

## A COMPREHENSIVE MODEL OF LIFE'S COMPLEXITY AND THE NATURE OF THE SPIRITUAL

Well, here we are: world and us and God. So much to live in, but what is there to live by? What is the heart of the complexity of life, within, without. I listen for a voice to heal my pain and confusion, and to speak my meaning.

Well, here we are!

What to do with ourselves!

We see the wonder in the mirror,  
and the strangeness;

And feel the strong and hidden currents  
of sea of mind and passion  
carrying with it things wondrous --  
and o'erwhelming.

We remember where we have been  
and remember the stories they told us  
of before we were;

And we see the hesitant glance  
from the mirror,  
almost afraid to smile,  
as if she knew not quite  
who and what she was.

It is as if we lived  
in world, within without,  
and knew not what was ours  
and what to us was brought  
by powers not us,  
bent upon confusion and destruction  
of what we cherish.  
And yet we cannot live  
in worlds not ours, not owned,  
for fear and damned by what "they" say;  
these worlds are us,  
within, without.  
Perhaps there must be courage  
but above all  
there must be love,  
and then there must be  
God.

Interventions for healing may come from various disciplines, deal with various aspects of human existence and will have various levels of influence and success. Here complexity needs recognition. Some religious approaches, and even medical approaches, remain within the confines of limited views and interests. The more one can deal with the whole of a person's life, the greater are the possibilities for healing. The interpretation of life to the patient also calls for a wisdom which comes from as full a knowledge and experience of life as possible.

One aspect of the diagram which follows deals with the reality of evil. This is a major issue. Much prayerful and contemplative approach to life presumes that the spiritual is all good, that it is unified, and somehow all related to a good ultimate source of life. If evil is real, as Christianity believed from the beginning and the experiences of this century would seem to confirm, what then does one do to deal with this when one opens oneself to the spiritual realities of life and recognizes there a possible oppositional force preventing healing? There is the problem of discerning what is "out there" or "in" our experience, but there is also the problem of our *trust of life* and existence when there is something lurking out there intent upon our harm. To be unable to trust life profoundly affects one's life (and health). Spirituality has dealt with this through discerning whether spiritual experiences were of God or some other spirit (note I John 4:1-4) and trusting in God to manage and protect one from other powers. One of the best approaches to this is that of Gerald May in his *Will and Spirit: A Contemplative Psychology*. In trust, one is forced into "the fundamental contemplative statement concerning good, evil, and God" which expresses the contemplative "leap of faith":

I DO NOT KNOW. I do not know what is ultimately good or evil, nor even what is real or unreal. But I do know that there is no way I can proceed upon my own personal resources. In this as in all things, I am utterly and irrevocably dependent upon a Power that I can in no way objectify. I call this Power God, and God is beyond my understanding, beyond good and evil, beyond doubt and trust, beyond even life and death. God's love and power and Spirit exist in me, through me, and in all creatures. But God is unimaginably BEYOND all this as well. I also

know that in my heart I wish to do and be what God would desire of me. Therefore, in humility and fear, I give myself. I commit my soul to God, the One Almighty Creator, the Ultimate Source of reality. Good or bad, right or wrong, these things are beyond me. I love, but I do not know. I live and act and decide between this and that as best I can, but ultimately, I do not know. And thus I say, in the burning vibrancy of Your Love and Terror, THY WILL BE DONE.<sup>55</sup>

There are also the many other factors which impinge on the life of the person in the center of the diagram. Though these factors could be identified and described in various ways, it would seem to me that it is barely contestable that, however they are defined, they do affect the person and his/her well-being. Once the implications of this diagram are taken seriously *simplistic answers can no longer be given*. This would mean that whereas diagnosis of illness ordinarily takes into consideration the many systems of the body and sometimes considers psychological factors, if it were possible diagnosis should probably consider these other systems also, though that might introduce an unmanageable complexity. When efforts at healing are made on a spiritual level, this is done in the midst of this complexity. Even God in this world acts in the midst of this complexity. Thus one would expect that whereas the foundational healing of the rift between the person and the spiritual realm may be simply an act of accepting what God gives, the healing of mind, psyche and body is often more a process than a simple act --- for the complexities and established systems of our selves and our world are involved. An interesting question is how the cooperation of these other systems might be gained for the healing of a person. Another would be the extent to which the spiritual can relate to and modify some of these other systems. There is some evidence for this, besides the recognition of mind-body relationships. Then there is the importance of the *placebo* (or *nocebo*) effect. If the complexity of life introduces conditions and uncertainties and one communicates this to the person seeking healing and the possibilities of healing are doubted, even by the healer, then the possibility of expectations influencing outcomes is diminished. My approach to this would be realistic, but confident. There are many factors in life which affect us and God and the spiritual world must work for us in this context. Yet God is there for us. That is *absolutely true*. And we are spiritual beings, having souls, belonging also to the world of the spirit as well as the material and physical. This is *absolutely true*. Knowing who and what we are (biological and spiritual beings) and whose we are (God's) we welcome what God can do on the physical level and have absolute trust in what God always does on the spiritual level. We know that no illness, not even death, can affect Whose and who we are on the spiritual level. One element of personal existence that could not be easily diagrammed is a "tradition." A tradition consists of the stories we tell about life, God, and ourselves which give us roots and construct a world of meaning for us. Some stories come to us as part of our religious, philosophical, national, and scientific traditions. I believe that also some stories come to us archetypally through our genes, the result of human experiences the stories of which we cannot remember or tell, but which influence us. One possible construal of the meaning of a tradition is expressed in the diagram which follows and includes such items as personal history, developmental tasks, family, spiritual world and historical world. To this should be added the stories of our family before our personal history which nevertheless are part of our own history. This tradition of meaning, if it is really ours and we are in some way invested in it, tends to perpetuate its dynamics and bring to expression its implications. If we recognize little world of meaning beyond our individual life experience, then we have over simplified our life and the dynamics which inspire and explain it. Then individual experience is all we can identify amongst the hidden domains of a much broader existence. Moreover, the tradition which informs our lives is not just that which comes to us or is part of our history. We also choose traditions which by this act of choice and the process of living inform

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55. Gerald G. May, *Will and Spirit: A Contemplative Psychology*, San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1982., p 277.

our lives. This is often the function of religious traditions. They live their reality through us and the power of their imagery shapes our lives and can empower towards well-being.

To understand as much as one can of life and its dynamics does not mean ultimately to gain mastery over life nor does it completely resolve life's mystery. It does enable one to live better within life and its complexity -- and to experience more of well-being though not always of being well.

*With hope*

*I live*

*amidst 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.*

**DIAGRAM OF THE FACTORS OF HUMAN EXPERIENCE**

**SPIRITUAL WORLD**

[In some sense distinct from our created world, but also present as a dimension within it.

**Not a world of space and time** as our physical world.]

**God** offers relationship with God's Self and the spiritual world. The relationship with God is on-going and interpersonal, with interaction in the life process. Relationship with the spiritual world is partially natural and belongs to being human -- though the relationship with and awareness of this grows with interaction.

A major question is whether this is a *single* world, or whether there are *several* spiritual worlds or *multiple powers* within one world. Of special concern is the possibility of powers that are *oppositional* to God and humans, such as a personal force of **Evil**.

**THE PHYSICAL AND HISTORICAL WORLD**

**WORLD POWERS** which affect our lives. They are regarded as **NEUTRAL** in the N.T. since they are not bad or good in themselves, but at times support life and at other times function destructively.

**HISTORICAL, POLITICAL, CULTURAL, ECONOMIC, NATURAL** -- These were often spiritualized in the ancient world into personal spiritual powers.

**HUMAN SYSTEMS**

(political, economic systems might also be considered as human systems, but they come to have power and identity beyond that of those involved in them.)

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

⊖ CONSTITUTED BY ⊕

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

⊕ CONSTITUTED BY ⊖

**Personal History**

one's personal history happens outside one and with it one interacts and in it one participates. It is also introjected into the psyche consciously and unconsciously.

**Biological Organism**

with its own functional mechanisms  
The biological organism interfaces Psyche and Spirit. They interact and affect each other, but mind and psyche also have some autonomy.  
We live through our bodies but also transcend them.

**SOUL/SPIRIT** which belongs to the Spiritual World and

**Developmental Tasks:**

- Biological, Cognitive
- Moral, Faith/Spiritual
- Psychological, Social
- Integrative

**Psyche** (mind, human spirit)

**Conscious**

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

**Unconscious**

**Personal Unconscious**  
-personal history presently unremembered, sometimes integrated but often partially disassociated

**..Archetypal/Collective**

-structures of inherited psyche deposited by history of human experience.

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

- ^
- ^
- ^
- Self**
- v
- v a deep structure of the psyche leading to integration and wholeness as part of life's process. Relig. symbols often serve it.

interfaces but transcends  
the biological organism.

multiple personalities whole persons, not necessarily aware  
of each other, are formed in the Unconscious.

**EACH OF THE FACTORS CONTRIBUTE TO BEING WELL AND WELL BEING**

This complex world was that envisaged by many of the writers of the New Testament and of Jewish literature of the first century CE, though they did not use all of this terminology. Both Judaism and Christianity came to see the world as complex because they could not otherwise explain their experience of life, whereas the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) saw the world as more simply in God's firm control.

