

# Sessions on the Spirituality of the Gospel of John

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Our three sessions will be selected out of the 5 below. This material was originally designed for the Lay Academy at Moravian Theological Seminary.

## ***THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE GOSPEL OF JOHN***

- Dec. 4 **Session I** Learning Jesus — The pattern in the Gospel of John: Come See and Stay  
Dec. 11 **Session II** Stages of Faith, Mary Magdalene as A Paradigm, Devotional Reading of Scripture  
Dec. 18 **Session III** Lazarus, Finding the Meaning of the Story

The rest of this material is for your reading and all of it is for your reflection.

The purpose of this course is to introduce participants to the understanding of the spiritual life expressed in the Gospel of John. Each Gospel has its own unique approach to Christian faith and life. The approach of John is that life consists of a personal relationship with the living Christ who brings to us all that God has to offer and shepherds us through life. We need to come, see and stay with him --- and then with him move on into life. The original five sessions were:

- I The Pattern in the Gospel of John: Come, See and Stay John 1
- II Stages of Faith; Mary Magdalene as a Paradigm John 20-21
- III Nicodemus: The Mid-Life Spiritual Crisis John 3:1-15
- IV Devotional Approach to Scripture; Spiritual Experience; Healing John 9
- V Lazarus: Finding the Meaning of the Story John 11

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## **Session I Learning Jesus – The Pattern in the Gospel of John: Come, See and Stay**

What's Spiritual according to John 1:1-18 (the Prologue)  
 The Uniqueness of You and Me – personality types and preferences  
 The "Come, See and Stay" style introduced in 1:35-1:51  
 The difference between learning a person and learning about a person:

Belief in the resurrection had important implications for our knowledge of Jesus. We deal not with a dead person of the past but with a person whose life continues, however mysteriously, in the present. This changes everything. If Jesus is alive among us, what we learn about Jesus must include what we can continue to learn from him. It is better to speak of "learning Jesus," rather than of "knowing Jesus," because we are concerned with a process rather than a product. Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Real Jesus*, HarperSanFrancisco (quoted in Christian Century, Dec. 2, 1998)

### **The Practical Impact of Preference**

*The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator could be utilized as a testing instrument to test your functional preferences.*

Preference affects how one learns,<sup>1</sup> communicates, perceives the world, thinks and decides, handles conflicts, the persons to which one is attracted, how one works with others, and the vocations for which one is best suited.

In terms of **learning**, how easily learning would take place would depend upon the match of the preferences of the person with what one wishes to learn. Because preferences and what one needs to learn cannot always be matched because of circumstances and the needs of life, one must find ways to deal with learning processes that are not natural to one. This must first start with full acceptance of one the way one is, for to judge oneself inadequate (because what one needs to learn does not come easily or naturally) is the primary barrier to learning. To attempt to do what does not come naturally is difficult enough, much less to attempt to begin it with a sense of failure. To know how preference affects learning enables one to bring one's gifts to the task of adaptation to learning which is not natural to one's preferences and to choose areas of learning that are suitable.

The experience of being confronted with a learning process that is not natural to one's experience and preferences is most often experienced in higher education. If one deals with liberal arts or graduate study, outside of applied sciences, one is confronted with a theoretical approach to knowledge. One must learn theory and information, the application and experience of which is only a later issue. Some persons, however, learn through experience and their understanding is developed out of experience. Thus they experience difficulty in learning "deductively." Introversion and INTuition are most supportive of

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<sup>1</sup>. Gordon Lawrence, *People Types and Tiger Stripes: A Practical Guide to Learning Styles*, 2nd Ed., Gainesville, Fla.: Center for Applications of Psychological Type, 1982.

deductive learning and provide one with an advantage. A person with a J preference also has some advantage in being able to plan and structure both materials and time. The Extrovert is somewhat at a disadvantage because of all of the distractions available to the Extrovert in the external world -- and the Extrovert (especially if having a Feeling preference) would rather be with people than books.

It is interesting to explore how preferences affect **the way persons work together**. *Differences in preference both provide added resources to any project and opportunity for conflict. It is important to learn how to take advantage of differences and to live with them.*

Joe is an Extrovert. His way of working things through is to talk them out. It does not make so much difference whether anyone listens or responds. He needs to talk to think. Jim is an Introvert and he does all of his thinking within his head, sharing only the results after he has finished his process. Joe's constant verbal patter is distracting to him, especially since Joe does not seem to really want any responses but merely to have someone there so he can extrovert his thinking. Joe sometimes wonders what Jim is doing in his long periods of silence and why he seems to share so little of his thinking.

Joe's process of perception is Sensing. This means that he is always exploring his environment and taking in information. He can provide a lot of information about what he observes. There is little that he misses. Jim is an INtuitive. He observes his world. But after receiving some information what he knows inside his head starts up and he already believes he knows what is there or what is needed without detailed observation. Of course, because he comes to conclusions so quickly he may miss important information. Joe would be content to go on observing and gathering information for some time while Jim quickly comes to a conclusion and would like to make any decisions needed and get on with it. Jim also has the ability to see where things are going, their pattern, direction and meaning. Jim focuses on the future while Joe focuses on the present. The two have a lot to give to each other if they can listen to and respect each other. Otherwise then may become impatient with each other.

Jill enters the process with Joe and Jim. Jill thinks and arrives at decisions by Feeling, being sensitive to persons. "How will this affect the persons I work with," is her first consideration. Jim "thinks" and decides things by Thinking, on the basis of what is right, responsible, and true. He is less moved by how his decisions will affect others. Jim and Jill find themselves drawing different conclusions and giving different advice. Jim could remind Jill of important principles and Jill could remind Jim of ways to be sensitive to the personal impact of their decisions and projects --- or Jim could tell Jill, "You're soft. You can't make the hard decisions." and Jill could say to Jim, "You're heartless."

Jill's J/P preference is P, which means that she prefers a more spontaneous, less structured life. She can delay decisions for some time and doesn't need to have everything carefully worked out and planned. Jim, on the other hand, has preference for J. This means that he needs order and structure to his life, he needs to know where things are going and to plan to meet future emergencies and problems. Jill at times drives him to distraction because she is in no hurry to work things out and get them done. Jill's openness and unpressured nature could prevent hasty decisions and Jim's careful planning and structured mind could help to get things done -- if they understand and respect each other.

In working together in an office, on a board, in a church, or wherever, responsibilities could be assigned according to personality type so that persons would be asked to assume responsibilities to which they were naturally suited. However, it should be remembered that persons develop and possess skills in areas which are not their preference. To work in harmony with one's preferences makes work easier, more pleasant. Yet skills will ultimately get the job done.

In interpersonal interactions and decision making which involve a number of persons, each could be allowed to make their contribution. The process would have to be managed by one who was not only aware of the preferences of others, but who could direct the process towards decision making without allowing the differences to paralyze the process. A very helpful approach to problem solving is to allow everyone to express enough of their perspective to be sure it is heard. To make decisions without the hearing of differences quickly leads to conflict, or at least resentment. To hear others takes time, but it is time that must be taken if the process is to be democratic. In doing this, care has to be taken that no one's contribution is dismissed by ridicule. A good leader of the process would be able to "tease out" the particular contributions that each person can make and give necessary boundaries to the process. After a group has been together some time perspectives become known and the need for individual expression may become less -- if one feels respected and heard.

### **The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and Spirituality**

Preference is also significant in one's religious life: e.g., the worship and sermons that appeal, one's desire to be involved in activities or reflection and discussion, one's response to Christian community, one's approach to the Bible, and one's preferred spiritual discipline. It even affects one's overall approach to religion and what one looks for in it.

Perhaps it would be helpful to briefly indicate the spirituality preferences which belong to the different attitudes and functions:

**E**xtroversion = preference for spiritual interests in the external world of action, persons (if an F), things, and nature;

**I**ntroversion = preference for spiritual interests in the inner world of mind, imagination, privacy and solitude;

**I**Ntuition = preference for meaning, the pattern of things, intuited meaning of events and life, the inner voice of God;

**S**ensation = preference for the experienced world, meditative imaging, for the Extrovert the world of creation, action and people;

**T**hinking = preference for more abstract, conceptual treatment of religion and principled treatment of life;

**F**eeling = preference for people and groups, religion as relational, personal, and social;

**J**udgement = preference for a structured religious and moral life;

**P**erception = preference for a more spontaneous religious life.

Of course, type is not the only thing that affects religious preferences. There is the conditioning that comes from one's background and tradition and the particular personal issues with which one deals which call upon one's religious tradition in differing ways.

# WHAT MAKES US DIFFERENT: Personal Preferences in Attitudes and Functions

**YOU** are a unique person, composed of many factors, which include

**attitudes,**

the *attitude* which expresses your "preferred" world (inner, **I**nvert, or outer, **E**xvert)  
and your *attitude* towards the *outer* world (**J**udging or desiring structure and **P**erception or not desiring structure), and

**functions,**

the way you *perceive* your world (**S**ensing or **I**Ntuition) and the way you *think and make decisions* (**T**hinking or **F**eeling).

The descriptions of the preferences below portray *tendencies* observed for persons who have indicated these preferences.

**Attitude: Preferred World**

**Function: Perception**

Extrovert (Outer)

Introvert (Inner)

Sensing

INtuition

- open, outgoing
- thinks and decides by talking
- quick in acting
- likes people and action

- quiet, reserved, reflective
- thinks within, may share the results
- hesitates, thinks before acting
- likes privacy and time to be alone

- observes detail
- sees what's there
- practical, prefers facts
- focus on present

- senses within what things mean
- imaginative, prefers patterns, meaning, and possibilities
- focus on future

*Function: Rational, decision making process*

*Attitude: structured or unstructured approach to world*

Thinking

Feeling

Judgment

Perception

- principles, logic matter
- fair and impersonal
- objective
- often doesn't show emotion and uncomfortable with feelings

- people matter, harmony matters
- personal, tactful
- empathetic, subjective
- often aware of others' feelings and values

- lives by planning
- settled, orderly, likes closure
- thinks ahead
- dislikes interruptions and changes
- will tackle what needs to be done

- lives by moment, spontaneous
- open, unplanned, curious
- go with the flow, deciding difficult
- adapts to change
- may postpone the unpleasant

## YOU

*with your preferred attitudes and functions,  
but also with*

*your common human inheritance, your unique genetic history, your personal history and life experience,  
and your SOUL, your gift from God.*

## The Gospels

The Gospels were written by various persons, each with his own perspective and often representing the views of a particular Christian community. It is to the credit of early Christianity that in the Gospels four somewhat differing perspectives were preserved rather than just including one story. This kept the focus on the person of Jesus rather than a particular view of him and affirmed that variety of perspective was legitimate.

The earliest materials were transmitted orally and in memory, the memory of those who had seen and of those to whom the materials were transmitted. Luke in his Gospel (1:1-4) describes this as he discusses his purpose and research:

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things which have been accomplished among us, just as they were delivered to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the truth concerning the things of which you have been informed.

Luke indicates that he used the oral tradition delivered by those who had been there and seen, and that others had compiled a narrative before him. He writes in order to provide trustworthy information about the things of which Theophilus (“Friend of God” perhaps a person, but more likely a term for Gentile converts) had been informed. The word in Greek for “informed” gives us “catechism” in English and indicated oral instruction at that time.

Luke indicates that others wrote before he did. He may have used some of these as sources, though he argues that he made independent investigation. Modern scholarship concludes that Matthew (one of the latest Gospels) used Mark as a narrative source (about 90% of the stories in Mark are included in Matthew, though Matthew modifies and abbreviates them). The final author or editor of the Gospel of John in 21:24 mentions his dependence on a disciple “who has written these things.” The earliest Gospel was Mark’s (about 64 AD) and there may have been an early version of Luke written about 62. Matthew, John, and the present Luke are usually located somewhere from 80-90 AD. One way of dating a Gospel is to see whether it reflects knowledge of the catastrophic war of the Jews with the Romans (66-72) and the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD.

The basic story of Jesus contained in the Gospels began with the story of John the Baptist and his baptism of Jesus and ended with Jesus’ resurrection/ascension (much thinking in the early church put these two together so that when Jesus was raised he went directly to heaven and then returned to appear to his disciples). This compass of events is what the disciples had witnessed. It probably was a period of only about one and a half years long. Thus the information we have is rather good for such a short time. This means that we know very little about the thirty years of Jesus’ life before that. Any information about Jesus’ life before his public ministry would have had to have come from him or his family. The disciples were not there. This material about his earlier life was treated as a prologue to the Gospel story, but not a part of the main story. Matthew and Luke have prologues of narrative materials which are quite different. John has a prologue which describes Jesus as the Word/Wisdom of God who created the world, was God’s agent in history, and now became flesh in Jesus -- quite a different type of prologue. Mark does not have such a prologue. Mark begins with the statement “The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” The word “beginning” in Greek can mean a point in time, but philosophically it often meant “fundamental principle” or “fundamental material”. Thus Mark 1:1 can be understood as “The fundamental material of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” The Gospels of Matthew, Mark and

Luke are called “synoptic” from a Greek word that essentially means “look alike”. The Gospel of John, because of its unique nature, is usually understood as not related to the others and representing a separate stream of information about Jesus. John 21:24 indicates that the source of the Gospel was an earlier Gospel written by a disciple very close to Jesus.

A simple outline of the Gospels with emphasis on the geographical locations of Jesus’ ministry is:

- A Prologue, usually in the form of a story of Jesus' birth and infancy (not in Mark)
- Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist and the beginnings of his ministry in Judaea
- A ministry in Galilee (northern Palestine, the area from which Jesus came) which in Matthew, Mark and Luke represented a major portion of his ministry
- A exploratory ministry in Gentile areas (only mentioned in Mark and Matthew)
- A ministry in the south in Judaea and Jerusalem
- The last days in Jerusalem: Jesus arrest, trial, death and resurrection (often called the Passion Story). This may occupy as much as 1/3 of the Gospel materials, so it is clear how important this segment is.

[Besides the narrative portions of the Gospels, there are gatherings of Jesus' sayings at various points, sometimes arranged topically as in the Sermon on the Mount, Matt. 5-7, or the sermon about the end of time (Mk. 13, the Little Apocalypse). There is a large collection in Luke 9:51- 19:27 of material uniquely Lukan containing many sayings. Jesus was also regarded as a teacher and his teachings were remembered.]

*The Gospel materials are significant not only because the structure of the Gospel tradition follows a basic outline of Christ's brief ministry, but the material also seems to be organized to parallel the experience of Christ with the experience of the believer.* Certainly early Christians must have read the Gospels this way. The Gospel of Mark begins with the baptism of Jesus which contains many of the elements of the believer's baptism, then comes the testing (temptation) of the identity established in baptism. This is followed by the "day in the life of Jesus" in 1:14-39 which expresses many of the essential components of the Christian message and experience. Following that one encounters the controversies of chapters 2-3, similar to those experienced by early Christians. Then the problem of understanding the Gospel is dealt with in 4 in the context of an extended treatment of Jesus' parables. This is followed by the healings of chapter 5 and the description of the Christian mission in 6-8:21, of which the confession of Peter and the Transfiguration is the climax. And one could go on.

