

## CHAPTER XII CHRISTOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGY IN MARK

The Gospel of Mark is written to present the beginning, or fundamental content,<sup>242</sup> of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God (omitted in certain manuscripts). One must ask as to what is implied in "the fundamental content of the Gospel of Jesus Christ." Is this merely a heavenly message or the story of a heavenly messenger, or is this "good news" about the possibilities of human life? Though some manuscripts predicate "Son of God" of Jesus, the term "son of God" was also used of the Messiah, a human figure, and in the Jewish context of early Christianity described one who was "son" because obedient, not because consubstantial (which was a issue of the Hellenistic world). Even the Gospel of John with its high Christology sees the unity of the Father and the Son in terms of obedience, not substance. Thus the Gospel's purpose may be both Christological and anthropological.

### The Gospels and Anthropology

The Gospels may provide an anthropology in several ways:

1. The **issues of the persons Jesus encounters and the way he reacts to them** presents some understanding of the issues of being human.
2. Jesus' **acts of healing** present some view of the horizon of human possibilities when they are touched by the sovereignty of God (that is, the "Kingdom of God"). One must also watch for a recognition of the **limits of human existence**: i.e. that which is not changed. It becomes very evident in Mark that the historic situation in which Jesus lived was not changed and he was crucified. In Mark 1:32-39 Jesus also presents the limits of his activity as a healer: that this was not primarily what he came to do. The miraculous activity is heightened in the later Gospels and in Matthew is used to support Jesus' activity as "Teacher". Thus one must keep in mind the redactional effect of the Gospel writers on the tradition in the portrayal of the power and extent of God's sovereignty.
3. **The role of the Spirit** (God's presence in history), **the nature of the presence of the Kingdom** (God's sovereignty), **the "pull" of eschatology** (the influence of God's future) as well as **the impingement of the past** (God's past acts of salvation), and **the power of the presence of past, present and future within the liturgy/cultus**, all express the role of the Transcendent in human existence and self-understanding.
4. **Jesus' reinterpretation of the Messianic role** [in such as Mark 1:11 (a conflation of Psalm 2 and Is. 42:1 - a joining of the Messianic Ps. 2 with the servant concept); 4:11 (the mystery of the kingdom); 8:14-9:29 (Confession and Transfiguration); 10:13-52 (James and John's request for special privilege)] needs to be explored for what this implies about the presence of God and the transformation of life. Jesus advocates a different understanding of God's presence than did Judaism which expected complete transformation of the world at the coming of God's Kingdom.
5. The issue of **blindness and deafness** [such as dealt with in Mark 4 and parallels (and the use of Is. 6:9-10 to support this, one of the most frequently quoted OT passages in the NT) and in the stories of blind men, and the problems of belief] need to be taken seriously.
6. Then there are the contributions to an anthropology from **Jesus' life as an anthropological model**.  
  
-First one needs to ask whether the Gospel is presenting Jesus as such a model, namely a human in whom God is acting and present, or whether the Gospel has separated Jesus from humanity in the way that he is described. The later Gospels tend to separate Jesus from humanity: the Gospel of Matthew and especially the Johannine discourses (Jesus' discourses in

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<sup>242</sup>. In Greek *arche*, "beginning", besides a starting point in time, also means *fundamental content* or *fundamental principle*

John) which represent the latest strata of theological development in the tradition which eventuated in the Gospel of John. [However, even in I John one can see how the Proto-Gnostic Christology has also led to a Gnostic anthropology amongst those who separated from the community: they denied the humanity of Jesus and also their own humanity -- their need for expiation for sin.] The Gospel of Mark and Luke especially seem to present Jesus as a possible model for humanity.

-Then one needs to ask what the components are of the model: the role of the Spirit (presence of God) within Jesus' humanity and life, the receiving of identity in the baptism, the nature of Jesus' action, faith, commitment, struggle with the options of life, relational life, etc. Jesus' death and resurrection in much NT modeling are understood as a paradigm of human experience (e.g. always being given up to death so that Jesus' life may be manifested in us - II Cor. 4:11). Jesus' struggle with the political, cultural and cosmic forces of his historical period can help one model behavior towards the world and societal, political and cultural systems.

-One major question is whether the Gospels are modeled only after the pattern of Jesus' life or whether they are intentionally also modeled after the pattern of the life of the believer. If the latter is true of at least of some of the Gospels, then the pattern and sequence of experiences in the life of Jesus provide an understanding for the developmental model of the Christian life. Here one should remember the way in which the Gospel materials have been used over the centuries in the Ignatian *Exercises* to provide a model for spiritual development, decision making and vocational choice.

What follows then are some brief comments on how Mark may be regarded as providing material for an anthropological model.

### **General Comments**

One thing that needs to be remembered in interpreting Mark is that by and large Mark includes little interpretive comment and seems to present traditioned material that is already understood in the community in which it is traditioned. Early understandings of the origin of Mark speak of it as a preservation of the preaching of Peter. Thus we need to read the material carefully for the implications which were clear to the original audience but are not always to us.

The Gospel seems to be divided into two major sections. The first, chapters 1-10, present the basic features of Jesus's ministry and his hearer's interactions and controversies with him. This section moves to a climax in 8:27-10:52 in the Confession of Peter, the Transfiguration, and the description of the life and ministry of the disciples in chpt. 10. Though this section is rooted in the issues of the historical context of Jesus' ministry, it seems more directed to important issues about Jesus' life, ministry, identity and the impact of this on those who followed him.

Chapters 11-16 are much more rooted in the historical-political-religious issues of Jesus' time and the time in which Mark was written. While chapters 6:30 - 8:26 deal with Jesus inclusion of both Jew and Gentile, 11-16 deal with the attitude of Jews (and Christians) towards Rome. The Triumphal Entry, Jesus' cleansing of the Court of the Gentiles, his sayings about the coming judgement on Israel and the destruction of Jerusalem, all address the rising revolution against Rome. Jesus in confronting Jerusalem enters the center of culture, religion and power to speak to the times. Jesus' stance on the issues facing his people lead him to a destiny of trial and crucifixion. Thus in terms of both the general historical situation and Jesus' personal historical situation the concreteness of human existence is presented. One must speak and live out one's faith in God in concrete circumstances.

The situation for the Markan Church was not much different than in Jesus' day. The Gospel probably came from the church in Rome. It is dated by most before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE. The death of Peter is usually placed about 64 CE at the time of the burning of Rome under Nero. Thus the church at Rome having gone through the horrible times of the Roman persecution had to look again at how it would live with Rome -- and how it would deal with its Jewish roots and the Jewish opposition which it continued to experience. Anyone reading history could have seen the Jewish revolution coming which started in 66 CE. According to Mark 13 the coming destruction of Jerusalem would herald the end

of the world (a perspective changed in the later Gospels).<sup>243</sup> The Gospel was then a call not just to hear the Gospel individually, but to hear what it meant to walk as a Christian in that world and to be willing to enter "Jerusalem" as did Jesus. The consequence could be the same: they might have to drink the cup and be baptized with the baptism of Jesus (10:39 - the controversy with James and John). But at the end of the Gospel there is the proclamation of the resurrection from the empty tomb before which the women stand in awe, hearing that Jesus will shepherd his disciples again within the world. The story is unfinished for the hearer must complete it.

## Mark 1-10

The Gospel begins with the baptismal experience of Jesus in which he receives identity from God and God (in the Spirit) comes upon him, calling him "son". Thus the transcendent resources of life are indicated. This is immediately followed by a testing by Satan in the wilderness where the Spirit has driven him. Identity and the resources provided by God are tried as Satan (the world in its reality and values) confronts Jesus. Thus tried Jesus announces the Kingdom's nearness (the nearness of God's presence) and proceeds to call disciples, heal, exorcise, forgive sins (1:14-2:17). 2:18-3:6 moves on to the religious and cultural tensions of Christian life, stated in the form of Jesus' controversies with his contemporaries. This section includes the significant statement "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath; so the Son of man is lord even of the Sabbath." (2:27-28). In Aramaic "man" and "son of man" would mean the same ("man"), and so this perhaps should be translated "man is Lord of the Sabbath." The Sabbath law is the heart of the Law, and so Jesus states that man is not made for obedience to the Law, but the Law is created to serve human need and humans in God's eyes are more important than the Law -- a crucial anthropological statement.

Mark 3:7-3:30 presents Jesus' attack against demons and Satan, an important aspect to his ministry in Mark -- a continuation of the drama of the Temptation.

3:31-35 treats the lack of understanding among Jesus' family and chapter 4:1-34 explores the general problem of understanding. The theme of 4 is that the problem of misunderstanding is a real one which Jesus recognizes in his approach to his message. His message runs against the grain of his culture (no pun intended -- parable of the sower). God graciously sows, but the response is varied (soils). Jesus has given the "mystery of the Kingdom" to his disciples (vs. 11), but he tells parables as riddles<sup>244</sup> to limit understanding to those who turn again, repent, reorientate their thinking (the proper translation of vs. 12b is "unless they turn again and be forgiven."). One must have something in order to receive (vs. 24-25). What one must have is the "mystery" of the Kingdom: that God is here in a world like this, without everything changed, like a mustard seed or the grain growing in a farmer's field.

4:35-6:6 is a collection of miracle stories, in some of which the need for faith and the problems of unfaith are illustrated. This series ends with Jesus' "failure" to do mighty works in Nazareth because of their unbelief.

6:7-13 deals with the mission of the 12 to heal and exorcise; the disciples' ministry repeats the pattern of the ministry of Jesus in 4:35-6:6 and perhaps in the first part of the Gospel. Paralleling the disciples' mission to Jesus' mission, I believe, establishes a relationship between Christology and anthropology.

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<sup>243</sup>. In Mark 13 it is understood that the destruction of Jerusalem would mean the end of the world. In Matthew and Luke, since Jerusalem had been destroyed when the Gospels we have from them were written, the end of the world is separated from Jerusalem's destruction.

<sup>244</sup>. The word for "parable" in Hebrew and Aramaic also meant "riddle", and we know that the Rabbis loved to speak in riddles. A riddle is enigmatic either because you don't tell its point, or because its point is incongruous from contemporary perspectives.

6:14--29 is a transition point which raises questions about Jesus' identity (in anticipation of the Confession of Peter) and heightens the tragic in life with the death of John the Baptist. The juxtaposition of the questions about Jesus' identity and the death of John may also be seen as including within this pericope the major issues of the Confession (Mark 8) which treats Jesus' identity and the need for his suffering and death.

6:30-8:26 contain the two feeding miracles which are part of the Markan and Matthaean traditions (Matthew got these from Mark but does not seem to realize their full significance as interpreted in Mark 8:14-21). Preceding the second feeding is a sequence of events in Gentile areas and the second feeding seems symbolically to be a feeding of the Gentiles as the first is a symbolic feeding of the Jews, each with a "gathering up". Anthropologically this material is the "Ephesians" of the Gospels, speaking of the creation of one humanity, the breaking down of the dividing wall of hostility. It is fitting that a healing of a blind man concludes this section.