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When reviewing the diagram and the description of life contained in this book, one is likely to exclaim, "My God! I did not realize life was so complex. It all once seemed so simple." But that is before it was analysed. And in acceptance of this complexity lies the solution of many of life's issues. Involved is also a rethinking of God, something that I believe Jesus was advocating over against the misunderstanding of God and God's role current in his day. The primary error we make in seeking to understand God is to make God all powerful and to assume that within this world God can make whatever changes God wishes and can control the events which could harm us if only we have faith and deserve God's reward. The reason we hold on to this tooth and nail is in spite of the world being so frightening it makes the world seem so safe. God can make all turn out right – if only we deserve it and believe.

This longing for existential simplicity is almost built into our genes, though it also has its basis in some of our religious literature and thus is believed. One can see this perspective of simplicity in much of the Old Testament. Satan in Job creates problems, but Satan still serves God. By the time of Intertestamental Judaism Satan is a fallen angel who opposes God and rules this world. Satan has demons and unclean spirits as God has angels. And then there are the principalities, powers, elemental spirits mentioned in Paul who are the neutral powers of nature, the stars, and the political and social systems. God is present in this complexity. Some shoved God off to his heavenly palace because his power was not being shown in the spheres of human existence. In the end time he, or his emissary, would come and then all his power would be let loose to destroy evil and recreate the world. But it is now 2000 years since the time of Jesus. Many maintain their expectations without seriously questioning the way these 2000 years and their tragedies have inflicted endless pain on human beings. That we can hope for a rescue helps us survive, but hope has not produced the reality. To see Jesus' disciples struggle with his reinterpretation of the presence of God within the world's complexities makes us realize that a rethinking will not be easy.

### **Implications of a Relational Spirituality**

When religion is seen as doctrine, institution, or ethical system, 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. God is assumed, but often seen as distant from these tangible expressions, determining things from the far reaches of heaven. Religion is something that is *about* God. 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 spirituality consists of an interpersonal relationship. This would also challenge the idea of God in a remote heaven, for relationship exists where the persons are – and we are here.

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.

The Ancient Moravian Church said that the **Essential** was the relationship with the Triune God and the human response in faith, love and hope. All else is **Ministerial** and the variety in the way things are done is **Incidental**. For Count Zinzendorf and the Renewed Moravian Church the essence of religion is the **heart** (an inner organ of perception) **relationship** with the Savior through whom there is open to the believer a relationship with all that the Triune God is and wishes for us. Relational religion is the essence of **simplicity** and all, infant, senile and learned, may have this religion. Relational religion is the heart of the Moravian understanding of religion.

This relationship is a reality, as the Savior and God are realities. Luke Timothy Johnson in *The Real Jesus* comments on the difference that a real resurrected Jesus makes in our approach to the knowledge of Jesus:

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)

As we explore the complexity of life and our own experience for signs and hints of God we look for signs of relationship and the impact of this relationship upon our lives. This relationship exists in the midst of all of the other factors of life, as do human relationships. It does not overwhelm life, as we often expect God to do if God is really present. Its primary character is not power, but love. And it exhibits characteristics natural to relationship, as described in the following.

### **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.
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 what God may say 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 any one Gospel 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.

### **Incarnational Presence**

In the New Testament the paradigm of God's presence is established as *incarnational*. In Judaism, many ancient religions, and in much of early Christianity it was assumed that the proper analogy for God was that of a powerful emperor or king, dwelling in heavenly palaces, whose holiness and presence would immediately and powerfully transform all. The kingdom (rule) of God in the NT was often assumed to be an expression of God's power and thus most often the kingdom was seen as future, for the present world was not yet transformed by God's power. Thus all those stories within the Jesus' tradition which presented him as participating in normal human existence were often problematic to the church – such as Jesus' baptism. Matthew needs to explain why Jesus submitted to it (3:1ff). John eliminates Jesus' baptism by water while retaining some of the elements of the baptism story (John 1). Jesus also debated the issue of power with his disciples, renouncing traditional messianic expectations and the use of coercive power (see Mark 10:35-45). Worst, or most wonderful, of all, he suffered and died. While Hebrews 10 has him resting in heaven, now free from his suffering and human experience, John 20 presents a Jesus who in appearing to his disciples *after* his ascension (see the conversation with Mary) still bears his wounds. *Jesus has chosen to remain wounded*. Count Zinzendorf of the Moravian tradition tells 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." The presentation of Jesus as Son of God and Son of Man (who in Jewish mythology was the heavenly man according to whom earthly Adam was created) portrays him as one from heaven who submits himself to world, history and the conditions of human existence. The story of the Spirit in the early church is the story of God's continuing incarnation in real and often problematic persons and communities (note that in I Cor. 1:1-9 Paul affirms the spiritual gifts of the Corinthians in spite of their all too evident human nature). Although Luke in Acts seems to make the experience of the Spirit more a matter of pure power, Paul clearly knows that spiritual experience occurs in the midst of the realities of life which are sometimes harsh (II Cor. 11:22-12:10).

This means that the presence and activity of the resurrected Jesus who goes with and before us in life (Mark 14:28, 16:7) is not to be found in the magical and powerful experiences of life where God somehow clears away the realities of life, but in the midst of life's realities. We need to hear his voice within, not apart from, life.

Inasmuch as the ongoing presence of Jesus and God in the Spirit is portrayed as intimately connected with persons who bear the Spirit's gifts, serve the Lord and are energized by God (I Cor. 12:4-6), a primary place to look for the activity of Jesus would be in the lives of committed persons and communities and sometimes even in the life of an unsuspecting uncommitted person. The Bible is the story of persons, responsive and unresponsive, aware and unaware, committed and resistive, whom God somehow uses.

To take the Incarnation seriously is to have a sense of where to look in life to find God. To be able to find something of God in life is so important, for if there is no reality to which our words about God point, then perhaps we are fooling ourselves. But we do not want to miss God by looking for the wrong things. In the history of spirituality breathing has often been used as a focus of attention, drawing us away from other concerns and creating relaxation as its pace becomes slower and deeper. It also has become a symbol of the way we receive God and life, drawing them in with each breath and gifting them back to the world with each exhalation.

Such meditation also reminds us that what we need in life is within the reach of our breath. We do not have to search for God and life far away. All the possibilities are here, around us. God is near. Christ is near, Spirit is near, life is near.

As you breathe

take in all that life has to offer.

As you breathe,

take God into your life.

As you breathe,

take Christ into your life.

All that life needs is not far away,

all is here, God is here,

Christ is here, and you are here.

All is here and you are here

and all possibilities are here --

as you breathe them into your life.

This is the meaning of incarnation,

this is the meaning of Pentecost.

For what you need

there does not have to be more.

For what you need

you do not have to go somewhere else.

All has come to you

and is with you.

Be quiet and thankful.

And gently breathe.

### **What About Evil**

Discernment of the factors of life may include the discernment or discovery of Evil as a possible participant in the complex elements of life..

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

There are also the structures of our world, as spoken of above, in biblical times often described as neutral spiritual powers. Political, social, cultural, economic structures are important to life. They are intended to provide order and context for life. Some by their character are inherently destructive and dehumanizing for many while others would seem to express human and even spiritual values. However, these structures

should not merely be viewed as organizational, constitutional, legal, or economic arrangements. These structures come to have a life of their own and as living entities control the humans that are part of their system and those whose lives their system touches. It is helpful to make clear the values advocated by each structure, not only in its explicit statements but in the dynamics generated within its system.

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

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

The New Testament, and Intertestamental Judaism, took evil seriously. This was not just because of contacts with dualistic systems of thought. That seems to me too simplistic an explanation. Dualistic language was applied to life because of the way life was experienced. While hopefully we do not wish to buy into flesh-spirit dualism or world-God dualism (which results in denying the goodness of creation and human existence), we may wish to give consideration to the way the role of ontological evil was perceived in life. Satan, understood as a fallen angel against the background of the Genesis 6 myth of angelic fall), opposed God's purpose within the world and functioned as a destroyer and deceiver. The myth of Genesis 3 described human temptation, failure, shame and exclusion from the ideal world, now having to suffer various consequences. Satan, as prince of this world, represented the way the values of this world were often different than God's. But however one describes Satan in terms of values, the New Testament regarded him as personal, functioning with intent and intelligence. He was a threat to life from which one needed protection (Ephesians 6:11), a protection understood as available from Christ's Ascension and on-going conquest of cosmic powers (e.g. I Cor. 15:24-25, Phil. 2:5-11).

Over the course of my life I have moved from regarding Evil as an outmoded bit of Jewish-Christian mythology to taking it quite seriously. Besides becoming more aware of the tragic nature of history and human suffering, I have also had several experiences with evil. I do realize that there are alternative explanations of what I experienced, but alternative explanations no longer do it for me. And yet I fully recognize that my experience in dealing with Evil is very limited and I honestly have to represent my understandings as attempts to understand. I had some experience of Evil when seeking to help two young men kidnapped by a Satanic cult recover from their experience. I have worked with spiritual forces in life some of which were good, some evil, some used by evil, and some were Evil. I have worked with some to rid their home of the spirit of a deceased person. I have had some experiences of destructive things happening in an area which ceased when the area was blessed or anointed and God's protection was asked for. This may sound like desertion of the scientific perspective for a more primitive explanation of life's dynamics, but I want to remain clear that I am strongly appreciative of modern science and its developing interpretation of our cosmos. Jesus clearly saw his world as populated by spiritual forces and I am coming to believe that he was right and that his extended interaction with unclean spirits and demons was truly a central feature of his mission. He dealt with all of the dimensions of the world, and especially with the spiritual. Dealing with unclean spirits was a primary focus of his proclamation of the kingdom. A computer search of the text of the four Gospels and Acts will indicate 18 passages where Satan is mentioned, 68 passages which mention demons, and 21 passages which mention unclean spirit(s).

