

**Draft Outline for pilot program of
“Professional Enhancement for Clergy”**

Developed by

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Aims

To promote **ways of relating** with God – however we name God – ourselves, other people and the world at large, that are:

- realistic
- honest
- life-giving

This will include ongoing growth in:

- feeling grounded beyond work and roles
- self-awareness
- loving relationships

It will engender:

- a growing sense of well-being
- a deepening appreciation for otherness
- a contemplative presence

Structure and method

Dr Gerard Webster, Rev Michael Whelan SM PhD and Sr Marie Biddle RSJ MA MTh will be present for all sessions as presenters and facilitators

There will be four sessions, each of two and a half hours followed by a meal together.

A group of 8-9 participants by invitation is envisaged.

Each participant will be given texts appropriate to the subject matter.

During the sessions a variety of processes and methods will be used to promote the aims, including:

- viewing and discussion of a movie (eg “Secrets and Lies”, “Departures”)
- professional input with Q & A
- conversation within group
- socializing
- personal reading and reflection
- “focusing” (see Eugene Gendlin, *Focusing*, Bantam Books, 1982)
- mapping and discussing family of origin

Financial arrangement

Yet to be settled. Aquinas Academy is willing to assist.

SESSION ONE

Introductions and outline of program

Forum: “The field of formation” (Michael Whelan SM PhD)

- A model for discussing the various sources of relationships + spirituality

Forum: (Dr Michael Webster)

- Complementing “The field of formation”

Forum: Introduction to “focusing” (Sr Marie Biddle RSJ MA MTh)

- Explanation and exercise

Homework: Map family of origin, paying particular attention to *power, communication* and *roles* in the system.

Meal

SESSION TWO

“Focusing” exercise

Forum: Break into three groups. Present family maps

Forum: (Dr Michael Webster)

Meal

SESSIOM THREE

Watch and discuss the 1996 British film written and directed by Mike Leigh, “Secrets and Lies”

Meal

SESSION FOUR

“Focusing” exercise

Forum: Full group discussion of Adrian van Kaam, “Existential Crisis and Human Development”

Forum: “Key insights”

- Break into three groups – personal reflection on the Sessions
- Return to full group and discuss

Texts appropriate to the subject matter

“Introspection and Transcendent Self-presence” Adrian van Kaam

“The Man Who Was Put in a Cage” Rollo May

“The Work of Renewal” Charles Davis

“Existential Crisis and Human Development” Adrian van Kaam

“Listening to the Parables of Jesus” Paul Ricoeur

“Where is God” Elie Wiesel

“The Madman” Friedrich Nietzsche

“The Salt of the Earth” Les Murray

INTROSPECTION AND TRANSCENDENT SELF-PRESENCE

Adrian van Kaam¹

In the former chapter on the discovery and incarnation of one's spiritual identity, it was mentioned that this could not happen by mere introspection but primarily by transcendent self-presence. In this chapter we will highlight the role of transcendent self-presence in the spiritual life.

Two Forms of Reflection

While developing a theory of man's spiritual unfolding, I discovered the importance of a right balance between two forms of reflection, one being introspective, the other transcendent.

Let us say I suddenly lost a dear person; a husband, wife, parent, friend passed away. I feel not only immensely sad but guilty. I feel ashamed about the times I could have been more pleasant for the deceased but was not. I reproach myself for visits I neglected, letters I did not write, kind words that were never spoken. I keep asking myself why I did not do what could have been done easily, why I failed this dear person so badly during his life. I try to recall all of the lost opportunities in which I could have been of help and I was not. I ask myself over and over again how I could have been so negligent. I feel compelled to explore my past. Was it perhaps the same when I was a younger person? Does my lack of interest in others go back to things that happened at home when I was a little child? Am I as thoughtless with my other friends who are still alive? How can I as fast as possible remedy my lack of concern, my absorption in myself? I begin frantically to analyze every detail of my dealings with others.

This whole process could be described as one of introspective reflection, of looking anxiously into myself, of being present to myself in an aggressive attempt to figure everything out, to dig up the roots of my failure, to trace it back to the past, to analyze piecemeal my thoughts, feelings, deeds, and expressions.

I can also be present to myself, my guilt and failure in a different way. Yes, my friend passed away. I feel guilt and shame about the many times I failed him. I put myself totally before the Divine Majesty with my sadness, guilt, shame, and failure. My main attention is not directed towards my feelings but toward the Divine Presence. I adore His Holy Will that took my friend. Prayerfully I renew my faith that His love lets all things work out for the best. My failure may have helped my friend to become aware of the limitations of friendship in this passing world. I humble myself before God who grants me the purifying awareness of how sinful and self-centered I really am. My inner humiliation, accepted in peaceful surrender, creates more room in me to be filled with the Eternal Presence. I renew my faith in His redemptive love. With a contrite heart, I profess to Him my guilt, put myself in His hands, experience His constant mercy. I rekindle my hope that His will make everything right in the end, that He will give my friend in eternity what I could never give him during his life. I grow in a new love for God and people, feeling more at home than ever with a suffering and redeemed humanity whose guilt, failure, and need for salvation I compassionately share. Relaxed and peaceful, I allow now--against the background of eternal mercy--my failures of past and present to emerge in my awareness. In light of His compassionate love, I ponder quietly possible ways to gradually improve my life insofar as it pleases Him to give me the grace to better my predicament. This second gentle way of self-presence, I call transcendent reflection.

¹ Originally published as Chapter VII of Adrian van Kaam, *In Search of Spiritual Identity*, Dimension Books, 1979, 172-196.

Introspective reflection tends to be analytical and aggressive; transcendent reflection tends to be integrated and gentle. In introspective reflection, we isolate the "reflected upon," such as guilt and shame, from the larger backdrop of reality. We not only cut the "reflected upon" off from the larger whole to which it pertains; we also cut it up in its inner wholeness. In our first example, we did not put our failure in the perspective of God's all encompassing providence and forgiveness; we engaged in a fragmenting analysis of every aspect of our feeling and failure.

Introspective reflection implies a focusing process in which the background is either blurred or lost. Both inwardly and outwardly, it is divided. It purposely loses sight of the totality and goes at its object aggressively. How aggressively we tried in our first example to force insight by digging up all we could recall of the past. This aggressiveness of thought is beneficial in that it helps to make us more strict and precise. While this approach is excellent for our necessary analytical pursuits, it is destructive for any kind of transcendent reflection that underlies our awareness of spiritual at-oneness. In our first example, we were isolated in our guilt and shame about the negligence of our friend during his life; we felt cut off from God and man.

What I term transcendent reflection is the opposite of introspective. In it, we may reflect upon ourselves, others, and nature to become one with a Divine Source, mysteriously united in an Eternal Origin. We reflect meditatively upon the whole of creation, its enormity and simplicity, out of which we all emerge. In our second example, we never left the all pervading presence of the merciful God, His loving and all encompassing Providence and His unfolding creation; the ultimate meaning of our shame, guilt, and failure was related to this Divine Origin from whom we all emerge.

This reflection is not divisive but unitive. It is transcendent. It makes whole; it attunes us to a mysterious totality that already is; it is a healing reflection. Far from being dissective and aggressive, it is meditative and gentle, a gentle preservation of all things as given and as tenderly held in the splendor of a Divine Presence. It is a source of spiritual living. Whenever we reflect upon ourselves, upon our own inner life meditatively, I call such reflection transcendent self-presence.

It might be helpful to note here that every person is engaged in some kind of spontaneous reflection. It is a natural thing for us to keep some kind of mental journal about the things we are experiencing. To be human is to live somewhat reflectively, either introspectively and analytically or meditatively and unitive, or by means of both.

Our culture sets great store by utility, efficiency, success. It fosters aggressive analytical reflection which helps build science, technique, and efficient organization. Because we are so efficiency minded, we even examine ourselves in an aggressive analytical way when we engage in introspection. But one cannot rest in this predilection for the analytical. It is only one side of the story.

Exclusive introspection affects badly not only our spiritual but also our psychological and bodily health. Mere introspection without let up makes us lose touch with reality; it leads to self-centered isolation; it enslaves us to self-preoccupation and to the anxious urge to reach at once an unrealistic ideal of self-perfection.

Because transcendent self-presence is a condition for the emergence of the life of the spirit, it is presupposed by any authentic way of spirituality; it is therefore one of the essential topics to be reflected upon in fundamental spirituality.

Transcendent self-presence is called transcendent because it enables us to transcend, that is, to go beyond, the practical and sentimental meanings things may have for us in terms of our own private needs, ambitions, drives, and expectations. Transcendent self-presence pushes us beyond the limited here and now meanings of our own particular problems, childhood traumas, sensitivities, faults, and projects. In and beyond all of these, it integrates our lives contextually, that is, it helps us live in the

context of the whole of reality, of which we are part, and with its divine all-pervading source. We begin to see ourselves in the loving and redeeming perspective of Divine Presence.

In transcendent self-presence, we do not center on ourselves as isolated persons facing the task of overcoming isolated problems and projects; neither do we tighten our hearts to scrutinize our own feelings or take stock of our progress. In both cases we lose the fruit of transcendent self-presence. We become disquieted instead of deepening ourselves in an atmosphere of equanimity. We may end up with a self-centered emotional piety instead of ending up in Him, the Eternal Truth of our lives.

Transcendent self-presence sees us not as isolated but as sustained and centered in the light of Divine Presence. A gentle avoidance of any return to ourselves as outside the Divine light is an essential condition for transcendent self-presence.

Each kind of reflective presence to ourselves introspective or transcendent has its own purpose, time, and place. Our vision of ourselves as interwoven with the whole of reality should be primary, the introspective view secondary. Both views remain always necessary; one cannot take the place of the other.

Historical Development of Introspectionism

Prolonged study has led me to the insight that the art and discipline of spiritual self-presence has been neglected increasingly in our Western culture. An overemphasis on introspective attitudes has seriously hindered the spiritual growth of Western man. This did not augur well either for his psychosomatic welfare or his daily efficiency.

Traces of the art of transcendent self-presence can be found in ancient philosophies, in the Bible, the Church Fathers, early monastic writers, later spiritual masters, as well as in the pre-Christian spiritualities of the Far East. Studying these traces in light of my thought on the two types of reflection, I felt only recently able to articulate more explicitly this aspect of my theory.

Transcendent self-presence is not a concentration on ourselves or anything in ourselves as isolated from the rest of reality. It makes us look upon ourselves in a less strained way, seeing ourselves and all the things that touch us against the broader horizon of the mystery of a Presence that embraces all of reality. Transcendent self-presence goes beyond a "What-is-in-it-for-me" attitude; "How-can-I-use-it;" "What-can-I-do-with-it." In a contextual dwelling on our experience, we bind all the meanings of our life, its victories and failures, with the providential pattern of the universe, with the experienced or believed order of things of which we feel ourselves a part. We see ourselves as illumined by the light of the Divine, as interwoven with the mysterious rhythms of cosmos and world, of culture and history, as bathed in a Divine Presence that permeates all and is the loving origin of each one of us and our daily world. By the same token, we begin to experience the ordinary everyday grind as co-originating constantly with us within the successive life situations we have been called to cope with graciously.

At a certain period in the history of Westerners, somewhere between the 15th and 17th centuries, the interest in spirituality was gradually replaced by other preoccupations. Many people, of course, kept longing after the spiritual life, but society as a whole lost touch with spirituality as a vital concern. The rise of the Renaissance, with the growing emphasis on science and technology, made the knowledge and perfection of this world the focus of attention. The medieval view of reality collapsed. A humanistic view took over. The living awareness of the sacred dimension of reality was lost. Human beings no longer experienced their interwovenness with their fellow human beings, with nature, history, and the cosmos as constantly originating from the Divine Presence. His self-isolation, facing a competitive society, became the nucleus of his personal concern. This heightened fascination with our own world, and our egos at the center of it, led us to concentrate excessively on what happened in our isolated interiority. We became obsessed with the need for ethical and

psychological self-realization. We became more enthralled with self-perfection than with intimacy with the Sacred. For many of us, this development meant the neglect of an experiential spiritual life, no matter how well we actualized ourselves ethically or psychologically as members of different churches or humanistic organizations.

