

**A WORLD OF LOVE ...
AND HOW TO GET THERE**

Revolutionary Faith for the 21st Century

by
Vern Rossman

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True life is creation, and this is the only life worth the living.
- Nicholas Berdyaev

To possess more of God than others means nothing else than to resemble God to a higher degree.
- Meister Eckhardt

This is a college level, non-credit course offered free online by the Network of Religious Futurists. It is theology, but it attempts to be very practical theology. That is, I have tried to put in illustrations and examples and suggestions gleaned from the wisdom of many people over the ages on how we should think of God, how we should live and how our world might just possibly be transformed into a world of love. If I am successful, those who follow through the course will find not only intellectual content, but spiritual challenge and nurture as well. Some technical terms are used, but they are explained and simple illustrations and analogies are attached so that nonspecialists should have no difficulty understanding and, hopefully, profiting from the study.

This first session (following a table of contents, bio of the author and Preface) describes the approach and content of the course and defines the key terms. There are twenty sessions in the course, each with questions for thought at the end. Eventually, there will also be some suggested additional readings, besides the works cited in the text.

There are no examinations, but the author is available at his email address and will welcome your questions or discussion.

This course attempts to bring together into a new unity disciplines which have divided the human race: biblical and systematic theology, philosophy, biology, psychology, mysticism, insights from other religions, and social theory and practice.

Part I: (What God is Doing) lays out what is unique about this course: the restructuring of theology around two germinal ideas or paradigms:

(1) growth by stages both in individuals and societies on the model of Lawrence Kohlberg's stages of moral development; and (2) the recognition that we all have sub-selves, some immature and open to evil and one which is mature and capable of God's love; how this is possible is described scientifically through the ability of the brain to code the same material, simultaneously, in linear (left brain) fashion and in wholistic gestalts (right brain).

Part II (Life in the Age of the Spirit) deals with the critical individual and social issues and crises which we must face in the 21st century.

Please make use of the advantages this course offers. Under a lecturer you have to wait for the next lecture and the conclusions. Here, you can jump ahead and read any session which interests you. Please do it.

This course is dedicated to the memory of Lawrence Kohlberg (1927-1987)

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About the Author

Vern Rossman has wide experience as a writer in the religious field. He is co-author of a study book, *Called To Mission and Unity* and has written two plays and many articles for the religious press. He was for four years editor of a national newspaper, *The Social Action Newsletter*. After graduating from Phillips University (BA 1948) and Yale Divinity School (BD cum laude 1951), he spent two decades in church communications, including nine years as associate director of AVACO, the audio-visual production center of the National Christian Council of Japan; and seven years as director of Intermedia, the overseas communications and literacy arm of the National Council of Churches in the USA. His work has taken him to thirty countries.

At the same time he has pursued a second career in action for peace and justice. He served five years as a director in the national social action department of the Disciples of Christ, and three years as head of a statewide, interfaith organization to combat racism in Indiana; participated in voter registration and marches in Mississippi in 1964 and 1965, being arrested in Greenwood during those campaigns; served three years as the national executive director of Accountants for the Public Interest; was three years a ward chair for the Democratic party in Indianapolis; established two innovative prison visitation programs which still continue in New Jersey and Indiana; and spent almost two years in prison himself for his part in the Griffiss Plowshares action in 1983 when he and six others hammered and poured their blood on a B-52 bomber being converted to carry nuclear tipped cruise missiles. Formerly an ordained minister of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), he now belongs to the Society of Friends (Quakers).

From his sabbatical year at Union Theological Seminary in New York (STM 1960), he has been seeking to bring together the findings of a variety of disciplines in a more adequate "space age" understanding of God's purpose for humanity. His research draws upon Lawrence Kohlberg, Abraham Maslow, Ernest Becker, Nicholas Berdyaev, Matthew Fox, Paul Tillich, Ched Myers, Walter Wink and others. He participated in a seminar under Kohlberg and knew him personally as a friend.

[Note: The above was written prior to Vern Rossman's death in 2006.]

Preface

This course is for those who are seeking a faith perspective they can believe in without trampling on their intelligence.

It is also addressed to those who feel instinctively that life should be directed more by creativity, compassion and celebration than stolid exertion of the will or unquestioning loyalty to tradition. It is for those who seek power to ride on top of the battering waves life sends, rather than being bowled over by them. It is for those who want to know what a truly just and compassionate society would look like and what they can do to help bring it about. It is for those who long to actually experience the transcendence, ecstasy and joy they have heard about.