What then does one do with evil? Perhaps one approach is to recognize and assume its reality. At least when we recognize what is possible we have a sense of what could be part of experiences we otherwise could not understand. When we know what is possibly there, we have a way to deal with it and we know that God has provided us with resources, thus the world becomes less frightening. One still has to decide whether evil is really operative within particular situations, being careful about too quickly identifying dynamics of psyche and world as the work of evil and neglecting the other factors which are part of experience. For example, it has often been customary to see the normal dynamics of the psyche as evil. In the Jewish psychological model of Jesus' day such functions of the psyche, focused on the needs of the human organism, were seen as due to the "evil impulse," equivalent to the Freudian libido. At various times Christians have also far oversimplified factors of world and society by demonizing them. As there are principles for discernment of God's involvement in life, so there can be principles for discerning the presence of Evil.

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

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

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

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

4. *Receptivity.* There are persons whose lives seem to be rich with religious or parapsychological experiences and who seem easily to pick up the experiences and feelings of others (i.e., they are receptive). I have known persons who were very receptive to such experiences and influences.

This often enables a person to have significant spiritual experiences, but it also means that their psyche could be easily penetrated by Evil. Sensitivity to this is needed..

5. *Rationalization of surrender to destructive feelings, no matter what.* Destructive feelings may powerfully exist because of personal history. From the perspective of one's history and one's rights it can be rationalized that one should act upon them. I have seen this when a person in childhood was deprived of love, affection, or security, often accompanied by abuse. Such a person seeks that to which s/he feels entitled, of which s/he will not now be deprived, in a relationship sometimes inappropriate. I have seen persons destroy their professional life, their family and that of another, because of this. Or there is the anger one feels because of what has been done to one. If only one could do to others what has been done, then one would be free and the inner turmoil would be satisfied. Personal consequences seem to become less and less important, or the compulsion to action becomes so strong that the consequences are not even in awareness. There is only the need to act. In coping with such powerful feelings, it is important to realize that Evil is an "abuser", using persons destructively for its own end. Usually persons once abused do not wish to be abused again.<sup>56</sup>

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

7. Life is filled with *energy systems* and skills may be developed to be aware of their presence and their nature. Often this can be done through holding one's hands near an energy source one is seeking to understand and developing skill in sensing differences. The matter of the nature of the energy source is important for one may encounter God, spiritual representatives of God, spiritual representatives of Evil, and evil itself. I believe that there are also some spiritual forces which are initially neutral but now destructive in their confusion regarding their own issues or perhaps used by Evil. If one feels clear about what one is dealing with one can seek their redemption, but let Christ handle the details for the dangers are not always clear.

8. It is important to *distinguish between non-personal forces and energies and those which are personal and interactive*, approaching one with thought and intent. To seek the removal of a personal power which engages with intent and flexibility and responds to our actions is much more complicated than to stop some spiritual influence or energy which does not.

It is important when events or experience indicate the presence of spiritual forces to discern, as much as one can, what is present. If dealing with spiritual powers becomes part of your ministry you will gradually gain experience which will help discernment. There may have been experiences or events connected with a person or a space, there may be perception of negative spiritual forces, there may be sensations when one passes one's hand over persons or objects, there may be thoughts which come to mind similar to what in the New Testament is called tongues or prophecy, styles of communication from God, which define what one is trying to understand. In fact, it is important to ask God for such guidance.

One may experience Evil, or unclean spirits or just bad vibes. One may at times experience spirits that remain in a location after death and need to be dealt with in terms of their unfinished business and whatever disturbances they are causing. There are powers or spiritual beings which seem to me to be influenced and used by Evil but whose transformation and emancipation could be prayed for. If the

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<sup>56</sup>. Those who have been deeply hurt or disempowered may often see Evil as an ally which empowers them. This is the rationale often for belonging to a Satanic cult. However, Evil does not empower by love, self-sacrifice, and sharing life with us (as presented in the Gospel about God in Christ and the Spirit), but by using persons for its own purposes. Evil uses and abuses, performing a spiritual rape upon those who open themselves to it.

problem is quite serious and the spiritual power is very powerful, you may need to go to exorcism, a much more confrontive approach. The stronger the powers seem the more you should really have several persons involved with you, being sure that someone has had experience with exorcism. If it seems that Satan is directly involved, exercise extreme care. Remember that the struggle is really between Satan and God, not between you and Satan. You provide the occasion, not the power, where God can deal with Satan. Do not think that you can deal with Satan by yourself.

Both because it is safer and because it is more in harmony with the understanding of God's approach to life as grace, at least the initial approach to spiritual powers which may be evil or problematic should be an approach of BLESSING. This means asking God to grant love, care, well-being and God's presence to the place, situation, power, or person involved. A traditional blessing may be used such as the priestly blessing of Numbers 6:24-26 or the Triune blessing "May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be and abide with you." This may then eventuate in the redemption and transformation of the problem, person or power which can be sensed in the way the situation "feels." Or it may result in the presence of a terrible contradiction between God's goodness and the power's evil which itself may solve things and drive out what is evil. At least this recognizes that ultimately the problem is solved by calling God into it.

A person or space can be *prayed for*. There can be *laying on of hands* and/or *anointing*. A blessing/benediction could be pronounced or the Lord's prayer recited. The last petition "lead us not into trial/temptation" can be understood against the background of Jesus' own temptation and encounter with Satan.

When there is an important service for which the fullest manifestation of the power of God is hoped, it is good first to *pray for the space* in which the service will be held and to free it from negative forces.

When someone needs help I have found it helpful to *anoint* or *mark the cross* on the forehead, perhaps with the touch of laying on of hands. The sensations involved with this remain with the person both on the conscious and unconscious level and the marking of the person designates that he or she belongs to God. Some today make much of "spiritual warfare," using prayer as a way to battle Satan on a variety of issues, including challenging Satan's power as a part of evangelism. There are a number of Web Sites which can be consulted on this, usually with a very conservative evangelical perspective. You should critique how the perspectives of those engaged in spiritual warfare fit the theology that is important to you. You might wish to explore Spiritual Warfare Ministries, Warrington PA, at their web site <http://www.sw-mins.org>.

## THE SPIRITUAL RESOURCES OF THE CHRISTIAN TRADITION

The Christian tradition as a wisdom about life is itself varied, including differing perspectives on the experience and activity of God and the nature of life. The very variety embodied in four Gospels witnesses to the varied experience and descriptions which are part of the Christian tradition. The Christian tradition starts with the life and ministry of Jesus and about 60 years of the early church and its literature. To this was added the Old Testament, the literature of which covers a thousand year history. In this variegated witness we root ourselves and then stay close to the guidance of God (the Spirit) as we work out its implications in creed and confessions and in good healthy debate, such as that between John Wesley and the Moravian Count Zinzendorf in 1741 over the crucial issue of the contribution of grace and God to the human formative process.<sup>57</sup> All of this, from the roots in Scripture through the 2000 year history of the church, has provided us with varied forms of a wise tradition by which we can understand and deal with life. Even in its variety it bears a profound witness to the reality of God who as Source of life and Companion on our journey works in personal and contextual ways.

The spiritual resources are provided not only because we are spiritual beings, but to shape and enable life beyond the events and personal story which may predetermine self-understanding and possibility. While the good things of life need celebration, it is the God-things of life which offer possibility beyond your own resources. The resources which reshape your thinking and life must be grasped and deeply believed to form and shape your life through its God-given possibilities. While our struggles with our own life and history will often make us uncertain, the spiritual resources of life are given by God to make us certain. The very fact that they come to us as gift from God means that they are not dependent on us and do not arise from our own accomplishment. They are pure gift. Christians call this "grace." In religion there are legitimate times for doubt and questioning, but if God's gifts are to work for you, you need to trust them and believe them.

### **The Spiritual Character of the Life Process**

Human existence and process involves many complex factors. As we live, we experience them and become aware of them if we develop the capacity to reflect upon life. However, not all become able to do this. Thus God provides a "great simplicity" in life which is not dependent on neurological and intellectual development. In life we are there as PERSON and God is there as PERSON, and God gives us RELATIONSHIP. For one to exist and to exist in relationship with God is the *foundational human reality*. It constitutes one as a human being and affirms the spiritual dimensions of being human. In case of severe brain damage or limited neurological development this foundational reality preserves our essence and perseveres through and beyond death. Thus God takes us where we need to go in and beyond life if we cannot be consciously and reflectively involved in our own process. Who cannot develop in this life will develop with God in the next.

Life begins with the genetic resources and patterns which determine us biologically and carry within a familial if not archetypal memory. But we are more than our biogenetic inheritance. There is a spiritual dimension to each person which somehow becomes dimension and resource of life. This is experienced as more than an aspect of mind or psyche. As one experiences oneself and life there are times when it would seem to disappear within the process of one's existence but other times when it transcends one's body and history as commented on in "Affirming Human Transcendence", p. 59. Human experience would seem to point to a spirit/soul which has its own reality but in the process of living takes on the experience and identity of the person. Some would like to see this as having its origin within a previous life, but at least one needs to view this as ultimately the gift of God which constitutes the preservable core of the

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<sup>57</sup> From Wesley's *Journal*, dated Sept. 3, 1741. *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M., Enlarged from Original MSS, with Notes from Unpublished Diaries, Annotations, Maps, and Illustrations*, Standard Edition ed. by Nehemiah Curnock, London: The Epworth Press, 1938, Vol. II, pp. 487ff.

individual life. Life in this world then originates as an act of God as well as an act of the parents. The nature of the act of God may be shrouded in mystery but the presence of a transcendent reality in the life of the person which constitutes the persistent and non-destructible core of the person seems evident. The process by which one lives out one's potential may be described as:

CREATION/BIRTH into this world and individual existence which presents us with opportunities and contexts for development, if able, in a world of dynamics both creative and destructive.