The Gospel of John provides rich resources. The Prologue alone speaks of the Word/Wisdom of God, with God before creation, agent of God in creation, and present throughout all history seeking to bring life and light and to enable persons to become God's children. This Word becomes incarnate in Jesus. What is disclosed in the action of the Word is "grace and truth", God's "gracious love and faithfulness."

Following the Prologue John the Baptist proclaims Jesus as the one on whom the Spirit descends and who will baptize with the Spirit. He directs two of his disciples to Jesus by proclaiming, "Behold, the Lamb of God.!" They follow Jesus and Jesus asks what they seek, inviting them to "come and see", an invitation repeated by Philip to Nathanael. The encounter with Jesus is central. Each pericope in John deals with an encounter and ends with a confession. One may then see the stories following chapter one as dealing with what happens in encounter with Jesus to a variety of persons: Nathaniel, the young visionary; the wedding where Jesus was present incognito; the cleansing of the Temple; Nicodemus and his questions of the older years; the Samaritan woman; the official and his son; and the man who didn't want to be healed in chapter 5. Again one could go on.

Yet the Gospel narratives do more than narrate the public ministry of Jesus and parallel the experience of the believer. They provide the material the remembrance of which forms and shapes the life of the church. The Gospel narrative treating Palm Sunday to the Resurrection of Jesus, covering a period only a week long, is usually about one third of the total material in each Gospel. To historians this meant that it was probably one of the earliest continuous narratives constructed by the early church from the Jesus tradition. The context in the life of the early church for the assembling and use of this narrative is probably given by Paul in I Cor. 11:23-26 where he treats the Lord's Supper. Here Jesus' command to do this in remembrance of him would necessitate the construction of the narrative which would facilitate that remembrance. This remembrance is not a delving into the past but the making present of the past reality of Christ's death so that the lives of persons and the church might be shaped by it, similar to the way the narrative of Passover was used in Judaism.

### Brief Outlines of the Four Gospels

**Matthew:** Jesus is the Jewish Messiah and descended from David and Abraham (1:1). Particularly he is like a new Moses giving a new Law from a new mountain (5-7, Sermon on Mount). The mission of the church is to make disciples and teach them to observe Jesus' commandments (28:18-20).

**Mark:** Mark presents the beginning of the Gospel ("beginning" is a word that in Greek means basic principles or content and not just beginning in time) (1:1). Jesus comes to be a servant, rejecting the use of power. He came not to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many. (10:43-45) Mark has no infancy narrative and no resurrection narratives, though he has an announcement of the resurrection to the women at the tomb.

**Luke:** As a conscious historian Luke writes that "Theophilus" (a "lover of God") may know the truth concerning information previously received about Jesus (1:1-4). Jesus sets forth his mission in the Nazareth synagogue where he quotes from Isaiah (4:16-19) indicating that he would make changes in the problems of the world. The Spirit of God was upon him to preach good news to the poor, proclaim release to captives, preach recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those oppressed, to proclaim that the time has come when God would change things ("the acceptable year of the Lord"). Much of this happens in the stories Luke narrates. Luke and Matthew have stories of Jesus' infancy, but they are quite different. Luke, as well as John, includes much material about the role of women in the ministry of Jesus.

**John:** John expresses his theme in 20:31: "these (things) 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." The theme of Jesus as a bringer of life often appears. The pattern of relationship with Jesus is to come, see and stay with him. The final editor of the Gospel in 21:24 says that the beloved disciple had written about the events which he includes and that this disciple was very close to Jesus (13:23) and therefore knew well what Jesus was about. Instead of an infancy narrative describing historical events he has a highly theological Prologue. Jesus is presented as the Son of Man who came down from heaven and he speaks openly about the heavenly things he knows, something he does not seem to do in the other Gospels.

## Outline 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

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 Jordan 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

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 CONFESSION: "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.

### **Devotional Reading of Scripture**

Why do we read Scripture? We read it because we understand that in some way it is God's Word, God's message to us. Christians have debated as to just how it is God's Word: whether it is God's Word because it contains God's message, whether it is God's Word because God speaks to us through it, or whether it is God's Word in the very words on its pages. *The important thing is not how it is but that it is God's Word.* It is also important to remember that when the early church in the second to fourth centuries selected the books to be included in our Bible it felt that *its selection would bring to Christians the faith of the apostles and would be what was needed for the faith and life of the church.* All through the centuries it has nourished this faith and life. And it has called Christians to pay attention to the earliest and original forms of faith. It especially calls us to pay attention to the God of the Word and the Jesus and Spirit of the Word. We pay attention to the Spirit of the Word because it is God's Spirit that seeks to advise us in the present, not just in the words of Scripture. We pay particular attention to Jesus who in his person and teachings brings us our understanding of God and makes possible our relationship with God. But Jesus, as is the Spirit, is also a contemporary, raised from the dead, a part of our contemporary experience. He also speaks to us through Scripture and beyond Scripture. God and Jesus are always in Scripture, but also always beyond Scripture as living participants in the present.

*We do not necessarily have to understand how Scripture is what it is and how it does what it does. We just need to keep coming to it and reading it and living with it and its message. It will do what God wants it to do if we only read and listen, with our hearts as well as our mind. And like the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, we will meet in Scripture the living God who comes to us in the present.*

### The Benedictine Method

That God uses Scripture to speak to us now, to nourish our lives now, to inspire us and give us insight now, makes it clear that however important the historical critical method is, it is not enough. Several methods have been developed in the Christian use of Scripture to encourage a devotional, intuitive, personal response to the text and also to the God of text. Here the question is not so much exactly what the author meant, but what the text means to the reader and what God would say to the reader through the text.

The particular approach outlined below has been associated with St. Benedict and Benedictine spirituality, though it really is earlier. It uses a "ladder" of four steps which provide it with a broad appeal. It may be used with the Bible or with other devotional literature. It provides a methodology for meditating on the words of Scripture rather than using imaging which is characteristic of some other devotional approaches such as that of St. Ignatius mentioned below. Focusing on words rather than images works better for some people and some of the Biblical material (for example the letters of Paul) do not lend themselves to the imagining of the text.

### Reading

Read the passage, paying special attention to words and phrases to which you intuitively respond. I would suggest first reading the passage through rapidly and then going back and reading very slowly, stopping with phrases or words which "draw" you.

### Meditation

Here welcome the words that have drawn you into life with Christ, life with God, and gaze upon them. Mentally say them over and over again until your mind becomes centered upon them or saturated with them.

### Prayer

This prayer is in the form of a spontaneous dialogue with God or Jesus about these words and what they might mean to you, and how they might be incorporated into your heart.

### Contemplation

Contemplation means directly turning one's attention to God, without the use of words and images, in silence: a loving silence before God. Relationship with God is the ultimate purpose of all devotional exercises, and this is the fulfillment of all done in the exercise.

If portions of the passage still remain after the words on which the Meditation was made, then one might go back and continue in the passage to the next words that attracted one, repeating the above process as time allows. It is also helpful to keep the results of this process in a diary or journal.

### A Meditative Method Similar to Ignatius

Ignatius, the founder of the Jesuits in the 16th century, in his *Spiritual Exercises* developed a devotional approach to the life of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels. This approach made extensive use of imagery, and if imagery works well with you, you might wish to try this modification of the Ignatian approach.

### *Exercise for the Morning* (30-60 minutes)

1. Have paper and pencil or your journal at hand so that you can note any significant elements of your experience after the meditation is over.
2. Take a moment to become aware of yourself and of your needs. You might wish to write down one or two elements of your present situation which come to mind.
3. Read over the passage slowly to familiarize yourself with it. Think for a few moments about what this passage means according to your knowledge of the life of Jesus and the Gospels. Then allow this information to move to the periphery of your mind.
4. Place yourself in a comfortable position for meditation so that you can be comfortable and relaxed, but yet maintain attention. In a brief prayer offer this time of meditation to God for his/her using.
5. Close your eyes and "enter" your time of meditation. This will involve allowing your body to relax and your mind to slow its activity. Even though you have thought of some elements of your present situation and have thought of the historical meaning of the text, place this at the periphery of your mental vision and try to allow a space to "clear" in your mind in which the meditation can develop. It is sometimes helpful to focus attention on your breathing for a while so that your mind has something to give attention to. The rate of your breathing is also a good indication of relaxation, so that you will have some clue to your relaxation as your breathing slows.
6. Recall briefly the main features of the story in the text. **Then stop your active role and allow the setting of the scene and its story to develop in your imagination.** Do not create the story,

but allow your mind and God to create the story for you. You will need to develop your inner senses of observation. **Pay attention** to what you see, hear, smell. You may even want to touch objects in the scene. Your relationship to the story as it develops may be one of **observer** or **participant**. You will need to decide whether you want to watch, or be there in the scene and perhaps experience the role of one of the characters in the story.

7. When the story has run its course, find some place at the edge of the scene in your imagination where you can sit down and discuss your experience with Jesus. Do not create the conversation, but allow it to develop around what you have "seen" or experienced.

8. Ask Jesus what one or two aspects of your experience you should take with you into the day. Conclude your dialogue with Jesus and remain for a time in silence with him, enjoying and experiencing the relationship.

9. Gradually return from the biblical scene to the present and open your eyes. It may be helpful to tell yourself that you will do this and that you will come out of your meditation refreshed, remembering the insights you have gained.

10. Jot down any insights gained in a journal.

### *Continuing the Meaning of Your Scriptural Reading During the Day*

As a way of connecting your experience with the rest of your day you might wish to do the following:

#### *During the Day*

At several points during the day briefly remind yourself of what Jesus in your morning dialogue indicated you should take with you into the day or what you feel was significant which came out of the experience. This should only take a few seconds unless you feel strongly led to do more.

The object is only to call to mind your morning experience so that it might continue to be effective for you and that the meaning of the text for you might be integrated into your daily activities.

#### *Exercise for the Evening, before going to bed*

As part of whatever other devotions you do, take a few moments to reflect back on the meditation of the morning. Then consider whether the text and its meaning has affected your day and its activities. Jot down any further insights gained about the text, God and your life from your day or your evening reflections.

## Addenda for Session I

What is spirituality?

While acknowledging that it is difficult to find a common definition among the world's religions and that the word "spirituality" does not exist in all traditions, the editors of the 25 volume series on *World Spirituality* agreed on the following:

The series focuses on that inner dimension of the person called by certain traditions "the spirit." This spiritual core is the deepest center of the person. It is here that the person is open to the transcendent dimension; it is here that the person experiences ultimate reality. The series explores the discovery of this core, the dynamics of its development, and its journey to the ultimate goal. It deals with prayer, spiritual direction, the various maps of the spiritual journey, and the methods of advancement in the spiritual ascent.<sup>2</sup>

The Introduction by Arthur Green to the two volumes on Jewish Spirituality, defines the varied dimensions of Jewish spirituality:

Life in the presence of God – or the cultivation of a life in the ordinary world bearing the holiness once associated with sacred space and time, with Temple and with holy days – is perhaps as close as one can come to a definition of "spirituality" that is native to the Jewish tradition and indeed faithful to its Semitic roots. Within this definition there is room for an array of varied types, each of which gives different weight to one aspect or another of the spiritual life. For some the evocation of God's presence includes an "ascent" to a higher realm and implies knowledge other than that vouchsafed to most mortals. Others content themselves with "preparing the table of the Lord" or, alternatively, seek to discover "the tabernacle within the heart" and allow the *Shekhinah* (Presence) to find a dwelling there. The ultimate vision may be one of a highly anthropomorphic Deity seated on His throne, an utterly abstract sense of mystical absorption within the presence, the imminent arrival of messiah, or simply that of a life lived in the fulfillment of God's will. What all these have in common is a commitment to the life of holiness, a faith in the power of Israel's ancient code to embody that holiness, and a knowledge that such a life fulfills God's intent in creation and in the election, however understood, of His "kingdom of priests," the people Israel. This consensus has lasted until modern times when we find, as we shall see, Jews in search of the spiritual life who can no longer accept its premises as classically outlined by Judaism.

*Paths of Faithfulness: Personal Essays on Jewish Spirituality* presents Reform Jewish perspectives of a number of faculty from Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in New York.<sup>3</sup> With the development of Zionism the relationship of the land to Jewish spirituality needed to be explored. Abraham Isaac Kook within our century began the task of reinterpreting messianic expectations into the basis for the aspirations of modern Zionism. For him the land of Israel is not something apart from the soul of the Jewish people, the land is of the essence of what it is to be Jewish.<sup>4</sup>

The editors of the three volumes on Christian Spirituality in the same series reject the use of the term to express a dualistic and anti-material understanding of Christianity. Their working description is:

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<sup>2</sup> Ewert Cousins, General Editor, in Arthur Green, ed., *Jewish Spirituality*, vols. 13 and 14 of *World Spirituality: An Encyclopedic History of the Religious Quest*, NY: Crossroad, 1986, vol. 13, p. xii.

<sup>3</sup> Carol Ochs, Kerry Olitzky, and Joshua Saltzman, eds., *Paths of Faithfulness: Personal Essays on Jewish Spirituality*, Hoboken, NJ, KTAV Publishing House, 1997.

<sup>4</sup> Dan Cohn-Sherbok and Lavinia Cohn-Sherbok, *Jewish and Christian Mysticism, An Introduction*, NY: Continuum, 1994, pp. 84-85.

Christian spirituality is the lived experience of Christian belief in both its general and more specialized forms.... It is possible to distinguish spirituality from doctrine in that it concentrates not on faith itself, but on the reaction that faith arouses in religious consciousness and practice. It can likewise be distinguished from Christian ethics in that it treats not all human actions in their relation to God, but those acts in which the relation to God is immediate and explicit.<sup>5</sup>

This summary of Christian spirituality seems somewhat deficient. Though it rightly focuses on the lived experience of Christian belief, there is very little "God language" in it and spirituality as here described is close to being defined as the religious experience of the believer and "the inner meaning of Christianity." Language about the transcendent source of the spiritual experience and the spiritual nature of the human who encounters this experience needs inclusion. Perhaps this approach was necessary to be adequately inclusive of those who see spirituality as primarily a human experience. But the God question and the question of the innate spiritual dimensions of human beings are very important.

In the 1950's and 60s, following the war, there developed a real hunger for something beyond conventional religion – a hunger for what religion was about.

Tilden Edwards, Episcopal priest and founder of the Shalem Institute in Washington, DC, describes his sabbatical journey to California in 1973 in search of a spiritual guide as ultimately leading to a Tibetan study center in Berkeley.<sup>6</sup> In his book on spiritual direction he exclaims:

My plea is that we explore much more deeply the experiential tradition of the Church, lest we have no conscious unique inner heart left to offer, or just the very shrunken heart of the hard-shell fundamentalist or vague sentimentalist.<sup>7</sup>

Father Adrian Van Kaam, who founded the Institute of Formative Spirituality at Duquesne U in Pittsburgh, talks about his concern for Catholicism in Holland as it faced the development of National Socialism in Germany. "... a new fear came to the fore – the fear of the possibility of the eventual collapse of the monumental structures, powers, and bureaucracies Christians had wored so hard to build up. They wondered whether or not it would be possible to avoid over the course of time a subtle diminishment of inner animation, of spiritual transformation. .... Or might a mainly moralistic, decorous Christian style replace in a growing number of believers who were worldly successful, the fift and grace of a truly alive spirituality?

