death, even affecting the timing of death, while the causes of death may be purely natural. As God's presence graciously transforms suffering, so may God's presence transform our experience of death. But even to the most faithful death's timing is not always of God's choosing.

Preparation for death is of utmost importance. This means preparation of persons with an understanding of death before the possibility of death occurs. Some of the best pastoral care is done at times when persons can reflect upon life without the emotional pressures of a crisis being at hand. Then there is the type of preparation of both the dying and relatives when death is immanent.

In the general preparation for death in preaching and teaching the most important thing that one can do is to point to the transcendent dimensions of life, to help persons become aware of where and how God impinges upon their lives, to help them to become aware of their "souls", the eternal aspects of their nature, and to help them think in terms of that greater fellowship which encompasses the living and the "dead". Because modern medical technology has rescued so many from "near-death", a whole literature has recently developed out of these experiences which can provide helpful insight on the "death transition."<sup>150</sup> The confidence of the early church about eternal life in Christ as an immediate experience after death (not some waiting for a future resurrection) should be affirmed.

The death and resurrection of Christ appears in the New Testament as related to the life and experience of the believer in a number of ways. This is concretized in the symbols of baptism (e.g. Rom. 6:5ff) and becomes the basis for ethical action (Col. 3:1ff). In II Cor. 4:7ff it is seen as symbolizing both our human limitations and the transcendent power which is in us but belongs to God, "always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies." In I Peter it bears witness to the Transcendent Realm. (I Peter 1:3ff)

Something that is not often observed in the stories of Christ's death is that here one may observe a pattern that may bear similarities to our dying. The following aspects or stages may be noted:

- Confession of Peter (Mark 8:27ff) - Jesus, in connection with Peter's confession of him as Messiah, immediately begins to speak of his suffering and death, but also expresses confidence that God will after three days raise him.<sup>151</sup> He calls upon his disciples for a similar taking up of the cross and trust in God. Jesus was moving towards Jerusalem and knew what his ministry there would mean in terms of opposition to him and his own suffering. He was coming to terms with his death in a way Peter could not. Frequently it is the friends of the dying that have most difficulty with a death or fatal illness. One can also see how this experience confronted Peter with his own mortality.
- Transfiguration (Mark 9:2ff) - Jesus and his disciples are prepared for his death by being given a glimpse of his "nature" and God's affirmation of him: "This is my son." Reality opened up

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<sup>150</sup>. See, for example, Kenneth Ring, *Heading Towards Omega: In Search of the Meaning of the Near-Death Experience*, NY: William Morrow and Co., 1984.

<sup>151</sup>. It may be that in Jesus' mind the expression of confidence in God was related to the promise of the vindication of God's servant in Isaiah 52-52 and a similar theme in the righteous sufferer Psalms, such as Psalm 22.

and they were given a glimpse, though brief, of the transcendent world. The idea of the transcendent in a cloud brings to mind not only OT images, but those of the mystical tradition. Peter wanted to build booths, but they could not stay there and avoid what was to come. The voice of God repeats here to Jesus the identity which was confirmed to him in his baptism, affirming the role of personal identity in dealing with death. Jesus had to know who he was to face the dissolution of his physical life. He must have been confronted with the identity issues posed by Satan after the baptism: "If you are the son of God ..." According to Luke, Jesus discussed his "departure"<sup>152</sup> with Moses and Elijah, thus finding not only his personal identity confirmed, but that he stood in relationship to a great spiritual tradition.

- Gethsemane, Trial and Death (Mark 14:32 - 15:47) - Jesus expresses his feelings in Gethsemane, struggles with his death and grieves. The concrete circumstances of his trial and dying inflict great suffering, as death often does. He feels forsaken, but trusts himself to God: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"<sup>153</sup>
- The Interval Between Death and Appearance - There is a short interval between his death and resurrection when his contemporaries would have said he was in Sheol, the place of the departed. This interval is not discussed in the New Testament Gospels (though a subject of later Gospels), but is reflected in a few places in the New Testament.<sup>154</sup> For many early Christians it meant that where they might have to go, Christ had gone too, and to this realm he brought the full implications of his accomplishments. It is, however, doubtful as to whether one should try to indicate that those who believe in Christ will follow the same journey as he into an interval or intermediate state. Much of the "near-death" experience speaks of a movement towards light and a "being" of light which can be interpreted to mean a direct and immediate movement towards God. How one would deal with this interval depends on how objectively descriptive one understands the forms of the biblical faith in life after death and how one sees Christ as changing the conditions of human existence and perhaps doing away with the "need" for an interval/intermediate state. Though the interval was a place of meaningful existence in Intertestamental Judaism, as discussed before, it was really a "holding place" until the resurrection. In the Gospel of John, where Christ brought eternal life into present experience, the world, not Sheol, was the waiting place until Christ could take his own to himself in heaven (14:2, 17:24). For Christ there was a necessity to his descent, for it was an extension of his earthly mission and his victories. His descent makes our possible descent of little significance for us. Part of the difficulty in how to understand this interval relates to how literally one needs to take the resurrection of the body and therefore needs an intermediate state in which one waits for it. Some of the Christian church has developed this into the idea of purgatory, a place to be purged and get ready for life with God.