DEVELOPMENT as a process of ongoing CREATION including: dimensions  
biological, psychological, cognitive, moral, spiritual,  
concerned with identity, etc.

VOCATION Life involves not just being, but alignment with life's  
meaning, God's call, community needs, and decisions about  
what one's life shall serve

RESOURCES for one's process of CREATION/FORMATION including what is  
genetic, communal, societal, spiritual

SPIRITUAL RESOURCES which include  
knowledge of origin, identity, destiny  
the presence of God/Christ/Spirit in life and its productive,  
formative consequences and blessings  
the wisdom of the religious tradition which maps and advocates  
the process of human becoming  
presence of the spiritual dimension in life as well as in the person

DECREATION – which is the experience of the loss of peripheral aspects of biological existence through the aging process, but preservation of the person and retention of memory and identity in the indestructible soul

Eventually there is DEATH in this world and BIRTH into the spiritual world, carrying with one what one has become. Christians have often used Jesus' experience of suffering, death and resurrection as a model, to which should be added the many modern descriptions of near-death experience made available by the ability of modern medicine to rescue some from the process of dying.<sup>58</sup>

THE FUTURE is with God in God's world, of which one has gained glimpses in the process of life and in which one has gained confidence from the experience of God's companionship.

This brief presentation of life process indicates that out of the biblical tradition and Christian experience an understanding of life has been developed which constitutes a wisdom by which persons may be helped to understand their life process and experience and to live it well. This is of great value.

### **The Gospel**

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 Synoptic Gospels for *miracles*. The Gospel is not just about something God has done in the past 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

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<sup>58</sup> For example, Kenneth Ring, *Heading Towards Omega: In Search of the Meaning of the Near-Death Experience*, NY: William Morrow and Co., 1984. I Peter 3:18ff and 4:6 follow the Jewish understanding of death in Jesus' time by describing his going to the place of departed spirits after his death.

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 and here is 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.

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 (read Revelation). Some seems to expect perfection (such as the way Jesus' sayings are cast in Matthew 5). 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.*

The Great Healing

The Gospel and its message are *the Great Healing*. To help persons understand the relationship of *the Great Healing* to all other healings and well-being and to help them grasp the certainty of *the Great Healing* amidst the uncertainty of other healings, it would be well to post the following sheet where it could be frequently seen and used in meditation and reflection. The ten items could also be used as a liturgy, the leader reading each and the congregation responding to each item with: "This I surely believe!"

*THE GREAT HEALING*

*While physical healing needs to take into consideration all of the factors and complications of life, there is the GREAT HEALING of our human needs and condition which God accomplishes for us all. It is upon this that all other healings are based, and it is with awareness of this that we offer all our prayers for physical or emotional healing. All of these elements of the Great Healing are implications of the proclamation of the Gospel.*

- 1. God offers you a relationship as your heavenly Father. God is the source of life and the origin of our world. When you have God, you have everything.*
- 2. In this relationship God receives you as sons and daughters. This is not something you can earn or produce by your own efforts. It is a gift of God's love. On this then you can build your life.*
- 3. God offers forgiveness of the sins and mistakes which affect the quality of your life and keep you from moving on to new possibilities. God also asks that you forgive others their sins against you not only as a gift to them but also so that you can get free of the bondage of your anger and move on.*
- 4. God participated in your creation and birth and gave you a soul. This spiritual part of you cannot be destroyed or affected by disease or death. Whatever your physical illnesses or sufferings, you cannot be destroyed. On death you will be born into a new life in God's world*
- 5. 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.*
- 6. God gives you the Spirit as a resource for your development and life journey. God's strength is working for you, which is much more than your own strength. [Some have called the Spirit "Mother" because "she" cares for persons as a mother. You may want to use this image.]*
- 7. 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 and that others will share your burdens. You are also called to help others in their life journey.*
- 8. The negative and evil powers of life cannot overcome you when you belong to God. When life seems too much, remind yourself of Whose you are.*
- 9. Always, always, always know that nothing can separate you from God's love.*
- 10. Jesus brought all of this to you. If you cannot understand it, he will help you. If you have difficulty living it out, he will help you. Let him help you as your Companion, Lord and Teacher.*

When one reflects on the implications of these ten items, it becomes clear that their appropriation will have much to do with the well-being of a person. *The Great Healing* is an appropriate name for their collective impact. The meaning-power of this self-understanding together with its reduction of the stress often connected with life may also contribute significantly to physical and emotional health.

### **Prayer<sup>59</sup>**

Besides the Gospel there is the Lord's Prayer which embodies much of the Gospel's meaning and by the time of the Didache (second century CE) had become a regular part of Christian discipline, prayed three times a day. According to the account in Luke 11, Jesus taught the prayer in response to his disciples' request to teach them to pray as John the Baptist taught his disciples to pray. This was immediately preceded by the story of Mary and Martha, where Mary did the "one thing needful" by focusing on her relationship with Jesus. The Lord's Prayer in Luke is a simpler form of the prayer, probably the original form intended more as a pattern for prayer than a prayer to be prayed. In Matthew 6 the Lord's Prayer is made into a more formal, liturgically developed prayer and included in the Sermon on the Mount among several sayings on prayer. The Prayer, extensively discussed on pp. 93ff, reflects balanced concerns for the primacy of God's role in life and basic human needs.

### **Sacraments**

And there are the Sacraments. For a long time the church had seven, as the Roman Church still does, but most Protestant Churches have limited the Sacraments to the two which Jesus established: Baptism and Communion. The others, such as confirmation, marriage, ordination, confession, and extreme unction, many Protestants regard as rites which still remain an important part of the spiritual life of the church.

### **Baptism**

For the early Christians, and for Christians down through the ages, Baptism established their identity and spiritually joined them into the creative and empowering events of God's action in Jesus. Baptism in the first centuries was only experienced by adults and thus it was always remembered as the event which symbolized what and whose they were. Colossians 3:1-17 precedes the household ethical code which describes how Christians should behave in the household. 3:1-17 describes the self-understanding which comes from Baptism as prelude to the whole matter of how one should live. Rom. 6:1-11 functions in a similar way, as prelude to ethical discussions.

Early Christian Baptism involved:

Preparatory education

Accepting Jesus as Lord and rejecting the service of Satan, and being freed from the controlling powers of world and life

Laying off the old life, usually symbolized by laying off an outer garment

Immersion into water which symbolized being united with Christ in his death and resurrection, thus dying to the old life and rising to a new life

Putting on a new white garment symbolizing putting on Christ and the new life

Receiving anointing with oil symbolizing receiving of God's Spirit, a type of "confirming" or strengthening

### **Eucharist/Communion**

There are four accounts of the institution of Communion by Jesus: Mark, Matthew, Luke and I Cor. 11 which is the oldest. The accounts differ somewhat because they follow the worship practices of different parts of the early church, Luke even including two cups. This sacrament became a regular part of early Christian worship, so that while Baptism helped to shape Christians' self-understanding at the beginning of their Christian life and could also be formatively remembered, the Communion service was there to

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<sup>59</sup> See the more extended discussion of the Lord's Prayer in a later chapter.

nourish Christians on a regular basis. My preference is to describe its meaning from the earliest account in I Cor. 11:23-26.

Paul reminds the readers that he is passing on what came from Jesus and what will remind them of Jesus. The statement about the bread is "This is my body for you." This expression means that Jesus offers them himself (his body) with the bread. Life is to be lived from this gift. In connection with the cup they are reminded that "This cup is the new covenant in my blood." The cup contains his life/blood for us, but it also represents a covenant, his gift which includes our response. The cup is the point at which we are called upon to also place our life within the cup and to pledge our life to him. This we are to do until he comes, reminding us of his part in our lives. But his coming does not mean that in some sense he is now absent. The Communion is symbol of his real presence in our lives. He continues to be our Lord, as indicated in the early Christian creed "Jesus is Lord" which each Christian repeated at Baptism.

### **Community/Church**

Christian life is always lived in community and in all of the resources of this community. One only has to read I Cor. 12-13 and note all of the gifts available in this community through God's Spirit. Life is hardly possible without community. And there is no Christianity which is not communal and relational.

### **The Spiritual Realm**

Paul in II Cor. 12 speaks of spiritual experiences he has had, including being caught up to the third heaven. The book of Revelation does not just describe the end of history but the reality of the spiritual world – see Rev. 4-5. To know that this is real changes our perspective on life. Jesus seems, however, to have felt that this spiritual world was more a part of this world and life rather than high beyond the heavens. The role of the Spirit symbolizes this while there were also Christians who seem to have believed that Jesus remains close to us, in this world, as our Companion, rather than having gone to heaven. If he went to heaven rather than staying in our world, as expressed in the stories of the Ascension, then perhaps heaven is very near, a fourth dimension of our world.