The Lily Foundation in the 1960s established a program "For the Deepening of the Spiritual Life of the Seminary Faculty," which affected not only the Seminaries but also the life of many churches.

I would like to suggest that much of Christian spirituality consists of receiving as a gift the relationship with God (and the consequent identity as God's son or daughter), to live the life to which God calls, to live in response to Christ as Lord, and to live from the contemporary resources (gifts) of God's Spirit (note this is a sort of Trinitarian definition). The foci or expression of this can be as varied as the expressions of Jewish spirituality mentioned above: a sacramental experience, a living out of social responsibility, an inner journey and transformation, devotional reading of Scripture, ascent to heaven and union with God, descent into the heart to meet with God, an involvement in a historical process moving toward the Second Coming of Christ and the establishment of God's kingdom. There may also be varied emphases upon the particular persons of the Trinity in Christian God-experience: a piety centering on Jesus, the Father or the

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<sup>5</sup> Bernard McGinn and John Meyendorff, eds., *Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century*, NY: Crossroad, 1985, Vols. 16-18 of *World Spirituality: An Encyclopedic History of the Religious Quest*, Vol. 16, pp. xv-xvi.

<sup>6</sup>. See Tilden Edwards, *Living Simply Through the Day: Spiritual Survival in a Complex Age*, NY: Paulist Press, 1977.

<sup>7</sup>. Tilden Edwards, *Spiritual Friend: Reclaiming the Gift of Spiritual Direction*, NY: Paulist Press, 1980, p. 33.

Spirit. In my own Christian journey, in the beginning of my Christian life Jesus played a very important role. Then I found that my spiritual life focused on the God to whom Jesus had introduced me. Now in later years Jesus has again become more central.

In its broadest sense *spirituality has to do with the way life is lived out from the claims the religion makes and the resources it offers*. To live it out means to do this in relationship to all that the religion claims to be concerned about: individual development, relationship with the Transcendent, social development and ethics, compassion, etc. To do this from the resources which the religion offers means to engage (or be engaged by) these resources and to explore them in the process of living out what the religion asks. The volume on Jewish Spirituality mentioned above, provides a concise but pregnant definition: spirituality is "Seeking the face of God, striving to live in His presence and to fashion the life of holiness, appropriate to God's presence..."<sup>8</sup>

### Implications of a Relational Spirituality

When religion is seen as doctrine or institution it can be described, understood and accepted as something whose terms are clear. When religion is described as a certain conversion experience, it can be described and judged as to whether it fits the norm. When religion is believing the Bible, for many the words of truth are understood as equivalent to the words on the page. In all of these approaches all is concrete and describable.

When religion and spirituality are understood to be relational or interpersonal, one presupposes that one is dealing with God as person and we as persons and the spirituality consists of an interpersonal relationship. Though there are constants to such an interpersonal relationship (the same persons are engaged and one discovers personality constants in the persons), yet the changes occurring in each of the persons, the accumulation of new experience, and the changes wrought by time and context which give birth to different needs – all mean that two persons interacting in one situation is not completely like the two interacting in another. Where in religion viewed as theology or ethics one might supposedly construct truths relevant for all time, when the heart of religion is interpersonal relationship it is difficult to construct such eternal truths. God is eternally true, but truths may not be.

As Luke Timothy Johnson comments:

Belief in the resurrection had important implications for our knowledge of Jesus. We deal not with a dead person of the past but with a person whose life continues, however mysteriously, in the present. This changes everything. If Jesus is alive among us, what we learn about Jesus must include what we can continue to learn from him. It is better to speak of "learning Jesus," rather than of "knowing Jesus," because we are concerned with a process rather than a product. Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Real Jesus*, HarperSanFrancisco (quoted in *Christian Century*, Dec. 2, 1998)

### Elements of a Relational Spirituality

1. Relationship starts in the *gift of relationship*. Without this gift, from each involved in the relationship, relationship would not be possible. Thus relationship starts in *grace*. Thus is also understood as *love*. Love here is not a sentimental feeling or a deserved response, but the unselfish and free choice of one to give oneself to another and to care for another.

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<sup>8</sup> Arthur Green, ed., *Jewish Spirituality*, 2 vols., Vols. 13 and 14 of *World Spirituality: An Encyclopedic History of the Religious Quest*, NY: Crossroad, 1986, Vol. 13, p. xiii.

2. Faith is the human response to God: in interpersonal terms it is understood as *trust, faithfulness, fidelity*. It is *not just believing something, but believing Someone and being faithful to Someone*. One does not just trust that statements and beliefs are true, but that the person of God with whom one deals is faithful and trustworthy and that what is needed will be given appropriately in the changing circumstances of life. Faith thus has a *process and history* in which interactions with God occur and which can be described as *following* our Lord.
3. What God gives is the relationship with *the God in whom all possibilities and solutions to life's needs exist*. When God has one, or one has God, one has everything that is possible, everything that might be called for by circumstances, and the One in whom all possibilities exist.
4. In the field of knowledge the gaining of *control* may be helpful, but not in interpersonal relationship. The best happens when the other is given the freedom to be oneself and to do what is needed. *God needs the freedom to be God, which implies our relinquishing the attempt to control everything – including God*.
5. One needs to enter a *process of thinking about God*, meditating on God, getting familiar with God, entering into spiritual (interpersonal) relationship in depth: all of which are really a part of interpersonal relationship.
6. One needs to *pay attention to God*, to listen to God and give God a chance to relate and communicate. Theology, Bible and Church are then not just to be understood and accepted, but are opportunities to hear from God. When one reads Scripture one needs not only to pay attention to the words, but to what God may say using the words and beyond the words.
7. *One needs both to think about and stop thinking about God in historical terms*. This means, for example, that Jesus was a first century Jew, dressed like a first century Jew, thinking like a first century Jew, addressing the problems of his day, and speaking the Aramaic language. But he is also a contemporary addressing our needs. Knowing the historical Jesus helps us to get acquainted with Jesus so that we might better know what he is like in our time. We need to read the historical Gospels until the Jesus beyond the Gospels more fully emerges from the Gospels. The Gospels help us to do that since they are not all alike and do not agree in all aspects. Thus we are prevented from making them the final description of Jesus.
8. Knowing and believing involves the *suffering of uncertainty and the need to trust* beyond what we know (but not beyond Whom we know) and the *suffering (and joy) involved in living with someone and being changed by someone*. Knowledge of truth may sometimes involve change and transformation, but knowledge of a person always does.
9. *One does not have to know and understand everything if one is in relationship with the One who knows all*. One may be patient with oneself and with life, and know and appreciate what is given one to know. One is not saved by knowledge, but by relationship.
10. *The religion of relationship is available to all from the infant to the senile because it does not depend upon understanding*. It depends upon God giving the gift of relationship.
11. Relationship is the *primary power and resource* from which human life is to be lived.

## John 1:1-18 Hymn to the Word, Prologue and Introduction to the Gospel of John

BEFORE CREATION (The Word is the expression of the life and meaning of God.)

1. *In (the) beginning was the Word,  
And the Word was with God,  
And God was the Word.*

## WORD IN CREATION

- 2-3. *He was in (the) beginning with God.  
All things through him originated (came to be),  
And apart from him not one thing came to be.*

## WORD IN GENERAL HISTORY

- 3-5. *That which came to be in him was life,  
And life was the light of humanity,  
And the light shines in the darkness.*

**And the darkness did not overcome it.** [Single lines appear for emphasis.]

- 6-8.           There came a man,    [Material about John the Baptist is indented]  
                  Sent from God       [and not italicized as it is likely a later addition.]  
                  Whose name was John.

He came to witness  
That he might witness concerning the light,  
That all might believe through him.

He was not the light,  
But (understand, "he came")  
That he might witness concerning the light.

9.       *There was the true light  
Which enlightens every person  
Coming into the world.*

10. *He was in the world,  
And the world through him came to be,  
And the world did not know him.*

## WORD IN JEWISH HISTORY

11. *To his own (heritage - neuter) he came,  
And his own (people - masculine)  
Did not receive him.*

## THE GIFT TO THOSE WHO RECEIVED HIM

12. *But as many as received him,  
Who believed in his name  
He gave to them right  
To become God's children.*

13. *Who are born  
not of bloods,  
nor of the will of the flesh  
but of God.*

WORD IN INCARNATION WE RECEIVE FROM HIS FULLNESS

14. **And the word became flesh,** (Single line paragraph for emphasis)

*And he tabernacled among us,  
And we beheld his glory,  
Glory as of the only begotten from the Father,*

**Full of grace and truth.** (Single line paragraph for emphasis)

15. John witnesses about him,  
And cried out saying,  
This was he of whom I said;

He who after me comes  
Before me was,  
For he was greater than I.

16. *From his fullness  
We all have received,  
Even grace upon grace.*

17. *For the Law was given through Moses.  
Grace and Truth  
Through Jesus came.*

18. *God no one has ever seen.  
He who is only-begotten,  
God,  
in the bosom of the Father,  
He has made him known (or "interpreted him").*

The above seeks to recreate a poem of three line stanzas which is the basis for the Prologue to John (1:1-18).

## Session II John 20-21 and Stages of Faith

Note on John 21: John 20 is the conclusion of the Gospel and thus the Gospel is complete without chapter 21. John 21 is an Epilogue added to deal with the authority of the "beloved disciple" who has born witness and "has written these things" (21:24) and to deal with him in relationship to Peter. Here the functions of both the "disciple" and Peter are defined leading to a sense of reconciliation between the communities showing allegiance to the 12 (and especially Peter) and those who belonged to the "Disciple", the founder of the Johannine communities. The fact that the authority of Peter and the "disciple" could at one time have been conflicting authorities is similar to what we find in the debate between Peter and Paul in Gal. 2 and what is said about Jesus giving Peter authority in Matt. 16. It seems clear that the Synoptics and John represent different streams of early Christian tradition. The Epilogue also seems to have been written after the deaths of the "disciple" and Peter, both of which are alluded to in chpt. 21. Some distance from the life-time of these two men would have made the reconciliation easier.

### JOHN 20

This chapter contains several important stories:

1-18 Discovery of the tomb and Mary Magdalene's experience

19-23 Appearance to disciples without Thomas

24-29 Appearance to disciples with Thomas

30-31 Statement of purpose

The information contained in the Gospel resurrection accounts is quite varied. Only Luke and John recount a number of appearances.

1-18 This story includes a number of persons coming to the tomb, including the other Disciple who saw and believed. This belief without seeing is important and is reiterated in 20:29. It indicates that it is possible to have faith without seeing, and of course that is the position in which the post resurrection church finds itself. They have the witness of others, but they have not seen. The Gospel of Mark deals with the same issue by not including any resurrection appearances in the Gospel, but ending with the woman at the tomb to whom a "young man" has born witness. Thus the hearer of the Gospel stands in the same existential position as the women.

The central character here is Mary Magdalene. This is the only account of an extended appearance to a woman. Matthew mentions an appearance to women, but its content is only what the angel says to them at the tomb. Mary's encounter with Jesus contains the problematic saying: "Do not hold(touch) me, for I have not yet ascended..." It probably means, "Do not hang on to me, for I have not yet completed the resurrection in my ascension to the Father." In the Pauline literature the resurrection and the ascension are one event, the ascension expressing the meaning of the resurrection. The ascension mentioned in Acts 1 is different, and is similar to Jesus discussion of his going away in Jn. 14-16. This latter ascension is his final leave-taking.

Mary's role here is somewhat like that of the woman in chpt. 4. She serves to carry the message to others. These two stories would seem to legitimize the role of women as evangelists within the Johannine community. It would be interesting to speculate as to how the reconciliation with the communities of the 12 affected this. There is no woman in chpt. 21, though its limited scope may mean that we would try to prove too much from silence if we tried to argue this.

19-23 This has sometimes been called the Johannine Pentecost, because Jesus breaths his Spirit on his disciples. However, it is different. John in chpts 14-16 also knows a coming of the Spirit after Jesus

ascension, such as mentioned in Acts 1. In Jn. 20 we have a giving of authority and mission. This is really similar to the Great Commission at the end of Matt. 28 in nature. The authority to forgive and retain sins, similar to the authority to bind and loose in Matt. 16, is really the authority to preach the Gospel and offer the relationship with the Transcendent which God offered in Christ. The receiving of the Spirit then is similar to "abiding" in Christ, as the branches in the vine (chpt. 15).

24-29 This is an appearance to the disciples with Thomas, but it is primarily an appearance to Thomas and focuses on his need to see in order to believe. It is an appropriate ending for the Gospel since it, as indicated above, raises the issue faced by those who lived in the post-apostolic age. As in I John 1:1-4, they could say that they had seen that which was from the beginning because they belonged to a community which included the original eyewitnesses. However, they themselves had not seen and would need to face the need to have faith without seeing. Thus the beatitude: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."

This story also was important to Zinzendorf and the 18th century Moravians because it indicated how Jesus appeared to the Moravian Church. Though Jesus appeared in many different ways, to the Moravians he appeared with his WOUNDS, in his suffering cross-form, as he did to Thomas.

The life and activity of the Savior and the giving of the Spirit, which proceeded from his sufferings, his side-wound,<sup>9</sup> "began a new 'economy' and religion, the religion of the heart."<sup>10</sup> This term "heart" Zinzendorf uses to describe "the whole inner person"<sup>11</sup> which then becomes the locus of religious knowledge instead of the rational mind. This "inner person" possesses all the senses which the outer person does and by these senses, in a way that we might talk of today as "intuition" or "extra sensory perception", perceives the reality of the living Christ. The heart smells, sees, tastes, feels and hears.<sup>12</sup>

All that it takes to constitute one as Christian is to have seen the Savior. One needs to

have caught sight of the Savior when the Savior looked into his heart for the first time. This is the order. First the Savior looks at us, and we perceive him, at that moment we have the matter in hand, and the Christian is ready. ....

I do not pretend that we see a body with our corporeal eyes; I do not desire that the mind try to imagine a body or try to conceive a representation of it, or that the mind look into itself or turn its thoughts in toward itself until it sees a form standing before it. But I do ask for the essential in this, and that is that a person who has seen abstractly and purely must in the next moment realize that he has actually seen; that a person must know as certainly that his spirit has seen, that his heart has seen and felt, as when in ordinary human life one can be certain that he has seen or touched something. In the moment when this happens he does not need to have a sense-experience or see something visible (this cannot be excluded with any certainty, but neither is it essential): it is only necessary that afterward the essential effect remain, that one can say not only, "I have seen, I have heard"; but rather, "Thus have I seen it, and thus have I heard."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> *Ein und zwanzig Discourse über die Augspurgische Confession, gehalten vom 15.Dec. 1747. bis zum 3.Mart.1748 denen Seminariis Theologicis Fratrum, op. cit., (2/18/48), pp. 160-161.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid., (12/23/47), p. 99.*

<sup>11</sup> Spangenberg, *Apologetische Schluss-Schrift*, op. cit., (Synodal Protocoll 1750), p. 452.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid., (Synodal Protocoll 1750), p. 451.*

<sup>13</sup> George W. Forrell, transl. and ed., *Nine Public Lectures on Important Subjects in Religion*, Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1973, (9/25/46), p. 80-81.