Toward the end of the 19th Century, the scientific world view extended itself to human beings themselves. Psychology, psychiatry, anthropology, and sociology began to study human beings in isolation from the eternal presence that transfigures the cosmos. To be sure these human sciences gave us a wealth of insights that could eventually be integrated in a deeper and richer, but also more practical and realistic, spiritual image of the human person.

In line with our already changing vision of ourselves, the psychological disciplines began to perfect methods of introspection. They stimulated people even more to look reflectively at what was happening within themselves, without relating these inner events to the horizon of meaning beyond themselves. We began to look at people, events, and things primarily to assess how they might affect our private fate. Their deepest meaning within the whole of things began to escape us. The introspective methods thus mushroomed in many forms. They could be used by the person alone or under the guidance or stimulation of an analyst, therapist, counselor, or sensitivity group.

A climate of introspectionism and therapism pervaded the culture. All sorts of experts – psychological, psychiatric, sociological, anthropological – began to take the place of the great spiritual guides of the past. Under this new guidance many people became inclined to center their lives around a well organized, world-centered interiority. Unwittingly, people tried to fill the vacuum left by the disappearance of the art of transcendent reflection in the light of a loving faith. Introspective self-presence substituted for transcendent self-presence.

I don't contend, of course, that introspection is useless; it can be highly advantageous, a definite gain in the arsenal of human means for growth. I believe that our loss is only that people find it no longer necessary to integrate introspective self-presence into a primary and deeper transcendent self-presence.

Effects of the Decline of Spirituality in the West

The decline of the practical knowledge and wisdom of spirituality led various experts in religion to borrow blindly introspective and therapeutic methods from the prestigious human sciences. Some of these experts had already lost living touch with the treasures of spiritual wisdom in their own tradition. They were unable to recast these new human-centered insights in the light of an all embracing spiritual vision. These insights remained foreign and therefore harmful bodies within the body of traditional spiritual wisdom and knowledge.

As a result of the neglect of the spirit-dimension, life in the West became precariously one sided. If people live long enough onesidedly, it will show up in their minds and bodies; it will affect their mental and physical health. This is what happened, especially in the last decennia. People experience themselves increasingly as lonely fighters for self-actualization in a hostile world they feel no longer embedded in; they become overly anxious to beat the fast pace of time, to outdo competitors; they live and work in a hurry; they become filled with hidden hostilities towards those who threaten to outshine them. They miss the wider vision of the spirit to save them from this growing self-preoccupation. This anxious struggle also badly affects their bodies by steadfastly releasing glandular overdoses of chemicals in the bloodstream. This excess harms arteries, brain, heart, and other vital organs. It is one factor among many that contributes to heart attacks, strokes, ulcers, and digestive disorders. Cultures that neglect the unfolding of the spiritual dimension of man are prone to such diseases.

The increasing physical and nervous deterioration of Western humankind, partly as a result of one sided ego living, may prove a blessing in disguise. When other panaceas fail to stem the tide of such illnesses of body and mind, people will be forced to look again for the lost experience of interwovenness with the wider horizon of mystery; for at-oneness with what is beyond the visible and tangible, the experimentally verifiable; for that region of existence where excessive competition, envy, and time urgency become senseless.

We are on the verge of a rebirth of the awareness of the human need for transcendent self-presence. Unfortunately, many people begin to feel this need but are far from ready for a sound and true transcendent vision of themselves within the whole of things. As a result, many become victimized by the occult, by exotic fads, by weird mysticism, witchcraft, astrology, eastern cults. Others, however, may be fortunate enough to find true spiritual guides who will open up for them forgotten pathways to the life of the spirit. They may receive, as a gift, the art of transcendent self-presence that is a condition for spiritual unfolding. They may be liberated from a mere introspective attitude that for so long has dominated their lives.

One of the major drawbacks of the introspective attitude is the alienation of human beings from the context, horizon, and wholeness of the whole and Holy as it reveals itself in simple everydayness. Spiritual self-presence tends toward connectedness with daily things and situations and with the Holy hidden at their core.

Introspective reflection makes our own self and its urgency for instant self-realization central, embroiling us in a futile battle against time and against real or imagined competitors for success and survival. All things – our meetings with others, our work and charities, our religious and apostolic endeavors – may be measured in terms of self-perfection, of a matching or outdoing of the efforts of other strivers after social or apostolic success. Isolated self-actualization becomes the measure of all things. For countless Christians, too, the Christian life becomes narrowed down to a project of theological sophistication and moral self-perfection.

Of course, we should take our own needs and abilities into account; but they should not be the only and ultimate measure of our thoughts, feelings, and actions. Persons and things encountered in daily life must not be assessed only in terms of our own self-perfection and of the fulfillment of our proud missionary "do-gooder" image. How they may foster or hamper our personal growth ought not to be our main concern. In that case we tend to make our ego, its projects, its eagerness to "do, have, and show" the quasi-divine center of our world. We cut this self-perfecting ego off from the real world where the Divine is the center from whom and to whom the true meaning of all things flows. We no longer see people, events, and things in their own God-given richness and density; they become mere occasions for self enhancing missionarism, envious comparison, painful competition, frustration, and the tyranny of time tables that make us feel important. We think we are thinking about others and our task, but we are really thinking about ourselves alone.

Transcendent Self-presence and the Life of Spiritualization

In transcendent self-presence, we are present to ourselves as showing up in the light of God and as interacting with people, events, and things as they also show up in His light. We experience ourselves as unique manifestations of the will of the Father, equally immanent in all that happens around us. Our essential questions are no longer, "What is in it for us?; how are we benefitting ethically, psychologically, emotionally?; how do people and things affect our needs and the hypersensitivity of our lightly bruised ego's?; how do we find fulfillment?" Rather our questions are, "What is the appeal of the Spirit expressed in the demands of everyday?; how do these demands manifest a deeper underlying reality?"

Rather than beginning with the isolated self out of touch with its daily surroundings and the horizon of the sacred, we try to surmise what the situation asks of us as the incarnation of God's

mysterious call. We begin to uncover our hidden transcendent self, willed from eternity; its discovery and growth is meant to be silently interwoven with the mundaneness of our daily duties and their numerous demands on us. Then the life of spiritualization can truly begin.

Of course, we must take into account among all the other signs of God's will for us the divine signposts that show up in our own personal make-up, background, temperament, talents, and deficiencies. The transcendent dimension of the spiritual person's self-presence sees this make-up as a sign post of the Divine, whereas the introspective dimension of his self-presence examines the concrete details of the temperament, talents, and deficiencies God allowed to develop in him. Moderate introspection is necessary. We say "moderate," for "taking into account among other things" is quite different from making our introspective self-preoccupation the measure of all things. The introspective dimension of self-presence is in this case wisely subordinated to the transcendent dimension of self-presence.

The transcendent approach to life happens also to be healthier; it leads to less isolation, aggravation, anxiety, despair, to less futile anger, worries, and fights against people and situations that cannot be changed anyway. At the same time it grants steadfast readiness to labor for the liberation of humanity where and when possible within the limits of our personality, even if, in this battle for the Kingdom, our egos may be bruised or our lives destroyed. Spiritual self-presence envisions a self that transcends when necessary the limits of life and ego fulfillment.

The transcendent approach is healthier also because it does not allow us to wall ourselves up within our inner worlds nor to evade our ordinary shared everydayness where demands have to be met, things done, promises kept.

The point I have been trying to make so far is that there is a danger that "therapism" and "introspectionism" will take over in our lives because their influence is so widespread and uncritically applauded in our culture. They tend to weaken our ability to cope. When excessively indulged in, they can make us wishy-washy, overly sensitive and preoccupied with our own feelings. We lose the strength to be wholly present where we are, sharing the ordinary everyday grind, ready to get our hands dirty in the muddle of life as it manifests itself since the fall of man.

Further Dangers of Introspectionism

Another of my findings is that when we are always looking at ourselves merely introspectively we cannot help but become mesmerized by all the limiting dimensions of ourselves, life, and situation. I have come to the conclusion that those people who see themselves in isolation must necessarily see themselves as a depressing collection of countless limitations: limitations in appearance, health, background, knowledge, temperament, virtue, intelligence, emotional range and intensity, chances and opportunities. No matter how gifted we are, we are bound sooner or later to collide with the prison walls of our limited existence. We can only go beyond them by accepting them.

Wholehearted acceptance becomes possible only when these limits are seen in the light of God's plan for us, for our limited but unique participation in the history of salvation and culture. Outside this perspective we may feel as if we have just been dumped into this confusing world like a grain of sand tossed up and down by unpredictable winds. No wonder the person without spiritual life can feel so schizoid, lonely, and alienated, disgusted with life and the meaninglessness of it all.

It is better to start with a transcendent presence to oneself as a unique meaningful part of the pattern of the Divine Will in the universe. Then it is possible to cope more serenely with the numerous limiting aspects of one's life without being flung into despair or succumbing to a frightening "crisis of the limits" when one grows older and experiences one's limits more vividly. Too many people who begin to get in touch with themselves – in isolation from the larger horizon of

the Divine – end up as overly competitive, excessively guilty, anxious, and depressed, filled with self-depreciation.

Transcendent self-awareness is an integrative awareness of one's whole life blending harmoniously with the life of faith. It enables us to dwell prayerfully on ourselves as deeply loved and cared for by God within the situation in which He wants us to be and to grow for our own good and the good of others. This compassionate look on our rooted, sustained, and divinely loved self does not lead to strain and self-preoccupation, as does the look of introspection at a lonely self lost in an indifferent universe and loaded with guilt that does not find Divine Redemption.

I discovered also during my research that the introspective attitude inclines us to overrate our childhood history. Introspection implies retrospection within our closed off inner world. Not in tune with the Divine Source from which all things flow forth we tend to see our childhood as the ultimate source of who we are at present. Blinded by insight that is exclusively psychological, we may not be present to a transcendent mystery that saved and carried us in and through that childhood history and in spite of that history. Transcendent self-presence, however, enables us to accept the painful limitations of our youth even if they gave rise to life long hang-ups, imperfections, and neurotic tendencies. They are accepted in faith as challenges to be met and as such allowed by a Divine Love who will ultimately transform the person here or in the life hereafter, if only we try gently to make the best of the past in the present. Transcendent reflection makes us look in reverence at Divine Providence speaking to us in and through the childhood God allowed to happen to us. Transcendent dwelling does not allow us to see our past in isolation from God's caring.

Another danger of a merely introspective and retrospective vision is its possible abuse as an excuse for lack of self-control. The cover-up of such people may be that their mother did not love them; the clergy were too rigid; they were so spoiled by their father that they are now unable to exercise self-control.

To be sure, one of the means of making the best of the past may be a period of counseling or therapy. God may have meant that help for some of us during our life time in this period of history. He never meant that such psychological techniques should be extolled as our ultimate salvation. Neither psychology nor psychotherapy should be totalized as the only and ultimate road to liberating Intimacy with the Divine.

Two Kinds of Willing

In developing this aspect of my theory of spiritual personality, I was gradually able to formulate a distinction between two kinds of willing and freedom. I began to differentiate a primary transcendent willing or receptive volition from a secondary or ego-willing. The latter I called in some of my writings executive or managing willing then related introspective self-presence to executive willing and transcendent self-presence to spiritual receptive willing. Again both kinds of willing are necessary in the fully functioning person. People are inclined, however, to engage in managing willing when receptive willing is called for.

For example, I can will to write a poem. I can go to a quiet place, put pen and paper before me, try to distance myself from other occupations and distractions and to dwell on the theme of the poem I want to write; but I cannot will in the same way the poem itself nor the inspirations, feelings, and images that accompany it. The harder I try, the more the inspiration seems to recede.

Managing willing involves all the preparatory steps just described and, following the inspiration, all the subsequent "executive steps," such as writing the poem, correcting, typing, checking, and retyping the inspired words. In between these executive actions, there must come a moment in which spiritual receptive willing takes over.

Likewise, I can organize time and place for prayer and spiritual reading, but I cannot will myself to be inspired by the Divine or uplifted by spiritual reading. In other words, there are many things in life we cannot force or will in a managing way, among these joy, love, and religious experience.

Introspective people may find that they tend to live more on the level of executive willing. They are willful people who plan their lives without dialogue with the Divine Will; they neglect to develop a more receptive attitude, open to manifestations of God's will in everyday life situations. It was this kind of willing that got us into what I have called a capitalistic type of spirituality of post-Renaissance times when people tried to buy salvation by piling up stocks of good works and indulgences. Managing willing is often needed, but it should be enlightened by receptive willing, by my obedient willing of the Will of God.