### **Living the Mystery**

The term "kingdom of God" does not describe a geographical place where God rules, rather the rule or sovereignty of God. It is equivalent to what we would call "the presence of God." In this book the presence of God is presented as existing and experienced within the complexity of life and world. When complexity in life is recognized then the identification of God's presence and action also becomes a more complex matter. One of the major religious ideas in most religions is that when God is present all will be changed and fixed, for nothing can resist God's power. This has then caused God to be seen as primarily resident in heaven for it is evident that the world is not fixed.

In this book God's presence is described as relational (manifested in relationship) and incarnational (present within history and the world's realities rather than obliterating them). In The Gospel of Mark chapter 4 Jesus speaks of God as a sower, sowing seed on all sorts of soil, responsive and unresponsive. The kingdom is like a farmer sowing seed which grows by its own process while time continues, night and day. The harvest will come, but it is not in the control of the farmer. The kingdom is also as a grain of mustard seed, smallest of all seeds, but greatest of shrubs when it has grown. Jesus tells his disciples (Mark 4:11), "To you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything comes in parables." Some translate the word "mystery" as "secret", but that is not what the text says. When you know a secret, you know it and understand it. When you know a mystery you know it but do not understand it. Jesus points out to his disciples that they are dealing with something mysterious and not understandable, clearly evidenced by the fact that the metaphors which Jesus uses for the "kingdom" do not make any sense in the light of Jewish expectations about the kingdom. Jesus says that for those outside of the group of disciples, everything is in parables. We are used to thinking of a parable in the form of a story comparing one thing to another. But parable also meant something which is enigmatic and puzzling. Thus what Jesus said means: "To you (disciples) has been given the mystery (but also the

reality) of the kingdom so that you know it is present even if you can't figure it all out. But for the outsider who hasn't come to terms with the mystery it all remains confusing and a puzzle."

The mystery of the kingdom is related to the discussion between Jesus and James and John in Mark 10 where they want a share in the power of the kingdom and in Mark 8 where Peter confesses Jesus as Messiah but then argues with Jesus about his understanding of the Messiah who Jesus says must suffer and be rejected. His followers are also called upon to "take up their cross and follow" him.

People are the place where the kingdom of God is expressed, like the different soils on which the sower sows seeds in Mark 4. Thus Jesus calls upon people to repent (change their minds) and believe in the kingdom so that it may be expressed in them. But it is expressed in them within the real world where everything does not become different, but some things certainly do.

We know that God is present and can be present in us. But how this all works out is a mystery. Life's complex conditions often persist while the kingdom of God is also present. *This is a mystery which needs to be accepted and lived.* We need to live what we can't completely figure out but nevertheless know is real. Because of God's presence in our lives we can live life in this world in the best possible way. We also know that we have a soul which cannot be destroyed. And we know that we also belong to God's world where we will go after the process of this life is finished.



role of "god" could be somewhat fulfilled in the role of the parent, but it is even more profound when with God it happens at the center of all existence involving the One ultimately responsible for existence. Now of course to portray God in this way is a theological statement about God. God might have been portrayed as scorner of our nature, judge of our struggle and punisher of our failure, in no way able to come to terms with what we are. Or God may be eliminated and we are left to find our own way in this. But no one, or no skill, can take the place of the One who ultimately affirms us, though we may try. The Gospel of Mark was designed to parallel Jesus' life with the life of the believer. Thus it begins with the story of Jesus' baptism by John in which he experiences the transcendent reality of heaven coming to him in the form of the Spirit. But this is not just a religious experience, for he hears a voice cast from Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 42:1 which identifies him to himself as "my Son, the beloved". In Mark only Jesus hears this voice as a personal and private experience, not a public announcement. This is then followed by the Temptation experience which in Mark is not presented in the form of the Matthaean and Lukan Messianic temptations, but remains undefined as an encounter with the Spirit, Satan, wild beasts and angels. Jesus has met the reality of God in the midst of the reality of life and God has named him and his relation to the Transcendent. He may now walk into his ministry and his suffering knowing who he is. The first and primal question of his existence is settled.

### **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 affected by bio-chemical processes and systems, 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 or above these processes.<sup>61</sup>

Within our psyche or mind, which in themselves are biologically based, 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.

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<sup>61</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.

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*.<sup>62</sup>

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. All of us know how fears and anxieties we have learned from early life experience affect the present, even though that of which we are afraid is not really in our present world. 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 are born with a body which develops and grows in response to inner programming and external challenge. Even the mind or psyche are based in patterns of neurological organization. When aspects of the neurological system are damaged functionality diminishes or ceases, most strikingly manifest is such diseases as Alzheimer's. The body is vehicle and friend of our life, but at times it seems not to cooperate, inner conflict is experienced and some urges seem destructive. This wonderful body we are gifted may become a strange place to live and what to do with it we do not quite understand. We can come to appreciate it as a gift and friend, though at times it may cause us to do what we would not. Or we may regard parts of it as friend and parts as enemy. Or we may reject the body and place it over against the spiritual dimensions of life in a type of dualism.

We come from a religious heritage which in the century before Christ saw life dualistically, the material over against the spiritual, though modern views conditioned by science and historical criticism have actually 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 described in Genesis 3. One only has to read Paul's treatment of flesh to see that spirit is all good and

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<sup>62</sup> In medicine the power of suggestion is often called the placebo response. See Howard Brody, *The Placebo Response: How You Can Release the Body's Inner Pharmacy for Better Health*, NY: Cliff St. Books, HarperCollins, 2000. Brody provides a comprehensive survey of recent medical research on the placebo response, exploring the role of expectancy, conditioning and meaning on the biochemical pathways or the body's "inner pharmacy".

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" (5:48) you must control not only actions but feelings. There are, however, strong traces of traditions in the Gospels of Mark and Luke about Jesus' association with the crowds and "unclean" persons where Jesus would seem to be profoundly accepting of the human condition. The three parables of Luke 15, climaxing in the story of the troubled two sons of a loving father, are told to legitimize Jesus' association with sinners and tax collectors.

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>63</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>64</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 believe 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, disowning our body only allows the dynamics of body and psyche to operate without our presence and awareness and therefore as autonomous, without our control. Rejection of our body accomplishes little, for we see little good fruit from this dualism in western civilization and religion. Look at the horror of the Holocaust, supported or ignored by the rulers of Christian nations, and what various religious traditions have done to each other. And beyond the dangers of rejecting body, without full (but responsible) immersion in embodied existence we miss its joy and possibilities. Body is not the prison of the soul, but its opportunity.

One way to affirm the body is to affirm not only struggle but pain, physical and psychological. Pain is a part of life. Sometimes pain is due to disorder and disease within the human system which often can be repaired. At other times it is part of a warning system which protects from harm. Like so many of the aspects of human experience, it needs to be received and accepted – and certainly modified as appropriate.

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<sup>63</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>64</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.

It may be modified with medication, but also a primary way to modify it is to focus awareness upon it and incorporate it into life. When this is done it often transforms. It is still pain, but it is more. It is part of our experience of life and no longer object of our fear. It is what it is, but no more, not compounded with our reactions to it.

Pain is also pain somewhere and pain of some aspect of us and our lives. Frequently rejection of pain results in rejection of that which is pained or painful and thus we lose the functionality of a part of ourselves.

### **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>65</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>66</sup> Thus the body image is always being constructed out of sensory perceptions provided by the body at rest and in motion, along with inner self-image and 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>67</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 though the initiation of the movement was 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.

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<sup>65</sup>. Paul Schilder, M.D., PhD., *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.

<sup>66</sup>. Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>67</sup>. Ibid., p. 45.

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 talking, the awareness of one's speaking brings awareness of the mechanism of speech and a measure of confidence, and so 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, incomplete, 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 (or tension) and, at times, to their own surprise find themselves doing what they did not think they could do once they moved beyond initial uncertainty.

In our body image awareness of the eyes and ears within the structure of the head seem to be important since sight and sound supply us with so much important information by which we function, providing us with a sense of we who perceive and a structure or image of what we perceive. Without this basic perceptual structure our awareness of what is going on around us and its arrangement and our location within it is confused.

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 and problem areas of one's life which form expectations and an image that impacts life negatively, 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 and new possibility.

To speak of 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.

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

### **Affirming Our Story**

Our lives consist of experiences which may be narrated and together constitute our story. Few persons are satisfied with or are willing to embrace all of their life experiences, but our story is like our body which we cannot afford not to accept. To embrace our life with all of its wonder and strangeness, its successes and failures, is the starting point for living the future and its possibilities. I use "embrace" intentionally because it implies intimacy with and closeness to our story, and it is the result of a decision which transcends our feelings. We may not like what is part of our story, but it cannot be denied that it is our story and we cannot afford not to embrace it in an act of compassion and as a way of granting ourselves freedom as to what we do with our past as we move into our future.

We all live from our life experience which establishes the presuppositions and patterns out of which we function, both mental and biological. These patterns and presuppositions may be part of the unconscious structures of our mind and biological system, but often when we narrate the stories of our remembered experience, these patterns emerge and become conscious. Then we become aware that in many of the present and future events of our lives we live out and fulfill our stories, the memory shaped expectations

of life, world and future. If we are fortunate, the stories and their residence within our human systems aid and support us in approaching the future. But if the past includes little that is good and creative, at least as it is remembered, then the future will be filled with anxiety about what might happen and the happening of what was expected.

It is important then to make explicit the story/stories out of which one functions. This would involve reflecting on one's life for significant events and their meaning. And it could involve asking parents and grandparents or significant persons for stories they may remember but you might not. Then individual stories could then be constructed into an extended narrative, and the narrative should then be questioned as to the meanings, patterns, and expectations which are expressed in it. Such questions should be asked of it as:

Are there similarities and patterns in the events and extended narrative of my life?  
Do I see any meanings in them which tell me something about myself?  
Do they indicate any issues with which I consistently struggle?  
Are there feelings which arise within me when I look at the whole or parts of my life, which feelings need to be explored? Do I have any clues as to what they mean?  
What has been my experience of my world, the contexts in which I have lived?