8:27-9:29 is the climax of the Gospel. Peter confesses Jesus as the Messiah and Jesus reinterprets this in the light of the suffering Son of Man. Peter's rejection of Jesus' interpretation is not only Christologically focused, but it involves anthropological issues. The people must be as the Messiah. Thus in vs. 34 the issue clearly becomes anthropological as Jesus speaks to his disciples and the "multitude". This treatment is then balanced with the promise of the Kingdom in power (9:1) and the Transfiguration experience in which Jesus' identity and nature was affirmed; but they had again to return to the real world where Jesus looks as he did before, the theme of the suffering of the Son of Man is repeated, and a man with an epileptic son cries out "I believe; help my unbelief!" (9:24)

9:30-10:52 contains primarily teaching materials at the end of Jesus' ministry in Galilee and before his last entry into Jerusalem. All the Synoptics locate a collection of teaching materials at this point. It begins with Christology, a saying about the suffering and resurrection of the Son of Man (9:30-32), and soon turns into anthropology, the nature of discipleship:

- "If anyone would be first such must be last of all and servant of all." (9:33-37)
- Do not forbid who works in my name (33-37)
- "Have salt in yourselves" (42-50)
- A question of divorce turned into affirmation of one flesh (10:1-12)
- To the child belongs the kingdom (10:13-16)
- What it takes to inherit eternal life (10:17-31)
- Another prediction of Jesus' death and resurrection (10:32-34)
- What it is to have privilege in Christ's glory - service (10:35-45)
- A story about the healing of blindness in the context of a blind man's confession (10:46-52)

## Mark 11-16

In chapter 11:1-26 Christ enters Jerusalem with all of its historical and spiritual symbolism. This initiates a complex of events: he enters on a selected colt; <sup>245</sup> he looks around in the Temple and goes back out to spend the night in Bethany -- making his action the next day intentional, not impulsive; on the following day on the way in to Jerusalem he symbolically judges a fig tree for not bearing fruit; he cleanses the court of the Gentiles in the Temple saying that "my house shall be a house of prayer for all nations", and this precipitates the decision to put him to death; the next day he and his disciples pass by the withered fig tree (the judgement of which symbolizes the future of Jerusalem) to which Peter, frightened for the future of Israel, calls his attention. Jesus responds "Have faith in God." Much of this can be understood as relating to Jesus' call to his disciples to heed the Gentile mission and to establish their stance in politically troubled times over against the Jewish desire for revolution. There is here an understanding of what it is to be a citizen and a Christian within the Roman world.

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<sup>245</sup> The other Gospels see this in fulfillment of Zechariah 9:9, the use of which indicates Jesus as a King of Peace. Here again, one must wonder how Mark's readers understood this. The animal is very deliberately selected though the meaning of this selection is not discussed.

11:27-12:44 presents another collection of controversy stories, appropriate after the previous chapter. It includes the parable of the vineyard (the judged tenants), payment of taxes, affirmation of resurrection to the Sadducees, the two great commandments, Jesus' denial of Davidic descent (how can the Messiah be David's son), and a critique of "formal" religion (scribes), closing with the lovely story of the widow who gave her all.

Chapter 13 in a way repeats the themes of chapter 11. In 11 Jesus cleansed the Temple and symbolized what would happen to Israel (the fig tree) while in 13 there is an extended discourse (often called the "Little Apocalypse") speaking of the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world. This ends with a denial that one can know the time of the end and a command to "watch".

Chapters 11-13 can be seen as embodying many important issues about the life of Christ and the Christian in the world. When one seeks to indicate the anthropological relevance of this material, one must remember that the writer also was presenting the story of Jesus. Particularly as the Passion story is approached (chpts. 11ff) the writer has less freedom to develop anthropological implications explicitly.<sup>246</sup>

Chapters 14-15 deal with the plot against Jesus, his anointing, Judas' betrayal, the Last Supper as Passover meal and provision for a way of remembering, Jesus' pledge to again lead them as a shepherd (14:27-28 -- reiterated by the "young man" at the tomb in 16:7), the Garden of Gethsemane, the arrest, trial before the high priest, Peter's denial, trial before Pilate, the crucifixion with the symbolic rending of the veil of the Temple, and the burial. In these chapters the experiences of Jesus and the experiences of the disciples are interwoven so that the listener becomes involved in the events and issues of the story. Peter becomes a primary character with which to identify as the issues of Jesus' life are played out.

Most scholars agree that Mark originally ended at 16:8. The church has always been concerned with the lack of resurrection narratives at the end and so has added at least two distinctive endings and probably added the words "there you will see him" in vs. 7.<sup>247</sup> With the removal of the added endings and of the addition to vs. 7, verses 1-8 become a masterpiece ending to Mark. Mark concludes as he does in order to let the reader and hearer of the Gospel identify with the women at the tomb, for they stand in the same existential situation as the reader. The reader hears the announcement that Jesus is risen, he is not here, he is as Shepherd going before them into the world. Like the women, the reader has not seen and must respond to the message and must follow into the world to find Jesus. I Cor. 15 is clear indication of the

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<sup>246</sup>. The Passion Story was the first assembled extended narrative in the process of the formation of the Gospels. It may have first developed for the use in the Christian Eucharist, to remember what Jesus did as the Exodus was remembered in the Passover meal. The Gospel writers would have had less freedom to modify this established tradition, though it is clear that the tradition became established in several forms.

<sup>247</sup>. This insert in vs. 7 has led to the tradition of Jesus' Galilean resurrection appearances, followed by Matthew with little real additional information, contrary to both John and Luke which speak of Judaeen resurrection appearances (except for a late Galilean appearance in Jn. 21). A resurrected Jesus could appear in both locations, but you can't get the disciples back and forth. The problem of Galilean appearances is then solved with the removal of the addition to vs. 7, understanding that Matthew tried to create an ending in harmony with what he believed to be implied Galilean appearances in Mark, his primary source.

existence of traditions about the resurrection before the writing of Mark, so Mark cannot have done this because he did not know of resurrection appearances. It is interesting to speculate about the meaning of "Galilee." This could be understood as Jesus' call to his disciples to return to the primary scene of their ministry. However, "Galilee" in Aramaic means "outskirts", "boundaries". Galilee was at the outskirts of the homeland of Judaism. However, what may be behind these words which translate the Aramaic tradition about Jesus could be a misunderstanding that Jesus was speaking of Galilee whereas he may have been saying that he would be with them "to the ends of the earth", as if reflected in some of the other NT traditions.

The conclusion then places the readers/hearers at the proper place to think on the meaning of having heard the story and to know that they, like the women, must go and tell. Mission (Commissions) ends all of the Gospels as an existential aspect of the Christian life. Trembling and astonishment comes upon the listener as upon the women. Each listener must finish the story.

## CHAPTER XIII THE GOSPEL OF JOHN: HISTORY, CREATION, AND ANTHROPOLOGY

The Gospel of John is difficult to understand because there are so many differing perspectives contained within it. To understand it we must also come to an understanding of its relationship to the rest of Johannine literature, much of which modern scholarship sees as coming from a particular early Christian community.

It seems fairly clear that Revelation does not belong to the same community as the Gospel and the Epistles. If it should, it would have to represent the Johannine community at a time when its formulation of faith was extensively different from that represented in the Gospel and the Epistles, though the perspective of *all* this literature is decidedly dualistic.

Since II and III John are so short that it is difficult to gain much information from them, we are left with the Gospel and I John as sources for the faith of the religious community that gave them birth, and our understanding of their relationship and date affects our understanding of both.

When reading the Gospel it becomes evident that the Gospel is a product of a historical process, with different perspectives on the tradition about Jesus developing in various periods according to the needs of the community, and so preserved within the Gospel. For example there are aspects to its Christology which make Jesus sound very human and others which make him a visitor from another world who stands serenely above his historical predicaments. There are remnants of Apocalyptic eschatology while much of Johannine eschatology is "realized." There are places where the text itself bears witness to later interpretation of earlier ideas (2:22, 12:16). 21:24 attests to a written source used in the compilation of the Gospel. Raymond E. Brown's *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* presents his understanding of the history of the Johannine community, along with a summary of the theories of others.<sup>248</sup>

There are indications in I John that it was written to deal with disputes taking place within the Johannine community and it might be possible to see these disputes arising from the varied perspectives contained by the Gospel. Thus differing interpretations arose because the Gospel itself was ambiguous. I John then "corrects" misunderstandings of the Gospel and becomes the first commentary upon it. The first four verses seem to be a restatement of the Prologue to the Gospel (1:1-18), but with a perspective that differs from the Prologue itself. 1:5-10 clarifies the message we heard from "him" (Jesus), as over against the theology of those who have separated from the Johannine community (2:18-27), the two groups seemingly having different Christologies and soteriologies.

My interpretation of the relationship of the Gospel to I John used to be as just described: that I John was written later than the Gospel as a commentary upon it, calling the community to correct perspectives on Christ, atonement, Spirit, etc.. Various views had arisen because of differing interpretations of the ambiguities of the Gospel. This meant that its first four verses represented the "orthodox" perspective on the Prologue to the Gospel. Whereas the Word in the Gospel existed "in (the) beginning," before creation, and was God's personal agent in creation and throughout history, in I John 1:1-4 the beginning is the lifetime of Jesus, the Word which was "in (the) beginning" is the Gospel, and the relationship of Word to creation is completely overlooked, a triumph of Johannine dualism. Since much of the material in the body of the Gospel seems to take a dualistic perspective, I had understood the emphasis on the relationship of the Word to creation in the Prologue to have been part of a Jewish hymn to Wisdom (many of its elements are in Sirach 24) which was modified for use in the Johannine community, with its references to creation never taken seriously within the Gospel.

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<sup>248</sup>. Raymond E. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple*, NY: Paulist Press, 1979.

However, I discovered something at the other end of the Gospel of John which indicated that all the emphases of the Prologue were taken more seriously than I had thought: namely, that the author understood that Jesus appeared to his disciples with his wounds (chapter 20). This was not merely Jesus appearing with the marks of his death which were soon to be changed in his spiritual transformation and to be forever left behind. Jesus appears to Mary, asking that she not cling to him for he has not yet ascended. In the theology of the early church the Ascension was the theological completion of the Resurrection (e.g., Phil. 2:65-11). The later Ascension, mentioned in Acts 1, was only the final leave-taking of Jesus. This would mean that the Jesus who bears his wounds, according to John, was the ascended Jesus, the Jesus returned from heaven, the Jesus who was completely what he was to be.

Zinzendorf in the Moravian tradition, in the 18th century, had indicated that the resurrected Jesus had forever assumed humanity and would always be the wounded one. It is only recently that the connection of this perspective to his preference for Johannine theology dawned on me.

For the Saviour is never in all eternity without His sign, without His wounds: the public showing has His holy wounds as its ground. .... If we, therefore, want to invite people to the marriage, if we want to describe the Bridegroom, it must be said like this: "I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus as He hung upon the cross (I Cor. 2:2, alt.), as He was wounded. I point you to His nail prints, to the side, to the hole which the spear pierced open in His side. .... As soon as this look strikes your heart, you run to the marriage feast ...<sup>249</sup>

If we speak of the cross in the congregation, so we mean a certain form, a certain style and fashion, in which the Saviour, the God over all, the Creator of all things, has appeared in this present time. He rules and does what he wants; he gives us life and breath, he makes us healthy, he keeps us, he preserves us, he conquers sin and every earthly need for us, he carries out his decree for our salvation as it was foreknown by him from eternity: but all that, my sisters and brothers, he does for now in the cross-form. One must not try to present that as a way of power, a kingly method, a despotism striking to the eyes: he is a despot, but in the cross-form. Everything appears according to the fact that he is a Lamb who endures, who is so patient, lamblike, open, contented, self-composed, gentle if it does not go his way ...<sup>250</sup>

If the Gospel of John has at its beginning the relationship of the Word to creation and history, together with the Incarnation, and then has at its conclusion the resurrected and ascended Jesus who still lives through his wounded humanity, then it is possible that the tradition within the Gospel must be read in the light of the Prologue and the ending, rather than the Prologue being seen as merely a Jewish hymn to Wisdom, the implications of which were not utilized fully in the Gospel's dualism and were denied in I John 1:1-4 (where the orthodox interpretation of the Prologue is set forth).

This would then mean that the Gospel even more radically asserted Jesus' humanity than did I John and affirmed Jesus' relationship to creation and history, something completely ignored in I John. Though the tradition within the Gospel would not always explicitly support this, this was the way in which the author/redactor of the Gospel read and understood the tradition.