I have tried to keep the technical jargon to a minimum and to explain those terms I feel it necessary to use. I have also tried to avoid phrases like "I believe" or "it seems to me." This course represents convictions of mine. They are to some degree true and no doubt to some degree need correction. If, however, the tone at any point sounds pretentious or insulting to other points of view, it is due to this style of writing and not to the author's arrogance. At least I sincerely hope so.

In order to help undo the insult to women implied in our language customs, I attempt to use non-sexist language where possible. This is particularly hard in speaking of God as one gets tired of saying the Deity. So on occasion I use the odd term "S/He" to indicate that God is beyond our divided sexuality, and is certainly not masculine.

So many have helped me along the way that it is impossible to thank everyone. I am especially grateful to my teachers who opened to me the riches of Bible, theology, ethics and church history, especially H. Richard and Reinhold Niebuhr, Roland Bainton, Albert C. Outler, Paul Tillich, Liston Pope, John Bennett, Robert Calhoun, and Eduard Heimann.

Then, I owe a special debt to the Christian Church (Disciples), the National Council of Churches and the Atlantic Life Community. The Disciples sent me to work in Japan, to live and work with migrants and in the ghettos of our cities and to Mississippi during the civil rights struggles. The NCCC gave me the rare privilege of traveling to 30 countries, of meeting the leadership of those churches and their people. Special thanks go to the Atlantic Life Community and Liz McAllister and the other five beloved co-conspirators of the Griffiss Plowshares action for the action, trial and the months in prison.

Without these experiences I do not think I would dare to write theology in our day. Even with them I find it a daunting task.

1. Introduction

Either nature is closed to our demands for futurity, in which case thought, the fruit of millions of years of effort, is stifled, still-born in a self-abortive and absurd universe. Or else an opening exists – that of the super-soul above our souls; but in that case the way out, if we are to agree to embark on it, must open out freely onto limitless psychic spaces in a universe to which we can unhesitatingly entrust ourselves.

-Teilhard de Chardin ¹

If there is a God, how can we know what that Being is like? Which of the gods pushed at us is closest to the true God?

There are new discoveries in biology and developmental psychology which may give us more satisfying answers to these questions.

Over the life span of the person who moves to greater and greater maturity, there is an opening out to belief in a series of gods each one closer to the real God. If we grow far, we are likely to worship seven different gods, each corresponding to a stage in our development:

Stage 1: God is a deity of magic, taboos and unpredictably dangerous behavior. Uzzah reaches out to steady the Ark of the Covenant and is struck dead. This corresponds to the young child's magical interpretation of events in the world she does not yet have a cognitive structure to understand.

Stage 2: God is one who rewards and punishes and can be bargained with. If there are ten righteous ones in Sodom, the city can be spared. Abraham negotiates. (Genesis 18) Or, as it is put later: "If it is the Lord who has turned you against me, an offering to him will make him change his mind." (I Sam. 26:19) God keeps a big book in heaven into which he enters all our good and bad deeds. This god is very real to the seven year old whose favorite phrase is, "It's not fair!"

Stage 3: God is a very personal deity who takes special care of me and mine. This teenager's god is seen as tolerating young love in the back seat of the car because he knows their love is special. King David's special relation to god as protector made his enemies god's enemies: "Do I not hate them that hate thee? ... I hate them with a perfect hatred." (Psalm 137:8,9) This god (inconsistently it must be admitted) sends misfortune down on evil people and protects the righteous.

Stage 4: God is the deity of the law and order people, sustainer of my country "right or wrong." This god floats three feet above the flag in the Fourth of July parade and justifies killing those "lesser breeds without the law". It is a god who still has a most favored nation policy.

Stage 5: God is a rather liberal deity, a tolerant grand fatherly sort. Like the stage 5 person, god is confused by conflicting systems of values and is not sure how to relate to his old autocratic exclusivist self.

Stage 6: God now has a universal perspective, embraces and loves all humanity. Where once people thought God distinguished between good and evil nations and between good and evil persons, now it is clear that good and evil are in each individual. There are no good kingdoms and evil kingdoms; there are no purely good people and evil people. This god finds it impossible to choose sides in wars and weeps over killing and cruelty to any person. From stage 6 on, god is inevitably a suffering parent, crucified on the divisions and violence of the children.

Stage 7: God has a cosmic and transcendent perspective. This is the god of the saint, mystic, prophet and seer. This is the god of those who have overcome the power of death in this life and who live in eternity, which is to live in the wholistic power of the divine love. People at this stage are aware that the true God has designed them for a glorious eternal destiny of loving creativity. The Cosmos is their living room and workshop.

These are the gods of atheists also, because the one who doesn't believe can only reject the god which goes with his stage of development.