Transcendent Self-presence and Community

People, caught by ego-will and unenlightened by spiritual vision, might appear to surrender their individualistic stance when they bind themselves together with other "ego-willers" into a group or organization. In reality they may not change a bit; they only join a larger ego corporation. They swell the power of shared willfulness; they expand their own self-preoccupation with the self-preoccupation of the group. Such a group can neither see reality in its own right nor the individual members of the group as they objectively and uniquely are allowed to be by God. The introspective community – alternatively enthused or bemused – sees only its own present mood or need; everything else is measured by its momentary moodiness.

True community living on the level of the spirit is marked by the primacy of transcendent self-presence. It transcends the temptations to totalize any missionary or social enthusiasm of the community or any pressure group within its midst. It tries to be open in dialogue to the manifestation of the divine uniqueness in the many concrete life situations to be faced by unique members of the community.

Introspective members cannot relate to others in the community, especially those who differ from them in outlook on the personal or vital levels. Lacking in transcendent self-presence, they may not be experientially aware of their oneness in Christ, the eternally Word, in whom all are contained as little words. Therefore, they cannot be present to the transcendent self of the community which goes beyond all surface differences.

Because we are all different, we are called to be opponents in many issues. Our deeper at-oneness rests, however, on the transcendent vision that God allows each of us to be helpful in his own way. Our insights may differ from those of others, but somehow God uses all things in His ultimate project for this earth and its history.

Occasionally, a certain agreement on the practical level is necessary for our effectiveness as a group. What we have to watch out for are enthusiastic agreements of a more idealistic nature. They may represent nothing more than a vital reaction to our own collective moods to which we are sensitive due to our shared introspective attitudes.

Ego-willing and introspectionism belong to the same life style, that of willfulness. A community built on the combination of ego-willing and moodiness is bound to flounder. True community is a gift to be received not forced; it is received only by those who try to live together in a transcendent vision of themselves and the community as a whole.

Practice of Spiritual Reading Related to Transcendent Self-presence

One of the facilitating conditions for a spiritual life is the practice of spiritual reading. Spiritual reading is a reading that helps us to discover our true self in the light of God's self-

communication in and through His word in Scripture, in the Church, in spiritual writers. Because its main aim is transcendent self-discovery, everything depends on our mode of self-presence during this reading. If we approach our spiritual reading for the sake of information only, for exegetical, literary knowledge, or for affirmation of our own moods, prejudices, and sentiments we will be unable to grow to an understanding of what God is asking of us through these words. If we take up the same texts in a spirit of transcendent self-presence, we will experience them as sources of wisdom that reach far beyond the interests of our own anxious ego. We will make these sources the measure of our life instead of making our own project of life their measure. Transcendent people live their lives against a much wider horizon. They do not reduce its message to their own solipsistic need. They allow Holy Scripture and the words of spiritual guides to be what they are and to speak to their deeper spirit-self. Their transcendent dialogue with the richness of these spiritual writings save them from their own narrowness.

Those who live in transcendent self-presence are not only in genuine dialogue with the message of Scripture and spiritual writers; they keep also in dialogue with the rest of reality, with their own inclinations, with their actual words and deeds in daily life, with other people, their experiences and expressions.

Fantasy Life of the Introspective Person

Introspective self-presence, on the other hand, makes the link with daily reality tenuous; it entails the danger of one's living a grandiose fantasy life. Unable to see the transcendent beauty and truth of the treadmill of daily life, the world becomes boring, dead, dull. We try to escape its uneventful routines by living a fantasy life fed by unchecked desires, flamboyant ambitions, needs, and drives. We begin to hunger after the extraordinary, the not-everyday, the exciting, the novel, the grandiose, the impressive, the latest, the newest. This fantasy world of the introspectionist is often marked by illusionary projects and make-believe accomplishments. We may feel that others misunderstand us; they are against us because they refuse to feed into our deluded self-appreciation. We secretly may say to ourselves, "If only they knew the great person who lives among them!"

Each of us can get out of touch with the fact that we are quite an ordinary person, not called to set the world afire. Of course, each of us, whether we live in transcendent or introspective self-presence, has a fantasy life. The fantasy life of the introspective person is rarely in tune with their common surroundings whereas that of a person who is spiritually present to self as interwoven with their concrete world, originating in the Divine, is nourished steadily by the deeper meanings they discover in rather pedestrian circumstances.

The spiritually present person is intuitively open to the extraordinary richness hidden in the concrete people, events, and things he meets while living a prosaic day to day life. They begin to realize how ordinary everydayness is spiritualized and divinized in a special way by the Incarnation of the Divine Word, who became a human being in the pedestrian situation of a life lived for the most part as an unnoticed worker in Nazareth. They want to participate in the hidden life of Jesus by finding and adoring the deeper divine meanings of his own simple daily life. They are less tempted to ambitious or anxious fantasies about themselves and their future than the introspective person.

Spiritual life is trustworthy to the degree that it is faithful to the everydayness of the common life, lived as the manifestation of deeper mystery, by a person who keeps in touch with all of its ordinariness and inconspicuous routines. Fewer neuroses will flourish in such people. They will be task-oriented, people who get things done, less subject to addictions, over dependency, rationalizations, compensations, and wish-fulfilling fantasies. Transcendent self-presence will make them aware of the fact that their deepest self is already God-oriented and loved and redeemed by Him. This faith is really healthier than having only an analytic awareness of his faults, sins, and limits.

The life of the spirit should keep in touch with everyday inconspicuous existence. Whatever takes the person unnecessarily out of the ordinary daily life in Christ is suspect. It isolates us and tends to make us closed, proud or depressed, the victim of willful spurts of self-centered imagination.

The deeper we go into the study of the impact of an exclusive introspective attitude on our religious outlook, the more we discover its deforming influence. Introspection, as we have seen, may give rise to a preoccupation with our isolated interiority. It tends to give us the impression that the Divine Presence manifests itself only within our closed-off inner life. We become less aware of the God who is the Beyond in the midst of our daily life. He is somehow in all people, events, places.

A mere introspective self-presence thus tends to isolate us from the Divine Presence in everydayness. Transcendent self-presence, on the other hand, puts us in touch with our culture, with the whole tradition out of which we emerge, with the cultural period God has called us to live in. If we cut ourselves off from this ground, our isolated self begins necessarily to project a kind of ideal world in no way “contaminated” by our real past or present. We are like astronauts floating above the world in airtight capsules. If and when we return to our limited tradition and cultural period, we may have a reentry problem. We feel dismayed by the difference between our dream world and the earthiness of the tradition and cultural period with which our lives are intertwined. We may react with distrust to anything our tradition and culture has to offer. Instead of benefitting from the limited best our background and present epoch have to give us, we throw out the whole bag, so to speak. We end up becoming uprooted people who cannot find a path to joyful and vigorous participation in the tasks of humanity. We begin to “live only in our heads;” we take that to be the whole of reality.

Rhythm of Mindfulness and Forgetfulness

If we suffer from this problem, we must broaden our mindfulness to include a more intuitive transcendent presence to the deeper meaning of our vital, emotional, and spiritual life. We may then become tuned in once again to the whole of our spontaneous life in the midst of the real world.

Such wholeness will affect not only our self-presence but also our self-presentation to others. We don't give people the impression that our words are “out there” while we are some place else. We are really in our words and gestures. They sense that we are not parroting what “they” think, say, or write. Others cannot escape the impression that we have personalized what we express not only intellectually and critically – which, of course, is necessary – but also we've appropriated it with our whole being in light of our experience of lived transcendent self-presence to the Divine.

This is not to say that we should always live in total mindfulness, vigilance, and reflection. Mindfulness is most beneficial when balanced by a kind of forgetfulness. We need to establish in our lives a rhythm of mindfulness and forgetfulness in a healthy sense. We need periods of quiet in which we can be reflectively mindful of the deeper meaning of our life, but we also need to live our lives in a spontaneous way, forgetful of our reflections, re-immersing ourselves in the natural flow of daily life. There should be dialogue between reflection and the rest of life but never in such a way that vigilance and thoughtfulness take over totally and destroy our spontaneity. Without this healing forgetfulness, we would become alienated from the manifestation of God's will in the sacrament of everydayness. Re-immersion in daily life is also a homecoming, a being about the things of our Father.

Gentle Reflection

By now it should be clear why the way of gentle reflection can be distinguished from the aggressive way; it is the way of stillness and repose. Its aim is to come to a union of the deepest self with the Divine Presence.

Transcendent self-presence awakens us from illusion. In our fallen condition we take mirages for truth. We are ego-centered when we should be God-centered. We have lost inner wholeness, a loss

that obscures the splendor of the Divine Presence in our life and world. This loss leaves us victims of a multitude of illusions that distort our perception of people, events, and things. Enchanted by projects, ambitions, possessions, we become blind to God, who is our Center. We live in illusion.

Gentle reflection implies a certain detachment from daily involvement. This distance helps us to discern the illusionary ways in which we relate to God, self, and others. We begin to awaken from illusions. We experience the Divine Presence as the true center of our life. We awaken to the true nature of reality, both created and uncreated, seeing things from within God as it were. We no longer view people and other creatures as self-contained entities external to God, to one another, to ourselves. Within the Spirit of God, all created things exist in intimate togetherness with one another. Gentle reflection is thus a means we use on the way to a greater state of wholeness and to an increase in sanctity and participation in the divine nature.

One of the most beautiful themes of gentle reflection is that of the resplendent divine indwelling in the depths of our true self. At certain moments, God may halt the movement of meditative reflection and make us feel the mysterious flame of the Divine Presence ever glowing within. God draws us irresistibly into the divine mysteries He Himself reveals in the silent depths of the core of our being. What we learned from faithful gentle reflection becomes now one simple lived experience. Any spiritual good we do, think, feel, or possess does not originate in the isolated self; it is dependent on the grace of God at the root of our deepest self; it originates in Him.

During transcendent self-presence such pauses of wordless presence may grow in frequency, intensity, duration. This experience may be so overwhelming that it grows difficult at times to engage in any reflection. Transcendent self-presence by means of reflection should be set aside at the moments God grants us the grace of a deeper mode of presence – a presence that goes beyond any limited word, image, or reflection and keeps us silent before the mystery of the Eternal Word.



THE MAN WHO WAS PUT IN A CAGE

by Rollo May²

What would happen to a person if his freedom were entirely and literally taken away? We shall approach that question by constructing in fantasy an imaginative parable. This parable might be called

The Man Who Was Put in a Cage

One evening, a king of a far land was standing at his window, vaguely listening to some music drifting down the corridor from the reception room in the other wing of the palace. The king was wearied from the diplomatic reception he had just attended, and he looked out of the window pondering about the ways of the world in general and nothing in particular. His eye fell upon a man in the square below – apparently an average man, walking to the corner to take the tram home, who had taken that same route five nights a week for many years. The king followed this man in his imagination – pictured him arriving home, perfunctorily kissing his wife, eating his late meal, inquiring whether everything was right with the children, reading the paper, going to bed, perhaps engaging in the love act with his wife or perhaps not, sleeping, and getting up and going off to work again the next day. And a sudden curiosity seized the king which for a moment banished his fatigue, “I wonder what would happen if a man were kept in a cage, like the animals at the zoo?”

So the next day the king called in a psychologist, told him of his idea, and invited him to observe the experiment. Then the king caused a cage to be brought from the zoo, and the average man was brought and placed therein.

At first the man was simply bewildered, and he kept saying to the psychologist who stood outside the cage, “I have to catch the tram, I have to get to work, look what time it is, I’ll be late for work.” But later on in the afternoon the man began soberly to realize what was up, and then he protested vehemently, “The king can’t do this to me! It is unjust, and against the laws.” His voice was strong, and his eyes full of anger.

During the rest of the week, the man continued his vehement protests. When the king would walk by the cage, as he did every day, the man made his protests directly to the monarch. But the king would answer, “Look here, you get plenty of food, you have a good bed, and you don’t have to work. We take good care of you – so why are you objecting?” Then after some days the man’s protests lessened and then ceased. He was silent in his cage, refusing generally to talk, but the psychologist could see hatred glowing like a deep fire in his eyes.