Significant also in the Gospel are the words of John the Baptist in 1:29 and 35: "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." This seems to draw upon the theology of the Servant Songs of II Isaiah (especially Isaiah 53:7). The crucial position of this passage, as the first announcement of Jesus' meaning following the Prologue, would seem to indicate that the Gospel tradition should also be read in its light. What in John 13 takes the place of the institution of the Eucharist is Jesus' acting out of the role of the "servant", through the foot washing, as an example to his disciples. At the end of the Gospel the death of Jesus occurs before the Passover meal rather than after it, as in the Synoptics. Though attention is

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<sup>249</sup>. Nicholas Ludwig Count von Zinzendorf, *Nine Public Lectures on Important Subjects in Religion*, (9/4/46), ed. and transl. by George W. Forell, Iowa City: U. of Iowa Press, 1973, p. 28.

<sup>250</sup>. Nicholas Ludwig Count von Zinzendorf, *Vier und dreissig Homilien über die Wunden-Litaney der Brüder, gehalten auf dem Herrnhag in den Sommer-Monathen 1747*, n.d., (5/14/47), pp. 60f.



not expressly drawn to this, Jesus does die about the same time that the Passover lambs are being slain in the Temple. Thus the Lamb who fulfills the role of the Servant would seem to be another element supporting the Christology developed in the Prologue.

If the above is true, then I John would no longer necessarily be seen as later than the Gospel and interpretive of it, but rather as representing a supportive but differing perspective on common issues. This would mean that the key to the Gospel was not to be found in I John as our first commentary on the Gospel, nor in the dualistic and anti-world tradition within the Gospel, nor in the semi-Gnostic Christology (particularly expressed in the Discourses within the Gospel), but rather in the Prologue and conclusion which surrounded it and key elements within it (as indicated above). This would mean that the final author/editor of the Gospel intended the tradition to be read in the light of all the Prologue, and that the relationship of Word to creation and the Incarnation were to be taken seriously.

As to the Christology of the Gospel, where elements of Jesus' humanity were affirmed alongside consciousness of his heavenly origin, both would need to be taken seriously in the Johannine community's understanding of Jesus. For them (or at least for the author of the Gospel and those sympathetic to him) these elements were not contradictory, whatever the historical origin of Jesus' self-consciousness in John.

If Johannine Christology is to be taken seriously, one must ask how it was possible for the Johannine community to hold this view. One possibility is that the beloved disciple source spoken of in 21:24, a source portrayed as not dependent on oral tradition, might have contained aspects of the self-consciousness of Jesus portrayed in John which in turn may have had some foundation in Jesus' own experience. Whatever the historical foundation of this perspective, I would question as to whether it could be maintained without some support from the experience and self-understanding of those in the Johannine community. What Christ is and offers must have had some manifestation in human experience, the Christology and anthropology of the community would have been close cousins. Persons within the Johannine community must have experienced an awareness of themselves as more than human, as more than belonging only to their time, in much that way that Carl Jung spoke of his No. 2 personality which belonged to the ages and his No. 1 personality which was the product of his own history.<sup>251</sup> There are times that we may momentarily have the same type of consciousness. In near-death experiences there is an experience of the self apart from one's body and history, as there is in mystical experience.

### **Meaning: An Appraisal of History and Creation**

What does this mean. *First*, it means that the perspective put on the Johannine tradition by the final editor/redactor of the Gospel moved away from a world and history denying dualism. As indicated within the Prologue, what/who became incarnate in Jesus preexisted creation and was God's agent in creation and history. Although there was darkness (the image the Johannine tradition often used for the world and those people influenced by it), the light shines in the darkness and the darkness does not overcome it (1:4). The Prologue is really a Midrash, or interpretation, of Genesis 1 which seems to have its own implications for understanding the predicament of the world, different from the tradition of the Fall in Gen. 2-3. In the beginning there was chaos and darkness. Out of this creation comes to be by the action of God's Word. However, although creation was good it seems not yet to have realized its goal and potential. Humankind placed in the world in *the image of God* has been understood in various ways, but one way to understand it is that God, like an ancient king placed an image in a city to represent his power and authority, so placed humankind, male and female, within the world. The responsibilities given humans seem to indicate that what earth will be depends on how they respond. Although the story ends with God resting, this may be understood not so much as everything being completed, but as the transition to human responsibility.

Thus creation is good, but its potential is still to be fulfilled and it is not far from its original chaos and darkness. That the Prologue is an interpretation of Gen. 1, rather than chapters 2-3, follows the preference of Jewish Wisdom literature for Gen. 1 as a more positive presentation of creation in harmony with its

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<sup>251</sup>. Ibid., p. 91.

theology. Creation is not to be explained from the perspective of the Fall. The emphasis on the Fall in Intertestamental Judaism and Christianity came to mean that, without redemption, history and creation cannot mediate God to us -- and world, history, and humanity are not only condemned but incapable of good without redemption.

Much of spirituality has followed a model derived from the Hellenistic world and the theological perspectives of Intertestamental Judaism and early Christianity. Augustine is frequently blamed for the dualistic perspective of much of Christianity since his time, but as in truth dualism is very evident in the New Testament itself -- in the very sources of our Christianity. One must go to the Old Testament, much of which represents Judaism before the development of dualism in the Intertestamental Period, and treat the New Testament rather selectively to present a positive perspective on creation and human existence. Thus the above interpretation of the Johannine Prologue is so crucial to arguing for a more positive appraisal of creation and history. This is not to deny that there is some truth to what was perceived about the dangers of existence in the development of dualism.

One of the significant developments in spirituality in recent years has been "Creation spirituality" advocated by Matthew Fox.<sup>252</sup> Rather than discussing Fox here I would like to discuss one of his primary sources, Meister Eckhart.

One might at first judge that an optimistic and creation affirming spirituality would have arisen in the best of times and dualistic spirituality would be characteristic of more tragic times. However, this was not the case with Meister Eckhart. Fox in his book *Breakthrough* mentions Barbara Tuchman's book *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous 14th Century*, whose thesis is that the apocalyptic upheavals of the 14th century mirror our own time.<sup>253</sup> It was a time of population expansion but economic contraction, corruption in high places, cultural upheaval and disillusionment. Eckhart was born in 1260 and died shortly before 1329, after his trial by a papal court. He was trained as a Dominican and served various teaching, preaching, and administrative positions in Paris and Germany. That such a positive affirmation of creation could have arisen in such times is testimony to the contribution of personality to reaction to one's times, but more specially to the need to find some way to trust creation and life in the worst of times. If there is nothing in the world safe and loving that one may trust oneself to, then life indeed is tragic. As will be indicated, it was central to Eckhart's theology that one can "let oneself go" into creation and into God. This was not only for the sake of his own sanity, but for the sake of those to whom he preached.

Fox summarizes the essential elements of Eckhart's theology as follows:

1. *The creative word of God.* Here Eckhart uses especially the idea of the creative word in Gen. 1 and John 1. God creates by his word and because of God's goodness, creation is good.
2. *Blessing.* Using ideas derived primarily from the Old Testament idea of blessing, creation is seen as a divine blessing. The holy "isness" permeates all things, making all things equal at the level of being. The purpose of life is to return the blessings one has received by blessing others.
3. *Panentheism.* God is not out there or above us. God is in creation and us, and we are in God. This is not pantheism (that all is God), rather panentheism (that God is in all).
4. *Realized Eschatology.* Heaven is not something that begins after life. Eternal life is now and we are already in God. As Eckhart says in a moving passage:

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<sup>252</sup>. Fox, Matthew, *Breakthrough: Meister Eckhart's Creation Spirituality in New Translation*, Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1980.

*Original Blessing: A Primer in Creation Spirituality*, Bear and Company, 1983.

*Western Spirituality, Historical Roots, Ecumenical Routes*, Bear and Company, 1981.

*The Coming of the Cosmic Christ*, Harper, 1988

<sup>253</sup>. Matthew Fox, *Breakthrough: Meister Eckhart's Creation Spirituality in New Translation*, Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1980, p. 11.

You don't need to seek him here or there. He is not further off than the door of your heart; there he stands and tarries and waits to find someone ready to open up to him and let him in. You don't need to call him from afar; he can scarcely wait for you to open to him. He is a thousand times more eager for you than you for him.<sup>254</sup>

5. *Celebration of all beings in God's blessing-filled cosmos.* Blessing flows out from God and still remains within God "in a panentheistic ocean of divine pleasure". Thus the search for God is not within oneself alone, but within the entire universe. The reaction to this is rejoicing and celebration.

6. *Letting go, and letting creation be the holy blessing that it is.* Our tendency to try to control and possess prevents our celebrating with creation. Therefore we must *let go* and *let be*. By letting go we learn true reverence for things. By letting go of our fear, we can "sink" into the blessing and grace that creation is about, and into the God who is in but beyond creation.

7. *The unknown, unnameable God who is a non-God.* This is part of Eckhart's *via negativa*. In this the self is not put-down, but let go of and God is recognized as being beyond the images of God. This is why he "prays God to rid me of God".

8. *The divinization and deification of humanity.* Eckhart calls for persons to allow a "breakthrough" of God into consciousness, the birth of God's son within us, a "new birth" which indicates that we are sons and daughters of God.

9. *Spirituality is a growth process.* There are no limits to growth as there are no limits to the divine. "If people lived a thousand years or even longer they might still gain in love." Growth is not a competitive and compulsive climbing of Jacob's ladder, but an expanding spiraling which "touches the ends of the cosmos and returns us to our primal origins refreshed."

10. *Creativity is the work of God in us.* In the image of God we are also creators. Artistic work is the "work that works as God worked." Eckhart's theology of art and creativity is well expressed in Sermon Twenty-nine, entitled "Be you creative as God is creative," included in Fox's book.

11. *Compassion, the fullness of spiritual maturity.* God's compassion flows towards us in creation. Out of God's compassion we respond in birthing compassion and justice.

12. *Everyone a royal person.* Here Eckhart sees all as royal persons, within this biblical tradition, who are responsible for creating compassion and justice.

13. *Jesus Christ as reminder of what it means to be God's child.* Jesus is the first and foremost reminder that a birth as God's child is possible. "He is a creative and compassionate person, in touch with his divine origins and his divine destiny. .... Jesus on leaving this earth sent his Spirit to vivify us and render us other Christs."

14. *Laughter, newness, and joy.* God is the eternally new, young. To let oneself go is to let life, newness, and joy be. "Rather than fleeing pleasure, we are to penetrate it to find God there and we are to struggle to share it. .... Laughter may well be the ultimate act of letting go and letting be: the music of the divine cosmos."<sup>255</sup>

One difficulty with creation spirituality is that in its interpretation of human existence and history it does not preserve an adequate role for radical evil and sufficiently recognize the complexity of the factors which make up historical experience. All is not of God and all is not good. This is probably preserved within the Johannine tradition by the strong presence of the dualistic perspective within the Gospel tradition and I John.

## Meaning: Anthropology

*Second*, there are interesting implications of Johannine Christology for anthropology. As indicated above, I have difficulty believing that the Johannine community could have sustained its Christology without some correspondence in the experience of its members within their own self-consciousness. The

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<sup>254</sup>. Ibid., p. 247.

<sup>255</sup>. Ibid., much of the above is derived from pp. 43-49. I have not always exactly quoted or used quotation marks because of the complexity this would introduce. The categories are verbatim the categories of Fox.

## Gospel of John p. 118

Incarnation explained for the Johannine community how Jesus can say something like: "Truly, truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I am." For his followers, commitment to Jesus must have provided the sort of life, light, and knowledge, to use major Johannine themes, which enabled them to have a self-consciousness similar to their Lord though derived from him.