The beauty of the Bridegroom, even when speaking of the Song of Songs, is the beauty of his wounds. Zinzendorf mentioned the story of a Bishop named Martin, to whom Satan appeared in the likeness of the Savior, but in the form of a king surrounded with heavenly glory. Martin said to him: "If you are Christ, where are your wounds? .... a Saviour who is without wounds, who does not have the mark of his sufferings, I do not acknowledge." To this Zinzendorf added:

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>14</sup>

A friend who has experienced a great deal of suffering recently sent me a quotation from William Temple's *Readings in St. John's Gospel* in which Temple quoted a poem by an Edward Shillito written just after World War I. Temple remarks "The wounds of Christ are His credentials to the suffering race of men." "Only a God in whose perfect Being pain has its place can win and hold our worship; for otherwise the creature would in fortitude surpass the Creator." The poem expresses the same awareness of the implications of Jesus' wounds as one finds in Zinzendorf:

If we have never sought, we seek Thee now;  
     Thine eyes burn through the dark, our only stars;  
 We must have sight of thorn-pricks on Thy brow,  
     We must have Thee, O Jesus of the Scars.

The heavens frighten us; they are too calm  
     In all the universe we have no place,  
 Our wounds are hurting us; where is the balm?  
     Lord Jesus, by Thy Scars, we claim Thy grace.

If, when the doors are shut, Thou drawest near,  
     Only reveal those hands, that side of Thine;  
 We know today what wounds are, have no fear,  
     Show us Thy Scars, we know the countersign.

The other gods were strong; but Thou wast weak;  
     They rode, but Thou didst stumble to a throne;  
 But to our wounds only God's wounds can speak,  
     And not a god has wounds, but Thou alone.<sup>15</sup>

30-31 These verses state the purpose of the Gospel. It is interesting to compare this to I John 1:1-10 and such vss as 5:13. I John seemsto have been written to give a proper interpretation of the tradition about Jesus in the Johannine community.

## JOHN 21

<sup>14</sup> *Nine Public Lectures on Important Subjects in Religion*, op. cit., (9/4/46), p. 28.

<sup>15</sup> William Temple, *Readings In St. John's Gospel*, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1959. p. 366.

There is much that could be said about this chapter, but we will be brief.

1. It is an Epilogue, written later than the Gospel-- likely for the purposes mentioned above.
2. It deals with a Galilean appearance of the risen Christ, but a late one. The appearances immediately after the resurrection occur in Judaea in John, as in Luke.
3. Jesus invites his disciples to a meal and so it may have Eucharistic connotations, as does John 6.
4. It probably is reflective of mission. The sheep that Peter is asked to care for are qualified by the 153 fish, which some indicate are the number of nations which Judaism understood existed. At least the number has to be given some significance, as do the number of baskets taken up in the Feeding Miracles. As in Jn. 17, there are sheep not of this fold. Though the sheep may be understood to include both the Johannine community and the communities stemming from the 12 apostles, there would seem to be some vision here of those yet to be caught -- to use the fish image. Chapter 21 also indicates how Jesus disciples went back to their everyday work and seemed to have regarded their experience with Jesus as a matter of personal enrichment, not mission. Jesus had to call them to feed his sheep, if they really loved him (see the conversation with Peter which was focused on Peter but conducted before the group of disciples).
5. Jesus' question to Peter is crucial. If one really loves Jesus, then one will feed his sheep. Though this would establish the role of Peter in the church, it must also be understood as symbolic of the ministry and mission of the church, of which Peter became the symbol. That Peter would be taken where he did not wish to go may be understood as Peter being taken beyond Judaism into the Gentile world in mission, though in the parenthetical comment this is said to indicate his death.
6. Vs. 20-23 seem to indicate that in the Johannine community it was felt that the Beloved Disciple would not die. That this belief could have arisen must mean that he did live for some time within the community, perhaps even surviving many of the 12. Yet it is indicated that his death does not diminish his authority, and he is the one who bore witness to these things in writing which are contained in the Gospel. The death of both Peter and the Beloved Disciples perhaps enabled a reconciliation between these early Christian communities because in death the final authority of Peter and the Beloved Disciple became qualified, though the churches which stemmed from them needed to move on into the future.

Mary Magdalene. John 20:11-18

Mary Magdalene came from Magdala on the Sea of Galilee. She first appears in the Gospels in the stories of the crucifixion (John 19:25). There is another mention of her in Luke 8:1-3 where it was said some women were healed of evil spirits and she was included among them, having been healed of seven demons. Some of the women provided for Jesus and his disciples out of their means, and she may have been one of them. To say that she was healed of spirits or demons does not mean that she was a bad person. This is a way they had to describe illness. In fact spirits and infirmities are linked in vs. 2.

It seems clear that Mary knew Jesus in different ways over the course of their relationship. With these different ways of knowing Jesus the form of her faith probably changed:

1. Mary of Magdala knew Jesus well enough to be at the crucifixion and resurrection. Thus she knew him as he was during his ministry.
2. She knew him as he was when he was crucified.
3. According to John, she came to the tomb on the morning of the resurrection. He does not mention other women at this time and she did not come to anoint his body as this was already done by Joseph of Arimathea (19:38-42). She came because she wanted to come. When she saw that the stone was rolled away, she ran to Peter and "the other disciple," both of whom ran to the tomb and who return home after finding the tomb empty. However, Mary stays there weeping. The angels (messengers) ask why she

weeps, and she says, "because they have taken my Lord and I do not know where they have laid him." She then sees Jesus, but mistakes him for the gardener from whom she asks Jesus body. This is a dark time for Mary who stands there seeking to find what was left of Jesus, the crucified Jesus she saw at the cross.

4. Jesus says, "Mary," and recognizing him she says, "Rabboni." "She has now found Jesus again, but he was not quite the same as before. He was now raised and alive and seems to have been somewhat different in appearance. Jesus then oddly says, "Do not hold me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brethren and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." Jesus' resurrection was not complete until he ascended into heaven. After this he was to come back to appear to his disciples. He asked Mary not to hold him, which in this context means not to hold him back from ascending. This may mean that Mary, having found him, did not want to let him go for she might not find him again. As she did not recognize him now, she might have difficulty recognizing him next time.

5. Unfortunately, the difficulty of the changing forms of Jesus and the problems of recognizing him were to continue. When he came back to appear to his disciples, he showed them his wounds, almost saying to his disciples that he would be wounded as long as they had to deal with the difficulties of life. Having found a resurrected Lord, she would not want a wounded Savior again.

6. In the future Mary would have to deal with a Jesus who went away, but was now to be present in the Spirit. Would life never stop changing? Would the forms of Jesus never stop changing.

Please, not again,  
She asked.  
She'd just become  
accustomed to the way he was  
and then again he changed.

Don't hold me back  
and keep me same,  
he said. Each person's  
need, each varied hope  
must mean another form.

And I must be for all.  
These paths of Palestine  
are far too small  
for the Spirit I would  
pour o'er all the earth.

Free me to be --  
for you ---- and you -- and you.  
Don't hold me back. --  
And yet in all the forms  
I come, it will be me.

A. Freeman

## Faith Development Theory Recognizes

1. Early faith is intuited in one's *family*, then learned in the religious stories that are part of the family.
2. Then as one gets older, one learns the faith of one's *religious community*. Up to this point faith is often what might be called "conventional," the faith of the significant others with whom one is in contact. Sometimes we have permission from family or church to go beyond this. If we do not, some then refuse to allow their faith to continue changing and some leave their religious community in order to allow new forms of faith.
3. If one continues in faith development, faith may become shaped by *individual experiences, insights, the needs of the different stages of life, and the rethinking of the faith of family and religious community*. This faith may be constantly in the process of formation, because life and God continue to present one with new experiences and one has need to draw upon the religious tradition in particular ways.
4. Faith then may become *appreciative of the different forms of faith* held by others, the breadth of the expressions of faith.
5. Changes of faith are often experienced as a *loss* to be grieved, and the transitions from one form or expression of faith to another can be experienced as a "*dark night of the soul*", when meaning is lost and God seems absent. This dark night should be clearly distinguished from depression. Depression should be healed, while a dark night can only be lived through. To understand that the dark night is often a normal part of development is crucial in dealing with it.

### **Session III Nicodemus The Mid-Life Spiritual Crisis John 3:1-15: Life Anew and From Above**

Nicodemus comes to Jesus in the privacy of night to ask his question. He does not want others to know that he needs to ask a question. He is a Pharisee, a person who spent his life studying the Law and exploring what God wished of him. That he comes expresses that all of his study and knowledge did not ultimately satisfy him. Nicodemus begins with an expression of confidence in Jesus, that God is with him, and does not really voice his question. But Jesus knows what his question is and replies "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above (in Greek the word translated 'from above' also means 'again.')" If one is born from above, has life from the spiritual and heavenly world, then one can see (becomes aware of) the "kingdom" ("presence") of God. This is further supported by Jesus' response to Nicodemus' next question as to how he can be born when he is old. Jesus responds with "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit." I would understand being born of water as the first birth and the breaking of the amniotic sack and then being born of the Spirit as being born of God, drawing one's life and identity from God's world as God's child, carrying in one's life both one's biological and spiritual inheritance. Even though the Spirit at times seems nebulous (he uses the analogy of the wind which blows and the origin and destiny of it is unclear – before the development of the science of weather), it is nonetheless quite real.

Nicodemus as a mature person has experienced a crisis which his knowledge could not satisfy and where he would ask something more of life. What he and Jesus are talking about is the reality of the spiritual realm and the possibility of the person living from this spiritual realm as well as the earthly realm. For us such a question will often arise in a crisis of life where we wonder if, amidst our pressures and problems, the spiritual and God exist at all. This was not so much his question. He as a Pharisee knew that God and the spiritual realm existed – in heaven. His question was whether one could live from it, whether it made any difference in this life, or whether it was only far off from the world. Much of the thinking of Pharisaism understood that one could live from the Law of God, but can one actually live from God as a life-resource? Jesus was not only indicating that one can live one's life from God, but that he himself is familiar with God's realm, that he as Son of Man has ascended into it and descended from it. Thus one who believes in Jesus, the Son of Man, may have "eternal life", which in the language of the Gospel of

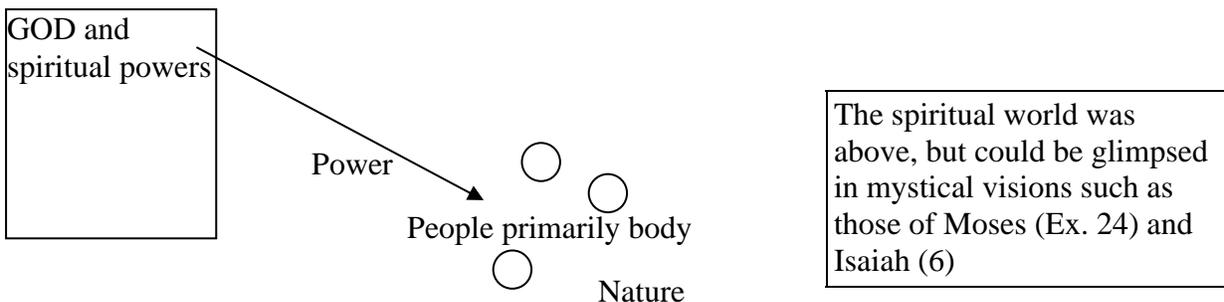
John means something like "the life of God", "the life of heaven". Jesus summarizes the point he is making with the famous John 3:16:

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."

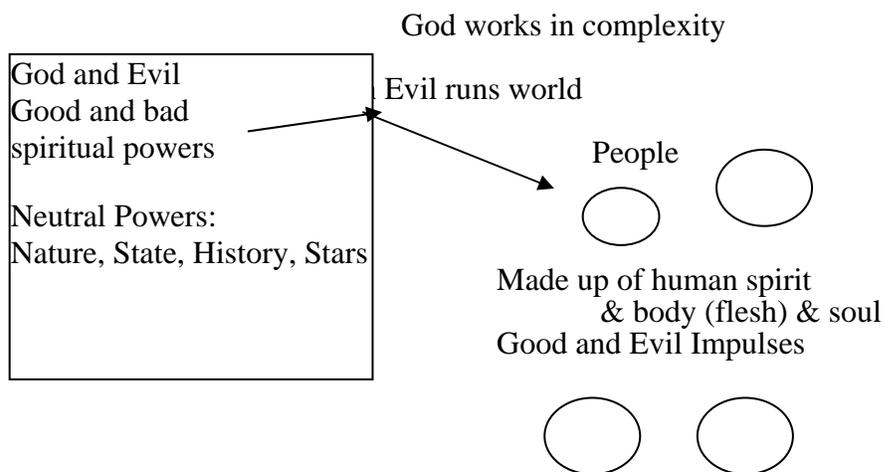
How then is one to live from God in this world? The Prologue to John (1:1-18) indicates that the Word or Wisdom of God, agent in creation of the world and history, has become flesh (1:14). In the Gospel Jesus identifies himself with the heavenly "Son of Man" or "Man" of Jewish Apocalyptic thought which understood the Man created in Genesis 1 to be the heavenly ideal Man and the man of Genesis 2 to be the earthly man made after the heavenly pattern but who failed (Gen. 3). In John this heavenly ideal Man comes to earth from heaven. Thus God and God's emissaries come into the world to make it possible to live from God. Jesus in John 14:25-29, 15:26-27, 16:4-15 speaks of the Spirit which he and the Father send after he goes back to heaven, the continuing presence of God within life and world.

## Views of Life and How Life Works

OT View of Life -- Simple: primarily God, people and nature with God always in control



Jewish View of Life in NT Times -- Complexity: Good, Neutral and Evil: God not always in control – in fact Satan is ruler of this world.



The spiritual world is above and God becomes more remote from the world in which God does not run everything, but spiritual emissaries, such as angels and demons, are in the world and Satan is the prince of this world. God's glory is in the Temple and God is in some sense present in the Law which provides everything one would want to know from God. In the future God will come into the world and change all.