Then summarize this in terms of important meanings, patterns of life and how the past seems to determine my future and future expectations.

If the narrative of one's life, its patterns and meanings, are not helpful for the future, then one may explore three possibilities:

1. *Has the narrative of one's life been interpreted correctly?* If there is much that is good and creative which has not been used to construct the narrative reality of one's life, can then one's life be reinterpreted and given more positive and creative meaning?
2. *Can a new narrative be constructed?* One cannot completely do away with the past, but one has a future. Elements for formation of a new narrative can come out of venturing into new experiences and having a sufficient supportive community which helps to sustain the possible realities of this new experience. Eventually one can construct a new life. A supportive community functions in a way to support new reality and interpretation of life which the individual could not sustain by him/herself. Religion often works in this way. Those baptized in the early church came to understand that they were separated from the determinative realities of their old lives and prior cultures. As Paul indicates in Gal. 2:19, "For through the law I died to the Law so that I might live to God." He had died to the Law which previously constituted his life so that he might live to God and Christ who would now constitute his life. In Col. 2:8-15 the alternative reality is constituted by Jesus having overcome the cosmic powers that previously determined existence. Now the substance of existence belongs to Christ (17). The reality of this new substance of existence is partially based upon the historic actions of Christ which have a stronger reality than the previous narrative reality of the person, but this reality is also always seen as sustained in the supportive character of the Christian community. Even when it does not feel real it is made real by those who stand around one, are committed to it, and live it out in their own lives. It is also interesting that both in Baptism and Eucharist persons were called upon to remember Jesus' story which was to be lived through by them and become their story. This is also why the Passion Narrative, which constitutes about 1/3 of the Gospel narratives, was the first extended narrative of Jesus' life to be constructed. The story of his last days was to become their story. The compass of the formative story was expanded in all the Gospels beyond the Passion Narrative, but with special intent both in Mark and John where the pattern of the Gospels seems determined by the desire to help the reader construct their story from Jesus' story. In other words Jesus' story from his baptism and temptation to his death and resurrection provides a pattern for the experience of the believer.

3. The third option is to *surrender to one's narrative and let it take one where it will*. If it is a good and creative narrative, then its meaning will support the positive possibilities of the future. If it is a limiting and destructive narrative, then its tragedy will be realized again and again.

### **Affirming an Appropriate World**

The world is not just what it is in reality, but it is often what you expect or assume 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 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 an answer, but there are things that you can do which would bring about some of what therapy would accomplish. The concern is to re-image your world in a more constructive way and to diminish the fear and anxiety about world and life.

1. *You can 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. 8:31-39). 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. The following poem expresses this, written after the destruction of the World Trade Center, NY, on September 11, 2001:

We thank you God  
that into the chaos and uncertainty  
of this world  
you have sent your Son and your  
Spirit  
to promise us your love and  
presence  
that we may live with hope,  
without doubt or question,  
knowing that our suffering is yours,  
owned on the cross.  
We know that:  
Where there is darkness there is your light.  
Where there is death there is your life.

Where world disintegrates there is your world  
When future is uncertain there is your future.  
And life is ours  
as your indestructible gift.  
We thank you that you remind us  
to discover our world in the light of yours,  
as joy, hope, and possibility,  
as creation yet to be realized,  
unlimited by boundaries of the present.  
And so we celebrate, believe and trust  
what is beyond us  
but for us  
and gift to us  
from YOU.  
Amen.

There is a very helpful image in the New Testament connected with Baptism. Since during NT times Baptism was only an adult experience and therefore clearly remembered, 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.

2. *Another helpful approach is to try to live "mindfully," to live completely with awareness of 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. To live mindfully needs extended practice in order to become a natural part of functioning.

Often the techniques for being mindful, or for the exercises of meditation and contemplation, are understood as relaxation rather than the clearing away of distractions and the *intentional focus of attention*. One might describe the difference in terms of energy. Relaxation diminishes energy, allows old patterns to operate because they are customary, and often will result in some mental confusion when relaxation leads to the borders of sleep. Mindfulness and attention focus and invest energy, keeping one alert and allowing what one is mindful of to have sufficient energy to influence one.

3. *Another approach is to stop trying to get rid of fear*, stop trying to make life perfect, and to accept life as the struggle that it is. When this is tried, it often works. When we are no longer afraid of fear, fear and life become more manageable.

### **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, 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>68</sup> and various techniques for stress management, exercise, vitamins and proper food, and at times appropriate medications.

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<sup>68</sup>. Though various types of meditative exercises can be done, such as the focused mindfulness mentioned above, complete relaxation, involving quieting of body and mind and gentle attention even at times drifting off to light sleep, over a period of time allows the body to engage in its own restorative processes and for a while decreases life's stress which has various

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.<sup>69</sup> 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 so as to change 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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physiological consequences. To begin to experience the possible results of this relaxation one needs to be very intentional and not just think in terms of short periods of rest plagued by the feeling that one is wasting time. As a person ages restoration may take longer. Meditation may need to be for at least two hours a day for a period of at least 3-5 days, something few can do without scheduling and laying aside compulsive activity. A part of this process is the body's restoration of its systems, particularly of the neurotransmitters the diminution of which produces depression. If depression is a problem initially relaxation may make it seem overwhelming, recovering only happening after a period of days, and mindfulness may need to be supplemented by medications. Be sensitive to what you can tolerate. Once you experience the restorative value of this, you then can work with it as a part of a regular program of self-care and maintenance will not demand the time which restoration does. 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.

<sup>69</sup> Howard Brody, *The Placebo Response: How You Can Release the Body's Inner Pharmacy for Better Health*, NY: HarperCollins, 2000, p. 107ff, has a very helpful discussion of the relationship of mind and biochemical pathways within the body

state will mean that the introduction of something new will not easily or immediately 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 and maintain itself. 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.*

### **Affirming Responsibility and Assuming Control**

In your daily life people, circumstances and a lack of personal confidence can create anxiety and make you feel powerless. Though this is often a natural reaction, you cannot afford this because of the long term effects of stress and anxiety. You need to solve this not just because anxiety feels bad, but because it will hurt you physically and keep you from functioning. You also cannot afford this because your life needs someone to run it. You are not only the one closest at hand, but your life is God's gift to you and it should not be wasted.

It makes no difference how well you can explain your fears. You still cannot afford fear all the time, even if it is legitimate.

The frequent long duration of trauma, abuse, etc., in childhood leaves a strong impression, different than a singular incident when one is older, and so anxiety and feelings of powerlessness are difficult to overcome when they come from childhood. They may even feel normal for your life.

Power over your life is important. You cannot manage life's challenges without power. You cannot overcome fear and anxiety without power. And yet you may have learned as a child that to be you, to want your way, to try to have some power over circumstances and parents is bad. Religion has often seemed to say the same, though I could illustrate how Jesus led persons to assume responsibility for their lives and provided them the resources to do so. I could also indicate how humans (according to Gen. 1, not 2-3) were created to be responsible for the world and to be in the world in the image of God.

To take power over your life is not wrong. You may have been told that it is wrong, but there is no other way to manage life and be responsible for life. If you have no power, life will run you rather than you running life. If you have no power, other people will run you rather than you running life. To be fully you, the person you are, may be frightening if you were never given permission for this and may seem wrong if you never had the feeling that the person you are was liked by parents or others. *But you are the only you you have.* If you cannot be fully you, there is no other you, no other person present in you. If you cannot be you, you cannot even be present to assume responsibility for change in your life. *You must be there to run you.* You will find it more possible to manage fear and anxiety if you are truly present in your life.

If you have no strong sense of yourself, to be truly YOU will be hard. You may not even be aware of yourself as a person and presence within your own life. Thus you will need to be patient, not expect things to improve right away, and realize that becoming aware of YOU in your life will be a learning process. It may even have been easier in childhood not to be present in your life because of the battles you would have to fight and the additional fears and guilt you would experience. But gradually you will develop experience of how this works and it will become easier. It would be natural for you to experience a tug of war within yourself between the old way of living (which has now become a habit for you) and this new way which gives full recognition to the presence of YOU as person in the midst of your own life. *Don't expect you to be perfect. There are no perfect human beings.* You don't need to be perfect to manage your life, *but you must be there.*

## Stress

Extended stress profoundly affects the well-being of persons. Because it can be decidedly modified by the Affirmations listed above and because it is so closely related to human functional failures, I decided to include the discussion of stress here.

Many persons suffer from stress which sets in motion certain biological processes (the stress response) intended to equip the person with greater energy and awareness by which he or she might deal with emergencies. This would include diversion of blood to muscles, secretion of hormones to mobilize energy, increase of heart rate and blood pressure, etc.. However, the mechanisms are intended to equip us with energy and readiness for only a short period of time. Over long periods of time stress begins to have biological and psychological consequences both in terms of the impact of stress on the body (e.g. fatigue and headache) and the failure of the biological mechanisms related to stress.

There are a number of causes of stress.