In a sense this self-consciousness is Gnostic. Gnosticism essentially involved a myth of a redeemer from the world of a God unknown within this world and its powers. This redeemer came to bring knowledge, *Gnosis*, to all who had inherited a particle of the world of light and to help their souls escape this world of darkness (seen as evil and the creation of a lesser God: for Christian Gnostics, the God of the Old Testament) and journey through the heavens to the world of light. Because this world and the creator God are identified with darkness, misunderstanding, and actual opposition to the world of light, some interesting interpretation of Old Testament texts results, especially of the Genesis 2-3 creation narrative. Old Testament perceptions are now seen as the work of the lesser God who opposes the God of light. The woman and the serpent, to whom traditional interpretation assigns primary responsibility for the Fall, now become agents of light, seeking to bring to humanity the knowledge which the lesser creator God sought to keep from it. Because of Gnosticism's strong dualism, its Christian forms usually treated the divine Christ as in some way separate and not really united with the human Jesus. A recent and valuable new work discussing the sources and beliefs of the Gnostics is Kurt Rudolph's *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism*.<sup>256</sup> The sources can be explored in Bentley Layton's *The Gnostic Scriptures*.<sup>257</sup>

While the Christology and anthropology of Gnosticism seem to be represented in the group that broke away from the Johannine community (mentioned in I John 2:18-27), the position of the "orthodox" author of I John affirms the need for recognizing the real humanity of Jesus and the meaning of Jesus real' death (also rejected by the Gnostics), without giving up what one might call the "high" Christology and anthropology held within the community. *Thus he holds in tension the humanity and divinity of Jesus --- and that of the believer. Yet the Gospel goes farther.* For the author of the Gospel, Jesus is not merely human as well as from heaven, but related to creation -- and the resurrected Jesus Christ, though having been really human, has not left behind his humanity nor his wounds. And in the use of the Old Testament throughout John, the Old Testament has not been rejected as the work of a lesser God. In fact, an interpretation of Genesis 1 becomes the key to understanding all things. Thus certainly within I John, but even more so in the Gospel, the experience of being *human* and *more than human* are retained side by side as uncontradictory elements of experience. For Jesus to pray with knowledge at the tomb of Lazarus, not for himself but for the sake of those standing by, does not deny that he truly wept (11:38-42). The heavenly voice in John 12:27, which Jesus said came "for your sake, not for mine" (12:30), does not deny that his soul was really troubled. That he faced his death with knowledge that he was "from the Father," does not deny the agony of his dying.

The Johannine understanding of the Spirit is important in affirming this. Jesus is clearly the bringer of the Spirit as well as the bearer of the Spirit. John the Baptist so announces this in 1:29-34. In the Nicodemus pericope in John 3 one must be born of the Spirit, from above (one meaning of the word often translated "anew"). In John 14-16 there are several sayings about the Spirit who will be the mediator of Jesus and the reminder of his truth.<sup>258</sup> "Abiding" in Jesus would seem to reflect this, for the presence of the Spirit is in a sense the presence of Jesus. In chapter 20 Jesus breathes the Spirit upon his disciples. Whether the author of John had in mind any relationship of the Spirit to the Word/Wisdom of 1:1-18 is unclear, but this identification is made in Wisdom literature. The coming of the Spirit upon the disciples might be regarded as a type of Incarnation, but in the Gospel the Spirit comes upon Jesus after the Incarnation, thus denying that Jesus' self-consciousness came only as a result of the Spirit. For John the Baptist the Spirit was a sign of Jesus identity and a transcendent dynamic that he could bestow, not the origin of his identity. Thus for the Christian the Spirit would bring Transcendence, dynamism, and awareness, but self-

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<sup>256</sup>. Kurt Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism*, trans. by Robert McLachlan Wilson, San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1983.

<sup>257</sup>. *The Gnostic Scriptures: A New Translation with Annotations and Introductions* by Bentley Layton, Garden City: Doubleday, 1987.

<sup>258</sup>. 14:15-17, 25-26; 16:12-15.

awareness would not depend only on this. The Prologue indicates the relationship of the Word to all creation, which must have included humanity. Although to those who accept his illumination is given the *right to become* God's children (1:12), there *is* also something in the nature of humanity that comes from God and the Word before the Spirit. However, this is not really developed in the implied self-consciousness of members of the community. To be a child of God is rather seen as a right which is given, and happens through the Word/Son whose own relationship to God is unique (*monogenes*, "only begotten"). And yet it is clear that the right to become children of God was given before the Incarnation (1:12).

The term "Son of Man" contributes to our understanding of anthropology. It appears, I believe, about 13 times in the Gospel.<sup>259</sup> This term has various connotations in the Synoptics: sometimes the Apocalyptic Son of Man, sometimes as an Aramaic periphrasis of "man", and sometimes as equivalent to an Aramaic indefinite pronoun ("one"). In John the term seems to have a special meaning: Jesus as Son of Man is one who is from above, has come (not *is to come* as the Apocalyptic Son of Man), and mediates transcendence.<sup>260</sup> This title may also be related to an interpretation of the creation stories we know was held by the Jewish philosopher Philo, contemporary of Paul and Jesus, and perhaps others. He understood that, in Platonic fashion, the "man" in Genesis 1 was the heavenly ideal man after the pattern of which the earthly man of Genesis 2 was created. Though Philo doesn't develop this, this "heavenly man" would then be in heaven to function as the restorer of earthly humanity. This may be the origin of the "Son of Man" redeemer or "the Man" in Jewish Apocalyptic.<sup>261</sup> As original human, this "Man" could then restore earthly humanity to what it should be for *he is what "humanity" should be*. As Wisdom is feminine within the Wisdom tradition, this "Man" of Gen. 1 is male and female. How well the Johannine community understood this is unclear, but the significant role of women in the community would seem to say that it did.

In John 6:27-34 the Son of Man will give the food which endures for eternal life, the bread of heaven. In 6:35ff Jesus not only brings, but *is* the bread of life. Persons must partake of the flesh and blood of the Son of Man or they will not have life (6:53). In John 9 the healing of the blind man results in a progression of insight, leading to the climactic confession of Jesus as Son of Man (9:35-37). The death of Jesus is the glorification of the Son of Man (12:23, 13:31), and original Man and Lamb of God/Servant merge in the foot washing. As supreme irony, Pilate presents Jesus dressed as a king and announces "Behold, the man," which may be intended for the reader to understand as the "Man from heaven" (19:5).

The self-consciousness of the member of the community would not only consist of awareness of both humanity and the transcendent *sources* of his/her life including *identity* as child of God, but there would be awareness of *qualities* of life, such as insight, abiding, love, servanthood, and mission -- as developed within the pericopes of the Gospel.

*To live with the self-consciousness described above, one must take seriously both one's humanity and one's spirituality as the poles within which one's life is lived. One is both and has both. Without one's higher consciousness, without awareness of one's spirituality the resources for life are inadequate and one is ill equipped to face life's limits and death itself. Jesus, by what he was, did, and taught, brought knowledge and awareness. Thus the Gnostics were somewhat right: the knowledge which Jesus brings is a form of redemption.*<sup>262</sup>

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<sup>259</sup>. 1:51; 3:13,14; 5:22; 5:25, 6:27, 53,62; 8:28; 9:35; 12:23,34; 13:31.

<sup>260</sup>. See 1:51 where the angels ascend and descend upon the Son of Man. Of course, the Gospel is full of comments about Jesus' mediation of transcendence.

<sup>261</sup>. The Seer in II Esdras sees a vision of a heavenly Man who came up from the heart of the sea. The interpretation given is: "As for your seeing a man coming up from the heart of the sea, this is he whom the most high has been keeping for many ages, who will himself deliver his creation; and he will direct those who are left. ....And he, my son, will reprove the assembled nations for their ungodliness ..." II Esdras 13:25-37

<sup>262</sup>. For Gnostics, Jesus brought redemption not from sin, but from ignorance of who one was and blindness to the God of heaven who was above all in this world. With "knowledge", one's destiny could be realized.

An outline of the Gospel is provided below as an aid to understanding it.

## **Outline of the Gospel of John**

### 1:1-18 PROLOGUE

The Word/Wisdom which existed with God in the beginning, was God's agent in creation and history, giving the right to become God's children throughout history, became flesh in Jesus. John the Baptist's relationship to this is defined. (Note how the community "we" appears here and in 21:24, expressing that this Gospel comes from and belongs to a Christian community.)

### 1:19-11:54 JESUS BRINGS LIFE

The phrase "eternal life" in John takes the place of the phrase "Kingdom of God" used in the other Gospels. These two phrases deal with a common reality. "Kingdom of God" is the presence and rule of God in life and "eternal life" is the type of life which results from God's presence and rule. Thus John is concerned especially with the life that becomes possible for people when God (or Christ) is present.

1:19-51 Three testimonies to Jesus' Messiahship, beginning with John the Baptist who proclaims: "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world." The theme of "come, see, and stay" with Jesus is developed in Jesus' contact with the Baptist's disciples, repeated in Philip's invitation to Nathaniel. Jesus is Son of Man, ladder to the Transcendent, original "Man" (Son of Man) of Genesis 1.

(Some Jews believed that the Man of Genesis 1 was the ideal Man and still resided in heaven. The Man of Genesis 2-3, earthly humanity, was copied from him, but turned out badly.)

### 2:1-3:36 The Transformation of Old Ideas

2:1-12 Symbol of Transformation - Cana wedding - water to wine, Jesus' glory manifested (waters of Judaism transformed) - the first sign in Cana

2:13-25 Temple Redefined - Jesus' Body As New Temple - cleansing of the Temple and prophecy of its destruction

3:1-15 Pharisaism Redefined - Nicodemus - new birth by the Spirit to enter the Kingdom

3:16-21 Editorial Comment - Eternal life and judgement is now through the Son who is the light.

3:22-30 John the Baptist Redefined

3:31-36 Editorial Comment - He who comes from heaven is above all and brings a true testimony. The Father has given all things to the Son, and who believes in him has eternal life.

### 4:1-54 Life to Non-Jews

4:1-42 The Samaritans and the Woman by the Well

4:43-54 The Official's Son - the second sign in Cana

### 5:1-11:54 Jesus and the Jews

#### 5:1-6:59 Moses and Christ

5:1-47 Jesus' Authority (as grantor of life and judgement) is from the Father - Moses testifies to him

6:1-59 Feeding Miracle - Christ as new Moses, Son of Man, and true Manna

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6:60-71 Reaction and Confession (of Peter)

7:1-11:54 Reaction of Jerusalem

7:1-52 Is this the Christ?

(7:52-8:11 Pericope on Adultery - not part of original Gospel)

8:12-59 My Father and Yours (son acts according to the father)

- question of Abraham or Devil as father of Jews (part of the anti-Semitism of Johannine community)

9:1-10:21 The Problem of Response

9:1-38 The Man Born Blind and Seeing

Jesus confessed as Son of Man: the original "Man" from heaven

9:39-41 The Problem of Blindness (with reminiscence of Is. 6, cf. Mark 4:11-12)

10:1-18 The True Shepherd and the Door

10:19-21 Response by Division

10:22-39 Witness of Jesus' Works - I and the Father are one

10:40-42 Beyond the Jordon in John the Baptist's country

11:1-54 The Resurrection of Lazarus

This is the CLIMAX of witness to Jesus as life and also the climax of opposition (45-53) (cf. Mark 11:18). Both Jesus' death and Lazarus' are occasions for the glorification of God and Jesus, and are thematically linked. This is indicated as the end of Jesus public ministry (11:54).

11:55-20:29 THE PASSION AND RESURRECTION

11:55-57 Will Jesus come?

12:1-11 The Messianic (Royal) Anointing and Anointing for Burial

12:12-19 Triumphal Entry

12:20-50 NOW THE HOUR HAS COME for the Son of Man (It was previously said that the hour had not yet come. Note that this section includes Jesus' statement in 23, struggle in 27-28, heavenly voice in 28, significance in 31-32, problem of belief in 37ff with reference to Is. 6, and summary in 44-50)

13:1-20 The Footwashing - He loved them to the end. (There is no institution of the Eucharist in John. John 6 sounds Eucharistic. Jesus sets the example of the "Servant" in Jn. 13.)