## Jesus' Perspective

Jesus accepts the world's complexity, but announces the Kingdom (Presence) of God in the world now. God is not just in heaven, but among us (note John 3 and the need to be born of the Spirit and from above and Luke 17:20-21 where the kingdom is in our midst). Where traditional ideas said that when God was present in the world all would be changed, Jesus describes a presence of God in the world where God is subject to and somewhat limited by the forces within world and history, as is Jesus. God is surely with us, there is no limit to God's relationship with us (see Jn. 3:16), but God must work within life and history to help us. In the Gospel of John the great symbol of this is Jesus' cross and woundedness. Jesus' being exalted or lifted up in John is through his crucifixion so that great suffering and his victory over the world need to be seen together. Also, Jesus still has his wounds when he appears to his disciples in John 20, indicating that he has chosen to continue to carry within himself the consequences of his coming into the world. The incarnation of God in the world represents the way that God is with us. When Jesus ascends he sends the Spirit (Jn. 14-16) to continue his and God's presence within the world.

## With Hope I Live

*With hope  
I live  
midst all  
I've come to see  
and know.*

*To understand  
I would;  
but to control  
my world  
I cannot do.*

*Thank God  
the mystery is  
replete with God  
so that the mystery  
within, without,*

*is not my sacred care.  
But to live and others  
help to live  
is what  
I'm called to do.*

*And  
therein  
lies  
my  
peace.*

A. Freeman

## God of the Scars

If we have never sought, we seek Thee now;  
Thine eyes burn through the dark, our only stars;  
We must have sight of thorn-pricks on Thy brow,  
We must have Thee, O Jesus of the Scars.

The heavens frighten us; they are too calm  
In all the universe we have no place,  
Our wounds are hurting us; where is the balm?  
Lord Jesus, by Thy Scars, we claim Thy grace.

If, when the doors are shut, Thou drawest near,  
Only reveal those hands, that side of Thine;  
We know today what wounds are, have no fear,  
Show us Thy Scars, we know the countersign.

The other gods were strong; but Thou wast weak;  
They rode, but Thou didst stumble to a throne;  
But to our wounds only God's wounds can speak,  
And not a god has wounds, but Thou alone.

Edward Shillito

From William Temple, *Readings In St. John's Gospel*, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1959. p. 366. Temple quoted a poem by an Edward Shillito written just after World War I. Temple remarks "The wounds of Christ are His credentials to the suffering race of men." "Only a God in whose perfect Being pain has its place can win and hold our worship; for otherwise the creature would in fortitude surpass the Creator."

## Session IV John 9:1-41

### A Devotional Approach to John 9

Why do we read Scripture? We read it because we understand that in some way it is God's Word, God's message to us. Christians have debated as to just how it is God's Word: whether it is God's Word because it contains God's message, whether it is God's Word because God speaks to us through it, or whether it is God's Word in the very words on its pages. *The important thing is not how it is but that it is God's Word.* It is also important to remember that when the early church in the second to fourth centuries selected the books to be included in our Bible it felt that *its selection would bring to Christians the faith of the apostles and would be what was needed for the faith and life of the church.* All through the centuries it has nourished this faith and life. And it has called Christians to pay attention to the earliest and original forms of faith. It especially calls us to pay attention to the God of the Word and the Jesus and Spirit of the Word. We pay attention to the Spirit of the Word because it is God's Spirit that seeks to advise us in the present, not just in the words of Scripture. We pay particular attention to Jesus who in his historic person and teachings brings us our understanding of God and makes possible our relationship with God. But Jesus, as is the Spirit, is also a contemporary, raised from the dead, a part of our contemporary experience. He speaks to us through Scripture and beyond Scripture. God and Jesus are always in Scripture, but also always beyond Scripture as living participants in the present.

*We do not necessarily have to understand how Scripture is what it is and how it does what it does. We just need to keep coming to it and reading it and living with it and its message. It will do what God wants it to do if we only read and listen, with our hearts as well as our mind. And like the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, we will meet in Scripture the living God who comes to us in the present.*

Benedictine Method of Reading Scripture – See p. 13 in materials.

#### Reading

Read the passage, paying special attention to words and phrases to which you intuitively respond. I would suggest first reading the passage through rapidly and then going back and reading very slowly, stopping with phrases or words which "draw" you.

#### Meditation

Here welcome the words that have drawn you into your life and "chew" upon them as a cow chews a cud, i.e. mentally say them over and over again until your mind becomes saturated with them. Another method might be to mentally focus upon them and hold them in the center of the mind for a while.

#### Prayer

This prayer is in the form of a spontaneous dialogue with God or Jesus about these words and what they might mean to you, and how they might be incorporated into your heart.

#### Contemplation

Contemplation means directly turning one's attention to God, without the use of words and images, in silence: a loving silence before God. Relationship with God is the ultimate purpose of all devotional exercises, and this is the fulfillment of all done in the exercise.

### Discussion of Experiences with the Text

## The Logic of John 8-10

John 21:24 indicates that the final author (editor) of the Gospel depended on a Gospel written by the Beloved Disciple who in the Gospel is never named but only known as someone close to Jesus. The final arrangement of the material in John should be seen as the work of the final author or editor. The editor has arranged materials in John to present his themes, though he seems to be quite faithful to the material from the Beloved Disciple which he uses. In John 1:4 he indicates that in the Word was "life, and the life was the light of all people. In chapters 8-11 the editor, by the arrangement of materials, develops these themes: that in Jesus light (healing of the blind man) and life (the raising of Lazarus) are to be found. In regards to Jesus as light, the development of this theme begins in 8:12 where Jesus announces that he is the light of the world.

Now there is an indication in John that a **cultural transition** has taken place, something true of much of early Christianity. It moved from a world of Jewish culture into the Greco-Roman world. This is indicated by two characteristics of the text. First is the fact that although much in the text of the Gospel has a strong Jewish flavor, now in the present form of the Gospel even simple Jewish terms need explanation (1:38 meaning of Rabbi, 1:41 meaning of Messiah, 1:42 Peter is the translation of Cephas from Aramic into Greek). Second is the strange **anti-Jewish character of parts of the narrative**. The Gospel of John, while being one of the most Jewish of the Gospels, is the most anti-Jewish Gospel in the NT. Usually Jesus opponents are named as coming from various Jewish sects (such as Pharisees and Sadducees) or the priestly community – including the High Priest. While in some passages in John the opponents of Jesus are specifically identified, **in a number of passages the opponents are changed to "the Jews" as if all Jews were against Jesus**. That all Jews would be seen as being against Jesus would reflect a time when Christianity had become separated from its Jewish background and now the Jews were no longer the founders of Christianity but its opponents. Whether that means that the final editor added these anti-Jewish passages or just changed some of the terminology within passages is unclear. However, it is clear that the use of the term "Jews" as representing Jesus' opponents only appears in certain passages. In the outline which follows these passages are placed in [ ]. However we handle this, it is important to remember that anti-Semitism was not an outgrowth of Jesus' conflict with Jewish leaders but of later Christianity's conflicts with Jews after the time of Jesus and the apostles when Christianity no longer felt close to Judaism. To fail to recognize this as having historic roots is to contribute to anti-Semitism in the present, something that Christian attitudes did in the Holocaust.

- 8:12 "I am the light of the world." Theme
- 8:13-20 Debate with Pharisees about truth of Jesus' testimony.
- [8:21-59 Debate with the Jews]
  - 21-30 Jesus is from above, from the Father
  - 31-47 True Sons of Abraham = disciples of Jesus
  - 48-59 "Before Abraham was, I am."
- 9:1-41 Restoration of blind man's sight
  - 1-5 Intro: Blind that works of God be manifested
  - 6-7 The healing
  - 8-12 The neighbors "The man called Jesus"
  - 13-17 Pharisees and the Sabbath Sinner or Prophet
  - [18-23 Jews and his parents Ask him]
  - 24-34 Healed man teaches Pharisees From God
  - 35-39 Do you believe in the Son of Man?
  - 40-41 Pharisees- Are we blind?

- 10:1-42 Jesus' discussion with Pharisees/Jews about his identity in the light of the Pharisees question as to whether they were blind.  
 1-6 True shepherd (Messiah) enters by the door to the sheep-fold  
 [7-18 I AM the door/good shepherd -door defined by Jesus]  
 [19-21 Division of the Jews because of Jesus' words]  
 [22-39 Jews: Are you the Christ? I and the Father are one.]  
 40-42 The witness of John the Baptist

The logic of the above is that Jesus presents himself as the light of the world. Jesus then engages in a debate with the Pharisees/Jews about the truth of this. Then Jesus heals a blind man so that the works of God might be manifest in him: i.e. that he may serve as a sign that Jesus is light of the world. The story of the healing as it presently exists is a highly complex story which deals with the developing sight and insight of the blind man. This culminates in the blind man confessing his faith and in the Pharisees raising the question as to whether they are blind. Jesus then tests the Pharisees/Jews insight by using the "figure" of the true shepherd (Messiah) who enters by the door. They do not understand, so he says that the door is to be defined by him and what he does -laying down his life for the sheep. This results in division and the question as to whether Jesus is the Christ. He replies by indicating his works, the response of the sheep, and his oneness with the Father. This raises the question of blasphemy.

#### An Examination of John 9 as a Paradigm of Spiritual Experience

The long stories in the Gospel of John provide greater opportunity to understand what happened to persons in contact with Jesus than do the often very short narratives of the other Gospels. John 9 takes a man through his experience of healing, through all of the conflicts and challenges this produces, and through the various developments in his insight and faith. In the end we know enough about this man to ask how his experience is like ours. We also learn that when God comes into life we do not have to understand it all. What we need to do is respond to God, and the presence and relationship which God offers will care for the rest.

1-4 The blind man is seen and the question is raised as to why. That Jesus' disciples raise the question as to whether the man's sin or his parents' sin might be the cause indicates the way that much Old Testament, and still much popular thought, handles suffering. If you suffer, there must have been a reason. Someone did something. Jesus indicates that the blind man was born blind that the works of God might be revealed in him. In 11:1 this is the same reason assigned to Lazarus' illness. In 12:20ff Jesus' crucifixion will be his time of exaltation and glorification. Thus in all three cases suffering is not a punishment, but an opportunity to manifest the works of God, to reverse the mistaken judgements about suffering, to use the difficult times of life creatively and for God.

5-12 Jesus announces himself as the light of the world and then heals the blind man. Immediately questions are raised as to whether this man was really the blind man: he states "**I am the man.**" Then it is asked **how** this happened and he can only narrate the event. He does not deny either himself or the event. Then it is asked where Jesus is, and he has to say, "**I don't know.**" There is still much he does not know even though he knows his own new reality and can describe the event.

13-17 The man is questioned by Pharisees, especially about Jesus breaking Sabbath Law by healing him. If Jesus is a sinner, how can a sinner do such signs? They again ask about Jesus, and the man replies "**He is a prophet.**"

18-23 The man's parents are called in to identify him. The parents acknowledge that he is their son who was blind, but deny they know how he sees. They tell the "Jews" to ask him and so avoid the conflict. The man is of age and should answer for himself.

24-34 The authorities a second time call upon the man, asking him to give the glory to God and reject Jesus as a sinner. Moses (the Law) is presented as the authority to whom God spoke, but they don't know where Jesus comes from. the formerly blind man says "If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." But the authorities reject his teaching, calling Jesus a sinner, and drive the man out. It now becomes clear that the man's society, at least its authorities, will not accept his interpretation of the event.

35-41 Jesus now poses the crucial question for the man, "**Do you believe in the Son of Man?**" The man is not clear as to who this is and asks for Jesus to identify him so that he may believe in him. The man is willing to do whatever Jesus asks without understanding it all. Jesus identifies himself as the Son of Man (in the terminology of the Gospel of John meaning the Original Man, created by God in Genesis 1, who comes down from heaven.) The man replies "**Lord, I Believe.**" **And he worshipped him.** Then Jesus comments that he came so that those who do not see may see and those who claim to see may become blind. The Pharisees ask if he is talking of them.

The primary concern in the narrative is whether Jesus is from above, whether he is from God, and whether he can bring light (understanding) and in chpt. 11 (Lazarus) whether he can bring life. The understanding of the man is seen as a progressive matter where ultimately he has to trust/believe in Jesus without understanding it all, but knowing that something has come into his life from God. In the end he worships Jesus, which means that he realizes that God has come to him in Jesus. The Pharisees represent the opponents who believe that God's revelation has all come in the Law and expect no miracles. They also argue that God would not reveal to a sinner. The man's experience says that God can also come in the present, can make a decided difference in life, and that God will come even to the sinner. In the end the religious authorities who exclude the possibility of God's action in the present are the sinners.

### **Addenda on Healing**

#### The Gospel and Healing

The Gospel is the proclamation, the good news, of what God has done in Christ. As Paul describes it in Rom. 1:16-17, it is "the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith" and in it "the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith." When Paul calls it the *power* of God he is using a phrase used in Judaism for the action of God within history and used in the Synoptics for *miracles*. It is not just about something God has done that is to be applied in the present, but through the proclamation of what God has done *God now acts to effect* what the Gospel announces. This is more than what we might call "the power of words." It is the power of God in these words. Thus the proclamation of the Gospel is as much God's act of salvation as were the original events which it describes. The righteousness of God which is revealed in it is not just the justice of God which judges, but the justice of God which saves.

In this proclamation then God is encountered and what God intends for one's life is encountered. Thus to really hear this proclamation and to respond is to encounter that which changes one's existence, what might be called the Great Healing.

In its simplest form it is salvation, which means everything from being saved from sin and Satan to being saved into relationship with God and knowing that nothing "will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:39)." It means to be assured that we are God's children (Rom. 8:14-

17). But it also means to be healed and made whole, an understanding of this which well expresses the *total existential impact of the Gospel* upon life and self-understanding.

The Gospel does not consist of a few statements or descriptions, but as the early church collected the tradition about the life and ministry of Jesus the Gospel became the story from the baptism of Jesus to his resurrection, with three of the Gospels adding prologues (Matt. and Lk. about Jesus' infancy and John relating the preexistent Word of God to Jesus). The richness of the many stories included affect us in many ways. We cannot just focus on his death on the cross as salvation. All of the stories in which we meet him in the varied aspects of his life and ministry are in some sense salvation. They are for the healing of our existence. They invite us into the full drama of his life.

And there are also the sacraments which enable persons to enter the experience of the Gospel. Baptism, at first practiced only on adults, provided a way for the believer to enter the meaning of Jesus' death and resurrection, to renounce sin and Satan, and to symbolize new existence by wearing the white robe of their transformation. The Lord's Supper brought them again into the drama of Jesus' last days and reminded them that "This is my body which is for you" and that the cup was "the new covenant in my blood (I Cor.11:24-25)."

#### Affirmations for Resourcing Life <sup>16</sup>

Life involves great possibilities but great struggles. What will equip us for both – the possibilities and the struggles?

Certainly religion is about God. Yet there is so much anthropological material and focus in the biblical materials that one would need to say that one of God's primary concerns is to enable the life of humanity. God indicates that God is for us, not just that we are to live for God, and God knows and provides the necessary resources for life.

But even if the human struggle and possibility were not seen from a religious perspective, humans would have to form their own vision of life and how it might be well lived. They would need to take their struggle into their own hands and develop the wisdom which would enable their living. The following comments will then deal with what is necessary for life, expressed primarily in the form of affirmations. To call them affirmations reminds us of the need to commit ourselves to them that they might be operative for us.