Those who know developmental psychology will recognize that these seven gods are defined according to Lawrence Kohlberg's stages of moral development. These are not, of course, stages in the life of the Deity but rather stages in our growth in maturity of understanding of God.

Stage development also helps draw a kind of road map through history. Understanding these stages in depth allows us to track a curve through history and then project it into the future. We can perhaps then see a little more clearly where we have been and also what our farther destiny looks like.

The Omega Point

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, the great paleontologist, philosopher and priest, tried to understand what the destination of human personality and human history will be like. He looked to the beginnings of life and drew a line of meaning through history. Then he projected that line to what seemed to him to be the logical end. He called this end the "Omega Point," omega being the last letter of the Greek alphabet.

The Omega Point, as he saw it, is the logical conclusion of a process going on through history which was producing

simultaneously a greater and greater complexity and richness, on the one hand, and a greater unity on the other.

He believed that ultimately harmony would triumph but in a way which would celebrate and conserve interpersonal compassion and the creative contributions of individuals.

This course also draws a line and extends it into the future, but in a way which seeks to fill Teilhard de Chardin's insights with more specific content..

Part I of the course attempts to define and describe what God is doing and how. Part II, then, spells out what this means in the important areas of our lives.

To Become Like God

Meister Eckhardt, the 14th century preacher and mystic, wrote, "All the names which the soul gives God, it receives from the knowledge of itself."²

He was saying that we must remember how far God is beyond us, but also that any real understanding of God, which is not just a projection of our own inner needs and hopes, arises from our becoming more like God.³

I believe Eckhardt is right on this and also on another vital point: Salvation is to become like God. A main purpose of this course is to try to describe more clearly what godlikeness looks like in a human being and how we become like God.

As we become more mature, that is, more loving, more expanded in our concerns, more free of social control, and more united within, yesterday's god turns out to be too small.

As individuals pass through stages in their development, so also have human institutions in history. We can discern patterns in our growth, both individual and social. These patterns make it possible to see to some extent beyond where we are to what we must become.

When we talk of God's purpose it is also necessary to say something about the divine strategy for saving and perfecting all peoples. This course spells out where the quiet and hidden resources of God are, the ones which tip the balance against evil and in favor of good, where they come from, how they exist within the personality, why evil cannot overwhelm them, how God works within them now, and in what ways they make the difference between God's success and failure.

Two Pivotal Paradigms

This understanding of God's purpose and strategy is held together by two linchpins. These are: (1) the movement of individuals and society through stages of growth and development, and (2) the god-self within each person, sometimes referred to as the image of God.

These two concepts as understood scientifically, and their interrelation, form a new paradigm, a new basis for faith and a revised methodology for truth verification.

Stages of Development

Stages of development appear in various forms in history. They are implied in our commonsense distinction between immaturity and maturity.

Theologians have found it necessary to speak of dispensations or historical stages in God's self-revelation in order to explain vastly different levels of morality in the Bible. God, they say, had to deal with primitive peoples as adults deal with children, to bring them along bit by bit.

Mystics, building on their spiritual experience and the logic of bridging the enormous gap between humanity and God, have constructed ladders of the four to thirteen steps on the way to Enlightenment or Beatitude.

Now, we have Lawrence Kohlberg's stages of moral development to work with. This structure describes the process of potential development in the life of the individual. It rests on over thirty years of research by the late Harvard professor of developmental psychology and his associates and students. It can help us enormously to understand God's educational process, the meaning of history and the nature of progress and moral lag in societies.

I recognize that there are criticisms of Kohlberg's system and I deal with these in detail. I could have used stages of faith development (Fowler) or ego development (Kegan and others) and established what is important to this course. I believe it has been scientifically established that there are stages in our development and the movement from one to another is often a kind of little death and resurrection, so painful that many turn back and do not go on to maturity, and that each stage has a markedly different viewpoint, kind of relationships and ethics and morals.

The God-self

The other main idea to be tested is that we have within us a number of sub-selves, each organized around a different system of values, one of which is wholistic, the one I call the god-self.

The god-self is an inner reality of pivotal psychological and spiritual power. This sub-self is that into which is gathered all the goodness and love and affirmation which we have experienced as we grow up. Also feeding this wholistic core self are experiences from the very beginning of our lives of ecstasy (laughter, play, dancing, sex, mystical sense of oneness with all being, creating, etc.) and transcendence (the awesome "starry heavens above").

In this way, Kohlberg's stages 6 and 7 are already being formed within us as patterns long before we are able to consciously affirm those advanced values or live by them for more than fleeting moments.