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<sup>152</sup>. In Greek the term is "exodus".

<sup>153</sup>. Many commentators feel that Jesus was not merely expressing his feelings in these words, but was reciting Psalm 22, something often done when a Jew faced death. Though the words quoted only express forsakenness, the Psalm itself expresses both forsakenness and trust. Thus to understand fully what was going through Jesus mind, one must read the whole Psalm.

<sup>154</sup>. One finds reference to this in such passages as Rom. 10:7, Ephes. 4:9, Phil. 2:11 (which expresses his sovereignty over what is under the earth), and in I Peter 3:18ff and 4:6. Further evidence is that Jesus' resurrection was not described as being from "death", but from the "dead", i.e. the realm where the dead were. In I Peter this descent into "Hades" seems to be for the proclamation of his victory over the angels of Gen. 6, now "in prison", whom Jewish mythology thought had responsibility for bringing evil into the world in the time of Noah (3:18ff) and the preaching of the Gospel to the dead who had not had a chance to hear it (4:6).

- Resurrection - Jesus appears. His disciples know his continuing presence, though it is experienced and described in various ways in different Gospels. This might be described as his "vivid presence", which was important in helping his disciples make the transition to "his presence in the Spirit". According to all New Testament traditions this "vivid presence" occurred only for a short period of time and then stopped, though Paul claims such an experience "as to one untimely born" (I Cor. 15:8) The Ascension in much of New Testament theology is seen as at one with and the completion of the resurrection.<sup>155</sup> Thus his resurrection is not only to his disciples, but to God.
- Christ's presence in the Spirit - The early church understood that their ongoing spiritual experience, identified as the Spirit, was not only of the "Father," but also of the "Son." For example, in Gal. 4:6 it is "the Spirit of his Son" that helps us to say to God, "Abba, Father." It is the resurrected Christ who sends the Spirit. In Ephesians 4 it is the resurrected Christ who gives the gifts which are spoken of elsewhere as the gifts of the Spirit. The point is that in the theology of the early church there was recognized a difference between the way Christ was present immediately after the resurrection and later. The later presence was less tangible, less concrete, more "spiritual". He was still with them, but in a new way.

A number of these elements also seem to enter into the experience we have of the dying of family members and close friends, where we are intimately enough involved to extensively experience their death. At times there is the sort of premonition, understanding of the circumstances, reflected in Jesus' discussion of his coming death with Peter. Like the Transfiguration, there may be a time of insight, a moment of transcendence, when we glimpse the "other side" of life and its meaning. As death approaches there is the desire to avoid and the grief of Gethsemane. Then the experience of death itself, as with the cross. Following death there is often an experience of the presence of the deceased, at first more vivid, followed by a "departure/ascension" and then more nebulous and "spiritual".<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>155</sup>. The Ascension described by Luke in Acts 1 is a different event, really a final leave-taking. The Gospel of John knows of both understandings of the Ascension. The Ascension mentioned by Jesus in John 20:17 is the completion of the Resurrection. The one described in the Spirit sayings of John 14-16, i.e. Jesus must go away to send the Spirit, is similar to Jesus' departure in Acts 1.

<sup>156</sup>. I first became aware of a possible correlation between the events of Jesus' last days and our experience of death during my first wife's dying. I still am unsure as to how to interpret my experience in terms of objective or subjective components, but it was my experience which led me to see the biblical material as described. Some similar elements of experience may be noted in Sheldon Vanauken's touching story of the death of his wife in *A Severe Mercy*, Harper and Row, 1977.