#### Affirming Human Transcendence.

We have what may be called mind, spirit or soul, a spiritual and non-material self. Though this functions within a biological machine and seems related to bio-chemical processes, it also transcends such processes. We are flesh, have a body, but are not only body. As long as we are in the body we are bound to and affected by biological processes, but we can also reflect upon and relate to these processes. And in times of illness or spiritual experience we may experience ourselves strangely apart from these processes.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>. Originally written for the residents in the Clinical Pastoral Education Program at St. Luke's Hospital, Bethlehem, PA, the summer of 1998.

<sup>17</sup>. It is understandable that spiritual experiences help us to discover ourselves beyond our biological processes. Illness may also do the same when difficulties with biological processes make us aware of the self that observes and is beyond the processes.

Within our psyche we experience the dynamics (and even introjections) of our life experience and the success or failures of our developmental processes, we can experience the consequences of prolonged stress in our bodies, inadequate neurotransmitters will affect our mood and the neurological basis of our thinking processes, but we are still there. With ADD or dyslexia we cannot pay adequate attention or easily read a text, but it is still we who cannot. When we feel panic because our systems do not work right, it is still we who feel panic and we know that the panic is in us but not of us.

To understand human transcendence of the biological system gives awareness of the spiritual identity which becomes key resource in coping with and affirming oneself in physical or psychological experiences (e.g. illness) which could swallow up one's reality. One can't cope with life and body unless one is truly there and aware of one's transcendent reality.

Human transcendence is not only a matter of awareness of spiritual or soul reality so that this identity stands out for us in the midst of the difficult realities of life, but the soul comes from God, precedes biological existence and awareness and will transcend death. It has its own reality and its own power which in the process of life become blended with our total personal reality and therefore difficult to distinguish. In the modern world this reality is often not only personally unclear but culturally denied. But this power can be called upon and awareness of it developed. And it can be seen as the core of our being which resources the individual and communal future to which God calls us and will after death carry what we have become in the opportunities of human existence.

There are also certain types of actions in which one can engage which enable some freedom from the normative functioning and limits of our biological systems. These might be called *actions of transcendence*. As we as person transcend our biological system, so there are certain things we can do to function beyond the present state of our biological and psychological processes outlined below under "Working with the Way the Body Works." There is the *will* ( or *will-power*) by which one chooses or wills something into existence. There is *decision* by which the person chooses for one option and eliminates others. *Commitment* may be partially understood as a conscious reduction of options and their significance, but *commitment* also involves accepting the reality of something not yet realized in one's present and so bringing it into the present, making it real by one's investment in it. And then there is *suggestion* which enhances the power of a new vision or understanding, causing it to be accepted as real and enabling one to function on the basis of its assumed reality. It is important to note how all of these *actions of transcendence* are aspects of what the religious person calls *faith*.

Lastly, there is what one might call *community transcendence* in which a community brings to the person a reality one does not yet have operative within oneself but which is enabled and empowered by the reality of the community.

These actions of transcendence and the transcendence of community are not unreal for they initially commit one to an assumed reality outside one and actually make possible the reality's realization within one so that it becomes part of one's operative reality. It is an important question as to whether this new reality is *only* mental or imaginary for the individual and the community, and therefore might not be true to an "objective" reality which could persist and sustain itself. But it is also true that the presence of a vision, commitment, suggestion within one's mind is real and powerful within one's life, whatever its relation to external reality. In fact, one's personal history introjected into the psyche operates powerfully in the person whether or not it is true to the external reality of the present. One role of the community is the transmission and the testing of reality so that one's relationship with this reality may have integrity and confidence.

## Affirming the Body

We come from a religious heritage which saw life dualistically, the material over against the spiritual, though modern views conditioned by science and historical criticism have really denied the spiritual and affirmed the material. Within the cultures that influenced our religious traditions the spiritual was seen as real, but imprisoned within a body which had been affected by the Fall. One only has to read Paul's treatment of the flesh to see that spirit is all good and body all bad (Gal. 5). Sexuality is tolerated within marriage which is the place to handle the flame of one's passion (I Cor. 7:9). In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus is presented as equating lust with adultery and anger with murder, and thus to be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect you must control not only actions but feelings. There are, however, strong traces of traditions in the Gospels about Jesus' association with the crowds and "unclean" where Jesus would seem to be more accepting of the human condition.

The European poet Rainer Maria Rilke reacted to traditional Christianity's attitude towards sexuality:

And here, in the love which, with an intolerable mixture of contempt, desire, and curiosity, they call "sensual", here indeed are to be found the worst results of that vilification of earthly life which Christianity has felt obliged to engage in. Here everything is distorted and disowned, although it is from this deepest of all events that we come forth, and have ourselves the centre of our ecstasies in it. .... Why, if guilt or sin had to be invented because of the inner tension of the spirit, why did they let it fall on that part, waiting till it dissolved in our pure source and poisoned and muddied it? Why have they made our sex homeless, instead of making it the place for the festival of our competency?<sup>18</sup>

Akin to a negative view of body and flesh is the difficulty we have had in accepting the real humanity of children. Alice Miller, a Swiss Psychoanalyst, writes particularly about what she calls "poisonous pedagogy" long practiced in western culture which calls for driving out the wickedness of the child, breaking the will, denying the uniqueness of the child which does not fit parental expectations, and denial of unacceptable feelings and the child's desire for autonomy. Thus the unique identity of the child is hidden within, while in life the child learns to conform to the expectations and needs of others.<sup>19</sup>

What happens to us when we cannot accept this strange vehicle of our human existence called "body" which seemingly is rejected by others and constantly creates problems for us? What happens when we must disassociate ourselves from our humanity? We must not disown the vehicle of our life, but must consciously stand within the strangeness and wonder of our body and fleshliness, choosing to be there. We must choose what others have made it difficult for us to choose. We must choose to be human, but of course, not only human, for there is the transcendence spoken of above. When we choose to be fully within our body, then we are present within it to control and manage our behavior. Separation from, disassociation from and disowning our body only allows the body dynamics to operate without our presence and awareness and therefore without our control. Rejection of our body accomplishes little, for we see little good fruit of this dualism in western civilization and religion. Look at the horror of the Holocaust supported by the rulers of Christian nations. And beyond the dangers of rejecting body, without

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<sup>18</sup> *Where Silence Reigns: Selected Prose by Rainer Maria Rilke*, Trans. by G. Craig Houston, Forward by Denise Levertov (New York: A New Directions Book, 1978), pp. 75-6.

<sup>19</sup> Alice Miller, *Prisoners of Childhood: The Drama of the Gifted Child and the Search for the True Self*, Translated by Ruth Ward, Basic Books, 1981; *Thou Shalt Not Be Aware: Society's Betrayal of the Child*, Translated by H. and H. Hannum, Meridian, 1986; and *For Your Own Good: Hidden Cruelty in Child-Rearing and the Roots of Violence*, transl. by H. and H. Hannum, Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1983.

full (but responsible) immersion in embodied existence we miss its joy and possibilities. Body is not the prison of the soul, but its opportunity.

### Affirming One's Self Through Body and Self Image

Paul Schilder in 1950 published an important work on the *body image*, which he terms "one of the central problems of psychology."<sup>20</sup> His attention was originally called to this by clinical observations on the affect of brain lesions on body imagery, particularly confusion in differentiation between the right and left side. He was also intrigued by "body phantoms": the retention of image and sensations of a part of the body which had been lost or amputated. When he in his subtitle speaks of the "constructive energies" of the psyche he opposes the centrality of regression in Freud whom he sees as neglecting "the principles of emergent evolution, or, as I would prefer to say, of constructive evolution, which leads to the creation of new units and configurations."<sup>21</sup> Thus the body image is always being constructed out of sensory perceptions provided by the body at rest and in motion, along with optical perceptions, which information is layered together to produce the body image, the tridimensional image we have of ourselves. This image is, of course, related to the neurological apparatus which enables it and whose destruction confuses it.

There is a close relation between body image and action. Schilder says:

When the knowledge of our own body is incomplete and faulty, all actions for which this particular knowledge is necessary will be faulty too. We need the body-image in order to start movements. We need it especially, when actions are directed towards our own body. Every trouble in gnosis and in perception generally will lead to a change in the action.<sup>22</sup>

Schilder's emphasis upon the importance of body image in starting movements is particularly important. The initiation of a movement usually has inadequate sensory information from the body to enable its accuracy. Once the movement is initiated, additional sensations are received from the body because of the movement. The information becomes more adequate and the limbs moved become better defined in awareness. The initiation of the movement is dependent primarily upon the body image. A simple illustration of this is to place your hand at rest upon your desk so that all movement and tension within your arm and hand are diminished. You should then sense your awareness of your hand and fingers becoming very vague. Then start to move your forefinger up and down while leaving your hand on the desk. You will find that the quality of awareness of your finger, and even your hand, immediately changes, becoming more vivid. While at rest, unless you think of the image of your hand you would have little sense of where your forefinger is in the vague sensations you are receiving from your hand. Therefore you locate the forefinger in the body image of your hand in order to initiate movement. Once you begin movement, there is no question of where your finger is.

Something similar is experienced of the whole body when movement ceases. If you relax in a reclining chair you will find that awareness of your body becomes amorphous.

Another simple illustration is speaking. Often before speaking anxiety builds because one is not adequately aware of oneself and the contents of one's speech. Once speech is initiated, if one keeps on

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20. Paul Schilder, M.D., Ph.D., *The Image and Appearance of the Human Body: Studies in the Constructive Energies of the Psyche*, New York: John Wiley & Sons, Science Editions, 1950, p. 10. Note that the Preface provides a 1935 date for the original writing of this monograph.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

talking, the awareness of one's speaking brings awareness of the mechanism of speech and the anxiety diminishes.

If body image is crucial in the initiation of movement in any limb, it is interesting to raise the question of the relationship of body image to the over-all functioning of the person. Here one must recognize that body image and self-image are closely related, if not the same. What happens when one has a very inadequate or negative self or body image? How then can action be initiated when one's image is inadequate or tells one that it will not be successful? Some persons then initiate action with great effort and, at times, to their own surprise find themselves doing what they did not think they could do once they move beyond initial uncertainty.

Body image in terms of awareness of the physical body can only be enhanced by physical activity and perhaps cultivating bodily awareness through meditation. As in the developing person the formation of body image is a gradual process, so is the intentional reformation or more adequate development of a body image. One must work at it and it takes time. Self-image can be enhanced by dealing with the negative dynamics of one's life and intentionally striving for a new self-image which is both realistic and calls us forth into what we can be, our unrealized potential. When life is seen developmentally, it foundationally always involves unrealized potential.

A realistic self-image does not mean that one defines oneself within the negativities and limits of one's history (something we repeatedly do as we rehearse our past life story). It has to do not with the realities of the past but with what is realistically possible in the future. To know what is realistically possible in the future we need the gifts of a new image and a new story (history) from outside ourselves and our own history. We may also be able to construct a new story out of our old story, reconstructing and reframing it in the light of new perspectives. As is the case with body image, the new self-image develops gradually, needs the persons intentional involvement, and experiences resistance from the established previous self-image.

This new story and self-image can also be a gift from an other in a good interpersonal relationship. A new self image and a new story is what God grants us in our relationship with God. The new story is given us from the story of Christ through Baptism, Eucharist and Gospel where his story becomes our story, much as Jews were part of the Exodus experience when they recited that story.

*Both body image and self image must be adequate for the enablement of life and functioning.*

### Affirming an Appropriate World

The world is what it is, but it is also what you expect it to be. During your life experience you have learned to expect certain things of your world. It is important to recognize that perceptions of life, or the world, come from past experience, not present. If your expectations of your world are negative, you need to ask yourself whether these expectations suit the reality of your present world. Just understanding that the present world is different from the world you came to fear is of some help, but usually not enough to make old feelings go away. Therapy may be one answer. But another is to place another powerful image upon your present world. I would suggest the face or the presence of God from whom nothing can separate you (see Rom. 8). The world may be frightening, but God will be there for you in the midst of all else that is there. It is also important to recognize that all experiences of the world involve what is in you besides what is in the world. You may not be able to change much of the world, but you can change what is in you so that what you bring to the world transforms it or its appearance to you. You do have that power. Another helpful approach is to try to live "mindfully," to live completely in the present rather than always anticipating the future. The present is the only place and time in which you can live anyway. You

cannot live in the future and you cannot stand the long-term stress of being afraid of it. You are afraid of what is not yet and there is no way of dealing with what is not yet – and may never be.

There is a very helpful image in the New Testament connected with Baptism. Since during NT times Baptism was only an adult experience, its imagery worked powerfully for the believer. The imagery involved confession of Christ as Lord, rejection of Satan, putting off an old garment symbolic of laying off the old life, dying with Christ as one went into the water and rising with him as one came out of the water, putting on a white garment symbolizing putting on Christ and new life, and an anointing which symbolized the presence of the Spirit. When one died in Christ one died to the Law (Rom. 7:4) and the powers of the world were overcome (Col. 2:13-15). These were the powers of culture and world for the Jew and for the Greek. Having died to the world it no longer had power over one. Now one might reenter the world on new terms. Perhaps the remembering of one's Baptism or participating in a rite remembering one's Baptism might help gain freedom from one's fear of world and life.

### Affirming Relationship

Human life starts in relationship. Certainly the womb is a very profound relationship, a relationship in which there are no questions and no separations. Then the child is born. Separated from the secure and primal relationship in the womb, the child must enter into relationship with family members, and even the mother, who are now other and separate. This is far richer in possibilities than the womb but no longer as certain and protective. It is in relationship that the child finds resources not yet available in him or herself, finds the affirmations, reactions and responses which define and enable becoming self-aware. The success or failure of these relationships, and the child's reactions, determine the child's later approach to relationships, defining the hunger, fear or trust with which relationships are approached. Isolation from relationship in infancy and childhood damages the child both psychologically and physiologically.

Most important, relationship is foundational to human existence, which fact is expressed in a primal relational hunger for which we seek satisfaction and fulfillment.

Relationship in religion is often the primary spiritual paradigm. God enters into relationship with us and creates relationship beyond this in community. The style of relationship expected often depends on the relational paradigms available in a culture. In the hierarchical world in which most of our religions were born, relationship with God is often seen as analogous to the relationship with a king or emperor. Here the relationship demands much of human responsibility and includes little intimacy. God is primarily distant. A major New Testament paradigm is the God who may be addressed intimately (as Abba, Father) and who enters life in Son and Spirit not only to be in relationship but to provide for the conditions by which humans can enter into relationship. God designates us sons and daughters, in a sense overcoming all the failures in human relationship and overcoming our loss of faith in relationship.

### Working with the Way the Body Works

However we may be able to enhance life through recognizing our transcendence; realizing the importance of will, decision and commitment as transcendent actions, affirming our body and our body- and self-image, and affirming an appropriate world and the significance of relationship, we will still be affected by the way our body functions. It is important to remember:

1. *You have a body. In this life there is no disembodied existence.* How you feel and function will be affected by the way your body functions and its condition. It makes possible your life, but it will at times seem to resist and limit you. Appreciate it as a gift and work with it. There are ways to care for

your body, such as meditation<sup>23</sup> and various techniques for stress management, exercise, vitamins and proper food, and at times appropriate medications.