The true self or god-self is the inner individual expression of what philosophers call the ground of being. Some psychologists describe it as the true self, the wholistic self, the core self, or true being. Quakers and mystics have called it the Inner

Light, the Seed, or “that of God in us.” In the Old Testament it is the image of God. It is what St. Paul calls the new person in Christ or putting on Christ. Thomas Merton called it the true self which he saw as opposed to the false self. It seems to be what Eastern sages intuited when they spoke of Atman-Brahman and the Buddha nature.

I am not suggesting that all of these people describe the same reality in the same way, but there are striking similarities suggesting intuitions of something of God’s Being within each of us.

The god-self is the one self-system that has the structural power to pull together and knit up into a unity the basic polarities of life expressed throughout the course in this diagram:

FREEDOM autonomy, power to stand alone	RELATEDNESS belonging, commitments, intimacy, compassion
EXPANSION inclusiveness, universality, variety, complexity	INTEGRITY inner unity, cohesiveness, harmony

This diagram outlines the pattern or shape of the god-self. It is a definition of wholeness. It also points to the kind of inner structural strength – a unity of opposites – which alone can produce that selfless, out-going love we call agape. For this reason I sometimes refer to this diagram also as expressing the structure of agape. Agape is the Greek word used in the New Testament for God’s kind of love.

This diagram expresses what the Omega Point – unity with rich diversity – looks like in the individual.

The god-self is the unity of the highest of the human and the depth of the divine in us. It is our fulfilled humanity and also the pattern of our likeness to God. This inner, powerful sub-self is, at the same time, God’s hidden rock on which evil founders and breaks apart.

In *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, C.S. Lewis describes how the god figure, the lion Aslan, takes on himself the punishment of the little boy who has violated the law of the White Witch’s world. Aslan rises again from the dead and the witch’s perpetual winter is overthrown. Aslan explains that the White Witch did not know of the older, deeper magic, by which is meant the saving power of sacrificial love which encloses but transcends law. The deeper magic is hidden because we think and live mostly within the narrow blinders of self-centered anxiety belonging to the self-systems of the lower stages in our development. But there is also within each of us the god-self, the inner influence which continually offers us choices based upon the deep magic of God’s creative, unselfish, unanxious love.

Left Brain/Right Brain

How should those of us who do not consider ourselves mystics think of the concept of the god-self? How might we understand it scientifically?

Over the last couple of decades, the scientific hypothesis of bicameral (left/right) brain has been introduced and much discussed. The right hemisphere of the brain, the theory has had it, does not record material in words and numbers. It receives and organizes material in patterns (gestalts), feelings and pictures. It operates as an unconscious reservoir for innovative intuitions. Bob Samples calls this side of the brain the “metaphoric mind” and says of it:

*Beyond the corpus callosum in the right cerebral hemisphere lies the metaphoric mind. Its mode is analogic, intuitive and wholistic. It also possesses the visual acumen of the brain. This side of the brain thrives on multiple relationships processed simultaneously.*⁴

Location of functions is contested by some experts. My own use of the concept does not depend upon localization of these operations in a part of the brain. The important point is that the brain engages in two kinds of operation – the more conscious, logical, verbal-oriented and the unconscious, pattern-forming, picture-oriented. These are sometimes referred to as the analytic and integrative functions.

This division of function, whether it is localized or operates throughout the brain, suggests that there may be a scientific basis for the god-self, that of God in each of us. This provides an inner source, as Nicholas Berdyaev believed, of true revelation and genuine freedom, formed as a wholistic pattern with its own special sources and boundaries.

This unconscious, pattern-forming function of the brain means that we have the biological capacity for the formation of various sub-selves. The same emotion-laden experience may be simultaneously and unconsciously recorded in different sub-selves with quite different codings. We will see in sessions 4 and 5 how this may take place.

The god-self is the inner reservoir of greatest maturity. Its hidden and unanalyzed impact throughout our lives may be the best way to account for the astonishing bursts of sacrificial altruism on the part of little children. It may explain the insights of prophets, saints and seers through history who seem to stand out like mountains above those around them, ethically and morally.

Taken together, the god-self and stages of development bring into focus more clearly than any other set of lenses how God's love has been able to appear and act in history, how S/He has built in the power necessary for love's victory over evil, both in human beings and human history, and how this victory is achieved without overriding the individual freedom of will essential to our godlikeness.

The Age of the Spirit

Part II of the course is unified around the theme, the age of the Spirit. The age of the Spirit symbolizes and sums up a central point of the course, that how we see God changes in step with the growing maturity of our understanding of God. It has, in addition, another more specific implication, that law and forgiveness (justification) are too narrow to sum up what God is doing and wants from us.