But after several weeks the psychologist noticed that more and more it now seemed as if the man were pausing a moment after the king’s daily reminder to him that he was being taken good care of – for a second the hatred was postponed from returning to his eyes – as though he were asking himself if what the king said were possibly true.

And after a few weeks more, the man began to discuss with the psychologist how it was a useful thing if a man were given food and shelter, and that man had to live by his fate in any case and the part of wisdom was to accept his fate. So when a group of professors and graduate students came in one day to observe the man in the cage, he was friendly toward them and explained to them that he had chosen this way of life, that there are great values in security and being taken care of, that they would of course see how sensible his course was, and so on. How strange! thought the psychologist, and how pathetic – why is it he struggles so hard to get them to approve of his way of life?

² Rollo May, *Man’s Search for Himself*, Delta, 1953, 145-148.

In the succeeding days when the king would walk through the courtyard, the man would fawn upon him from behind the bars in his cage and thank him for the food and shelter. But when the king was not in the yard and the man was not aware that the psychologist was present, his expression was quite different – sullen and morose. When his food was handed to him through the bars by the keeper, the man would often drop the dishes or dump over the water and then be embarrassed because of his stupidity and clumsiness. His conversation became increasingly one-tracked: and instead of the involved philosophical theories about the value of being taken care of, he had gotten down to simple sentences like “It is fate,” which he would say over and over again, or just mumble to himself, “It is.”

It was hard to say just when the last phase set in. But the psychologist became aware that the man’s face seemed to have no particular expression: his smile was no longer fawning, but simply empty and meaningless, like the grimace a baby makes when there is gas on its stomach. The man ate his food, and exchanged a few sentences with the psychologist from time to time; his eyes were distant and vague, and though he looked at the psychologist, it seemed that he never really *saw* him.

And now the man, in his desultory conversations, never used the word “I” any more. He had accepted the cage. He had no anger, no hate, no rationalizations. But he was now insane.

That night the psychologist sat in his parlor trying to write a concluding report. But it was very difficult for him to summon up words, for he felt within himself a great emptiness. He kept trying to reassure himself with the words, “They say that nothing is ever lost, that matter is merely changed to energy and back again.” But he couldn’t help feeling something *had* been lost, something had been taken out of the universe in this experiment, and there was left only a void.



THE WORK OF RENEWAL

Charles Davis³

There can be no doubt that the present movement of reform in the Church is the work of God. To fail to see the finger of the Spirit in the achievement of the Second Vatican Council would be spiritual blindness - blindness to the light of the Spirit. But God works through people. By their weaknesses and sins human beings introduce flaws into the effects of God's action. No movement within the Church is ever unmarked by human defect or free from the taint of human wilfulness and failure to respond fully to God's grace. To point, then, to dangers in the present reform is not to doubt its divine origin, but simply to recall the need for purification and the duty of constant self-examination.

Much speaking in different places on themes of renewal has brought me into contact with many people seeking to revivify their faith. I have found a sense of emptiness, but together with it a deep yearning for God. There is an emptiness at the core of people's lives, an emptiness waiting to be filled. They are troubled about their faith; they find it slipping. I am not speaking of those who are worried about recent changes. These people are not. But they are looking for something more; they are looking for something to fill the void in their lives, and what they hear does not do that. The more perceptive know they are looking for God. God seems to have withdrawn from the world and from them. They come to talks by speakers like myself. They hear about the new liturgy, about the new understanding of the role of lay people, about collegiality, about the Church and the world, about a thousand and one new and exciting ideas. They are duly impressed. But who will speak to them quite simply of God as of a person he or she intimately knows, and make the reality and presence of God come alive for them once more?

Before such need, how superficial, pathetically superficial, is much of the busyness with renewal. We reformers know so much about religion and about the Church and about theology, but we stand empty-handed and uncomfortable when confronted with sheer hunger for God. Holiness is less easily acquired than fluency in contemporary thinking. But people who, after listening to our enthusiastic discourses, quietly ask us to lead them to God are, though they do not know it, demanding holiness in us. I fear they may find everything else but that. The harnessing of modern publicity and know-how to reforming zeal is a potent cause of deception. Saints were required in the past to renew the Church. We suppose we can get by as spiritual operators.

It has long been recognized that religion may be used as a way of escaping God. People carry out their formal religious duties punctiliously, because this allows them to leave God out of the rest of their lives. They can live in peace without being troubled by God's inexorable demand for holiness. They have given a sop to higher things so that they can remain in mediocrity. They have blunted God's call to a total love. That is why God often finds the honest sinner more open to his invitation.

Zeal for Renewal may be used in the same way. The busier we are about liturgical matters, the lay apostolate, ecumenism, the biblical revival, reform of Church structures and all the rest, the more incessant our activity in the cause of the *aggiornamento*, the less need there is to confront the reality of God in our own lives. We are covering over the void in our own hearts. A fear prevents us from admitting the emptiness we should find there.

We must face that emptiness, because it is the presence of God calling us to Himself. God is in truth a hidden God. He comes to us under cover of darkness. It is when we have uncovered the void within ourselves, opened up the empty space of our need for God, that we can encounter God in

³ Charles Davis, "A Hidden God", *America*, January 29, 1966, 173.

sheer faith. God refuses confusion with our concepts and images, with our words and plans. God will not subject his action to our glib ordering. God tolerates patiently our attempts to arrange His work without Him. But He waits for those prepared at long last to meet Him in the silent and humbling darkness of faith and to surrender themselves unreservedly to His love.

On those who do so, the solid work of renewal depends. People, without often saying it, suspect that holiness unfits a person for the struggle reform entails. For their own comfort they are confusing true sanctity with its semblance. But there is indeed a difference of depth and tone where holiness is at the center. And the holy continue where others leave off, revealing to men the God who is present in His apparent absence.



EXISTENTIAL CRISIS AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

by Adrian van Kaam⁴

The main themes of an existential psychology of human development are the changes, conflicts, and crises that mark our self-emergence. One basic meaning underlies them: the recurring death and rebirth of personality, a death which prophesies resurrection on a higher level of existence. Not every psychological death, to be sure, leads to rebirth. There are ways of dying which do not lead to a renewal of life; rather, they impede human unfolding. At certain moments of my life I am faced with a crisis which I can solve only by dying to former modes of living. I have no choice: I must decide either to die authentically to my past or to die inauthentically in a fixation on a past way of life which will fossilize my existence. Therefore, an existential death wish permeated by the desire for self-emergence in a new way, is crucial in my life.

Let me observe somewhat closer the phenomenon of death and rebirth. As a human being, I am both "potentiality" and "emergence"; these are the two poles between which life unfolds itself. Human potentiality is not something inert. On the contrary, I experience my potentiality as a dynamic tendency toward self-emergence. I am not only what I actually am; I am also a constant movement towards self-emergence. As soon as a new potentiality for human presence announces itself in my existence, I experience a powerful motive to live in this new way. For example, if my association with my fellow human beings has been one of mere functional interaction, I may experience an invitation to die to my functional existence and to live as a generous person. Up until now, my world has been structured as a field of realization of utilitarian goals. But the emergence of this new possibility may change my world into a field of conflict between the old familiar way and the invitation to develop a new mode of presence which will radically change my life. When I affirm such a new potentiality, the meaning of my world becomes restructured in terms of the new life to which I am born.

My personality cannot be regarded, therefore, as an object that is completed. I am "becoming," I am potentiality for dying to my life at any moment and for being born to what I am not yet. It is my essence not to be closed in upon myself like a lifeless chair. Neither am I subjected to only the rules of biological and psycho-biological development as plants and animals are. I am a restless, spontaneous, creative movement towards new modes of presence to this world. I experience myself as incomplete, unfinished, as longing to be. In short, the fact that I am a human being implies that I can be reborn.

When I observe closely my own experience of psychological death and rebirth, I become aware of dynamic shifts in experience which precede, accompany and follow this event. I experience the emergence of a potentiality for a more meaningful life, first of all, as dissatisfaction with my past. Meanwhile, a restless anticipation of a new life springs up within me. Such emotional discontent may invade me over and over again, for my fullness is at the same time emptiness; my satisfaction is clouded by displeasure; my security is encumbered by uncertainty. No matter what success I experience, my contentment is never final; I carry with me always a secret desire to die to the old person and rise to the new. Paradoxically, my existential death wish will never die, for hidden in my life is the certainty that no mode of existence can ever fulfill me completely. Whether I fulfill myself as thinker, artist, scientist, or lover, I am never complete; I am always on the frontier of dissatisfaction with my past; my "yes" to what I am at present is never ultimate.

¹ Originally published in the *The South African Journal of Pedagogy*, 1969, 3, 1, pp.63-74. Later published in Adrian van Kaam's *Foundations for Personality Study*, Dimension Books, 1982, pp.357-371.

My need to negate what I am now in order to emerge anew may lead to self-depreciation. I may become bitter, bored, despairing or rebellious. I may desire new life without knowing to what I should be reborn. My negation of my past and present may lead me to self-destructive hatred of myself and my world. Only when my death to my former mode of life has been accomplished and a period of mourning has fulfilled its purifying and liberating purpose, will rebirth take place. Then I may accept my past again in the radiance of the present instead of rejecting my former life. This rejection was part of my process of dying. I can now, in a relative sense affirm it. I can now realize that my past life was not worthless, but relatively valuable and meaningful in the light of my new mode of existence. Thus I can assimilate my past to my present life and safeguard the continuation of any unique personal identity.

Existential death and rebirth is thus a fundamental process of human development or self-emergence. As we have seen, the rich outward flow of my existence becomes stagnant. Enthusiasm is gone: I feel bored, disinterested, frustrated, not at home in my world. Gradually the outward movement of my life is replaced by inward movement, by recollection and self-presence. In my absence from external involvement, I become aware of new possibilities of existence. My emotional distance enables me to see life in new perspectives. This new vision is the condition for self-emergence. In the days of stillness, or meditating on my own potentialities, my energies gather strength for rebirth. This period of death and isolation is in effect a preparation for new life. I am suspended between the two poles of return into myself and progress to new self-orientation. Existential renewal is thus a psychological sequence of frustration, retirement, new self-orientation and finally rebirth to new motivation and behavior. If I did not die repeatedly I should become encapsulated in past forms of life which I have already realized.

Human development or self-emergence is thus marked by crises which all human beings experience to a greater or lesser degree. They may be sudden or gradual, depending on the temperament and life history of the person involved. Whether the experience is cataclysmic or slow moving, there is always a critical period in which the ultimate decision to hold back or go forward must be made. Every important decision of my life implies a birth trauma of cutting myself free from a past in which I felt safely embedded like a fetus in the womb. Existential rebirth is exposure to the threats of the unknown. But the separation of rebirth is not passive. I must separate myself by a decision to accept my new mode of existence as a daring thrust into life. I must take the risk.

Such moments of crisis in counseling or psychotherapy often emerge when the meaning of a particular way of life has collapsed. My counselees may experience the feeling that they must retreat and begin again in a new direction; they must make way for a new dimension of their existence that vaguely begins to announce itself in spite of their attempts to repress this awareness. Often the crisis is evoked by an implicit demand for commitment, whether in love or in a social or occupational situation. While working through this demand and the response, my client is born to personal responsibility. During this period they may find themselves under unbearable stress. If they risk the unknown, they may find stability and serenity in the light of his new commitment.

To be sure, I, as a therapist, am also faced with the client who refuses the pain of transformation and clings to the false security of their past. Terrified by the uncertainty of new life, fearful of the collapse of their former self, they hold fast to old patterns. Such clients suffer defeat because they will not risk exposure to death and rebirth. At best, their refusal for renewal can result only in a compromise which successfully defends them against their feelings of existential guilt and failure. At worst, they will be engulfed by sudden breakthroughs of existential guilt. For the invitation to self-emergence can be repressed but not obliterated. Guilt is the price we pay when we cling to false security rather than risk emergence.

The life situation of the client usually precipitates the inner crisis which forces them to come to terms with their personal destiny. They manifest deep anxiety for they feel that this crisis threatens

the very meaning which they give to their lives. Such total threat lifts them from the routine of daily life and asks them to face in loneliness the unique decision which only they can make. As their counselor, I should be with them but I cannot make their decision for them. Cut off from their former foundation they must confront their future in creative freedom. Their situation implies both the possibility of failure and the potentiality of rebirth through a bold decision to transform themselves in response to the demands of reality.