13:21-30 Judas' Betrayal

13:31-16:33 The Farewell Discourses - Preparation of Jesus' Disciples for his departure. The sayings on the Spirit are important for understanding how the Johannine community saw the Spirit as guiding them to truth.

17:1-26 Prayer for the Church

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18:1-19:42 Arrest, Trial and Crucifixion

20:1-29 The Resurrection

20:1-18 Appearance to Mary Magdalene (Peter, John and empty tomb)

19-23 The Upper Room Appearance - Spirit Received and Disciples Commissioned (Johannine Great Commission)

24-29 Thomas and his climactic CONFESSON: "My Lord and my God." It is important to note that it is the wounded Jesus who appears, implying his intent to continue to live with his humanity.



20:30-31 PURPOSE OF THE GOSPEL

"Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name."

21 EPILOGUE Pastoral Charge: "Feed my sheep." - the destinies of Peter and Beloved Disciple - The Beloved Disciple as providing primary written source for the tradition about Jesus.

## CHAPTER XIV DISCERNMENT

### Definition

*Discernment* is a technical term for understanding the forces which work within and upon one, with a special concern for identifying among these the Spirit of God so that one may make the decisions God wishes and allow one's life to be shaped by God. In the early church this was often a matter of discernment of "spirits," trying to understand whether the dynamics experienced were of God or produced by some other "spirit," perhaps an evil one. Though it is still important to recognize that evil forces may play a role in one's life, today we would often speak of many of these "spirits" in other terms. "Spirit" is a term which describes something that affects us, acts upon us, often with some identifiable dynamic.

### The "spirits" of life.

#### The Human Psyche

A major aspect of life is the human psyche and so life's dynamics may be described in psychological terms. To speak of these "spirits" in psychological terms does not mean that they should also be considered "bad", but rather that they are parts of us of which we are not adequately aware, which operate somewhat independently of conscious control, and which can affect our desires and decisions. What is part of our humanity can be dealt with much better if we regard it as a natural and normal part of being human. We cannot deal with what we repress and run from. Thus the issue of discernment might be phrased as: Is God leading me to do this or is this merely the dynamics of my own psyche? The complexity of the psyche justifies describing its dynamics in the plural. Therefore an understanding of the human psyche is important in dealing with discernment and a treatment of discernment is appropriate when dealing with understanding the psyche. Though the "soul" is often identified with the "psyche" in psychological models, it is important to consider this as a separate and gifted aspect of human inner dynamics.

#### Many Forces

Much of the Old Testament is dominated by the Deuteronomic view of the world, which was that God was in control of all of the forces of world and history and that whatever happened was what God wanted. Thus if things were good for you, God was rewarding you for the good you had done. If things went badly, God must be punishing you. However, it did seem that some righteous people suffered, but that was still explained in such a way as to keep God in control. Job suffered because God allowed Satan (in Job, God's district attorney, not yet the head of evil) to test him, and when the testing was over God gave back to Job all that he deserved.

In the Intertestamental Period (from 150 BCE to about 50 CE) *Judaism changed its understanding of the world because of its experience of history and life*. History was tragic. In spite of the promises of God, Palestine was constantly conquered by foreign armies. Moreover, life remained a struggle and what happened often seemed unjust. In their attempt to explain the world they experienced, Judaism forged a new understanding which described life as consisting of *many forces*.<sup>263</sup> God had his world, but God no longer pulled all the strings in this world. There was also *evil*, something which Jews and Christians of the first century CE took very seriously and I really think we should take more seriously when we observe the almost intentional forces behind the tragedies of modern history. There are *neutral powers*, besides whatever influences human beings brought to bear upon things. Neutral powers were those powers which

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<sup>263</sup> . Along with interpreting the world as consisting of many forces, much of Judaism still felt that somehow humans were also responsible for the predicament of the world, and so Pharisees and Essenes argued for a stricter following of the Law and a greater maintenance of purity and separation from those impure (Gentiles). I believe that this is analogous to a person who has experienced tragedy and suffering, and so seeks to ward off future tragedy by excessively trying to do what their tradition tells them needs to be done to satisfy the powers in life.

are neither inherently good or bad, but may impact one's life quite destructively at times. The powers of nature and political systems were seen as neutral powers, needed for life, but inherently neither good or bad. God can hold us safely in God's love within this complex world, but God cannot save us from the nature of the world and its complexity. (A good passage in which to explore this is Romans 8:18-39. It is also helpful to read II Cor. 11:22-12:10 where Paul speaks of all his difficulties in life along with his experiences of God.) As the bumper stickers say, "shit happens."

As we seek to sort out why things happen to us and the resources we have to cope with them, it is important to note that the forces of nature from which we benefit may also harm us. It is important to recognize that the political systems which maintain order and provide benefits, may also be unresponsive, repressive, and destructive. Our industrial, economic and technological developments may also do harm. We may pollute our environment. Mergers of corporations produce unemployment. As Walter Wink has pointed out in his work on the neutral powers described in the New Testament, at times they take up a life of their own and control the humans that are part of their system.<sup>264</sup> And then there are the human contributions to the complex scene of history. We may do great good or we may do great harm, individually and through the structures of the world of which we are a part.

God's involvement in our lives then is in the context of all of the other forces (spirits) which affect life. When one's life is open to God, God does what God can for us, seeks to protect us from destructive forces, lovingly cares for our essential selves (our souls), and seeks to resource us as we develop and struggle with life's limits and challenges. As Paul indicates in Rom. 8:28, "*in all circumstances (even the difficulties mentioned in Rom. 8) God works for good together with those who love him.*"

Another aspect of our complex world is *the deterioration of our biological organism and ultimately death*. This process may be regarded as enemy, or as part of a process which ultimately is creative of life. The forms of aging and death are hardly pleasant, but neither was the way we were born into this world. For speaking about death I prefer to use a term used by Simone Weil, a contemporary French mystic, "decreation." She believed that as well as a creative process in life there was a decreative process. The decreative process brings us to death, but it is much more than death. It is the process by which aspects of life are gradually stripped away until, if we are wise, we recognize that we are left with the spiritual dimensions of life which are essential and eternal. It is my belief that the decreative process prepares us for birth into the next stage of our existence, into the spiritual world which is God's world. One may describe the decreative process as one of gradually becoming disabled, but it is a process of disablement which, if we are wise, will also enable us and help us to discover who and what we really are, for what we are is that which still remains. This decreative process also calls us to trust ourselves to a process which is in God's hands within the complexities of human existence, the goal of which we do not know until we move through the door/womb of death.

## **A Model of Human Existence**

The following is a fairly inclusive model of the complexity of human existence, including the factors discussed above and also others.

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<sup>264</sup> . Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992; *Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984.

# DIAGRAM OF THE FACTORS OF HUMAN EXPERIENCE

**GOD'S WORLD**  
**GOD** Representative powers: **Christ as Lord**, angels  
[separate from our created world, but also present spiritually in our world]  
*God offers us relationship with God and the spiritual world*

## THE CREATED WORLD (where we live)

**WORLD POWERS** which affect our lives

**EVIL POWERS** (is there a personal power of evil which intends evil?)

**NEUTRAL POWERS: HISTORICAL, POLITICAL, CULTURAL, ECONOMIC, NATURAL** (Neutral powers in cosmos, nature, political and cultural systems, historical processes -- These were spiritualized in the ancient world; in the NT called elemental spirits, principalities, world rulers, powers, etc.)

## HUMAN SYSTEMS

(political, economic systems might also be considered as human systems)

**PERSONS** Here most important is **FAMILY**, but also human communities and relationships.

⊖ CONSTITUTED BY ⊕

**THE PERSON**  
in continuity, process,  
and change

**Developmental Tasks:**  
-Biological, Cognitive  
-Moral, Faith/Spiritual  
-Psychological, Social  
-Integrative (wholing)

**Personal History**  
one's personal history happened outside one, but to one and becomes interiorized

**Biological-psychological organism**  
described in NT as **body/flesh**(includes biological base for mind & psyche)  
-  
We live within and through our bodies.

**Conscious**  
**Ego**-center of self-awareness, control center of person

**Unconscious**  
**Personal Unconscious**  
-including disassociated parts of experience and introjected parts of personal history  
**Archetypal/Collective**  
-structures of inherited psyche deposited by history of human experience.

^  
^  
^  
**SELF**  
v  
self is a deep structure of psyche leading to wholeness (the **image of God**)

Parts of the Unconscious may function autonomously unless made conscious and integrated within the psyche.

**SOUL - SPIRIT** - our eternal self which comes from God and returns to God and makes us more than can be described from our appearance, psychological life, and personal history.

**WE ARE ENGAGED IN A PROCESS IN TIME AND HISTORY WHICH INDICATES THE NEED TO ACCEPT THE DYNAMICS OF CHANGE.**

## Discernment and Evil

Discernment of the factors of life and of the will of God may include the discernment of evil.

The contents and structures of the psyche, however destructive they may seem, should not be regarded as evil, though the destructive actions to which they may give birth should be regarded so. One must be as responsible as possible for avoiding destructive expression of the psyche's contents. But to regard the dynamics which come from one's own life history, one's biology, or the collective psyche, as evil in themselves only makes it difficult to heal and transform them. It results in attempts to repress or disassociate which cause these components of one's life to operate autonomously, without conscious awareness. It forgets that the strangeness with us is what it is to be human. It usually does not produce the changed behavior which is desired.

There are also the structures of our world, as spoken of above, in biblical times often described as neutral spiritual powers. Political, social, cultural, economic structures are important to life. They are intended to provide order and context for life. Some by their character are inherently destructive and dehumanizing for many while others would seem to express human and even spiritual values. However, these structures should not merely be viewed as organizational, constitutional, legal, or economic arrangements. These structures have a life of their own and as a living entity control the humans that are part of their system and those whose lives their system touches. It is helpful to make clear the values advocated by each structure, not only in its explicit statements but in the dynamics generated within its system.

While humans may do evil things and social, economic, and political structures may also, consideration is needed as to whether there is a personal force of evil outside the psyche which would seek to use us, to use what is inside us, and to use the destructive possibilities of the structured contexts within which we live. The tragedies of the history of this century would seem to indicate that evil is more than accidental, or caused by circumstances or a few "sick" persons or societies.

There are some principles which I think can be used when judging the involvement of Evil beyond what is intrapsychic (within the psyche) or systemic (in the systems of our world). In doing this one must look carefully at one's theology and spirituality to be sure that one has a sound basis from which to judge Evil and does not over-moralize internal dynamics which are normal for someone's history. Discernment of the involvement of Evil would not only help one to understand why one feels the way one does, why life is the way it is, but why there may be so much resistance to God and what God would call one to do.

The New Testament, and Intertestamental Judaism, took evil seriously. This was not just because of contacts with dualistic systems of thought, which seems to me a too simplistic explanation. Dualistic language was applied to life because of the way life was experienced. While we may not want to buy into flesh-spirit dualism or world-God dualism (which results in denying the goodness of creation and human existence), we may wish to give consideration to the way the role of ontological evil was perceived in life. Satan, understood as a fallen angel, opposed God's purpose within the world and functioned as a destroyer and deceiver. As prince of this world he represented the way the values of this world were often different than God's. But however one describes Satan in terms of values, the New Testament regarded him as personal, functioning with intent and intelligence. He was a threat to life from which one needed protection, a protection understood as available from Christ's Ascension and on-going conquest of cosmic powers (e.g. I Cor. 15:24-25, Phil. 2:5-11).

### Discerning Evil

1. *The plus factor.* In some of human experience there seems to be a *plus factor*, meaning that something is there which cannot be explained from what one ordinarily considers to be the constituents of one's life and context. One knows where much of one's "baggage" and many of one's issues come from and why some things happen. However there is still an unexplainable element, either in the frequency and intensity of the problems or in the causative factors. When one attempts to deal constructively with life or engages in healing processes, there are results which would be expected. However, these results may not happen.