If we obey the law and are forgiven and justified by faith, this only leads us to the vital questions: We are saved to what? What are we meant to become and to do?

Beyond law and justification is creativity. God expects from us a creative response to his love. We are not destined to sit on clouds and play harps. We are to be co-creators with God into eternity.

This theme was first made central to a theology by Nicholas Berdyaev's *The Meaning of the Creative Act* published in Russia in 1916. To him it meant that God's purpose is not primarily to get some individuals into a place called heaven. God in the third age of history, the age of the Spirit, is looking forward to the flowering of human initiative and human creativity. Humanity is not the passive recipient of God's grace. Humanity is destined to participate in and help complete the divine creation.

A faith for the age of the Spirit shows how the contradictions which torment us daily are destined to be knit up in a higher synthesis, into a unifying, believable, redemptive and exultant way of life. It is theology which stimulates the formation of new kinds of community that actively press people to grow and celebrate and create. It is designed to inspire, motivate and empower people to go on to wholeness, to mature, healthy, joyful lives.

This is a Christian faith, based upon the deepest and highest strands in the Bible and the Christian tradition. But it is a system which is also rooted in modern science and psychology in ways which open it out for fruitful, reconciling dialogue with those who are atheists, agnostics or adherents of other religions. It is a way of life, moreover, much of which can be put to the test, both in scientific research and in daily life.

Such a wholistic, liberating and unifying faith is essential if Christianity is to have continuing relevance in our world. It is the energizing and unifying kind of Good News which speaks clearly to 21st century people. It is a faith which could fuel a meaningful reformation in the church. It is perhaps the only kind of new vision which is powerful enough to cause people to rise above narrow ethnic and nationalistic self-interest sufficiently to tackle effectively the global challenges of genocidal wars, nuclear weapons, famine, abject poverty, environmental pollution and chronic injustice.

Some of the points I make are from Matthew Fox's *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ*.⁵ He calls for a rediscovery of mysticism. And the way he defines mysticism looks remarkably like the stage 6-7 personality I describe in session 7. I am also indebted to Fox for luring me into the depths of Meister Eckhardt. However, this course goes beyond Fox in that it attempts to describe links and transmission belts between God and humanity, elements not dealt with directly in his work.

The stages of development and the god-self contribute substantially to our understanding of the origin and nature of evil and the sources and power of good in us. These two root metaphors also help us solve more adequately the problem of how the gulf between God and humanity is crossed and how the manner of the crossing fully affirms God's initiative and grace but also accords full participation, dignity and freedom to humanity.

Wholeness and Liberation

These two paradigms, moreover, enable us to define the terms wholeness and liberation in a way which show how both are interrelated and both relate God, good and evil to the biology of the brain and the scientific researches of developmental psychology. It gives the renewal of mysticism, for which Fox calls, a biological and psychological grounding which should make the idea more hospitable to 21st century people.

Ultimately, there is no full liberation without wholeness. Liberation as the struggle for social justice finds harmony with the truths in Christian mysticism within the wholeness of the god-self. There, both social justice and mysticism are also unified with a devotional piety and a life style of creativity, sensuousness and celebration. All of these belong to each other within the larger framework of what God is doing in us and in history.

The many conservative, minimalist, reductionist theologies try to restore some original nature or to fulfill some past human vision of what God intends humanity to become. The task of theology is rather to unriddle God's intended goal for human nature and humanity. We are to do our best to read the trajectory of God's grace as it has acted in the past and then to draw that line on into the future as far as we can meaningfully project it. And the criteria for evaluating the past and envisioning our future are to be taken from the best pictures we have of wholistic, healthy, joyful, maturely loving people and the kind of society which produces them and which they produce.

For Christians this means establishing our baseline in Jesus Christ. In Jesus, God's nonviolent, noncoercive love was with us personally in history. From this firm peg driven in history we cast our lines seeking understanding both into the past and the future. In the life, death and resurrection of Jesus we are led, not only from behind but from the future, as with a pillar of fire by

night and a shining cloud by day, into our destined godlikeness.

The natural question at this point is which of the many Jesuses that are offered should be followed. Session 16 offers very specific answers to this question. It utilizes one of the most provocative and wholistic approaches to biblical study to come on the market in a long time: *Binding the Strong Man, A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus* (Orbis Press, 1988) by Ched Myers. Myers transforms our traditional flat, monochrome interpretations of the gospel into tri-dimensional Technicolor. He reveals how Mark speaks to us with as much relevance as he did to his own struggling minority community of believers a generation after Jesus.