The personal crisis of the counselee highlights the conflict between two poles or centers of energy within the personality, a living polarity between what he/she is and what he/she ought to be. It is as if two incompatible forces are simultaneously active in the person, each with its own perceptions, desires, and purposes. Existential crisis emerges when a demanding new life situation actualizes this latent polarity rooted in the very structure of human existence. In self-encounter, the counselees become aware of what reality demands of them. Precisely at this crucial point, they can either freely surrender or hold on to their past. Humility and renunciation are therefore necessary for effective resolution of the existential crisis. While the counselees may perceive clearly the old way of life which they should abandon, they cannot be certain about the opposite pole of their conflict – the new life calling to them as a vague ideal shrouded by the unknown. Often the commitment which resolves the crisis, therefore, is not so much a stern willfulness as a gentle yielding to new life with its subtle revelation of the possible meaning of the future. Thus the counselees experience a crisis of self-surrender which is the vital turning point in the process of death and rebirth, the either/or of their decision.

We may conclude that existential crises have three phases: death, decision, rebirth. The death phase is one of frustration, anxiety, conflict. The phase of decision binds death to rebirth in the turning point of choice which is the transition to new life. The final phase of resurrection is one of emergence, transformation, and reintegration. These three aspects are so profoundly intertwined that it is often difficult to perceive them as distinct in the actual situation presented by the counselee.

The counseling situation reminds us that the life of every human being is a concatenation of turning points in which we are faced with the question of the meaning of our existence and called upon to decide. Presence to my counselee is also a recollection of myself in unifying inwardness. I also become aware that I too am destined always to move toward new integration. If I accept myself as I truly am, my life becomes a permanent possibility of crises and decisions. My counselees remind me that the development of my personality is not a performance to be achieved once and for all, but a project to be courageously reaffirmed in every new moment of choice.

In my presence to my counselee, I may experience a movement from the superficiality of functional life to the depth of personal existence. Like my counselee in crisis, I ask myself the fundamental question, "Who am I?" Doing so, I experience the call to emergence that is at the core of my own being. At this moment, I know that counseling has granted me its most precious gift. This gift is perhaps more to be prized in the contemporary world than ever before. I am in danger of losing the spontaneity of life in the technological surroundings of my world. The functional society in which I live creates institutional organizations which protect me but which also tend to alienate me from my deepest inspirations. I need traditional systems to safeguard me, but I also need to revitalize them and to integrate them within my own personal life. As a human being in a functional society, however, I tend to experience this process of free, personal assimilation as slow, impractical and ineffective. I am inclined to categorize living traditions in streamlined theoretical systems. However, lacking a living dialogue with the wisdom of the past, my life may become fragmented, estranged, alienated.

If my life does not unfold in openness to living tradition, I am in even greater need of the experience of personal death and rebirth. The inescapable demands of functional existence may tend to paralyze the spontaneity of my personality. Temporary self-alienation may lead to a

hardening of experience until finally I am separated from my deeper self. Herein is the essence of personal tragedy. I may even internalize functional systems in the form of a rigid superego which takes the place of my living existential conscience. Empty structure may thus replace living thought. If I desire to escape the benumbing systems which destroy my spontaneous experience, I must sacrifice functional security and accept the pain of death and rebirth. If I refuse to accept the invitation to new, self-emergence, I am in danger of becoming a meaningless cipher in a lifeless structure. Without transformation of personality, I may suffer annihilation in the sense that I am emptied of my essential human qualities.

Many contemporary sociologists have written of the "mechanical man" whose functional life is that of an automaton. Books like David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd* and Marshal McLuhan's *The Mechanical Bride* have lamented the alienation of man in our society. Moreover, modern plays like Elmer Rice's *The Adding Machine* and Karel Capek's *R.U.R.* have dramatized the plight of the "manufactured person," who is unbelievably efficient but devoid of sensibility and therefore easily seduced to brutality and violence. Indeed, the estrangement of contemporary human beings pervades the literature of two continents.

The pursuit of everyday occupations in contemporary society illustrates well the danger of functional existence without rebirth. My labor may either humanize or dehumanize my life. I may become tool, a commodity, an instrument of impersonal production. A rebirth to a new meaning of my labor may not change the task I perform, but it can deeply change the meaning of my labor in my life. Instead of means of economic production, labor may become for me a means of growth, sacrifice, atonement, service to humanity, and creative expression of my unity with humankind. When my main concern is the product of my labor, it alienates me; when I care for the meaning of my work, it heals me and makes me whole.

Normally I become aware of the possible deadness of my life when I am faced with a situation for which my functional systems provide no answer. Suffering introduces me to myself, to encounter with reality, and perhaps even to dialogue with the voices of human beings who existed before me. Here is the old story, the recurrent ritual of death and rebirth. If I desire to live and grow, I must suffer, I must renew my vitality in an act of sacrifice. I may have to renounce primitive impulses, status seeking, egocentrism. My offering symbolizes my willingness to renounce my past identity as a condition for my resurrection as a new person.

Existential Crisis: Negative Phase

Existential crisis, when it leads to personal emergence is, as we have seen, a sequence of psychological death, decision, and rebirth. However, we may remain fixated in the negative phase of existential crisis. In this case, we fails to experience the positive phase of crisis, or rebirth. The negative phase often reveals itself in a total revulsion for the past. This revulsion may lead to utter despair, suicide, or self-destruction through alcohol or drugs. Many persons undergo such a crisis without even being aware of the unconscious source of their agony. If people are open to reality, they may gain a dynamic insight into their negation of life, which opens up for them a totally new perspective for the future. Whether the crisis ends in hope or despair, their response to the negative phase of this decisive stage of their life determines the direction of their existential choice.

The term "existential crisis" as used here refers not to the ordinary crises of life but to those significant crucial situations which involve the very meaning of one's existence. Faced with personal tragedy or with a life-or-death situation, we may respond with either hope or despair. Despair refuses to affirm the possibility of new self-emergence in seemingly impossible situations. Hope, on the other hand, affirms the possibility of self-emergence against tremendous odds. On the last frontier of the possible, it answers "yes" to life. People who refuse to hope, who choose despair, may regard their situation as absurd. They may choose either to reject life or to face, in

estrangement and alienation, a reality which for them is meaningless. It should be noted that those who freely decide for hope and those who decide for despair both confront reality: neither one denies, represses or attempts to escape the reality of their situation. Those who choose hope may transcend their tragic past and experience joyful rebirth, while those who opt for despair either die or remain fixated in a kind of death-in-life.

Both of these sorts of people are closer to authentic existence, however, than those who reject decision. Those people who become fixated in negative existential crisis because they have not the courage to choose either hope or despair, refuse to be present to themselves in the profoundest depths of their being. They prefer complacency and security to confrontation with reality. Such people will inevitably attempt to still their awareness of their fundamental restlessness and anxiety. Normally, however, their destiny is unbearable guilt. The rejection of their humanity demands its price.

Though the negative phase of existential crisis has certain common characteristics, the experience of it varies with each individual. The people suffering it may experience a painful "dark night" preliminary to decision and joyful emergence; they may be caught up in terminal despair; or they may be fixated in negativism which rejects change. In ordinary life, moreover, the existential phases of death, decision, and rebirth are often so interlocked as to resist neat description.

Whether or not the stages of personal struggle are clearly demarcated, however, the negative phase of existential crisis always has as its basis, in one form or another, a dissatisfaction with reality which finds its terminus in hopeful decision and emergence, in desperate decision and failure, or in rejection of decision and fixation in negativity.

The crisis may be precipitated by a longstanding mode of life which is fundamentally a negation of reality. In terms of existential psychology, "negation of reality" has a special meaning. Obviously, it does not refer to reality in a superficial sense as related to the practical demands of everyday life or to the pragmatic pursuit of conformity to social patterns. What is expressed in the cliché, "hard cold reality," is merely one aspect of reality as conceived in a far deeper sense. Existential reality as used here is the revelation in a person's life situation, of that which he is called to be according to his potentialities. In other words being open to reality is being open to the richest possibilities within himself. To be realistic is to go deeper than the practical and pragmatic in order to respond to that which on the one hand surpasses the pragmatic and on the other demands and justifies practical involvement in everyday life. For example, when we are open to the challenge of love for others, we may be inspired by this inner appeal to embody our love in activities such as teaching, nursing or social work. In the harmonious personality there is a profound consonance between faithfulness to the deeper meaning of reality and to its more practical, secondary aspects.

Unfortunately, human beings are capable of splitting off their practical pursuits from their openness to the deeper ground of all their actions. Thus we may build for ourselves a career tremendously impressive to others while we actually become increasingly alien to reality in its profoundest sense. As a result, our life is impoverished; it becomes superficial, boring, and meaningless. However, our continual preoccupation with innumerable pragmatic tasks, plus the intoxicating wine of acclaim by those who admire our brilliant performance, may make it difficult for us to be even aware of our inward emptiness. The horrifying abyss of loneliness which faces us is so hard to bear, moreover, that, as functionalistic people, we unconsciously escape every possible insight into our real situation. In terms of existential psychology, we incessantly represses the awareness of our own emptiness. Our response to reality on a deeper level becomes increasingly negative. We must negate meaningful reality more and more because every acknowledgement of the actual meaning of our life threatens our repression, confronting us with the nothingness in which we linger. Thus our life becomes a frantic pursuit of the superficial.

To be sure, it is impossible to make superficial activity itself a final goal in life. Consequently, in our functionalism, we sooner or later make ourselves the ultimate purpose of our existence. All the love which we should have given to persons around us and to the mystery of being behind all things now reverts back to ourselves. We attempt to find meaning not only in the satisfaction of receiving homage from others, but in the feeling of dominance we experience in manipulating others in such a way that they cannot appeal to us from the depth of their own reality. Encounter becomes impossible for us. Perhaps the most morbid manifestation of existential sickness is his so-called love life, for our abortive attempts to live reveal only our impotence to love. Our conquests are merely superficial strivings for pleasure, a pleasure which reaches only the surface of the other while love fathoms our mystery.

Many people who lead empty lives die without ever knowing the depth of the meaninglessness of their pragmatic existence. Some, however, are impelled by the grace of a traumatic experience or a sudden flash of blinding insight to confront the failure of their lives. Such an existential crisis erupts most often in middle age. It is at once the heaviest blow and the most precious gift which the person may ever receive. It shocks us into experiencing on a conscious level the incredible vacuum which our existence has been until this dramatic moment. As an initial result of this discovery, we no longer feel able to maintain our usual feverish activity which now seems devoid of meaning. The clamor of our admirers now sounds hollow. We feel repelled, moreover, by the cheap manifestations of merely erotic or sentimental love which formerly fascinated us. We may suffer a complete emotional let-down which causes paralysis of all our desires, energies, and ambitions. Revulsion against the past becomes total. We cannot even tolerate our own existence. In one word, we feel really burnt-out. Indeed, the best phrase that the psychotherapist can use to describe us when we come for counsel during this negative phase of our existential crisis is Graham Greene's epigrammatic "burnt-out case."

When we experience this type of negative crisis, we usually reverse our existential transference of the past. If we formerly divinized ourselves, we may now undergo a demonizing transference in which we view ourselves not as a god but as the essence of evil. When we are in the stage of deifying transference, we make gods of limited people and objects; when we are in the demonizing phase, we make devils of those whom we previously idolized. Both forms of transference, to be sure, are based on fantasy. They do not reveal reality as it is, namely, as a limited but true manifestation of goodness, truth and beauty. When we are in the negative stage of crisis we may perceive only the defects of others without even a glimmer of awareness of the limited or at least potential goodness present in every human being. Our style of life, in short, does not comprehend the tempered wisdom and judgment of a mind that has grown beyond both deifying and demonizing.

The immediate symptom of the most bitter negative crises is often an existential boredom so profound that authentic people feel themselves sinking into blank despair. They have actually come to the end of everything which up to the present moment has given meaning to their life. They have tasted to the full the nauseating emptiness of their own existence. Their new insight changes, in turn, their evaluation of the lives of others. Their judgment develops a quality of merciless "honesty." Psychologically, they are so wounded that they cannot bear even the joy of simple people who, to their way of thinking, are still immersed in the superficialities of existence, not having experienced the sickening triviality of much that is considered of the highest importance by the average bourgeois.