2. *You need to work with your body's way of functioning, though still recognizing your transcendence of it.* That means that you need some understanding of its bio-chemical processes. For example, depression is not merely a feeling but has its bio-chemical counterpart in neurotransmitter problems which need remediation by allowing the body to restore neurotransmitter levels through rest and handling stress or through antidepressants. If you have dyslexia you know you are working with neurological limits but also with a neurological system which allows various compensations and alternatives. In all such circumstances *you* are there to participate in your body's processes. You are more than the physiological and neuro-psychological processes which you experience. Unless you know you are more than this, that you also transcend this, you will be purely at the mercy of your body.
3. *Your bodily mechanism learns in the process of life experience and mental reflection.* We cannot directly make changes in it or erase information stored within it which affects our lives and behavior. We can only add and appropriate new experience and images, and allow the mechanism to incorporate these within itself, granting it the time to do this and repeating the experiences and images we would hope would be formative. Powerful images are especially important, gradually becoming part of the body and mind's operative structure.
4. *Stress comes from attempting to do everything and solve problems by conscious thought rather than freeing the neurological mechanism to do its job.* Trying to think everything is like trying to think through the actions of our bodies as we walk down the street or engage in sports. Anxious conscious involvement only produces interference, loss of coordination, and stress.
5. *When you seek to provide the mechanism with new information, do not also dwell on the problems that you hope to change.* Doing so provides it with more information on the problems. This is another reason as to why it is so difficult directly to change a problem in human functioning. The very attempt to change an existing problem re-suggests the problem and its power. Here the Buddhist approach where the problem is not dwelled on and one sees oneself as transcending the problem may be more effective. However, the main concern is to present the new without reinforcing the problematic old.
6. *Accept that it is in the nature of the mechanism, as it is in the nature of being human, to make errors in the process of functioning.* Anxiety about errors will throw off the functioning of the mechanism.
7. *Recognize that your biological mechanism tends to sustain as a system what has become normal for you.* When you learn something that is strikingly new, with which the set of your psycho-neurological system can't immediately cope, you may experience some change and relief in the way you function. However, within a few days time the way you used to function and think will be restored as part of your inner system which seeks to restore its balance and normative state. The existence of a normative

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<sup>23</sup>. Though various types of meditative exercises can be done, complete relaxation, quieting of body and mind, and gentle attention even at times drifting off to light sleep, over a period of time allow the body to engage in its restorative processes and for a while decreases life's stress which has various physiological consequences. To begin to experience the possible results of this one needs to meditate for at least an hour a day for a period of at least 3-4 days. This is really what the Christian tradition has called contemplation which involves relaxation and attentiveness without the use of imaging. When one experiences the restorative value of this, one then can work with it as a part of a regular program of self-care. What usually accompanies this practice is a clearing of the mind, a greater level of mental awareness, and often a greater level of self awareness which may become a basis for more relaxed functioning. If you need help with this, almost any stress management program will include it.

state will mean that the introduction of something new will not easily or permanently take hold and one will experience frustration from the persistence and reestablishment of old patterns. Yet, when one knows how this happens, one can continue to work at the changes desired and know that their realization usually occurs gradually over time. The concern is to establish a new normative state or pattern which will eventually function automatically. This is possible unless body conditions prevent it. It is most possible when you have powerful beliefs working for you. There are appropriate times for critical analysis of belief systems, but not when you are seeking to use them to change powerful normative patterns in your functioning.

## The Gospel

While much of the above may be approached without religious imagery and ideation, it is important to remember that God acted in Christ and gave the Gospel in order to help us deal with the foundational issues of life. Thus to adequately receive the Gospel is also to find the resources for life through recognition of our transcendence, affirmation of our body, discovery of an adequate body-self-image, developing awareness of a livable and welcoming world, and affirmation of relationship. Moreover, crucial to life is not only what is given in the Gospel but *the Giver of the Gospel* by whose graced gifts we live. It is the Giver who fulfills our profound relational needs. Briefly, the meaning of the Gospel may be described as:

1. *All life is to be seen against the background of God's love for you, God's offer to you to be your heavenly Father. The Creator of the world, the Source of life, is the source of your life. When you have God, you have everything, and the presence of God in your life becomes a transformative power.*
2. *All of your life, your image of self and world, is to be understood from the perspective of the presence of God in your life, in the light of which the significance of your personal history and personal problems diminish. Your decisions, commitment and faith open your life to receiving of God's reality.*
3. *Your transcendence and your destiny. God participated in your creation and birth and gave you a soul. Because God participated in your creation, God has a place for you in life and a mission for you to perform. If you cannot find what God calls you to, God will go with you where you go. Trust the way God will work out your life. God gives you the Spirit as a resource for your development and life journey. God's strength is working for you.*
4. *Affirming the body. God expects you responsibly and lovingly to accept your life in this world and in the body, its vehicle. Because it is a good, but not perfect, vehicle, God offers forgiveness of sins and mistakes which affect the quality of your life and keep you from moving on to new possibilities. Because it is a limited vehicle, subject to illness and death, God reminds you of your transcendence which helps you to know that none of life's powers can overcome you.*
5. *Affirming a welcoming world. When you are God's child you are in community or fellowship with all of God's children. This means that you never face life alone. Whatever is wrong with the world, it is still God's world and God is in it with you. Whatever happens in life, nothing can separate you from God's love.*

Not all of the religious tradition reflects the love of God for you as a real flesh and blood human being with faults and limits. Some of the tradition in the Bible and Christian theology makes God more

fearsome and judgmental than loving. One has to work critically on the tradition, make up one's mind as to truth, and then risk and venture upon it. Continuing analysis will, in some sense, always be appropriate. But when one ventures upon a vision of self and life critical analysis must be set to the side or the vision will have no power, drained of possibilities by qualifications.

*God is waiting for you to venture upon the truth about you.*

## Session V The Resurrection of Lazarus

The Text of John 11:1-12:11

Introduction The Death of Lazarus and its Meaning

11:1 Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha.

11:2 Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. (Reference:12:1-8)

11:3 So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, "Lord, he whom you love is ill."

11:4 But when Jesus heard it, he said, "*This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.*"

11:5 Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, 11:6 after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

11:7 Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again."

11:8 The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?" 11:9 Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. 11:10 But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them."

11:11 After saying this, he told them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him." 11:12 The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right." 11:13 Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. 11:14 Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. 11:15 For your sake I am glad I was not there, *so that you may believe.* But let us go to him." 11:16 Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

Arrival at Bethany

11:17 When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. 11:18 Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, 11:19 and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. 11:20 When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home.

Jesus with Mary and Martha, Lazarus' Sisters

Martha and Jesus and Redefinition of Resurrection

11:21 Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. 11:22 But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." 11:23 Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." 11:24 Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." 11:25 Jesus said to her, "*I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, 11:26 and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?*" 11:27 She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world."

## Mary and Jesus

11:28 When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." 11:29 And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. 11:30 Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. 11:31 The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. 11:32 When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, "*Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.*" 11:33 When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved.

### The Tomb and the Resurrection

11:34 He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "*Lord, come and see.*" 11:35 Jesus began to weep. 11:36 So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" 11:37 But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" 11:38 Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. 11:39 Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days." 11:40 Jesus said to her, "*Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?*" 11:41 So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. 11:42 I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me." 11:43 When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "*Lazarus, come out!*" 11:44 The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "*Unbind him, and let him go.*"

### Reactions

11:45 Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him. 11:46 But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what he had done. 11:47 So the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the council, and said, "What are we to do? This man is performing many signs. 11:48 If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation." 11:49 But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all! 11:50 You do not understand that it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed." 11:51 He did not say this on his own, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus was about to die for the nation, 11:52 and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the dispersed children of God. 11:53 So from that day on they planned to put him to death.

### Jesus Withdraws

11:54 Jesus therefore no longer walked about openly among the Jews, but went from there to a town called Ephraim in the region near the wilderness; and he remained there with the disciples.

### Will Jesus Come to Passover?

11:55 Now the Passover of the Jews was near, and many went up from the country to Jerusalem before the Passover to purify themselves. 11:56 They were looking for Jesus and were asking one another as they stood in the temple, "What do you think? Surely he will not come to the festival, will he?" 11:57 Now the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that anyone who knew where Jesus was should let them know, so that they might arrest him.

## Mary Anoints Jesus for His Burial

12:1 Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. 12:2 There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. 12:3 Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. 12:4 But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, 12:5 "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" 12:6 (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) 12:7 Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. 12:8 You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me." 12:9 When the great crowd of the Jews learned that he was there, they came not only because of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. 12:10 So the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death as well, 12:11 since it was on account of him that many of the Jews were deserting and were believing in Jesus.

## An Analysis of John 11:1-44

### *An Approach to the Meaning of the Text*

#### PARAMETERS

##### Supplied by the Text

Parameters are the limits and possibilities of the text, set by its historical and literary meanings, from which we can explore the contemporary meaning of the text while still being responsible to its original meaning.

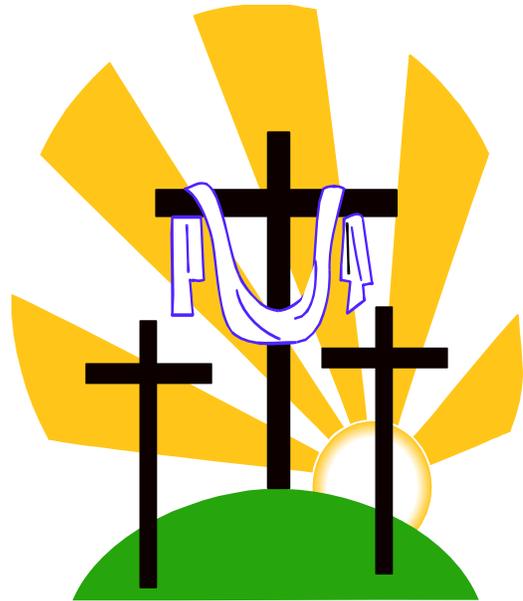
One of the major questions that scholars have had to deal with is what to do with the story of Lazarus which is not even mentioned in the other Gospels. Some have sought to see if they could make sense of the Gospel without this story. But the story of Lazarus is central to the narrative of John.

For example, 8:12 through chapter 12 form an integrated narrative where one part of the narrative refers to other parts. 11:37 refers back to the story of the blind man. 12:1 and 9 refer to the resurrection of Lazarus. 11:2 refers to Mary's anointing of Jesus in 12:1-8.. In 11:45-53 it is the resurrection of Lazarus that precipitates the decision of the authorities to put Jesus to death (in the Synoptics this is caused by the cleansing of the Temple), In 12:9-11, 17-18 the crowds are gathered in Jerusalem at Passover because of Lazarus' resurrection. Also the themes of Jesus as giver of light and life are developed purposefully in 8:12 through chapter 11, seemingly developed from these themes in the Prologue (1:4). Thus it is almost impossible to pull the story of Lazarus from the Gospel of John.

#### CONTEMPORIZATION

##### The Meanings of the Text for Us

These are the meanings of text in the present context of our life and needs: what the text comes to mean to us and how the text speaks to us. Here we still need to be responsible to the possibilities determined by the text and its author, and thus we want to be conscious of the parameters mentioned on the left. However, we must always allow for the possibility that God will speak to us through a text in a way that has little to do with the text's historical limits of meaning. When meaning comes to us apart from the historical meaning of the text, then we must discern, figure out whether this meaning is in harmony with the Christ and God we know.



The story of Lazarus must have been treasured within the Johannine Christian community. It's central role in the Gospel almost guarantees that it had a central role in the Gospel written by the Beloved Disciple and used as a source in the present Gospel (21:24). Its importance within the Johannine narrative speaks its importance as a paradigm, as a carrier of meaning.

The story focuses primarily on the experience of Mary, Martha (both mentioned in Luke 10:38ff) and Jesus, followed by the reaction of the crowds and officials to Lazarus resurrection (and the reactions of the disciples within the context of the story). Interestingly, Lazarus is only important as an object of Jesus' action and the women's concern. What really happens to Lazarus as a result of the resurrection is left to the imagination and early Christian speculation which said that Lazarus, Mary and Martha went as missionaries to southern France.

Jesus evidently used Bethany as a base when near Jerusalem as he used Capernaum in Galilee. In Capernaum he dwelled with Peter's family.

This is the story of a family's wrestling with death and the issues it poses. It is the story of how hope affects life and how death may rob it of meaning. It is a story about what the real nature of "life" is, eternal life being a major Johannine theme. Here Jesus redefines traditional eschatological hopes oriented to a future resurrection in terms of a present experience of the overcoming of death in him. The "eternal" life that Jesus speaks of is life of the "age to come" (the Greek adjective *aionios* is derived from the word for "age"), the great symbol of which was a new relationship with God, -- but it is to be experienced NOW.

Jesus acts as one in control, sovereign over the situation. He is not rushed or pressured. He knows that God hears him (42).

The story of Lazarus lives within the life and faith of the church as persons find that the story resonates with their own experience of Christ and life and pass it down within early Christian tradition (much as happened in the extensive use of this story in art and literature.)

Events precipitate responses and responses reveal the nature of each character, what one is. Character studies might be done of the persons involved in the story in order to get in touch with our own reactions.

Jesus usually finds a receptive family to live with who then enable his mission. What is this relationship between receptivity to him and the possibility of his mission?

How does a family deal with death? What difference does Christ make? Can death rob life of life? Does life essentially consist of the relationship with the Father through Jesus, as Jesus indicates in John. What does it mean to "believe in Jesus" and then never die? (vs. 25-26) What does it mean to confess Jesus, as in vs. 27?

Is this merely an aspect of John's Christology or is this in a sense true to Jesus? What enables Jesus to act in this way? Can a Christian act like this in a crisis?

Jesus loved Mary and Martha (vs. 5). Jesus also loved Lazarus (3,36), wept (35), and was deeply moved (38). There are many passages in John which portray the humanity of Jesus and there are others which present him as one who knows all and whose humanity is only a pretense for those standing by (e.g. the prayer in 41-42). The compassion and humanity of Jesus are preserved in the Gospel in balance with his divinity in a way which seems to recognize the role of both elements, contrary to those who split from the Johannine community and seemed to deny his humanity (mentioned in I John).

This story is connected with the healing of the blind man (11:37) in chapter 9. Chapter 9 deals with "light" and chapter 11 deals with "life". These are central themes in the Gospel and the Prologue.

In 9:3 (the blind man) and 11:4 it is clear that both miracles are to glorify God. In chapter 12 it is announced that the "hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified" in losing his life. This is the hour that has been waited for (note the theme of the hour in John). In this way God is glorified (12:28). Thus the suffering of the blind man, the dying of Lazarus, and the dying of Jesus all serve to glorify God. In a way the death and resurrection of Lazarus seems to anticipate Jesus' experience. Perhaps Jesus allows Lazarus to die so that people will know that there is life in death, not just after death. Thus his disciples will know that when he is lifted up in death, he will still be alive and life is overcome in death, not just after death. The theme of "glory" in the death of Lazarus, the blindness of the man in chpt. 9, and Jesus own lifting up on the cross, says that God and life must be affirmed in crisis and tragedy, not merely in the absence of crisis or afterwards when all might be fixed.