My wife had sarcoidosis, Addison's disease, and became mentally ill from the infiltration of the sarcoidosis into her brain and the use of cortisone as replacement for what the adrenals did not produce (due to the Addison's disease). Very simply, my experience consisted of my wife "spiritually" coming to me a month before her death during a period of meditation in a silent retreat and discussing her death (she was then in the hospital and could barely communicate). She was not expected to die at the time. This experience later became very meaningful because much was communicated that could not be communicated any other way. I was able to be with her when she died, and after she became essentially dead, though her body lived on for a few hours, there was a strong sense of her presence. This lasted for a week, until our son was confirmed a week later. After the confirmation, during the service, there was a sense of her departure. Her presence after that was less "vivid." Over the next year or so there were many times, as a part of our own grief process, that I and my son separately dialogued with her. (This was not a method that we determined upon, but seemed to develop very naturally for each of us.) And then things seemed to settle. The need for dialogue diminished, and a new stage seemed to be entered (not really described in the biblical paradigm above) which Sheldon Vanauken calls "the second death," his term for a later withdrawal and the ending of grief. Vanauken's friend, C.S. Lewis, commented:

The dying person needs the loving and supportive presence of others. Thus it becomes difficult when death cannot be discussed for the realities then cannot be dealt with and love affirmed in the context of what is happening. The dying person also needs interpretation of the process, including experiences and feelings. The dignity and value of his/her "soul" needs affirmation as physically one diminishes and becomes non-functional. Unfortunately, so much of one's dignity in the Western world is bound up with the ability to function. The person needs to be helped to deal with unfinished business and awareness of the Transcendent Realm needs to be heightened, so that one has an awareness of "going somewhere." It is one of the greatest pastoral privileges to "accompany someone into death," to help someone move into the strange and wonderful world which previously has only been glimpsed. Because of the significance of the death of Jesus to the church, the interpretation of death becomes a sacred task.

Friends and relatives of the dying also need interpretation and support in what is happening. Especially will they need help in dealing with their feelings which will often be regarded as unacceptable to God. If the dying can be dealt with openly, there may become available unfinished business which needs care. When death comes unexpectedly or when unfinished business cannot be cared for before death, it is important to remind persons that the one who has died is still alive and can be related to and "talked with." In a situation in which personal relations were bad or communication could not take place because of physical conditions, it should be remembered that the individual in death is freed from the limitations which characterized their life, and now can be approached in new ways. Dialogue with the deceased then becomes an important way of resolving unsettled issues. This may be viewed as purely a process "within the mind," but if eternal life is taken seriously, it can be a dialogue with the real individual.

In the Gospel of John it is said that both Lazarus' death (11:4) and Jesus' death (12:28) were ways of glorifying God. So may the manner of our dying. To glorify God means to both affirm who God is and who we are at the moment of our death. Thus it is to experience, but transcend, death.

### **Exercise: Leonard Bernstein's *Kaddish* Symphony and Suffering**

Suffering cannot be solved intellectually and then done with. Understanding helps and may change one's perspective on suffering. However, the very duration of suffering means that any resolution of it must include a living *with* it. Much of the suffering that one lives with is "stored suffering," the imprint of past experiences that could not be lived through emotionally. Though repressed it becomes part of our unconscious dynamics and projects its pain onto the present. And then there is the suffering of our present. To live *with* suffering can be merely toleration or coping. It certainly should include challenge. I would like to suggest a change of preposition from *with* to *in*. To live *in* suffering means to fully explore what it means both as enemy and friend, and to walk through the valleys, shadows, and sun-lit peaks of its landscape. It is to live into what we have experienced or presently experience as much as is possible and tolerable, withdrawing when we must, suppressing when it is necessary, occasionally escaping into creative separation from our suffering, balancing it with joy when possible, maintaining our vision, but always returning. Suffering is partially "fated" to us by powers not in our control, but in some measure it is part of what it means to be human. All must be born and all must die, two most painful "passages," and there is both suffering and joy in between. What is must ultimately be chosen and lived.

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I feel you are probably right in thinking that the fading of the beloved as-she-was is a necessary condition of the trans-mortal and eternal relation. May we not conjecture (am I repeating myself?) that when Our Lord said 'It is expedient that I go away' he stated something true *par excellence* of Himself, but also true, in their degree, of all his followers? *A Severe Mercy*, p. 232.

To live through suffering often necessitates the use or creation of an imaginative landscape, resonant with one's own experience, which may become vehicle for its expression. There are many ways to do this. One can use meditative techniques which employ images and symbols. One may use words or music into which the issues of one's situation may flow. The symbols which are used, to be fully engaging, should be adequately sensitive to the spiritual and transcendent dimensions of life.