Undoubtedly, the number of burnt-out cases is bound to be high in a society which in fact prepares people for predominantly pragmatic lives. Contemporary society is, in a sense, one-dimensional. It concentrates on the functional dimension of reality and tends to neglect the human implications. As a result, many modern people, particularly those in the second half of their lives, become victims of

the existential neurosis just described. Not many of them go into psychotherapy. Most of them live out the last half of their lives in “quiet desperation” or unconscious self-torture; a certain number surrender to despair and destroy themselves through direct or indirect suicide; not many achieve a satisfactory solution of their crisis by working it through in their own way. However when the existential crisis is worked through successfully in psychotherapy, the life of the client gains depth and meaning. In the light of this meaning, they are now able to see the relative significance and even beauty of many people, events, and objects against the appalling drabness of their former life.

One of the common accompaniments to existential negativity is the ironic attitude toward life. The significance of irony for existential psychology lies in its revelatory power. Irony as a mode of life may be good or bad, helpful or harmful, fostering of growth or inhibiting it. Depending on the existential situation, any of these opposites may be true. For example, the ironical approach to reality may be beneficial as a temporary means of devaluating persons or objects which have been over-valued or even deified in the past. Irony may function as a sledge hammer to destroy the false gods in one's life so that the true God may appear. Again, it may be a sharp instrument to pierce the veil of pretense shrouding unwelcome truth. Irony is a means of de-masking reality.

Although the breakdown of outward appearances may be revealed in ironical statements, verbal expression is not the essence of the ironic mode of existence. One may pursue an ironic evaluation of life without necessarily communicating verbally to others his inner process of de-masking and its resulting insights. To the person who lives the ironic style of life, the whole world may appear in the light of mockery. In the negative phase of existential crisis, then, irony may have a special meaning. It may help people to destroy the deifications of their past, such as their existential transferences to themselves or others, and so to be free for authentic commitment to reality. A danger is that we may become fixated in this state. In this case, the ironic way of existence gradually becomes the center of our life style around which all other modes of being are centered. Our behavior becomes permanently bitter and negative. No possibility appears for the breakthrough of a joyous approach to reality. We have learned to abdicate the superficialities of life, but not to grow to a daily celebration of the feast of existence.

Varied manifestations of irony, both explicit and implicit, may be present throughout the entire negative phase of crisis. At the end of this stage, as the crucial moment of resolution approaches, a complex phenomenon is often observed. An understanding of aspects of reality, which never reveal themselves in the life of irony, but only in the life of human commitment, begins to appear. At this point, irony is a light that illuminates human life insofar as the person who experiences it participates unknowingly and implicitly in the revelation of the deeper meaning of human life. For irony enlightens only when it prepares the way for valuable experience by destroying that which shrouded the deeper meaning of life. Indeed, all the superficial pursuits of which the “burnt-out case” has been the victim have concealed from us the radiance of life itself. Therefore, human life reveals itself to us in our negative crisis only by making us aware of what it is not.

In the discovery of what human life is not, appears a first glimpse of what it might be. In this sense, the ironic mode of life manifests indirectly – as through a glass darkly – the deeper human meaning of life. If irony were not a real and all-pervading aspect of the human situation, the ironic mode of existence could not reveal – as it does – so much of the truth of life. Nor would contemporary writers, confronting the complexity of a twentieth century world, use it as extensively as they do.

When we probe more deeply the psychological phenomenon of the negative phase of existential crisis, and attempt to understand why we, as victim, are often unable to transcend our despair, we inevitably come to the history of our intersubjectivity. It is possible to transcend a meaningless existence only in real encounter with others. Human beings become themselves only through encounter, which is a transcendence of ourselves. No wonder, then, that the problem of human love and friendship play so important a role in existential crisis. The core of the struggle is often

revealed in symbolic dreams, particularly at the beginning of the working through of the existential neurosis. It is impossible to overcome the attitude that life is meaningless if one does not discover the mystery of the infinite in encounter with others. The frustration and futility of such an attitude is like a night without stars. Some are caught in this darkness permanently. Their existence deteriorates into a sad sequence of disappointment and bitterness: life is insipid, the power for growth is paralysed, nothing has meaning. Others move toward the slow dawn of self-recognition, the hesitant passage through the maze of self-deception, the final acceptance of the real self in confrontation with reality.

When our negative crisis is rooted in transference to our own ego, and we begin the long journey out of the darkness of self-centeredness, our first glimpse of light is in incipient encounter with others. As we begin at last to doubt ourselves, to be aware of the irony of our self-idolization, we are ready to see others in a new perspective. To be sure, our painful awareness of our existential emptiness still implies a self-absorption which makes it almost impossible to encounter others in the fullness of their individuality. We see them, not in themselves, but in relation to our own self-discovery. Our new perception of others differs radically, however, from that of the past. In our phase of conceited self-sufficiency, we were able to approach others only insofar as they enhanced our pride. Now we see their personalities as mirrors of both our own deficiencies and our true potentialities. Encounter with others now offers a possibility for confrontation with both the false and the true aspects of self.

The person who is moving toward authenticity has need of encounter, however, not only as an opportunity for self-dialogue. Even more, we need to experience the other as one who grants us acceptance, respect, and understanding without demanding anything in return. If we are fortunate enough to find such generosity in a fellow human being at this particular moment in our existential crisis, we may be saved. We may be able to discover our self-identity which is weakly developed, covered over by thick layers of self-exalting fantasy, rigid defenses, and repressed feelings of guilt for our betrayal of life. In our former inauthentic existence, we were unable to actualize ourselves in response to reality. Instead, we substituted the approval of others for reality itself. It became crucial for us to appear good, important, or powerful in the eyes of others. While we may have been a "star" according to common standards of success, we were misfits in the realm of real values. Then we received the grace to distance ourselves, perhaps through ironic insight, from the counterfeit values which made us overdependent on others. Now we need the grace of encountering a loving person who will accept us unconditionally when we reveal our true self.

In loving encounter, people advancing toward rebirth may dare to be themselves for the first time – no matter how feeble and crippled this self may be. Only then do they experience themselves as openness to life itself. For the first time, they are able to make free decisions in confrontation with reality. They may be so overwhelmed by this new experience of freedom that they make the wrong decisions. They may temporarily decide for what is false. But what is important at this moment of their lives is that the decision is actually their own. Their openness to reality implies acceptance of the consequences of their false decisions. They will discover their undesirability in their real effects. With such awareness, they may experience existential remorse and the decision for change, when they realize that they have betrayed the truth revealed to them in the openness of their existence. Thus they will accept responsibility toward reality. Responsibility means literally their ability to respond to what reveals itself in reality perception. Before their existential crisis, they were not capable of such response, for reality was veiled by their self-idolizing fantasy.

People who divinize themselves cannot experience the core of existential regeneration which is true repentance. Self-deification implies the fantasy of creating reality rather than respectful response to reality, which is a gift and not a product. If we attempt to create reality we are our own standard. We need not repent our mistreatment of others for they are simply objects in a world of our own

making. But true openness to what is, including the realistic consequences of behavior leads to the repentance and responsibility which are sources of authentic existence. Only in gradually expanding openness do the once inauthentic people discover redemption from their prison of isolated self-centeredness. They are at home at last in a world they never made. Their life is a gift and the world itself is a gift. From now on, they will experience life not as a problem to be solved but as a mystery to be lived in openness and love.

Existential Crisis: Positive Phase

At the precise moment when despair seems unconquerable and life itself seems to be a monstrous absurdity, we may experience a positive phase of existential crisis which saves us from unbearable emptiness and isolation. Our redemption depends on our positive existential choice of life over death, of emergence over stagnation. When we look back on the negative phase of the crisis which preceded our option for rebirth, we discover in it a prelude to our rejection of a past which was no longer a response to the challenge of our present life. Even the most painful aspects of our negative crisis are somehow different from those of the person whose crisis ends in rejection of emergence.

At the onset of this stage, we experience extreme anxiety as we feel compelled by a free choice which will alter our future. Precipitated into the climax of existential crisis, we are overcome by hesitation because we feel that the radical transformation demanded of us is a threat to our very personality. Our life itself seems to disintegrate. In dialogue with ourselves, we are aware that our unquestioned former life was somehow inadequate, an affront to our authentic possibilities. The crucial situation which we face now reveals us as aroused from false slumber and forced to self-discovery. In the detachment of our unusual situation, we experience ourselves and our world as somehow strange, mysterious and incomplete.

When moving toward new self-emergence we are thus seen to suffer a sharp change from our ordinary life. Our very separation from familiar experience demands emergence to a new way of life. It leads, moreover, to loneliness, for the moment of personal decision is always one of isolation. The dramatic situation which calls for choice not only isolates us from our former life but places this life – with all its deception and illusions – before our eyes with a strange new objectivity. We are lifted, as it were, to a lonely mountain top where we can observe our own existence from a distance. This fresh vision clears away the obscurity, pretense, and concealment which formerly made it impossible for us to really observe our own life. We become aware of superficialities and limitations; we realize our potentiality for a different, richer existence. We become aware of the unimportance, irrelevancy, and even meaninglessness of many of our daily concerns. We may feel real anxiety in the face of this revelation.

The existential decision restores the integral unity of the personality. We have found our destiny, affirmed our heritage with all its inherent possibilities. We no longer live in a multiplicity of fragmented incidents and isolated moments. We recall the past and anticipate the future in terms of our new project of existence, and thus live in full presence to each moment that we integrate within our personal destiny; therefore we achieve a clarity of perception radically opposed to the psychological dispersion of our former inauthentic existence.

People who are reborn in this way, achieve joy, peace, and serenity because they have found their own identity. Such confidence differs radically from the complacency of inauthentic people who have lulled themselves into false security as a defense against self-discovery. The self-possession of the reborn character is the precise opposite of the self-satisfaction of people who avoid confrontation with all that transcends dull conformity. Indeed, the new serenity of these people is often in direct ratio to their ability to live with anxiety. They have dared to tear themselves away from the familiar in order to confront the demands of real life.

After experiencing self-emergence, reborn people may return to their daily surroundings with a new sense of reverence. They know how to enter into dialogue with their life situations and to answer them constructively. They reject blind conformity. They have experienced destruction of familiar attitudes during their existential crisis; now they renew their motivations in the light of their radically changed vision. Their rebirth is often a transformation from the common viewpoints they shared with "the crowd" to personal attitudes of their own. To be sure, they do not reject the treasure of tradition. But, having found themselves, they have found the source of creativity, which is a personal openness to the revelation of life.

Death and rebirth thus symbolize the struggle of my personality toward self-identity through the discovery and release of authentic potentialities which lie hidden within me. The recurrent crisis of death and rebirth prevents my falling into a stereotyped pattern of social reactions; moreover, it revitalizes the soil of tradition in which my real identity is rooted. As a human being, I am a unique power of self-actualization within a structured world of tradition. I face the danger that structure may paralyze my spontaneous creative potentiality. If this happens, structure becomes equated with death, and the re-emergence of creativity with rebirth. I can find true self-fulfillment only through a continued dialogue between the structured world in which I move and my own personal potentiality.

If I achieve nobility in this process of self-emergence, I shall always do so within the commonplace setting of a daily life that is partially disintegrating and self-alienating. Pure heroism is impossible. The best I may hope for is that an aspect of nobility will develop in my life which will redeem me from self-estrangement within dead structures. Life always has an element of mediocrity, but the heroism of rebirth can save me from sheer mediocrity.

It would be false for me to identify the source of my possible self-alienation as completely in my environment and not in myself. Like every human being, I am to some degree commonplace, selfish, corrupted. The unavoidable need for a structured world is, moreover, an estranging force for all people. The art of living demands that I affirm my need for structure and at the same time enrich it by actualizing new potentialities. When I do not accept this two-pronged challenge, I may either become the hardened victim of life-less structures or a rebel against my human condition in a foolish attempt to overreach myself. In the latter case, I arrogantly overleap the limits of my existence through a pride which strives to burst the bounds of human reality. I attempt to be pure hero; I repudiate the necessity of incarnation of my nobility in limited concrete situations.