Two Questions

To get at the meaning of the Omega Point and the age of the Spirit, I repeatedly raise two questions. These questions draw out and elaborate dramatically what is different about this theology. The questions are:

1. What does the Christian faith look like if salvation is believed to mean becoming like God rather than going to a place called heaven?
2. What would a stage 6 and 7 faith look like? Or a stage 6-7 church, or ethics, or personality?

These questions and their answers give us a pragmatic definition of what Berdyaev called the age of the Spirit, though they certainly do not exhaust the subject.

The answers to both questions converge in the end. And the implications of these answers help us to a uniquely clear understanding of our own age and the ways in which we must respond to its enormous challenges.

Questions for Thought

1. Read again the descriptions of the seven gods we worship and write down or discuss which views you have held during your life and where you are now.
2. Consider or discuss the two questions listed immediately above? How would you answer them at this point?

Notes

1. *The Phenomenon of Man*, Harper and Row, Publishers, New York, 1965, page 233. First published in 1955 in French.
2. Quoted in *Breakthrough: Meister Eckhardt's Creation Spirituality in New Translation, Introduction and Commentaries* by Matthew Fox, Image Books, Doubleday & Co., Inc., NY, 1980, page 175
3. Ibid., page 184
4. "Mind Cycles and Learning," *Phi Delta Kappan*, May, 1977, page 688
5. *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ*, Harper & Row, Publisher, San Francisco, 1988

2. God Chose to Grow Us

It is God who in love withdraws from us so that we can love him. For if we were exposed to the direct radiance of his love, without the protection of space, of time and of matter, we should be evaporated like water in the sun. There would not be enough "I" in us to make it possible to surrender the "I" for love's sake.

- Simone Weil ¹

The divine power should be conceived as ... the infinite power that springs from creative love. It is the power of sacrificial love. God does not control his creatures, he graciously lets them be. That need not mean he exercises no providential care over them. What it does mean is that the divine almightiness consists, not in God's unlimited ability to do as he pleases but of unlimited capacity for creative love, so that not only does he bring creatures into being to let them be; he creatively restores whatever seeks such restoration, so that the redeemed might indeed well be called a new creation, that is, a re-creation.

-Geddes MacGregor ²

A 21st century view of God and faith poses anew the question why we were created in the first place. The answer suggested by our most mature understanding of God is this: S/He wants us as friends, companions, lovers and co-creators. Nicholas Berdyaev, the great Russian Orthodox philosopher-theologian, emphasized that our divinely appointed destiny is to be "engoded" or "divinized." As God is by nature creator, so shall we be.

It is clear, though, that to create loving companions who give unselfish love freely and are innovatively creative is far from easy.

Programmed Possibility

Create persons, create a language, and program it into people. You have given them a history they personally did not live and have produced preprogrammed robots. You could program your robot to rebel and it will rebel until you tell it to stop. Robots were not what God sought, so He has used a long and costly process to grow persons, who because of their distance from the divine beauty and power, have their own history and content, but who are enabled by grace to put on God's own nature, that of free creative love.

Thus far, I've said nothing really new. I'm suggesting, however, that two new and different root word pictures help us explain how this growth into godlikeness takes place. The presence of the god-self within explains how the divine power enters history and is effective here. Growth through expansion of the boundaries of the self by stages helps us understand how we become increasingly universal, taking in more and more reality until we become like God in the sense Berdyaev meant when he called us "microcosmos" and "microtheos". We find the created sources of this godlikeness in the biological functioning of the brain and the interpersonal forces which shape us all. Otherwise we would be forced to rest the case for our faith on the supernatural or to declare it a mystery beyond human penetration. There is indeed mystery, but we must not imagine mystery where explanations exist. God does indeed act directly in the world, constantly, but as we shall see, it is not by crude intervention in the human psyche and in history. God acts only in ways compatible with the fullest freedom.

In the next session, Kohlberg's research project and the results are more fully introduced. These are important to everything that follows. This system is presented as a paradigm, a model, and not as a Procrustean bed to which people and societies must be cut or stretched to fit.

Lawrence Kohlberg was, until his untimely death in 1987, a professor of developmental psychology at Harvard's Graduate School of Education. Over more than thirty years he did research on what he called the stages of moral development. His research is being carried on by colleagues and students. The results have been incorporated in studies and textbooks on child development and are being applied and tested in schools and prisons as a method of teaching moral reasoning.

I suggested in the Introduction that humanity actually worships seven different gods, defined roughly in terms of Kohlberg's stages.

This over-simplified outline of seven ego stages of our gods on the Kohlberg scale helps us see how the stages of development picture successive surges of expansion of the borders of the self-system, and how they lead (though not inevitably) to the radical and repeated transformation of the understanding of God.