There are many musical pieces, popular or classical, which become vehicles for human experience. One of the finest I have discovered is Leonard Bernstein's Third Symphony, called the "*Kaddish*", from an ancient Jewish prayer.<sup>157</sup> It contains a long English narration in the form of a dialogue of the soul with God. This symphony meant a great deal to me during my first wife's long illness, and I share it with you as an approach to human suffering and spirituality -- particularly affective spirituality. Both the text and the music are intensely emotional and stir the feelings of one's own experience. Hopefully, it will be helpful. Bernstein wrote the Symphony viewing humankind as standing at the brink of annihilation (nuclear), the human soul desiring to say its last *Kaddish*, but also determined to live.

In the experience of the Symphony I suggest an approach similar to that used in the devotional reading of great texts:

1. **Know something about yourself.** Recognize and be open about your feelings, struggle and concerns -- and joys. Bring them to the Symphony with an intention to respond personally and hear a personal message.
2. **Know something about the text**, here the Symphony. Read over the introductory materials.
3. **Change the functional level of your knowledge of yourself and the text.** You cannot, and should not, try to eliminate from your consciousness what you know. Your acquired knowledge of yourself and the text will both facilitate and limit what you hear. What needs to be done is to change the functional level of your knowledge. This is very much as Simone Weil describes "attention" in her essay "On the Right Use of School Studies With A View to the Love of God:"

Attention consists of suspending our thought, leaving it detached, empty, and ready to be penetrated by the object; it means holding in our minds, within reach of this thought, but on a lower level and not in contact with it, the diverse knowledge we have acquired which we are forced to make use of. Our thought should be in relation to all particular and already formulated thoughts, as a man on a mountain who, as he looks forward, sees also below him, without actually looking at them, a great many forests and plains. Above all our thought should be empty, waiting, not seeking anything, but ready to receive in its naked truth the object that is to penetrate it ....
4. **Be attentive and willing to wait** for the answers that may come. Do not merely create answers. Be willing to hear something new.
5. **Trust your intuitive level of functioning.**
6. **Develop the habit of living with a text.** This means that you will need to give the Symphony some time to unfold its meaning for you. You may need to listen numerous times. If the Symphony will become

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<sup>157</sup>. There are several recordings of the Symphony No. 3, *Kaddish*. The one used here is that of Columbia, CBS, Masterworks, MG 32793, and is preferable to others I have heard. This pressing included the Jeremiah and the Age of Anxiety Symphonies.

an adequate vehicle for your experience, you will probably experience its drawing you in the first hearing. Allow the Symphony to work its way with you as long as it will. When it is done, you will know it.

7. Use your encounter with the text as a **means of worshiping and loving God and experiencing life, being open to God's and life's encounter with you**. In this you would be moving from what might be called "meditation" upon the text to "contemplation" of God and life. The ultimate purpose of a religious text is to meet God, while the ultimate purpose of many texts is to meet life. You may encounter what transcends you, what cannot be completely explained, but can only be lived and related to.

The Symphony was completed in 1963, the third of three Symphonies dealing with the anguish of human existence (the first was the Jeremiah Symphony and the second was The Age of Anxiety). In the "*Kaddish*", Bernstein takes up an ancient Jewish prayer, the *Kaddish*. In the synagogue service it originally followed the sermon and prayer and was also, with variations, introduced at other places in the liturgy. It calls upon God to bless and magnify God's name. It came to be the prayer chanted for the dead at the graveside, expressing faith and belief in God's sovereignty over life. In one form the opening sentence is:

Magnified and hallowed be his great Name in the world which he created according to his will;  
and may he make his kingship sovereign in your life time and in your days.

The form used in the Symphony is:

Magnified and sanctified be the great Name. Amen.

There are traces of its use in the Gospels. The opening of the Lord's Prayer is very similar:

Hallowed be Thy Name,  
Thy Kingdom come.

The *Kaddish* likely also appears in John 12:27ff where Jesus faces his suffering as in the garden of Gethsemane in the other Gospels.

"Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father save me from this hour.' No, for this purpose I have come to this hour. *Father, glorify thy name.*" Then a voice came from heaven, "*I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.*"

Thus in the *Kaddish* one is dealing with a prayer with a great tradition both in Judaism and Christianity.