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It is possible to explain this in various ways. In terms of personal struggles, it can mean that there are biochemical problems which distort the conscious and unconscious processes (such as in schizophrenia and some forms of depression). It also can mean that some factor has not yet been discovered in a person's life, and if it were only discovered, healing or change would be possible. However, it can mean that there may be a determining *plus factor* outside the person, if one allows for this in one's world view. Such a factor seems to "piggy-back" on the intrapsychic dynamics, augmenting them and making them insoluble. Such a factor seems to emerge in life when there is too much that is wrong, too many unexplainable events. This factor from outside must be judged in terms of what it seems to intend, and here it may become clear that the source is Evil.

2. *Insoluble resistance*. There are many reasons for resistance to what seems good, spiritual, and healthy, which can be understood in terms of intrapsychic or systemic (e.g., familial) dynamics. However, when there is unusual resistance the sources of which cannot be discovered, as implied above, Evil may be the *plus factor*.

3. *Voices, urgings and images*: The complexes and contents of the psyche express themselves to us in various ways. We may project on others what is in us so that our reactions towards others become clues to what is in us. We may dream dreams, see images or pictures within our minds, or hear voices. Some persons will feel or sense urgings. These are ways in which the contents and complexes of the psyche *normally* make themselves known, communicate themselves to us. By no means is this, by itself, a sign of mental illness. This often comes from the memory of what was once experienced or is the convenient expression of the dynamics of the psyche. One can discern from these phenomena what is within one. Now voices usually seem to sound like someone, seem to come from someplace, seem to belong somewhere. Images are usually connected with one's life history or inner process. We usually have a sense that voices, images and urgings come from inside us. However, *when there is a sense that they come from outside us and if they would urge us to destructive actions*, then it is important to consider whether this originates in Evil.

4. *Receptivity*. There are persons whose lives seem to be rich with religious or parapsychological experiences and who seem easily to pick up the experiences and feelings of others (i.e., they are receptive). I have known persons who were very receptive to experiences and influences from the outside. This often enables such a person to have significant spiritual experiences, but it also means that their psyche could be easily penetrated by Evil and sensitivity to this is needed..

5. *Rationalization of surrender to destructive feelings, no matter what*. Destructive feelings may powerfully exist because of personal history. From the perspective of one's history and one's rights it can be rationalized that one should act upon them. I have seen this when a person in childhood was deprived of love, affection, or security, often accompanied with additional abuse. Such a person seeks that to which s/he feels entitled, of which s/he will not now be deprived, in a relationship sometimes inappropriate. I have seen persons destroy their professional life, their family and that of another, because of this. Or there is the anger one feels because of what has been done to one. If only one could do to others what has been done, then one would be free and the inner turmoil would be satisfied. Personal consequences seem to become less and less important, or the compulsion to action becomes so strong that the consequences are not even in awareness. There is only the need to act. In coping with such powerful feelings, it is important to realize that Evil is an "abuser", using persons destructively for its own end. Usually persons once abused do not wish to be abused *again*.<sup>265</sup>

6. *Is it un-loving*. In the New Testament love is the primary fruit of the presence of God's Spirit. Thus a sign of Evil in life could be unloving and destructive desires, feelings, and behaviors. Here one must distinguish between legitimate anger which comes from experience of abuse within personal history and destructive feelings which seem to have the "plus factor" mentioned above.

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<sup>265</sup>. Those who have been deeply hurt or disempowered may often see Evil as an ally which empowers them. This is the rationale often for belonging to a Satanic cult. However, Evil does not empower by love, self-sacrifice, and sharing life with us (as presented in the Gospel about God in Christ and the Spirit), but by using persons for its own purposes. Evil uses and abuses, performing a spiritual rape upon those who open themselves to it.

## Discernment Difficult - God Will Go With Us Wherever

In our discernment and decision making it is important to know that *our loving God will go with us in different directions than God might have wanted if what we choose is not harmful and destructive*. It is difficult to be absolutely sure that one knows the will of God. Even Paul said, "I think I have the Spirit of God," implying that he was not absolutely sure (I Cor. 7:40); and after working out his understanding of the way God's plan of salvation would work out (on which he based his mission strategy), he comments: "How unsearchable are his judgements and how inscrutable his ways." (Rom. 11:33) That it is difficult to discern the will of God does not come from God's unwillingness to communicate, but from the ontological difference between humanity and God which makes it difficult for humans to see and hear what God wishes -- we are just not on the same level as God. Then too there is what one might call the "distraction factor" of life in this world. I believe we come into this world as children, much more open to God and human spirituality than we are as we grow older. As we grow older we lose faith in our imagination and become so absorbed in the tasks of growing up and managing life responsibilities that we may even forget that we have any spiritual dimension at all. Thus a major adult task is to become open to the spiritual dimensions of life, to know one has a soul, and to learn to listen for God's direction and messages.

## Discernment and Christian Vocation

If discernment is wanted regarding vocation, perhaps in some form of ministry, it is important to note that ministry and mission ultimately belong to the whole people of God. Baptism then is a type of ordination to ministry. We all have various gifts and fulfill various possibilities in ministry and mission -- depending upon gifts, context, and time available. Ministry is both within the church and within the world. Those who decide on full time, professional ministry, are deciding to do full time what they would do part time. To decide for the professional ministry is **never** a decision as to **whether** to do ministry or not, but rather a decision as to **how** to do ministry. Really all will need to decide on how to do ministry which belongs to all.

In considering the discernment of call to some form of ministry, give due consideration to the call that the church may bring to you. Because you are baptized and have committed yourself to God, the church has a right to assume that some form of ministry will be a part of your Christian life. It then has the right to talk with you about its needs and your possible role in ministry.

## Scripture The Spirit, and Discernment

We might wonder why we can't work out all our answers from the Bible, or especially from the teachings of the New Testament or Jesus. However, the Bible just is not designed to give us final answers on many issues and sometimes presents a variety of answers on the same issue. Writers of different New Testament books arrived at different understandings of the same issues. Even the Gospels present Jesus and his teachings in various ways.

To deal with discernment we must think about the role of God's *Spirit* (a term that the early church used to speak of God's continuing Presence) in arriving at answers. The role of the Spirit, affirmed in most of the New Testament traditions, has implications that are often neglected. Usually the Spirit is relegated to the role of inspirer and interpreter of tradition already established -- or the creative impulse of early Christianity which is thought **not** to be active in the same way since the days of the apostles or the early church's councils. In this way all authority is always placed within the tradition of the early church, especially the Bible. On the other hand, if taken seriously, the Spirit means that things are never settled and the church is continuously engaged in rethinking in the light of God's engagement with the present age (the Spirit). One must respect the tradition, but cannot idolize it in any form. *Only God is God and God keeps on being God by not abdicating to the tradition.*

The biblical tradition may be seen as follows: The divergent traditions of Judaism which bear witness to God and God's relationship to life are converged, clarified and evaluated in terms of a unique action of God in history in Christ. However, this self-disclosure of God is itself rendered ambiguous and multiform by the humanly and culturally-conditioned perceptions of those who witnessed it, bore witness, and

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transmitted this witness. *Though God in Christ is an unambiguous reality, its perception is not.* It was then left to the church, under the guidance of the ongoing activity of God (the Spirit), to do two things:

- 1) to clarify the misconceptions by distinguishing, in the light of ongoing history, where the God-in-Christ-event had not been adequately understood or had been actually misunderstood in the light of cultural and religious presuppositions;
- 2) to be open to the speaking of God to newly developing issues and circumstances not adequately anticipated or treated in the tradition.

In the light of both, the first century Christians and churches that produced the New Testament literature reflected a variety of views, while seeking to remain faithful to God's intention. They struggled with the diversity both within and between Christian communities.

While the variety of the Bible may not help us to arrive at clear answers, it does serve to bring us close to the God who in the Spirit would guide us. Thus various passages in the Bible may open up a "*window of opportunity*" for God to speak to us.

### Principles for Discernment of God

Regarding discernment of God's participation in life, both the Johannine and Pauline traditions in the New Testament affirm the following:

1. *The role of the Spirit must be recognized.* One cannot make the error of Pharisaic Judaism in tying God's activity and revelation to the written word, the Law, what was given in the past. God wishes to provide guidance and direction in the present. (I Cor. 14, John 16:12-15)
2. *One must stand within the available tradition of the Christ event, recognizing Jesus as Lord and listening to what he taught.* There seems to be some recognition that the tradition on Jesus himself was varied so that some "critical" decisions were probably necessary to know what Jesus wished, taught and did (e.g. the handling of the tradition about Jesus in the Gospels). The Old Testament seems to have been largely seen as prophesying the action of God in Christ and the witness of the early church and not to have been used as witness independent of or parallel to the Christ event. (for example I Peter 1:10ff, II Cor. 3:12ff. II Tim. 3:16-17 is an exception) In some cases Christ, or the Spirit of Christ, was seen as operative in the Old Testament history (similar to the way Jews viewed personified "Wisdom"). To stand within the Christ event was then not only to relate to Christ and his life, but also to stand within the streams of Old Testament history and their fulfillment. See the information below on the *Ignatian Exercises* concerning meditating on the life of Christ.
3. *A quality of life (particularly "love") should be manifested* if one claims to be acted upon by God's Spirit and to experience God's guidance. (I Cor. 13, I John 4:7ff)
4. *Community discernment of perceptions of God's will and truth were important.* (I Cor. 14:26ff) One needs the help of others to understand.
5. Especially in the authentic Pauline materials there is *a recognition of the limited nature of all human perception* (I Cor. 13:8-13) *and the danger of the ego-centered use of knowledge* (I Cor. 8:1-3).

To this one should add:

6. *Prayer.* Prayer is not merely praying for solutions or answers. It is a way of carrying on a dialogical relationship with God in which we share with God our life and concerns, seek direction, and desire to be open to God's presence and leading. It is a living with God sufficient to make us sensitive to God's purposes. In Jesus' ministry, particularly in the Gospel of Luke, there is a rhythm of retreat for extended prayer and then engagement in ministry and action which can present a paradigm for us.

There are additional approaches that one might consider in the desire to discern the will of God:



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7. *Visualize in a meditation the choices* you must make in following what seems to be God's will. This would mean visualizing what you would be doing, what would happen, what would be the nature of your life, if you made a certain choice. You should enter the scene of your visualization as much as possible to sense the situation and feel the feelings involved with each choice. It is good to visualize opposite options and to sense the contrasts involved in each.

8. *Imagine that someone comes to you asking what you are asking.* Imagine the advice that you would give to that person.

9. *Explore the patterns of life* which seem to be guiding you *and that which seems to be indications of God's directions to you.* It is very difficult to discern God's will from a single experience. However, when patterns of experience appear over a time, it is more likely that that is the direction you should follow. Be sure to include patterns of advice from your various religious communities, pastor, or spiritual director.

10. *Consider what are your personal needs* and how much the decision you feel led to make will satisfy your personal needs. If you seem to be lead to make a choice by your personal needs, this raises a question which you must examine: Am I doing this because God wants me to or because I have need to? However, if your needs are influential this does not mean that God may not be calling you, but you must ask the question. God may also call us through our needs and through our healing wounds we may be able to help others.

11. To process information from your life and God's guidance takes time. Things are not usually immediately clear. Thus you will need *time and patience.* As you go through the process you will begin to get a sense of what works best for you and the amount of time you must allow for the process. This will be helpful for the next time that you do this.

12. When it is important to make a decision and there is no clarity about what decision should be made, it may be possible to gain help from *the lot.* There are various forms of this. One form is to take three slips of paper, one with NO on it, one with YES, and one blank. You may wish to place Bible verses on the NO and YES slips which indicate a positive and a negative response. It is important to have one blank, which would indicate that there is no answer at this time. Pray about what you wish to discern and then, mixing the papers, select one. This should not take the place of the above methods nor should one understand the answer given to infallibly present the will of God for you. It merely provides an additional source of information on the basis of which you must ultimately decide.