When this happens, I contradict my very nature. I aspire to that imaginary freedom which is the ultimate deception of humanity. I am seduced to exchange one kind of alienation for a far more terrifying and monstrous kind--alienation from other human beings, from the world, from life itself. To choose for absolute autonomy and freedom is to choose for a schizoid existence. This type of schizoid alienation may confront me in the estrangement experienced by some of my counselees. The self-isolation of such a counselee is communicated in strange and erratic behavior. They experience all authority as a threat to freedom and all people as threatening potential authority. Their striving for unbridled freedom necessarily implies an inability to love, for the self-surrender of love is impossible to the person who attempts to break all ties with others who might possibly limit their freedom. Their conflicts present the subtle complication of human relationships that results from neurotic exaltation of the heroic stand.

If I desire to avoid this ultimate type of alienation, I must die not only to lifeless convention, but also to the exalted desire for a godlike, infinite freedom. Only such a death will prepare me for the resurrection to a life that is human – a life that is emergent in its openness and spontaneity and at the same time submissive to the inescapable authority of my limited situation.

In my rebirth after existential decision, then, I need to experience my self-emergence freely without falling into a false fixation on unlimited freedom. Once having achieved emergence, I must also avoid the danger of refusing the heroic dimension of my existence. If I do refuse, I shall experience existential guilt. If I attempt to be absolutely heroic, which is arrogance, I shall feel guilty; if I fail to be heroic in any way, which is cowardice, I shall feel even greater guilt. Once I have accepted my obligation to live an existence which is necessarily part heroism and part mediocrity, I must live out these two dimensions of my reality with a degree of serenity.

The positive existential crisis and its consequence of rebirth is, then, a call to heroism within human limits. It is possible to all people. It carries with it the built-in dangers of desire for unlimited freedom and refusal to accept the demands of self-emergence. It confronts me with a paradoxical life of simultaneous nobility and mediocrity. It makes us aware of the “splendor of our angry dust.” From the dust of the earth, we must reach for the stars. This is the truth of our existential situation.



LISTENING TO THE PARABLES OF JESUS

by Paul Ricoeur⁵

To preach today on the Parables of Jesus looks like a lost cause. Have we not already heard these stories at Sunday School? Are they not childish stories, unworthy of our claims to scientific knowledge, in particular in a University Chapel? Are not the situations which they evoke typical of a rural existence which our urban civilization has made nearly ununderstandable? And the symbols, which in the old days awakened the imagination of simple-minded people, have not these symbols become dead metaphors, as dead as the leg of the chair? More than that, is not the wearing out of these images, borrowed from the agricultural life, the most convincing proof of the general erosion of Christian symbols in our modern culture?

To preach today on the Parables of Jesus - or rather to preach the Parables - is indeed a wager: the wager that in spite of all contrary arguments, it is still possible to listen to the Parables of Jesus in such a way that we are once more astonished, struck, renewed, and put in motion. It is this wager which led me to try to preach the Parables and not only to study them in a *scholarly* way, as a text among other texts.

The first thing that may strike us is that the Parables are radically profane stories. There are no gods, no demons, no angels, no miracles, no time before time, as in the creation stories, not even founding events as in the Exodus account. Nothing like that, but precisely people like us Palestinian landlords traveling and renting their fields, stewards and workers, sowers and fishers, fathers and sons; in a word, ordinary people doing ordinary things selling and buying, letting down a net into the sea, and so on. Here resides the initial paradox on the one hand, these stories are - as a critic said - narratives of normalcy - but on the other hand, it is the Kingdom of God that is said to be like this. The paradox is that the *extraordinary* is *like* the *ordinary*.

Some other sayings of Jesus speak of the Kingdom of Heaven: among them, the eschatological sayings, and they seem to point toward something Wholly Other, to something beyond, as different from our history as heaven is from earth. Therefore, the first thing which may amaze us is that at the very moment we were expecting the language of the myth, the language of the sacred, the language of mysteries, we receive the language of our history, the language of the profane, the language of open drama.

And it is this contrast between the kind of thing *about* which it is spoken - the Kingdom of Heaven - and the kind of thing to which it is compared which may put in motion our search. It is not the religious person in us, it is not the sacred person in us, but precisely the profane person, the secular person who is summoned.

The second step, beyond this first shock, will be to ask what makes sense in the Parables. If it is true - as contemporary exegesis shows - that the Kingdom of God is not compared to the man who . . . to the woman who . . . to the yeast which . . . but to *what happens* in the story, we have to look more closely at the short story itself, to identify what may be paradigmatic in it. It is here that we run the risk of sticking too closely to the sociological aspects which I evoked at the beginning when I said that the situations described in the Parables are those of agricultural activity and of rural life. What makes sense is not the situations as such, but, as a recent critique has shown, it is the *plot*, it is the structure of the drama, its composition, its culmination, its denouement.

⁵Paul Ricoeur, "Listening to the Parables of Jesus", in C. E. Reagan & D. Stewart, eds., Paul Ricoeur: An Anthology of His Work, Beacon Press, 1978, pp.239-245.

If we follow this suggestion, we are immediately led to look at the critical moments, at the decisive turning points in the short dramas. And what do we find? Let us read once more the shortest, the most condensed of all the Parables Matthew 13, verse 44. Three critical moments emerge: *finding* the treasure, *selling* everything else, *buying* the field. The same threefold division may be found in the two following Parables: Matthew 13:45-46, 47-49.

If we attempt, now, to let these three critical moments expand, so to say, in our imagination, in our feeling, in our thought, they begin to *mean much more* than the apparent practical, professional, economical, commercial transactions told by the story. *Finding* something . . . This simple expression encompasses all the kinds of *encounters* which make of our life the contrary of an acquisition by skill or by violence, by work or by cunning. Encounter of people, encounter of death, encounter of tragic situations, encounter of joyful events. Finding the other, finding ourselves, finding the world, recognizing those whom we had not even noticed, and those whom we don't know too well and whom we don't know at all. Unifying all these kinds of finding, does not the parable point toward a certain fundamental relation to time? Toward a fundamental way of being in time? I mean, this mode which deserves to be called the Event par excellence. Something happens. Let us be prepared for the newness of what is new. Then we shall "find."

But the art of the parable is to link dialectically *finding* to two other critical turning points. The man who found the treasure went and sold everything he had and *bought* it. Two new critical points, which we could call after a modern commentator, himself taught by Heidegger, Reversal and Decision. Decision does not even come second. Before Decision; Reversal. And all those who have read some religious texts other than biblical, and even some texts other than religious, know how much has been invested in this word "conversion," which means much more than making a new choice, but which implies a shift in the direction of the look, a reversal in the vision, in the imagination, in the heart, before all kinds of good intentions and all kinds of good decisions and good actions. Doing appears as the conclusive act, engendered by the Event and by the Reversal. First, encountering the Event, then changing one's heart, then doing accordingly. This succession is full of sense the Kingdom of God is compared to the chain of these three acts letting the Event blossom, looking in another direction, and doing with all one's strength in accordance with the new vision.

Of course, all the Parables are not built in a mechanical way along the same pattern. If this were the case, they would lose for that very reason the power of surprise. But each of them develops and, so to say, dramatizes one of the other of these three critical terms.

Look at the so-called parables of Growth Matthew 13: 31-33. This unexpected growth of the mustard seed, this growth beyond all proportion, draws our attention in the same direction as finding. The natural growth of the seed and the unnatural size of the growth speak of something which happens to us, invades us, overwhelms us, beyond our control and our grasp, beyond our willing and our planning. Once more the Event comes as a gift.

Some other Parables which have not been read this morning will lay the stress on the Reversal. Thus the Prodigal Son changes his mind, reverts his glance, his regard, whereas it is the father who waits, who expects, who welcomes, and the Event of the encounter proceeds from the conjunction of this Reversal and this Waiting.

In some other Parables, the emphasis will fall on the decision, on the doing, even on the good deed, as in the Parable of the Good Samaritan. But, reduced to the last critical turn, the Parable seems to be nothing more than a moral fable, a mere call to "do the same." Thus reduced to a moral teaching, the Parable ceases to be a Parable of the Kingdom to become an allegory of charitable action. We have to replace it within the inclusion of the Parables of Event, Reversal, and Decision, if the moral fable is to speak once more as a Parable.

Having made, in that way, this second step and recognized the dramatic structure, the articulation of the plot which makes sense, we are ready for a new discovery, for a new surprise. If we ask: "And finally, what is the Kingdom of Heaven," we must be prepared to receive the following answer. The Gospel says nothing about the Kingdom of Heaven, except that it is *like* . . . It does not say what it *is*, but what it *looks like*. This is hard to hear. Because all our scientific training tends to use images only as provisory devices and to replace *images* by *concepts*. We are invited here to proceed the other way. And to think according to a mode of thought which is not metaphorical for the sake of rhetoric, but for the sake of what it has to say. Only *analogy* approximates what is wholly practical. The Gospel is not alone to speak in that way. We have elsewhere heard Hosea speaking of Yahweh as the Husband, of Israel as the Wife, of the Idols as the Lovers. No translation in abstract language is offered, only the violence of a language which, from the beginning to the end, *thinks through* the Metaphor and never *beyond*. The power of this language is that it abides to the end *within* the tension created by the images.

What are the implications of this disquieting discovery that Parables allow no translation in conceptual language? At first sight, this state of affairs exposes the weakness of this mode of discourse. But for a second glance, it reveals the unique strength of it. How is it possible? Let us consider that with the Parables we have not to do with a unique story dramatically expanded in a long discourse, but with a full range of short Parables gathered together in the Unifying form of the Gospel. This fact means something. It means that the Parables make a whole, that we have to grasp them as a whole and to understand each one in the light of the other. The Parables make sense together. They constitute a network of intersignification, if I dare say so. If we assume this hypothesis, then our disappointment - the disappointment which a scientific mind perceives when it fails to draw a coherent idea, an equivocal concept from this bundle of metaphors - our disappointment may become amazement. Because there is now more in the Parables taken together than in any conceptual system about God and his action among us. There is more to *think through* the richness of the images than in the coherence of a simple concept. What confirms this feeling is the fact that we can draw from the Parables nearly all the kinds of theologies which have divided Christianity through the centuries. If you isolate the Parable of the Lost Coin, if you interrupt the dynamism of the story and extract from it a frozen concept, then you get the kind of doctrine of predestination which pure Calvinism advocated. But if you pick the Parable of the Prodigal Son and extract from it the frozen concept of personal conversion, then you get a theology based on the absolutely free will of man, as in the doctrine that the Jesuits opposed to the Calvinists, or the Protestant Liberals to the Orthodox Protestants.

Therefore, it is not enough to say that the Parables say nothing directly concerning the Kingdom of God. *We must say in more positive terms, that taken all together, they say more than any rational theology.* At the very moment that they call for theological clarification, they start shattering the theological simplifications which we attempt to put in their place. This challenge to rational theology is nowhere more obvious than in the Parable of the Good Seed spoiled by the darnel sowed among the wheat. The farmer's servants went to their master and said, "Sir, was it not good seed that you sowed in your field? Then where has the darnel come from?" Such is the question of the philosopher when he discusses theoretically the so-called problem of evil. But the only answer which we get is itself metaphorical: "This is an enemy's doing." And you may come through several kinds of theologies in agreement with that enigmatic answer. Because there is more to think about in the answer said in a parabolic way than any kind of theory.

Let me propose one more step, a step which I hope will increase our surprise, our amazement. Many people will be tempted to say, "Well, we have no difficulty dropping all systems, including rational or rationalizing theologies." Then, if all theories are wrong, let us look at the Parables as mere practical teaching, as moral or maybe political teaching. If Parables are not pieces of dogmatic theology, let us look at them as pieces of practical theology. This proposal sounds better at first sight than the first

one. Is it not said that to listen to the word is to put it into practice? This obviously is true. But what does that mean, to put in practice the Parables?

I fear that a too-zealous attempt to draw immediate application from the Parables for private ethics or for political morality must necessarily miss the target. We immediately surmise that such an indiscreet zeal quickly transposes the Parables into trivial advice, into moral platitudes. And we kill them more surely by trivial moralizing than by transcendent theologizing.