1. One is the anticipation of emergency so that the body automatically responds to prepare for the emergency. When emergency is constantly anticipated and never resolved, then stress becomes constant and begins to take its toll. Important causes of anticipation are fear and anxiety. Whatever we are afraid of starts the process. Some persons are afraid of life, so that fear enters almost any activity. Sometimes fear of life is caused by traumatic experiences which condition all our responses. One of the primary functions of religion is to help reduce the fear of life and create a positive relationship with life and the God of life, thus blessing life and making one more functional. This also helps one to be able to recognize and live with the normal risks of life for God becomes the stable place in the midst of life's uncertainty.
2. A more foundational cause of stress is anxiety about one's functioning (or ability to function) and the attempt to constantly manage, control and guide the human mechanism.

Although it is a popular misconception that we are in control of our functioning, it must be indicated that we function primarily by what our body and mind has learned. If you raise your arm and move your hand, you will discover that though your decision to do this may start this process involving your arm and hand, their muscles, and your neurological system, all you can be aware of in the process is the feedback, sensation, from the movement of your hand and arm. While you can be somewhat aware of what is happening (though some actions are so rapid that even this is not possible) you cannot be aware of the muscular and neurological processes themselves by which this happens. It is a process you have learned, which you can start, in which you could interfere, which you could perhaps stop, but the process itself is not within your awareness. This is true of most of the processes by which we function. They have been learned and embedded in our unconscious memories. If we try to manage them or interfere with them, we throw them off or stop them in their process. There are plenty of examples of this in sports where attempts to control spoil coordination and action.

Thus while we can manage and decide many things, we cannot control our bodily processes *while they are in process*. We learn to function; hopefully we learn to function well and with positive results. We can start a function. We can stop or interfere with a function. Or we can learn to function in new ways over time as we create new habits, much in the same way that one would train for a sport. But in the moment when we do some things, say some things, makes some movements, we can only trust our system to work. If we are afraid that it won't work right, if we are afraid that it won't work well enough, according to what significant others told us we should do, or if something has confused our awareness of and trust of our own mechanisms (such as anxiety about functioning), then we try to cope by taking control -- with the consequences of stress and the confusion of the process itself. One cannot take conscious control of one's mechanisms.

The same is true of our thought processes. When some stimuli initiate a mental response and start mental processes, we cannot control the process. We can diminish the process by not paying attention to it, by not over moralizing it, and by not seeking to control it. We can cultivate different mental processes as we can

cultivate new physical processes. We can provide the mind with new information and patterns. New experiences change the mind.

We can be helped with anxiety about functioning when we examine the conditions that need to be present to function well:

1. There needs to be awareness of myself as observer so that I know I am there in the midst of the processes of life even though they are not me and I am not them. They happen within the biological mechanism in which I live. Though I am not in control of all of my processes, I can observe them and trust my biological system in which they operate (breathing, bodily awareness, thoughts, feelings, processes by which movement and actions take place, even the playing out of memories). Thus I become aware of what is going on, less afraid of it, more aware of my own reality apart from it, but willing to give myself to it as a "mystical experience" as I trust what I may have trained but cannot control.<sup>70</sup> Meditative practice often provides this awareness by helping one be more conscious of body and life processes while being clear about the self as real and observer of this. Becoming aware of the self is most important because this gives a person the confidence that one is there in the midst of what is going on. Sometimes a person can get lost in the midst of all that is going on with body and mind. Sometimes the person can withdraw from what is going on with body and mind, either through fear or some supposition that body, mind, or feelings are bad, thus not really being there and not instilling what one might call "the confidence of one's presence." One must be there because being there gives a feeling of confidence and creates an inner sense of organization and focus within. When one is really there and aware of how things work, one does not have to try to control everything and one does not have to be afraid. One is aware and there is confidence in being aware --- and if one really needed to step in at some point, one could. It is a real revelation to be aware of some inner feeling of which one had been afraid, to watch it come and go, and to know that it is merely a part of an inner process which does not have to be struggled with and moralized. When one is no longer so completely identified with the feeling, the feeling no longer matters in the same way.
2. At times there are neurological difficulties in awareness, such as Attention Deficit Disorder and Dyslexia. Anything that prevents clear inner awareness will make functioning more difficult and will raise the level of anxiety, producing stress. This can clearly be seen in children with ADD. Many children with ADD are also Hypertensive because of the anxieties connected with perception not being clear and ordered. If this can be recognized as a human "mechanical" problem which does not deny our dignity as persons, then anxiety levels can be dealt with and there can perhaps be some functional retraining or use of medications (such as ritalin) to improve things.

While one needs to be sensitive to stress as a constant and therefore damaging factor in our attempts to deal with life, it must also be realized that there is no life without stress. There are times when stress may be helpful, bringing about the availability of greater resources when they are needed. There will also be times when stress cannot be avoided because of what is necessary to bring about some accomplishment or transformation in our lives. Our concern should be to not let stress damage or exhaust us and to be aware of the long term consequences of continuing stress -- and then to find the most optimum ways of functioning.

Functioning well should be looked upon as a skill we develop in our experience of life and ourselves. Even the avoidance or diminishment of stress should be regarded as a skill. We ultimately let work for us the skills we develop. As with other skills, once we consciously try to enter the process of functioning we create anxiety and stress. Thus to become too concerned about stress and to try to consciously manage it

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<sup>70</sup> Sports has become particularly interested in this so that one may be present to and within the "flow" of one's body's action without raising questions or focusing on other issues which would be disruptive. See Jay Tolson, "Into the Zone", *U.S. News and World Report*, July 3, 2000, pp. 38ff.

often merely creates more stress. This is difficult for the Westerner who thinks of life in terms of conscious control.

### **The Relaxation Response**

Herbert Benson's Relaxation Response assumes that it is possible to create a patterned response which will relax the person and slow down the coping mechanisms of stress, just as there is a stress response which sets the stress mechanisms into action. It is somewhat like Transcendental Meditation because it is primarily for the person's well-being and does not intentionally seek any relationship with the spiritual and transcendent, though Benson indicates that this is often a byproduct. The Relaxation Response is especially valuable for dealing with stress and learning to function with less stress. It will provide you with an experience of yourself with diminished stress once it begins to work. Once you gain some experience of yourself this way you will be able to carry this into your active life. Some of the same techniques you may utilize while active (of course with the exception of sitting and closing your eyes). He describes the generic essentials of his technique as:

Step 1. Pick a focus word or short phrase that's firmly rooted in your belief system.

Step 2. Sit quietly in a comfortable position.

Step 3. Close your eyes.

Step 4. Relax your muscles.

Step 5. Breathe slowly and naturally, and as you do, repeat your focus word, phrase, or prayer silently to yourself as you exhale.

Step 6. Assume a passive attitude. Don't worry about how well you're doing. When other thoughts come to mind, simply say to yourself, "Oh well," and gently return to the repetition.

Step 7. Continue for ten to twenty minutes.

Step 8. Do not stand immediately. Continue sitting quietly for a minute or so, allowing other thoughts to return. Then open your eyes and sit for another minute before rising.

Step 9. Practice this technique once or twice daily.<sup>71</sup>

The word or phrase you pick you should remain with so that using it will more quickly elicit the response since you have become habituated to the word. You may want your word or phrase to be something of significance in your tradition, but it might also be good to just select a single word which would help to focus your attention. Try out the sound of your word either by actually saying it or trying it in your imagination. The sound should help you focus. The sound OM was used by Buddhism. The word ONE may also be used. Let me call your attention to where the sound is located within you. The M sound is located on your lips and in your throat and chest. The N sound is nasal and located in the center of your head. Easterners often thought of the center of the person as being within the body while we often think of our center being in the head. Try out these sounds and see which makes you feel more focused. If neither of these words suite you, pick your own.

### **Mindfulness**

One of the great questions of human existence is how we can manage our feelings and thoughts, have freedom from our thoughts sufficient to use our minds, have respect for ourselves, including body, mind and inner life, and not be hindered by inner restriction from our developmental process. Modern psychology has developed around various descriptions of this. Most religions also deal with this, often emphasizing disciplining and gaining control of inner dynamics.

"Mindfulness" is a term utilized in Buddhism which describes a way to be aware of what goes on inside us: feelings and thoughts are allowed to be "just there" so that we can be aware of them but let them be

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<sup>71</sup> . Herbert Benson, MD, with Marg Stark, *Timeless Healing: The Power and Biology of Belief*, Scribner, 1996., p. 136

and not fear and become absorbed with them -- or seek to manage, fight and control them, anxious that thought or feeling can so easily become an action we must prevent.

While Christianity's gift is the affirmation of a loving God who makes life possible, it never seems to let go of the struggle with the inner life and a negative appraisal of embodied existence. Buddhism's approach little emphasizes the role of God, but has gained significant insights about how to deal with the inner life. The insights of Buddha come from his lived experience as he sought answers to the difficulty of escaping life's suffering and the predicament of reincarnation which constantly returned one to live what one sought to escape and prevented arrival at the permanent and sacred dimensions of life. It is interesting that he sought answers in the many "ways" of his time, including extremely ascetic approaches. Yet the way to enlightenment opened to him when he remembered, according to some of the biographical material, a time when his father placed him under a rose-apple tree in a field which was being ploughed. When he looked at the ground torn up and the forms of life damaged he felt a strange sorrow. But in the beauty of the day a strange joy also arose unbidden in his heart. This happened without training and without discipline to a child. Thus the way to Nirvana was truly built into the simple nature of each person. This moment under a tree was like Paul's Damascus road experience which also disclosed to him the nature of reality.<sup>72</sup>

As most religions, Buddhism developed ways of understanding life and the human struggle. One of the most frequently occurring images is that of the Wheel of Life which includes Six Realms of Existence through which sentient beings cycle endlessly in their round of rebirths, accumulating *karma* (merit) which affects rebirth and ultimately release. Though the nature of life includes suffering (*dukkha*, a word that can be translated as "pervasive unsatisfactoriness"), the causes of suffering can also be the means of release, depending upon whether the sufferer's perspective continues his bondage or is a means of awakening to life's real nature.