## Some helpful Scripture

One valuable use of Scripture is to select several passages for meditation and exploration which will hopefully allow the texts to become the occasion for spiritual movement in one's life. For example, if persons were seeking to allow their own calling to be deepened and desired to gain some direction from God, much as is done in the Ignatian exercises, they might be asked to meditate on and pray through Matthew 19:16-23, Matthew 13:4-17, and Matthew 14:22-33. I would share with you my reactions to these three passages.<sup>266</sup>

In Matthew 19 a person asks about the good deed necessary to have eternal life. Jesus is called "good teacher," but he directs the questions away from mere moral teaching, the good deed necessary, to the One before whom all action takes place by saying that only God is good. Eternal life is in relation to God, not dependent upon certain select actions. Jesus then challenges this person generally to keep the commandments, and the question comes back, "Which?" Jesus answers with most of the ten commandments which are usually considered the "second tablet," dealing with responsibility to others, adding also a reference to loving the neighbor. The first tablet, according to tradition, contained the commandments relating to one's responsibility to God, the second being seen as based on the first. This is perhaps why Jesus immediately directed attention to God, not to himself or certain actions. The person then, indicating that all these commandments have been followed, asks, "What do I still lack?" Jesus answers, "If you would be perfect (in the sense of brought to the goal which God intends for you), go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." The

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<sup>266</sup>. My attention was called to the use of these three passages in a retreat done by John Westerhoff III.

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surrender of wealth is secondary to the primary focus of "come, follow." Jesus does not say where. It is a venture in faith. The person sorrowfully departs, it is said "because he had great possessions." But the person has two problems. One is that life with God is sought in certain actions rather than life with God being *life with God*, thus relationship is really avoided. The second is that the person is possessed by possessions and is not free for the radical decision to follow, especially where the implications of following are not clear and only to be found in the venture. But God does not give up. In the following verses Jesus comments that although "it is difficult for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God .... with God all things are possible." I must then consider whether I would be willing to hear Jesus' call, to explore where my evasions and resistances lie, and to consider whether I would follow him into ventures not yet defined.

In Matt. 13:4-17, though the parable is about "listening," it is also about the generosity of the sower, and a lack of concern for productivity and receptivity. The sower is who he is and does what he does without concern for results. It is almost as if he must sow, whatever the consequences. The results are not uniform or immediate, and in the soils there are many kinds of resistance. Even the good soil is not equally productive. But productivity or chance of success is not the issue. The seed must be sown and the sower must sow.

The verses which follow seem to shift the focus towards the receptivity of the soils, their ability to hear and understand. This is particularly true when one gets to the interpretation of the parable in verses 18 following. However, the original parable focuses on the sower. Why does the sower sow so generously and foolishly? Action is not to depend upon productivity and receptivity. One's life must be acted out as an inner necessity and divine call. If the acting out of life depends on what may happen, there is no freedom to be, to maintain one's own integrity. Jesus acted with integrity.

But how does one know when one's freedom and integrity become distorted and abusive of others? The answer seems to lie in the seed. The sower did not sow himself, but the seed. His freedom was to be himself as a sower. In the interpretation of the parable the seed is "the word of the kingdom," that is to say, the "message of God's reign and presence." Sowing the seed was then a pointing beyond self to God in the integrity of one's own being.

If I were to be the farmer, I would have to know my seed and myself as sower and then sow it in freedom, without consideration of response. In the sowing, my life would become open. I would become visible to others. This visibility is both a freedom and a vulnerability.

The broadcasting of the seed, without distinction, is also an act of love and graciousness. The possibilities of God's kingdom must fall, as the rain, upon the just and unjust. The complex conditions of the soils were not chosen by the soils, though the later interpretation makes them responsible. I would feel that God had some expectations of all the soils. It was only clear that there would be no response after there was no response.

To be able to toss one's seed is not only an act of freedom and integrity, but a celebration. The seed is celebrated as one lifts it up and trusts its destiny to God. There is a joyous trust in God and life. The earth into which the seed falls is ultimately into God, who is creator of the world. Thus beyond the soil into which it falls, it always falls into the fertile ground of God.

Regarding Matthew 14:22-33, after the feeding Jesus stays with the crowd, forcing his disciples to go on ahead. How did they think he would join them? He dismisses the crowd and, alone, he prays. The passage does not indicate this as an act of exhaustion, but seeking the re-creativity and transcendence of solitude.

By evening the boat was far from land, beaten by waves, the wind against them. Note the drama of vs. 25, "And in the fourth watch he came, walking on the sea." His disciples were terrified. He says, "Take heart, it is I; have no fear." In their terror over the sea and the apparition he calls upon them to have no fear. Why? "It is I." His presence is the difference.

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Peter impulsively says, "Lord, if it is you, bid me come to you on the water." Peter's faith seems simple. "Let me do what you do." Jesus says, "Come," an invitation he extends in many contexts. Peter plunges into the storm and in fear begins to sink. He cries out, "Lord, save me," and Jesus "immediately" reaches out his hand and catches him: "O man of little faith, why did you doubt?"

When Jesus entered the boat the wind ceased, but then the test of faith was over. The test came in the storm, not in the quiet. The act of faith was Peter's request for an invitation to come into the storm. Jesus says, "Come." Peter ventures and then when he encounters the storm he cries out to be saved, and Jesus takes him by the hand. Jesus speaks of his little faith and doubt, but is that not the way faith is: little faith and doubt, dauntless before the storm but quivering within it. And then one must ask for this hand of Jesus and accept that one's faith is little. *But it is faith.* It is what caused Peter to enter the storm. It was the act which enabled Jesus to reach out.

The confession, "Truly you are the son of God," sounds grandiose, but arises naturally in the context of the stilling of the storm. But is this its primary meaning? Is not Jesus son of God because he reaches out his hand to those of little faith who are sinking in their storms, son of God because in this action he does as God does?

Could I be different if I were Peter? Likely not. I would perhaps be much too cautious to ever venture into the storm. I might never have stepped from the boat. Perhaps by the time I had thought it over the storm would have been over. But if there is no venture, how can it be discovered that there is help in a storm, even if one can't walk on the water. Perhaps I must pray for some of the impulsiveness of Peter. Perhaps I must be one of those of "little faith." If I wait for great faith I may never do anything.

Thus these three stories take one through the experience of Jesus' call and raise questions about what stands in the way, present the need to act in integrity and freedom without consideration of results, and call for venture with "little faith." How well these three stories raise the issues of the calling and life directions which we seek to discern.

### Ignatius of Loyola and the *Spiritual Exercises*

As Christians we confess "Jesus as Lord." This confession, and our belief in his resurrection, causes us to recognize him as our contemporary Lord, Guide, Shepherd, Leader, Head of the church. Thus we not only look to the Spirit (Presence) of God, but to the continuing activity of God's Son who does the same things he did in his historical ministry (see Gal. 4:6). As indicated above, to know what Jesus did and said historically we need to make some judgements and decisions about what is said about Jesus in the Gospels (and even in the Epistles). Though we can't always be sure of everything Jesus taught and though what he taught was related directly to the needs of his time rather than ours, we get to know him as a person through studying the Gospels. The person of Jesus shines through. Gaining a sense of the living person of Jesus we also gain a familiarity with him so that we can try to hear what he would say to us today -- even on issues that may not have final answers or might not even be discussed in Scripture. To allow Jesus to lead us and help us with our lives and decisions, to help us discern, it is important to let him become a part of our lives. The Ignatian *Exercises* have become a classical way to do this, and so I summarize them for you.

The *Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius* represent a concern in the history of Christianity and spirituality to work with the Gospel narratives so that they become the occasion for meeting Jesus in whom the grace and love of God may be encountered and God's call heard. In this way the Gospel materials and the Christ described in the Gospels may engage the Christian in a process of formation. What I wish to suggest is that *this devotional approach to the Gospels should be seen as a legitimate method, alongside the others, for the interpretation of the Gospels.* Perhaps it is our most important method if we intend to be more than historians in our approach to the Gospels.

Ignatius was born in 1491 to a wealthy and noble family in Spain. His life was focused on the secular values of his time: the glories of knighthood and the mysteries of women. In a battle against the French he suffered a serious leg injury and spent months at Loyola recuperating. He asked for reading, and the only two volumes in the castle were the *Life of Christ (Vita Jesu Christi e quatuor Evangeliiis et scriptoribus*

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*orthodoxis concinnata*) by Ludolph the Carthusian and the *Book of the Lives of the Saints (Flos Sanctorum)*. He spent five to six months reading these books, and as he shares in his Autobiography, he underwent a series of inner experiences where the ideas of chivalry would fill his mind for a while and then the story of Christ and the saints would likewise. As he found that these experiences produced various feeling states, he began to formulate his principles of discernment from his experience. Distinctive was that fact that his religious experiences would leave him feeling good *after* the experience, but his fantasies about knighthood and women satisfied him only during the fantasy, but left him feeling empty afterwards. A very special experience was a vision of Mary and the child Jesus, which left him with a distaste for the world.

Through Ludolph's *Life of Christ* "the message proposed to the mind of Ignatius at Loyola was, in large measure, that of God's revelation, expressed through the multiplicity of the Gospel scenes, and made explicit in its broad lines by the theology of Ludolph..."<sup>267</sup> His conversion had occurred and like a good knight he set out to effect his salvation and imitate the saints. He was no longer attached to the world, but he still had to learn to surrender himself to the working of God on whom his salvation and further education was dependent.

Ludolph's *Life* belonged to a specific form of devotional literature current in the late Middle Ages, often entitled *Mysteria Vitae Christi (Mysteries of the Life of Christ)*. They divided the scenes in the Gospels into sections for the purpose of teaching the art of meditation. Thomas Aquinas included in the Christological part of his *Summa Theologica* a series of articles on the principal events of the life of Christ, neglected in subsequent Christological treatises.<sup>268</sup>

In 1522 at Montserrat, Ignatius took a side road leading to Manresa where he intended to stay for a few days, but he remained there more than ten months. At first his life there was filled with penances and prayers and satisfaction, but a period of great instability and inner turmoil developed, but gradually he discovered God's mercy and began to meditate again on the life of Christ. Writing in his autobiography in the third person he says of this period:

God treated him at this time just as a school master treats a child whom he is teaching. Whether this was on account of his coarseness or his dense intellect or because he had no one to teach him, or because of the strong desire God himself had given him to serve Him, he clearly believed and has always believed that God treated him in this way. Indeed, if he were to doubt this, he thought he would offend His Divine Majesty.<sup>269</sup>

It is here that he had a number of illuminations, such as a vision of the Trinity in the form of three musical keys, of creation as "something white from which some rays were coming," how Christ was present in Eucharist, of the humanity of Christ, of Mary. In these experiences the images seem to have been vague, but the experience profoundly affected his understanding..<sup>270</sup>

When one examines the *Spiritual Exercises* it becomes clear that, as Ignatius himself indicates, they reflect the process of his own experience, the process by which God formed and educated him. Behind their words "there exists in truth a whole world view, the world enclosed in Ignatius' heart, the world full

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<sup>267</sup> Gilles Cuwwon, S.J., *Biblical Theology and the Spiritual Exercises*, translated by Mary Angela Roduit, R.C., and George E. Ganss, S.J., St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1988, p. 22.

<sup>268</sup> . David Stanley, S.J., "Contemporary Gospel-Criticism and 'The mysteries of the Life of our Lord' in the *Spiritual Exercises*", in George R. Schner, ed., *Ignatian Spirituality in a Secular Age*, Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfred Laurier U. Press, 1984, p. 28.

<sup>269</sup> . Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>270</sup> . Ibid., pp. 27ff.