Are there elements of both humanity and "divinity" in the self-awareness of the Christian. There must be some basis for this not only in the tradition about Jesus in the Johannine community, but in the self-consciousness of the Johannine community. I think of Carl Jung's personality no. 1 and personality no. 2, mentioned in his autobiography *Memories, Dreams and Reflections*. His personality no. 1 belonged to the ages and had an awareness not connected with his life history. His personality no. 2 belonged to his life history. Are we out of touch with this?

How are these primal themes of light and life understood in our own experience. What does the process of the blind man and the process of the resurrection of Lazarus have to do with our life and light? Why are life and light related instead of separate themes?

How might we deal with the difficulties of life, and our own death, in the light the presentation of these three stories in John? How does God's glory shine in our humanness and limitations and suffering. Is there some way that the glory of God, the "something more" of life, becomes transparent in these moments? How is this like Paul's treatment of the manifestation of God's power in his weakness, as portrayed in II Cor. 11-12?

The life with God which Jesus offers is one plane of life. The level of history where things happen is another. Jesus' incarnation means that he is both from above, but also lives within the plane of history. Thus whatever happens within history cannot be understood to be all there is. The offer of life with God means that we also share this existence on two levels, which must always be affirmed in the face of difficulty and tragedy. In the face of death one lives.

Though Mary, Martha, Jesus, the disciples, and the crowds provide the major materials for personality analysis, Lazarus is still central to the story. All we know of him is that he was brother of Mary and Martha, that Jesus loved him, and that he was dead.. The drama at the tomb does revolve around him:

Jesus, greatly moved, takes charge (38ff):

"Take away the stone."

"Did I not tell you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?"

"Father, I thank thee..."

"Lazarus, come out."

"Unbind him and let him go."

The struggle of Mary and Martha over Lazarus' death and Jesus' words provide an interesting study of the struggle between the apocalyptic version of eschatology (life in the future) and the insights on the meaning of Jesus within the Johannine community (life now), as well as a dramatization of the struggle of those who heard Jesus to realize what it meant to have life now. In so much of the New Testament material one encounters the difficulty persons had in understanding Jesus (e.g. Mark 4 where Jesus seems to be speaking in parables which are like riddles and not understood, I Cor. 1 where Paul indicates that both Jew and Greek looked for something different than the cross, and Jesus reinterpretation of the Messianic mission). This was not only a problem in Jesus' communication to his fellow Jews, but in Christians grasping the nature of what God had done in him: that God's action in Jesus was an rejection of the use of power presupposed in both political and religious circles.

Does the unfinished story of Lazarus and the vaguaries about Lazarus help us better to identify with him? How can we identify with his being entombed and bound? Does Jesus also weep for our entombment and being bound and how does Jesus roll back the door of our tomb and call us out, commanding that we be unbound.

How might Jesus take charge of a situation in our life. A number of these "words" of Jesus become meaningful as we face any issue.

How does our dialogue with Jesus, as Jesus confronts us in the reality of our own situation and context, challenge the limits and culturally conditioned nature of our understanding? In a sense the theme of "misunderstanding" so evident in many of the Johannine stories, appears also here. It is almost as if nothing is quite as it seems until we adequately hear whether Jesus would call us to understand differently. This really calls us to adopt the *via negativa*, the way of unknowing, as the mystics spoke of it. To really know we must be willing to unknow, to lay all aside (all our concepts and knowledge), to hear anew, and to know the Person whose presence challenges all structures and formulations. Perhaps the tomb and the bindings signify the ways we are buried and bound by the limits of our understanding.

*The Resurrection of Lazarus*

The door rolled back,  
and forth he came  
called by the one  
whose voice he knew.

"Unbind!" he heard,  
and then could feel  
hands tearing 'way  
what held him fast.

How strange again  
to feel the sun  
and breathe the air,  
fresh from the field.

He didn't want  
to come, but knew  
he must. For death  
would take his Lord.

Then how'd they know  
that life was more.  
extending from both  
sides the door, called death;

that on both sides  
embraced and lived,  
both life and door  
belongs to God? And so,

forever, still,  
we hear the call  
to be unbound  
from fear of death - and life.

Arthur Freeman 1992

*Meditation on Lazarus*

From the mystery of the womb  
To the silence of the tomb  
Life moves through its stages;  
What was gained  
Slips through our grasp  
Thrust upon the mercies of  
existence beyond our control  
We are amazed to find life  
sustained by God.

Then we realize that  
living is not only birth and  
growth  
dying is not only life's  
final stillness.

Dying is that which  
weighs life down,  
keeps life from unfolding,  
binds it,  
drains its possibilities.

Dying is  
fearing to live,  
staring upon life with empty eyes,  
seeing nothing.

Living is finding  
the Source of life  
Who gifts our existence  
and sustains us.

Arthur Freeman 1983

## Two Perceptions: Arthur Miller and Vincent Van Gogh

I would like first to present two persons who have wrestled with the presence of the Transcendent (God and the spiritual world) and found different answers. Why does one continue to believe and another surrender belief in the face of life's realities?

### Arthur Miller's Play *After The Fall*

A good gauge of the spirit of the times is its literature. Following the second World War there was a great deal of literature which saw the world in the shadow of the war and God as essentially absent. One such is Arthur Miller's autobiographical play *After the Fall*.<sup>24</sup> In it Quentin, the central character, reflects back on his life and its failures in order to see what he can bring to a new marriage he is contemplating: two failed marriages, a friend's suicide, and failed family relationships. Most of the play really takes place in his mind. Those who have played roles in his life are located on various levels of the stage and they come to life as he remembers them. The title, *After the Fall*, represents his conclusion that one must live after the Fall, without God, not in some Garden of Eden which is a lie. One must live in the world as it is and accept the reality of oneself with all that that involves.

At the beginning of the play while Quentin is waiting at the airport for Holga to arrive (the German girl he is thinking of marrying), he speaks of the disappearance of God from life and the problems this poses in dealing with the despair and pointlessness of life.

You know, more and more I think that for many years I looked at life like a case at law, a series of proofs. When you're young you prove how brave you are, or smart; then what a good lover; then, a good father; finally, how wise, or powerful or what-the-hell-ever. But underlying it all, I see now, there was a presumption. That I was moving on an upward path toward some elevation, where - God knows what - I would be justified, or even condemned - a verdict anyway. I think now that my disaster really began when I looked up one day - and the bench was empty. No judge in sight. And all that remained was the endless argument with oneself - this pointless litigation of existence before an empty bench. Which, of course, is another way of saying - despair. And, of course, despair can be a way of life; but you have to believe in it, pick it up, take it to heart, and move on again. Instead, I seem to be hung up.<sup>25</sup>

In such a world it becomes clear that one is on one's own:

I've lost the sense of some absolute necessity. Whether I open a book or think of marrying again, it's so damned clear I'm choosing what I do - and it cuts the strings between my hands and heaven. It sounds foolish, but I feel ... unblessed. .... And I keep looking back to when there seemed to be some duty in the sky.<sup>26</sup>

How few the days are that hold the mind in place; like a tapestry hung on four or five hooks. Especially the day you stop becoming; the day you merely are. I suppose it's when the principles dissolve, and instead of the general gray of what ought to be you begin to see what is.<sup>27</sup>

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24. Arthur Miller, *After The Fall*, NY: Bantam Books, 1965.

25. *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 31.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 59.

In Quentin's rehearsal of his various failures, that with Maggie, the play's Marilyn Monroe who was Miller's wife, is central. He had hoped to save her from herself, but had to separate himself from her to survive. During her attempted suicide he knows he wanted her death. He is reminded of his visit to a German concentration camp:

Who can be innocent again on this mountain of skulls? I tell you what I know! My brothers died here - but my brothers built this place; our hearts have cut these stones!<sup>28</sup>

It is in the story of Maggie that the metaphor of the resurrection of Lazarus, John 11, emerges. Maggie is drunk.

Maggie: Quentin, what's Lazarus? Quentin? Quen?

Quentin: Jesus raised him from the dead. In the Bible. Go to sleep now.

Maggie: Wha's 'at suppose to prove?

Quentin: The power of faith.

Maggie: What about those who have no faith?

Quentin: They only have the will.

Maggie: But how you get the will?

Quentin: You have faith.

Maggie: Some apples.<sup>29</sup>

At stake in the play is whether there is any *blessing*. Felice, a young woman whom Quentin advises to change her nose by plastic surgery, becomes the satirical symbol of blessing, appearing after the remembrance of life episodes and raising her arms in blessing. On one occasion Felice says: "I'll always bless you!" and Quentin remarks:

When she left ... I did a stupid thing. I don't understand it. There are two light fixtures on the wall of my hotel room .... I noticed for the first time that they're ... a curious distance apart. And I suddenly saw that if you stood between them (he spreads out his arms) you could reach out and rest your arms.

Maggie enters and to his obvious gesturing of the cross cries out "Liar! Judge!"<sup>30</sup>

The play concludes with Holga's arrival at the airport, and of her Quentin comments that she hopes, for she knows that one must eventually "take one's life in one's arms" and kiss it though it bear the face of an idiot.<sup>31</sup>

That woman hopes!

Or is that exactly why she hopes, because she knows? What burning cities taught her and the death of love taught me: that we are very dangerous! And that, that's why I wake each morning like a boy - even now, even now! I swear to you, I could love the world again! Is the knowing all? To know, and even happily, that we meet unblessed; not in some garden of wax fruit and painted trees, that lie of Eden, but after, after the Fall, after many, many deaths. Is the knowing all? And the wish to kill is never killed, but with some gift of courage one may look into its

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28. Ibid., p. 162.

29. Ibid., p. 150.

30. Ibid., p. 15.

31. Ibid., pp. 30-31.

face when it appears, and with a stroke of love - as to an idiot in the house - forgive it; again and again ... forever?<sup>32</sup>

## Vincent Van Gogh

Van Gogh was an artist of the last century, dying at his own hand in 1890. Though he does not reflect the pessimism of our era, the tragedies of his own life caused him to reflect deeply. The first great Dutch artist since Rembrant, he participated in the turn to Expressionism.

His father was a preacher and there were preachers and artists in the family. His family tried to influence him to become an art dealer, but his melancholy because of an unhappy love affair caused the firm for which he worked to fire him. Moved by deep religious sentiments, he determined to study for the ministry, but failed the educational requirements. For a while he was a lay missionary to mine workers in Belgium, so identifying himself with their condition that the missionary society discharged him for excessive zeal. Finally, ten years before his death, he determined to follow his artistic inclinations and do through art what he could not do through preaching. After three tragic love affairs, one with a drunken prostitute, and the onset of mental illness, he gradually gave up the institutional aspects of his Christian faith. He turned from the church, calling himself "no friend of present Christianity"<sup>33</sup>, criticizing the Bible as "that saddening Bible which arouses our despair and our indignation -- which distresses us once and for all because we are so outraged by its pettiness and contagious folly." Christ remained his spiritual rootage and "the consolation of that saddening Bible,"<sup>34</sup> because Christ pointed to the spiritual dimension of existence.

Christ alone - of all the philosophers, Magi, etc. - has affirmed, as a principal certainty, eternal life, the infinity of time, the nothingness of death, the necessity and the *raison d'etre* of serenity and devotion. He lived serenely, *as a greater artist than all other artists*; despising marble and clay as well as color, working in living flesh. That is to say, this matchless artist, hardly to be conceived of by the obtuse instrument of our modern, nervous, stupefied brains, made neither statues nor pictures nor books; he loudly proclaimed that he made ... *living men*, immortals. ....

(Men have come to see that the world is not flat.) But notwithstanding this they persist nowadays in believing that life is flat and runs from birth to death. However, life too is probably round, and very superior in expanse and capacity to the hemisphere we know at present.

Future generations will probably enlighten us on this so very interesting subject; and they maybe Science itself will arrive - willy-nilly - at conclusions more or less parallel to the sayings of Christ with reference to the other half of our existence.<sup>35</sup>

One cannot judge the spiritual dimensions of existence by this world.

I feel more and more that we must not judge God on this world, it is just a study that did not come off. What can you do, in a study that has gone wrong, if you are fond of the artist - you

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32. *Ibid.*, pp. 162-163.

33. The Complete Letters of Vincent Van Gogh, 3 vols., Greenwich, CN: New York Graphic Society, nd, (autumn 1884, #378), vol. 3, p. 309.

34. *Ibid.*, [June 1888, B 8 (11)], vol. 3, p. 495.

35. *Ibid.*, [June 1888, B 8 (11)], vol. 3, pp. 495-6.

do not find much to criticize - you hold your tongue. But you have a right to ask for something better. We should have to see other works by the same hand though; this world is evidently botched up in a hurry on one of his bad days when the artist didn't know what he was doing or didn't have his wits about him. All the same, according to what the legend says, the good old God took a terrible lot of trouble over this world-study of his.

I am inclined to think that legend is right, but then the study is ruined in so many ways. It is only a master who can make such a muddle and perhaps that is the best consolation we have out of it, since in that case we have a right to hope that we will see the same creative hand get even with itself and this life of ours, so much criticized, and for such good exalted reasons, we must not take for anything but what it is and go on hoping that in some other life we will see a better thing than this.<sup>36</sup>

In the year of his suicide Van Gogh copied a Rembrandt portrayal of the resurrection of Lazarus. The red-bearded face of Lazarus looks strikingly like Van Gogh's own in his self-portrait. The only other two figures in the painting, besides Lazarus, are his two sisters. Above the scene hovers a bright yellow sun, likely symbolizing Jesus' words in John 11:9: "If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world." The crushing weight of his existence did not rob him of the awareness that "life too is probably round, and very superior in expanse and capacity to the hemisphere we know at present."<sup>37</sup> He seems to have known experientially what the circumstances of his life would seem to deny.

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If we have never sought, we seek Thee now;  
     Thine eyes burn through the dark, our only stars;  
 We must have sight of thorn-pricks on Thy brow,  
     We must have Thee, O Jesus of the Scars.

The heavens frighten us; they are too calm  
     In all the universe we have no place,  
 Our wounds are hurting us; where is the balm?  
     Lord Jesus, by Thy Scars, we claim Thy grace.

If, when the doors are shut, Thou drawest near,  
     Only reveal those hands, that side of Thine;  
 We know today what wounds are, have no fear,  
     Show us Thy Scars, we know the countersign.

The other gods were strong; but Thou wast weak;  
     They rode, but Thou didst stumble to a throne;  
 But to our wounds only God's wounds can speak,  
     And not a god has wounds, but Thou alone.<sup>38</sup>

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36. Ibid., (Spring 1988, 490), vol. 2, p. 572..

37. See above.

38 William Temple, *Readings In St. John's Gospel*, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1959. p. 366.