Though as Christians we bring our own understanding of life and answers to life's struggles, the solutions Buddhism developed in relationship to the suffering and struggle of the mind are well worth hearing and considering. One could easily discover that the question for Christians has not been settled by tracing both the Jewish and Christian struggle for management of the dynamics of the mind (or psyche). In first century Judaism and early Christianity the difficulties of flesh and mind were related to the "evil impulse" which was seen in ways similar to Freud's understanding of the *libido*. In Rom. 7 Paul's struggle is part of this, struggle with what he would not do, slave to sin and flesh. In II Cor. 12:7b-9 his thorn in the flesh is the "evil impulse." In the history of Judaism and Christianity there have been attempts to understand flesh and psyche more positively, though it is difficult to see this clearly in the New Testament itself because developmentally it covers such a brief period of time. However, in the Gospel of John, though dualistic in itself, the addition of the Prologue (1:1-18) by the final editor (who becomes transparent in 21:24) accepts flesh as the vehicle not of Satan but the eternal Word/Wisdom of God. The editor implies that we are no longer to interpret the Gospel tradition dualistically with world and flesh identified with Satan. Also in the history of Christianity, particularly in our contemporary world, there have been attempts to restore the positive and contributory role of mind, body, flesh<sup>73</sup> and in Judaism there is a rethinking of the "evil impulse" in Hasidism.<sup>74</sup> There have also been the interesting contributions of Buddhism to modern

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<sup>72</sup> The spiritual journey of Buddha can be read in Karen Armstrong, *Buddha*, NY: A Lipper/Viking Book, 2001.

<sup>73</sup> Fox, Matthew, *Breakthrough: Meister Eckhart's Creation Spirituality in New Translation*, Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1980; *Original Blessing: A Primer in Creation Spirituality*, Bear and Company, 1983; *Western Spirituality, Historical Roots, Ecumenical Routes*, Bear and Company, 1981; *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ*, Harper, 1988.

<sup>74</sup> . See Maurice Friedman, *Religion and Psychology: A Dialogical Approach*, NY: Paragon House, 1992, p. 23: "The 'evil' urge is not evil in itself. It is evil only when it is not given direction. It is evil only when it is not given the personal meaning of our unique response to the situation. It is needed for our service. The person who succeeds in being 'good' by repressing the

psychotherapy, such as expressed in the work of Mark Epstein.<sup>75</sup> An important question for the reader would be: how does Buddhism make a valuable contribution to our attempts to live creatively with our inner world and to deal with the suffering and mental illness which come from the failure to do this. In his Eightfold Path the Buddha spoke of cultivating as ethical foundation the behavioral categories of Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood, as wisdom categories Right Understanding and Right Thought which represent the conceptual foundation that has been called Right View, as meditative categories and the foundation of mental discipline Right Concentration and Right Mindfulness. Concentration and Mindfulness, though often thought of in relationship to meditative exercise, are really approaches to living with the human mind, quieting its struggles, managing emotional life, and drawing upon its creative potentials. *Concentration* cultivates turning one's attention to a central object of awareness and thus quieting (and training) the mind, and *Mindfulness* means being aware of exactly what is happening in the mind and body *as* it is occurring.<sup>76</sup>

*Mindfulness*, also called *bare attention* (attention without attachment or rejection), is an approach to awareness of the processes of one's life (including relationships with the external world) which accepts all that emerges and lets it be. It does not moralize, cling to or fight what emerges. What emerges is just what is. A famous Japanese haiku illustrates this:

The old pond.  
A frog jumps in.  
Plop!<sup>77</sup>

*Mindfulness* also makes a helpful distinction between core events and one's reaction to them. Thus one may approach events in new ways where reaction and meaning which has accrued to the event is separated from event. "*Bare attention*" describes this.

There is a tendency in life to avoid pain and process. Sometimes thoughts carry with them pain or pain becomes part of the context of awareness where the mind expresses the condition of the body. Here one needs to remain mindful of the pain and not to disassociate from it. A person must remain with what is and not flee from it so that all is qualified by one's awareness and presence. When I am present to pain, pain is not all. It is part of life's totality. When I struggle to resolve it, it becomes all. A good friend suffering from several serious illnesses has described to me the transformation of pain through mindfulness. It still remains, but it is now different because she has drawn it into the whole of her life and awareness. New pain is always different because her mindfulness has not yet drawn it into the whole of her life.

Process seems to present issues similar to pain. *Mindfulness* observes that life does not consist of isolated events, but streams of events and complex experiences. Here the problem is the desire to control, order, and simplify so that one can better manage what one is experiencing. It is like standing in the midst of a fast moving stream and seeking to slow the pressure of the stream upon one and to slow the movement of the stream around one. One may reflect on isolated events but to seek to control process not only interferes with awareness, but it usually keeps one from entering into and moving with the stream of life. Both pain and process can keep one from continuing to engage life in the process of its flow, supposing somehow that things might be settled before one goes on.

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'evil' urge is not serving God with all his or her heart, soul, and might. The 'evil' urge is the passion, the power that is given us to serve God. We cannot extirpate it or do away with it."

<sup>75</sup> . Mark Epstein, M.D., *Thought Without A Thinker*, NY: Basic Books, A Member of the Persues Books Group, 1995.

*Going to Pieces Without Falling Apart: A Buddhist Perspective on Wholeness*, NY: Broadway Books, 1998.

<sup>76</sup> . Epstein, *Thought Without A Thinker*, pp. 139-142.

<sup>77</sup> . *Ibid.*, p. 113.

I would like to add to this more traditional Buddhist description of *mindfulness* the importance of a growing awareness of “mind as a whole,” that by which I am aware. From my observation of mind I am convinced that there can be an awareness of mind as a whole in which thoughts and feelings occur. Awareness of mind as whole is somewhat nebulous until thoughts and feelings emerge and then we are aware that they emerge from somewhere, and eventually we are aware of a living context in which thoughts occur. Such awareness should not divide mind into components such as id, ego, superego, self, but understand it as a whole, a manifestation of the whole person.

For those who have long struggled with their feelings and thoughts, to accept mind may seem a dangerous approach. They have been seeking to keep both mind and body under control and refrain from actions which could be harmful. However, the struggle with mind gives what emerges from mind power and persistence (because a brief thought is now being sustained and extended), it makes thought and feeling something no longer neutral, transforming it into a powerful impetus for enactment. Thus a thought may become almost an action or actually be enacted rather than remaining a thought.

When what emerges is viewed negatively rather than neutrally, as enemy rather than friend or “just there”, then the person withdraws from the mind (or withdraws the mind) in anxiety and fear, or rejection, and the thoughts and feelings that emerge have no one present to experience thoughts and feelings in appropriate context and they take on their own life. Context is important. I am the context for all my thoughts – or, my mind is context for all my thoughts. I and my mind are more than my thoughts and embrace all else that I am. In the context of “me” all thoughts and feelings gain perspective. And when I do not fear or fight my thoughts, they do not become amplified and are not extended in time. This last is very important. A thought occupies a short period of time, a feeling may be momentary or somewhat extended dependent on its origin within mind and body. But what we fear and fight may last for days or weeks. It is a matter of the sort of attention we give.

There are two concerns in *mindfulness*, as I understand it. The first is to allow thoughts and feelings to be only that, part of the functioning of the mind, so that their potentiality is appropriately diminished and they can be allowed to be what they are. The second has to do with their provision of an important aspect of awareness within the person’s *perceptual field*: that place in the person where all awareness is brought together.<sup>78</sup> As we need to be aware of and have an image of our body to function physically, so mind awareness is an important aspect of the perceptual field which enables functioning of thought. Though thoughts may seem random or responses to stimuli, they occur within a whole person, and are a part of the person’s perceptual field and structured awareness. When a thought is part of my perceptual field it has a context which is aware of it as part of a whole and is not central in itself. *Mindfulness* then cultivates mind awareness. I realize that here I am departing from some of Buddhism which would see *mindfulness* focused on the emerging phenomena of one’s life, focusing on what is happening when it is happening, and not the possible structure behind it.

*Mindfulness* usually begins awareness with concentration on breathing, a foundational body process, and in its ebb and flow one discovers the possibility to trust the flow of life and experience. Thus it is important to start here. It then moves on to feelings, thoughts, emotions and mind until one is mindful of all of one’s life and process and both accepts and gains freedom from them, thus enabled to *wisely see* them and to let them be.

The question we all face as we live our lives is what will enable us *to live life wisely*. The gifts of God’s grace and person are so important from the Christian perspective. But perhaps we can learn something about life from the ancient wisdom of another tradition.

#### WHATEVER IS FEARED

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<sup>78</sup> See my unpublished article on “Disturbances In the Perceptual Field.”

Affirmations p. 66

*OR MUST BE FOUGHT  
TAKES OVER,  
FILLS THE MIND,  
PERSISTS WITHOUT END.*

*WHATEVER  
THOUGHT OR FEELING  
IS WELCOMED,  
EVEN FEAR AND PAIN,  
CAN BECOME FRIEND,  
AT LEAST NOT ENEMY,  
AND FREE THE MIND  
AND HEART  
TO LIVE.*