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of brightness and warmth which he constructs with the help of some illuminations he received during his mystical encounter with God.”<sup>271</sup>

Their focus is on the choosing of a vocation to which the heavenly King, Christ calls (elects) one, though the Exercises are often now not used for that purpose. The first Direction or Annotation is:

1. This expression “Spiritual Exercises” embraces every method of examination of conscience, of meditation, of contemplation, of vocal and mental prayer, and of other spiritual activity that will be mentioned later. For just as strolling, walking, and running are bodily exercises, so spiritual exercises are methods of preparing and disposing the soul to free itself of all inordinate attachments, and after accomplishing this, of seeking and discovering the Divine Will regarding the disposition of one’s life, thus insuring the salvation of his soul.<sup>272</sup>

At the beginning of the first week the “Principle and Foundation” is stated:

Man is created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord, and by this means to save his soul. All other things on the face of the earth are created for man to help him fulfill the end for which he is created. From this it follows that man is to use these things to the extent that they will help him to attain his end. Likewise, he must rid himself of them in so far as they prevent him from attaining it.<sup>273</sup>

The *Exercises* are divided into four sections called “Weeks,” though some Weeks provide for more than seven days. The complete Exercises take traditionally about 30 days. Various modifications of this have developed and are encouraged within the Directions or Annotations themselves. In the outline presented below please note the intentional design of the Exercises and their components, and the spiritual development they are intended to produce.

**First week** -- consideration of and meditation on sin

*This week provides one with awareness of one’s own sin and a process for dealing with this with awareness of the consequences of sin and the great mercy of God. These exercises are intended to produce perceptible changes in the person.*

There should be examination of conscience three times a day

Ex. 1 at midnight - Sin of Angels (Gen. 6), sin of Adam and Eve, sin of one who went to hell because of mortal sin

[Each Exercise has somewhat the following form:

-- Preparatory Prayer

-- Several Preludes -- to imaginatively set the scene for the meditation

-- Several Points -- the foci of the meditation

-- A colloquy -- where the matters are imaginatively discussed with Christ, God, and at times with Mary. This is closed with the Lord’s Prayer.]

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<sup>271</sup> . Hugo Rahner, *The Spirituality of St. Ignatius*, p. xi, quoted in Giles Cusson, S.J., *Biblical Theology and the Spiritual Exercises*, translated by Mary Angela Roduit R.C. and George E. Ganss, S.J., St. Louis, The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1988, p. 52.

<sup>272</sup> . *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, translated by Anthony Mottola, with an Introduction by Robert W. Gleason, S.J. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Image Books, 1964, p. 37.

<sup>273</sup> . *Ibid.*, p. 47. Please note that since the word “man” appears in my text of the Exercises and I did not have access to a translation using inclusive language, I have retained the wording of the text and would hope that the reader would understand “man”: inclusively.

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[In the First Exercise of the First Week instruction is given on the use of the imagination in the preludes:

It should be noted at this point that when the meditation or contemplation is on a visible object, for example, contemplating Christ our Lord during His life on earth, the image will consist of seeing with the mind's eye the physical place where the object that we wish to contemplate is present. By the physical place I mean, for instance, a temple, or mountain where Jesus or the Blessed Virgin is, depending on the subject of the contemplation. In meditations on subject matter that is not visible, as here in meditation on sins, the mental image will consist of imagining, and considering my soul imprisoned in its corruptible body, and my entire being in this vale of tears as an exile among brute beasts. By entire being I mean both body and soul.] <sup>274</sup>

Ex. 2 immediately on rising - Review of my sins, self-abasement, comparison of my sinfulness with God's goodness, and amazement at how creation and God has served my needs in spite of this

Ex. 3 before or after Mass, but before dinner- Repetition of 1 and 2 with colloquies with our Lady, with the Son of God, with our Eternal Father.

Ex. 4 at Vespers - a "resume" of 3, including colloquies.

Ex. 5 - Meditation on Hell, with thanks for God's mercy

[The times for prayer in monasticism, the Hours or Offices, were as follows. Many of the names come from the names for the hours of the day, the reckoning of which began with the first hour at 6:00 AM. Ignatius makes use of this structure.

6 am - Prime  
9 am - Tierce  
Morning Prayer - Lauds  
12 Noon - Sext  
3 pm - Nones  
5 pm - Vespers  
12 pm - Compline Matins]

Including :

Additional Directions on how to do the Exercises

Four Observations on Penance [interior which is our sorrow for sins and exterior which is the punishment we inflict on ourselves for sins, performed to produce three effects: a) to satisfy for past sins, b) to overcome ourselves, c) to seek some grace, to grieve for pain caused Christ, or to seek solution for some doubt.]

**Second week** -- The life of our Lord Jesus Christ, up to and including Palm Sunday

*Presented with the call of the Heavenly King, his earthly life is contemplated. Each night and morning one deals with a passage from the life of Christ, reinforced in three succeeding periods of contemplation. In the Contemplation on the Two Standards, one is confronted with a choice for Christ or Lucifer.*

Exercise: Imagine the call of an earthly king and then the call of our Heavenly King. Twice a day, when rising and an hour before dinner or supper.

Day 1 - The Incarnation and Nativity

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<sup>274</sup>. Ibid., p. 54.

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[This is in the form of five one hour Contemplations at assigned times. This establishes a pattern for the other days. The first two Contemplations are on stories from the life of Jesus, the first to be at Midnight and the second when rising in the morning. The next two are repetitions of the first two and therefore seek to reinforce them and continue their effect. These have the general pattern of recalling to mind the history of the subject of the Contemplation, making a mental representation of the place where the story takes place, and then asking for what is desired out of this Contemplation. The fifth focuses especially on applying the five senses to the first two, thus more fully developing one's experience of them. The instructions for the fifth are:

The first point is to see the persons in my imagination, contemplating and meditating in detail the circumstances surrounding them, and I will then draw some spiritual profit from this scene.

The second point is to hear what they are saying, or what they might say, and I will reflect within myself to draw some fruit from what I have heard.

The third point is to smell and taste in my imagination the infinite fragrance and sweetness of the Divinity, and of the soul, and of its virtues, and of all else, according to the character of the person I am now contemplating. And I will reflect within myself to draw spiritual profit therefrom.

The fourth point is to use in imagination the sense of touch, for example, by embracing and kissing the place where the persons walk or sit, always endeavoring to draw some spiritual fruit from this.]

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Day 2 - Presentation in Temple and Flight into Egypt

Day 3 - How the Child Jesus was obedient to his parents

Day 4 - Two Standards: Christ and Lucifer

Including:

Meditation on three classes of men with differing attitudes towards attachments.

Day 5 - Departure of Christ from Nazareth to Jordon and Baptism

Day 6 - How Christ went from the River Jordon to the desert and the events that took place at this time. Temptation

Day 7 - How St. Andrew and others followed Christ

Day 8 - Eight Beatitudes of the Sermon on Mt.

Day 9 - Christ appears to disciples on waves of sea

Day 10 - Our Lord preached in the Temple

Day 11 - The Resurrection of Lazarus

Day 12 - Palm Sunday

[Notable among the passages that Ignatius omits are much of Jesus' teaching: his parables, instructions on prayer, his novel ethical teaching; the question about the greatest commandment; the new commandment in the Last Supper. There is no mention of important passages which imply Jesus self-understanding including Peter's Confession. He was more concerned with the humanity of Jesus. He has little about Jesus' fellowship with sinners and the marginalized. For Ignatius Jesus seems to teach by his actions and he is constantly on the move from one location to another, modeling a type of pilgrim ministry that Ignatius chose rather than choosing a cloistered order.]

Including:

The three modes of humility

Introduction to making a choice of a way of life

Whether choices, immutable or mutable, are valid.

Three occasions when a wise and good choice can be made.

Directions for amending and reforming one's life and state.

**Third week** -- the Passion of Christ our Lord

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(The daily pattern for week two is followed. There are two Contemplations on stories of Jesus, followed by two repetitions of the two Contemplations and then the fifth exercise is the application of the senses.)

- Day 1 - How Christ went from Bethany to Jerusalem, including the Last Supper; Mysteries from the Last Supper to the Garden
- Day 2 - Events from Garden to house of Annas; Events from house of Annas to house of Caiphas
- Day 3 - House of Caiphas to that of Pilate; Events related to Herod
- Day 4 - Herod to Pilate; remaining half of what took place in house of Pilate
- Day 5 - House of Pilate to nailing to cross; Raising of the cross to His death
- Day 6 - Taking down from the cross to burial; Burial to where our Lady was after burial.
- Day 7 - Contemplation of entire Passion

Including:

Rules to be Observed in the Future in the Matter of Food

- distinguish between what is beneficial and what is harmful in abstinence, take care not to become sick, let the understanding be occupied with the Lord and less with the sustenance of the body.

### Fourth week -- the Resurrection and Ascension

Strangely, a First Contemplation is discussed, dealing with how Christ died, descended into hell, and then appeared to his mother. No further Contemplations are given, though the “Mysteries of the Life of Our Lord” listed in this week provide stories of the Resurrection which begin with the Second Apparition and end with the Thirteenth and then the Ascension. The appearance to Mary (which is not biblical) must constitute the First. There also is no explanation of how to fit the “Contemplation to Attain Divine Love” and the “Three Methods of Prayer” into the Fourth Week.

Including:

Contemplation to Attain Divine Love.

Prayer:

Take, O Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will, all that I have and possess. Thou hast given all to me, to Thee O Lord, I return it. All is Thine; dispose of it according to Thy will. Give me Thy love and Thy grace, for this is enough for me.

Three Methods of Prayer

1. On Ten Commandments, seven capital sins, three powers of the soul and five senses of the body. Concern with progress of soul rather than method.
2. Contemplating the meaning of each word of a prayer
3. Rhythmical recitation - Full attention to a single word of prayer between each breath

The Mysteries of the Life of Our Lord - meditations on selected biblical passages from the life of Christ. These passages seem to somewhat fit the recommendations for the Contemplations of weeks Two to Four.

**Rules** (Included at the end of the Exercises):

Rules for the Discernment of Spirits for first and second week for “understanding to some degree the different movements that are produced in the soul...”, interpreting consolations and desolations, understanding how God and the “enemy” work..

Rules for the Distribution of Alms

Notes Concerning Scruples



### Discernment p. 139

Rules for Thinking with the Church (so that one's experience and direction is not merely individualistic)

Ignatius states that the exercises are "methods of preparing and disposing the soul to free itself of all inordinate attachments, and after accomplishing this, of seeking and discovering the Divine Will regarding the disposition of one's life, thus insuring the salvation of his soul." The accomplishing of this is to be the work of God and Christ and not the leader. In words which are appropriate to all spiritual directors he says: ". . . in these Spiritual Exercises it is much better and more fitting in seeking the Divine Will, that our Lord and Saviour should communicate Himself to the devout soul, inflaming it with His love and praise, and disposing it to the way in which it can best serve Him in the future. Thus, the one who gives the Exercises should not lean either to one side or the other, but standing in the middle like the balance of a scale, he should allow the Creator to work directly with the creature, and the creature with its Creator and God."<sup>276</sup>

The helpfulness of Ignatius' *Exercises* to many over the centuries clearly indicates the importance of becoming acquainted with the stories about Jesus and allowing the living Jesus to appear to us from them so that he can be our guide in the many complex issues of life. Even if God had chosen to cause Scripture to be produced to give us explicit guidance on everything, God could not have included the answers to 20th century questions in the Bible written long ago. How much better to know that both God and Jesus will help us to understand what is right and appropriate in the complexity of our lives, working with us as persons rather than a bunch of rules! How much better to know that God always goes with us and loves us when decisions are not clear and some decisions involve both bad and good. We cannot be understood, loved, and supported by a set of rules.

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<sup>276</sup>. *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, transl. by Anthony Mottola, NY: Image Books, Doubleday, 1964, pp. 37, 40-41. Books are available to help those using the exercises, such as Marian Cowan, John Carroll Futrell, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola: A Handbook for Directors*, NY: Le Jacq Pub., 1982.