The Parables obviously teach, but they don't teach in an ordinary way. There is, indeed, something in the Parables which we have as yet overlooked and which they have in common with the Proverbs used by Jesus according to the Synoptics. This trait is easy to identify in the Proverbs. It is the use of paradox and hyperbole, in such aphorism and antithetical formulae as: "Whoever seeks to gain his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will preserve it." As one commentator says, the paradox is so acute in this overturning of fates that it jolts the imagination from its vision of a continuous sequence between one situation and another. Our project of making a totality continuous with our own existence is defeated. For who can plan his future according to the project of losing "in order to win"? Nevertheless, these are not ironical nor skeptical words of wisdom. In spite of everything, life is granted by the very means of this paradoxical path. The same has to be said of hyperbolic orders like: "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you." Like paradox, hyperbole is intended to jolt the hearer from the project of making his life something continuous. But whereas humor or detachment would remove us from reality entirely, hyperbole leads back to the heart of existence. The challenge to the conventional wisdom is at the same time a way of life. We are first disoriented before being reoriented.

Does not the same happen with the Parables? Is their way of teaching different from that of reorientation by disorientation? We have not been aware enough of the paradoxes and the hyperbole implied in those short stories. In most of them there is an element of extravagance which alerts us and summons our attention.

Consider the extravagance of the landlord in the Parable of the Wicked Husbandman, who after having sent his servants, sent his son. What Palestinian property owner living abroad would be foolish enough to act like this landlord? Or what can we say about the host in the Parable of the Great Feast who looks for substitute guests in the streets? Would we not say that he was unusual? And in the Parable of the Prodigal Son, does not the father overstep all bounds in greeting his son? What employer would pay the employees of the eleventh hour the same wages as those hired first?

The Parables of Growth are no less implausible. Here it is the hyperbole of the proverb that is at work. What small seed would yield a huge tree where birds can nest? The contrast is hardly less in the Parable of the Leaven. As to the Parable of the Sower, it is constructed on the same contrast. If it points to eschatological plenitude, it is because the yield of grain in the story surpasses by far all reality.

The most paradoxical and most outlandish Parables, as far as their realism is concerned, are those which Joachim Jeremias has grouped under the titles, "The Imminence of Catastrophe," and "It may be Too Late." The schema of *occasion*, which only presents itself *one time* and after which it is *too late*, includes a dramatization of what in ordinary experience we call seizing the occasion, but this dramatization is both paradoxical and hyperbolic; paradoxical because it runs counter to actual experience where there will always be another chance, and hyperbolic because it exaggerates the experience of the unique character of the momentous decisions of existence.

At what village wedding has anyone slammed the door on the frivolous maidens who do not consider the future (and who are, after all, as carefree as the lilies of the field)? It is said that, "these are Parables of Crisis." Of course, but the hour of testing and the "selective sorting" is signified by a

crisis in the story which intensifies the surprise, the scandal, and sometimes provokes disapproval as when the denouement is "unavoidably tragic."

Let me draw the conclusion which seems to emerge from this surprising strategy of discourse used by Jesus when he told the Parables to the disciples and to the mob. To listen to the Parables of Jesus, it seems to me, is to let one's imagination be opened to the new possibilities disclosed by the extravagance of these short dramas. If we look at the Parables as at a word addressed first to our imagination rather than to our will, we shall not be tempted to reduce them to mere didactic devices, to moralizing allegories. We will let their poetic power display itself within us.

But, was not this poetic discussion already at work, when we read the Parable of the Pearl and the Parable of Event, Reversal, and Decision? Decision, we said, moral decision, comes third. Reversal precedes. But the Event opens the path. The poetic power of the Parable is the power of the Event. Poetic means more than poetry as a literary genre. Poetic means creative. And it is in the heart of our imagination that we let the Event happen, before we may convert our heart and tighten our will.

Listen, therefore, to the Parables of Jesus (Matthew 13: 31-32 and 45-46)

And another parable he put before them, saying, "The Kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it."



WHERE IS GOD?

Elie Wiesel⁶

“Long live liberty! A curse upon Germany! A curse ... ! A cur-”

The executioners had completed their task.

A command cleft the air like a sword.

“Bare your heads.”

Ten thousand prisoners paid their last respects.

“Cover your heads!”

Then the whole camp, block after block, had to march past the hanged man and stare at the dimmed eyes, the lolling tongue of death. The Kapos and heads of each block forced everyone to look him full in the face.

After the march, we were given permission to return to the blocks for our meal.

I remember that I found the soup excellent that evening. ...

I witnessed other hangings. I never saw a single one of the victims weep. For a long time those dried-up bodies had forgotten the bitter taste of tears.

Except once. The Oberkapo of the fifty-second cable unit was a Dutchman, a giant, well over six feet. Seven hundred prisoners worked under his orders, and they all loved him like a brother. No one had ever received a blow at his hands, nor an insult from his lips.

He had a young boy under him, a *pipel*, as they were called – a child with a refined and beautiful face, unheard of in this camp.

(At Buna, the *pipel* were loathed; they were often crueller than adults. I once saw one of thirteen beating his father because the latter had not made his bed properly. The old man was crying softly while the boy shouted: “If you don’t stop crying at once I shan’t bring you any more bread. Do you understand?” But the Dutchman’s little servant was loved by all. He had the face of a sad angel.)

One day, the electric power station at Buna was blown up. The Gestapo, summoned to the spot, suspected sabotage. They found a trail. It eventually led to the Dutch Oberkapo. And there, after a search, they found an important stock of arms.

The Oberkapo was arrested immediately. He was tortured for a period of weeks, but in vain. He would not give a single name. He was transferred to Auschwitz. We never heard of him again.

But his little servant had been left behind in the camp in prison. Also put to torture, he too would not speak. Then the SS sentenced him to death, with two other prisoners who had been discovered with arms.

⁶ Elie Wiesel, *Night*, Bantam Books, 1960/1982, 60-62. Elie Wiesel, as a small boy, was swept up in the Holocaust with the rest of his family. His father died in his arms in the snow when they were being marched from one point to another. He is Hungarian by birth. You are encouraged to see Footnote 5 in Michael Whelan, “Some Reflections on Religious Life in Light of the Exodus”, reproduced in this *Reader*.

One day when we came back from work, we saw three gallows rearing up in the assembly place, three black crows. Roll call. SS all round us, machine guns trained: the traditional ceremony. Three victims in chains-and one of them, the little servant, the sad-eyed angel.

The SS seemed more preoccupied, more disturbed than usual. To hang a young boy in front of thousands of spectators was no light matter. The head of the camp read the verdict. All eyes were on the child. He was lividly pale, almost calm, biting his lips. The gallows threw its shadow over him.

This time the Lagerkapo refused to act as executioner. Three SS replaced him.

The three victims mounted together onto the chairs. The three necks were placed at the same moment within the nooses. "Long live liberty!" cried the two adults.

But the child was silent.

"Where is God? Where is He?" someone behind me asked.

At a sign from the head of the camp, the three chairs tipped over.

Total silence throughout the camp. On the horizon, the sun was setting.

"Bare your heads!" yelled the head of the camp. His voice was raucous. We were weeping.

"Cover your heads!" Then the march past began. The two adults were no longer alive. Their tongues hung swollen, blue-tinged. But the third rope was still moving; being so light, the child was still alive. ...

For more than half an hour he stayed there, struggling between life and death, dying in slow agony under our eyes. And we had to look him full in the face. He was still alive when I passed in front of him. His tongue was still red, his eyes were not yet glazed.

Behind me, I heard the same man asking:

"Where is God now?"

And I heard a voice within me answer him:

"Where is He? Here He is – He is hanging here on this gallows. ..."

That night the soup tasted of corpses.



THE MADMAN

Friedrich Nietzsche⁷

Have you not heard of that madman who lit a lantern in the bright morning hours, ran to the market place, and cried incessantly, "I seek God! I seek God!" As many of those who did not believe in God were standing around just then, he provoked much laughter. Has he got lost? asked one. Did he lose his way like a child? asked another. Or is he hiding? Is he afraid of us? Has he gone on a voyage? or emigrated? Thus they yelled and laughed.

The madman jumped into their midst and pierced them with his eyes. "Whither is God?" he cried. "I shall tell you. *We have killed him* – you and I. All of us are his murderers. But how did we do this? How could we drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there any up or down left? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is not night continually closing in on us? ... God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. What was holiest and most powerful of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood off us?"

Here the madman fell silent and looked again at his listeners; and they, too, were silent and stared at him in astonishment. At last he threw his lantern on the ground, and it broke and went out. "I come too early," he said then; "my time is not yet. This tremendous event is still on its way ... – it has not yet reached the ears of man. Lightning and thunder require time, the light of the stars requires time, deeds, though done, still require time to be seen and heard. This deed is still more distant from them than the most distant stars – and *yet they have done it themselves.*" It has been related further that on that same day the madman forced his way into several churches and there struck up his *requiem aeternam deo*. Led out and called to account, he is said to have replied every time, "What after all are these churches now if they are not the tombs and sepulchers of God?"

[Kaufmann's comment: "Nietzsche prophetically envisages himself as h madman. to have lost God means madness and when mankind will discover that it has lost God, universal madness will break out. This apocalyptic sense of dreadful things to come hangs over Nietzsche's thinking like a thundercloud.

We have destroyed our own faith in God. There remains only the void. We are falling. Our dignity is gone. Our values are lost. Who is to say what is up and what is down? It has become colder, and night is closing in. Without seeking to explain away Nietzsche's illness, one can hardly fail today to consider it also symbolically. ... We cannot distinguish what sense he may have had of his own doom from his presentiment of universal disaster.]



⁷ Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, (Fourth Edition), Princeton University Press, 1974, 96-97.

THE SALT OF THE EARTH

Les Murray⁸

“For many historical and other reasons, some of them Australian and our own fault, Christianity is no longer On Top in Australia. Others ... will have gone into the modalities of this more effectively than I could do. All I have to add are some personal impressions. The first of these is that the experience is probably a salutary one for us. The time for ecclesiolatry, the worship of the visible church instead of God, is past. We're no longer free to indulge our bad habits of boring people, bullying them and backing up respectability; we're no longer in a position to call on the law to do for us what we should be doing by inspiration and example; we're no longer in a position to push second-rate thinking and an outworn picture of the cosmos, where God is Up, we are in the middle and Hell is Down; we're no longer free to indulge the internecine warfare of denominations that has so harmed God's cause on earth for the past four centuries; finally, we're not going to be universally accepted as a spiritual elite, so we'd better get on with being what our Founder told us to be which is salt of the earth, the baking-soda in the loaf of mankind. Salt and baking-soda aren't privileged substances, but they're pretty essential ones. The second of my impressions is that, while our vision is no longer the dominant one, and may never have been, neither is any other at the moment. There is as yet no other vision abroad in our society which commands the same authority as ours does, the same sense of being the bottom line, the great reserve to be called on in times of real need. Many of the themes of the rallies are necessary problem solving and little more, and much in the spiritual supermarket is fair weather stuff, adjuncts to a prosperity which may now be vanishing. Unbelief, once a daring and rather aristocratic gesture, must now have exhausted most of its glamour; it is certainly no longer exclusive, or particularly rebellious. Much the same could be said of sexual indulgence, pornography and the like. Having by now surely lost most of its flavour of forbidden fruit, sexual licence has to justify itself in terms of whatever real satisfaction it can give; its utility as a bait to draw people out of traditional ways and beliefs, and if possible into new allegiances, must by now also be wearing thin. And it will be difficult at the very least, for the cult of unremitting youthfulness and physical beauty to survive in the era of aging populations which it has helped to produce. By now liberal humanism is as badly fragmented by dissension as our witness ever was, and its fiercest adherents are often covertly uneasy at its lack of gentleness, its readiness to force the facts and its desolate this-worldliness. Its unrelenting adulthood forces people onto the thorns of tragic complexity and the strange intractability of the world, and often when people who subscribe to it relax for a moment, their eyes are seen to contain an almost desperate appeal: please prove us wrong, make us believe there is more to it than this, show us your God and that Grace you talk about. We are more widely judged on our own best terms than we think, and more insistently expected to be the keepers of the dimension of depth than we find comfortable. We will be punished if we do try to live up to what we profess, but we will be punished much worse if we don't, because so many of our enemies are relying on us. If we say God and Christ stand by what we've said, we don't stand alone, but we do have to expect some splinters in our shoulders. We should not, I suggest, be tempted to see ourselves as a team that has to win for God; He is not helpless - and anyway His idea of a win is the Cross.”



⁸ Les A. Murray, “Some Religious Stuff I know About Australia” in D. Harris et al, eds., *The Shape of Belief: Christianity in Australia Today*, Lancer, 1982, pp. 25-26 of pp. 13-28.