Bernstein's *Kaddish* is uttered in the face of the agony of humankind and the chaos of the contemporary world. As one listens to the narrator it becomes clear that this is a *Kaddish* said at what could be the funeral of humankind. But it comes to a conclusion in an affirmation of both God and humanity.

The narrator, who struggles with God and the meaning of life, is identified as "the Rose of Sharon" (Song of Solomon 2:1), the lover of God,

that part of man you made to suggest his immortality. .... The part that refuses death, that insists on you, divines your voice, guesses your grace. .... The Lily that man has picked and thrown away.



She is exiled by contemporary "man" who then is free to "play with his new found (nuclear) fire" and so is in danger of obliterating both self and God. God is called to account for promises and covenant.

Your covenant! .... Tin God! Your bargain is tin! It crumbles in my hand. And where is faith now, your or mine?

Then the narrator realizes that God too must have sorrow over the nature of creation. She says:

Forgive me, Father. I was mad with fever. Chaos is catching, and I succumbed. .... In fever I forgot you too are vulnerable. If my faith is shaky, what must yours be? .... Dear God, how you must suffer...

She goes on to comfort God, to sing the *Kaddish* as a lullaby, to take God to a dream world where there are "stars that do not disappoint and disgust and disgrace your love," a perfect world with "every immortal cliché in place." But there in perfection "there is nothing to dream, nowhere to go, nothing to know." And so she calls God back to the "star of regret ... where dreaming is real and pain is possible .... And in pain you will recognize your image, at last." In the dream return to the world of "man" she portrays her accomplishments and asks God to believe in her. And then they both awake to the chill of reality. "The dawn has come." But they are both still alive. The conclusion speaks of a new relationship between humanity and God, won out of the struggle:

Father, we've won another day. We can still be immortal, you and I, bound by my rainbow. You can no longer afford my death, for if I die, you die with me. But as long as I sing, I shall live; and as long as I live I shall continue to create you, Father, and you me. That is our pact, and to honor it is our honor. It's not quite what we bargained for, so long ago, at the time of that other first rainbow. But then I was only your helpless infant, arms hard around you, dead without you. We have both grown older, you and I. And I am not sad. Don't you be either. Unfrown your brow. Look tenderly again at me, at us, at all these growing children of God here in this sacred house. And we shall look tenderly back to you, O my Father, Lord and Lover, Beloved Majesty, my Image, Myself. We are one after all, you and I. Together we suffer, together exist, and forever will recreate each other.

The conclusion is not what some would consider "correct theology." But does it have to be? It is a journey and struggle of the human soul that embraces faith and unfaith, much as the Psalms. It brings before God the full panoply of human experience. It does not move towards a rational solution, but an experience in which God and the human soul interact and wrestle as did Jacob (Gen. 32:22ff). Wherever that takes place is transformed into a holy place.

Narration Text: Symphony No. 3, "Kaddish," Leonard Bernstein

O my Father. Ancient, hallowed, lonely, disappointed Father. Rejected Ruler of the universe. Handsome, jealous, Lord and Lover. Angry, wrinkled old majesty. I want to pray.

I want to say Kaddish; my own Kaddish.

Listen, Almighty, with all your might. There just may be no one to say it after me.

Do I have your attention, majestic Father? Is my end a minute away, an hour? Is there even time to ask the question? It could be here, while we are singing, that we are to be halted once for all, cut off in the act of praising you. While I have breath, however briefly, I will sing this final Kaddish for you, for me, for all those I love in this sacred house.

I want to pray and time is short. Time to begin our gallant Yiggadol:

Magnified and sanctified be the great Name. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Did you hear that, Father. May abundant peace descend on us. Amen. Great God, surely you who make peace on high, who manipulate clumsy galaxies, you who juggle a space full of suns, bend light, spin moons, surely you can handily supply a touch of order here below on this one day's speck.

And let us say again, Amen.

With Amen on my lips I approach your presence, Father; and not with fear, but a certain respect for fury. I have little time, as you well know. Do you recognize my voice? Must I reintroduce myself? I am the Lily of Sharon, the Rose of the Valley's Daughter of Zion. I am that part of man you made to suggest his immortality. You surely remember, Father. The part that refuses death, that insists on you, divines your voice, guesses your grace. And always you have heard my voice. Always you have saluted me, with a rainbow, a raven, a plague, something. But now I see nothing. This time you show me nothing at all.