Feuerbach was right in saying that we make gods in our image. This is inevitably true insofar as it is not possible to relate realistically to a god greater and more moral than one stage above our own functioning level.

When a greater god is described to us, we manage to twist that deity around to fit comfortably within the arc of our blinders. For instance, stage 4 religionists say they believe in universal love. But their version reads, "Of course we must love everybody, but the world will be saved and united only when everyone converts to my kind of faith."

Kohlberg was a scientist, not a theologian. He did not deal with stages in our understanding of God. He was testing hypotheses about how moral reasoning develops. He believed that the first five stages he had postulated are firmly supported by the research results. He was forced by friendly critics to admit that stage 6 is less firmly established, but he never ceased to believe it exists. Stage 7, in his mind, was an extrapolation from his research, just a hypothesis. His picture of stage 7 was based partly on intuition and partly on his observation of persons of excellence.

Few people have reached stage 6 and Kohlberg and other students of the phenomenon of stage development aren't sure anyone has fully reached stage 7. This is why stages 6 and 7 remain so impervious to scientific testing. How, some developmental psychologists ask, can people operating at stages 3 to 5 devise tests for the higher stages which they have not yet experienced?

For a treatment of stages in relation to faith see James Fowler's *Stages of Faith*, Harper & Row, 1981. I have preferred to start with Kohlberg, because I wished to deal with stage development first as science and psychology and then to move to its implications for religious faith. Also, to give Fowler his due would require more space than this course offers.

Seven Valentines

One more exercise before we plunge into a more formal look at Kohlberg's stages:

Stage 1: Be my valentine or I'll kill you!

Stage 2: Be my valentine and I'll scratch your back and you scratch mine and we'll stay together as long as we please each other.

Stage 3: Be my valentine, you marvelous, gorgeous, "once in a lifetime" lover for me.

Stage 4: Be my valentine and I will stay with you, be faithful and love you and our children as society tells me my role must be as a legally wedded mate.

Stage 5: Be my valentine and you can have whatever career, hobbies and independent development you wish without losing my love and I will follow my own drum-beat.

Stage 6: Be my valentine and we will expand the circle of our love to enclose our neighbors here and all over the world and so be enriched in our relationship to one another.

Stage 7: Be my valentine and we will together conquer fear of death and be one in a cosmic relationship which embraces all beings and all of time and space.

God chose to grow us, by stages, and will succeed, in part because this expansion of the boundaries of the self is one dynamic built into the processes of human history and personality. Our ascent cannot take place without our assent, but mature wholeness is a gift we will, by sharing graceful love back and forth, eventually give to one another in this or future lives.

In the next session we see how Lawrence Kohlberg's researches in developmental psychology help us understand what godlike expansion means.

Questions for Thought

1. What is the difference between this view of God and the traditional view which reads the Bible literally and thinks the human goal is to attain heaven? What are the problems with an all powerful God who "runs" things? Read ahead in Session 18 if you wish.

2. Look again at the seven views of God in the Introduction and the seven humorous "valentines." Where do you find yourself on these scales?

Notes

1. *Gravity and Grace*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1952, 1972, page 28

2. *He Who Lets Us Be, A New Theology of Love*, Paragon House Publishers, NY, 1975, page 15

3. Becoming Like God through Expansion

The transition between stages in our ego's developmental history proceeds on the basis of crisis and tension. Our existing patterns of dealing with life do not fit as well as they did formerly; we must now think and act differently. ... Of course, some persons do not move as far along the possible sequence of growth as others; they fail to incorporate the new with the old. Tension and crisis can overwhelm as much as they can effect positive growth.

-Edward G. Sampson¹

What clearly emerges from research with Kohlberg's scales is that the vast majority of American adults and school age children have only reached Stages 3 and 4. They are rarely capable of making principled moral judgments and do not even comprehend those judgments when others make them.

-Charles Hampdon-Turner²

God's kind of love, agape, is the truly strong love. It is balanced in all its dimensions: power to stand alone, out-going compassion, incorporation of all people and all the universe, and, finally, inner unity, harmony.

These are the four essential sides to the divine love. When this love commands the heart of the individual it is the fulfillment of what Teilhard de Chardin's Omega Point so far as the individual is concerned. This is our eternal destination and it is in the innermost heart of God.

Of course, individuals grow primarily through the grace of other people, and by the time we reach the apex of development we are a community of people inside ourselves and also one member of some creative loving community.