Father, understand what is happening. I am exiled by man, no longer cherished while he runs free, free to play with his new-found fire, avid for death, voluptuous, total and ultimate death. Lord God of Hosts, I call you to account, and don't shrug me off as if I were playing defiant daughter, your impudent rebel who could do with a slap. You know who I am: the Lily that man has picked and thrown away. And you let this happen, Lord of Hosts. You with your manna, your pillar of fire. You asked for faith. Where is your own? Why have you taken away your rainbow, that pretty bow you tied around your finger to remind you never to forget your promise? Shall I quote you your own weighty words? "For lo, I do set my bow in the clouds and I will look upon it that I may remember my everlasting covenant." Your covenant! Your bargain with man! Tin God! Your bargain is tin! It crumbles in my hand. And where is faith now, yours or mine?

Forgive me, Father. I was mad with fever. Chaos is catching, and I succumbed. Have I hurt you, Father? Forgive me. In fever I forgot you too are vulnerable. If my faith is shaky, what must yours be? But yours was the first fatal mistake, creating man in your own image, fallible. Dear God, how you must suffer: so far away, ruefully eyeing your two-footed handiwork, frail, foolish, mortal. My sorrowful Father, if I could comfort you, hold you against me, rock you and rock you into sleep. Shall I sing to you? Shall I tell you stories of other stars: stars that you love, that deserve your love; stars that do not disappoint and disgust and disgrace your love? O, I hope that exist for your sake, Father. My heart's pity boils in my throat. I can barely speak:

Be comforted, be magnified, sanctified.

Sleep, my Father. Rest your anger. Dream softly. Let me invent your dream, dream it for you as gently as I can. And perhaps by dreaming I can help you find your image again, and love him again. I'll take you to your favorite star, the world most worthy of your creation. We'll make it a sort of holiday. And, hand in hand, like eager children, we'll watch in wonder, wide-eyed, the workings of perfectedness.

So this is the Kingdom of Heaven, Father. Just as you planned it. Every immortal cliché in place. Lambs frisk, wheat ripples, sunbeams dance. Something is wrong. The light flat, the air still. Do you know what is wrong? There is nothing to dream, nowhere to go, nothing to know. And these creatures of your kingdom, these smiling painless people, are they created in your image also? You are serenity, but rage as well. I know. I have borne it. You are hope, but also regret. I know. You have regretted me. But not these, these perfect ones. They are beyond regret or hope. They don't exist, Father, not even in the light years of our dream. Come back with me to the star of regret: come back, Father, where dreaming is real and pain is possible, so possible you will have to believe it. And in pain you will recognize your image, at last. Now I will show you a dream to remember. Real life marvels, genuine wonders, dazzling miracles. Look! A burning bush! Look! A fiery wheel, a ram, a rock! Shall I smite it? There. It gushes, it gushes. And I did it. I am running this dream. Now will you believe? You can't escape yet. I have you, Father, locked in my dream and you must remain 'til the final scene. Now, look up! High. What do you see? A rainbow which I have created for you. My promise in permanent sunfast colors. Look at it, Father! Believe! Believe! Look at my rainbow and say after me:

Magnified and sanctified be the great name of man.

The colors of my rainbow are blinding, Father, and they hurt your eyes. I know. But don't close them now! Don't turn away! Look! Do you see how simple and peaceful it all becomes, once you believe. Believe! Believe!

Don't waken yet, however great your pain. I will help you suffer it.

O God, believe. Believe in me and you shall see the Kingdom of Heaven. Just as you planned. Lambs will frisk. Wheat will ripple. Believe! Believe!

Sunbeams will dance, seraphim hover. See how my rainbow lights the scene! Cherubim call from corner to corner, chanting your praises.

The rainbow is fading. The dream is over. We must wake up now, and the dawn is chilly.

The dawn is chilly. But the dawn has come. Father, we've won another day. We have dreamed our Kaddish and wakened alive. Good morning, Father. We can still be immortal, you and I, bound by my rainbow. You can no longer afford my death, for if I die, you die with me. But as long as I sing, I shall live; and as long as I live I shall continue to create you, Father, and you me. That is our pact, and to honor it is our honor. It's not quite what we bargained for, so long ago, at the time of that other first rainbow. But then I was only your helpless infant, arms hard around you, dead without you. We have both grown older, you and I. And I am not sad. Don't you be either. Unfurrow your brow. Look tenderly again at me, at us, at all these growing children of God here in this sacred house. And we shall look tenderly back to you, O my Father, Lord and Lover, Beloved Majesty, my Image, Myself. We are one after all, you and I. Together we suffer, together exist, and forever will recreate each other.