The structure of God's love can be diagramed this way:

FREEDOM ——— RELATEDNESS
EXPANSION ——— INTEGRITY

Expansion of the boundaries of the self is only one of the four dimensions of the wholistic agape of God. But it is an essential one, no less important than the others. So let's look at what Kohlberg contributes to the subject.

The seven valentines of the previous chapter offered a humorous look at Kohlberg's stages, a superficial glance. Now, let's see them as the attempt to describe what actually happens in the course of our moral development. We first list the headings of the stages and look at them from two perspectives for comparison: that of the reason for the behavior and that of the orientation underlying the decision.

The Stages of Moral Development ³

Stage	General Class	Reason for Behavior	Orientation Context
I	pre-moral	to avoid punishment	punishment, obedience
II	pre-moral	to obtain rewards, favors returned	naive instrumentalism, hedonism (pleasure/pain)
III	role conformity	to avoid disapproval, dislike	good relations, approval, role models (“good boy, nice girl”)
IV	role conformity	to avoid censure by authorities, guilt	authority, law and order, codified or socially sanctioned systems.
V	self-accepted moral principles	to maintain respect (in eyes of impartial observer), community welfare	community welfare, contract rights, democratically constituted law
VI	self-accepted moral principles	to avoid self-condemnation	universal moral value, conscience, individual accepted principles

The Value of Life

Next, we take one area – here the value of human life – and follow it through the six stages. Kohlberg found the following differences in attitudes toward the value of human life at the various levels:

Stage 1: The value of human life is confused with the value of physical objects and is based on the social status or physical attributes of its possessor.

Stage 2: The value of a human life is seen as instrumental to the satisfaction of the needs of its possessor.

Stage 3: The value of a human life is based on the empathy and affection of family members and others toward its possessor.

Stage 4: Life is conceived of as sacred in terms of its place in a categorical moral or religious order of rights and duties.

Stage 5: Life is valued both in terms of its relation to community welfare and in terms of being a universal human right.

Stage 6: Belief in the sacredness of human life as representing a universal human value of respect for the individual.⁴

At each stage there is an quite different quality of relationship to society and persons implied.

Characteristics of the Stages

It is important to note several characteristics of the stages and the process which Kohlberg discovered always seem to apply:

1. The movement through the stages is invariant. Every person, everywhere, must go through the stages in this order and none can be skipped. This seems true in all cultures.

2. It is possible to move through the stages at different speeds and to be found partly in and partly outside a stage.

3. It is not possible for persons really to understand a stage which is more than one level above them.

4. The movement from one stage to another is best accomplished when several factors are present:

(1) an example of the next higher stage;

(2) the influence of peers or near-age persons who articulate or live at the next level; and

(3) tension or disequilibrium in which the present stage is no longer felt adequate to solve the problems of the enlarged environment.

5. Persons can become hung up at a lower stage. Kohlberg interviewed people in prison and found some adults stuck at stage 1 or 2 thinking.⁵

6. He found some differences related to class and culture. In lower class groups, persons evidently tend to move more slowly and stage 5 and 6 appear at a later date. He found that stages 5 & 6 tend not to be found at all in tribal or village peasant groups.⁶

Kohlberg was not testing what people do. A person may refrain from cheating or stealing at any stage. Kohlberg studied the reasoning and motivation behind moral decisions. After long years of research, he was able to identify the stages through which everyone must pass on the way to greater maturity.

Methodology

His methodology was to pose a series of moral or ethical dilemmas in the form of stories and then ask the person being tested to decide which course of action should be followed and why.

Look for example at the age-related results with regard to the value of human life.

He asked Tommy, at age 10, “Is it better to save the life of one important person, or a lot of unimportant persons?” Tommy answered, “... all the people aren’t that important because one man has just one house, maybe a lot of furniture, but a whole bunch of people have an awful lot of furniture, and some of these poor people might have a lot of money and it doesn’t look it.”

This is stage 1 thinking, confusing the value of a human being with the value of property.⁶

Kohlberg studied the same group through almost two decades, so was able to return to Tommy and others again and again,

asking similar questions.

At age 13, Tommy is asked whether it is right for a doctor to “mercy kill” a woman requesting death because of the pain. Tommy replies, “Maybe it would be good to put her out of her pain, she’d be better off that way. But the husband wouldn’t want it; it’s not like an animal. If a pet does you can get along without it – it isn’t something you really need. Well, you can get a new wife, but it’s not really the same.”

The answer is stage 2 reasoning. The value of the woman to herself is considered, but it is her value to her husband, who would have difficulty replacing her, which is more important.

At age 16, Tommy answers, “It might be best for her, but her husband – it’s a human life – not like an animal; it doesn’t have the same relationship that a human being does to a family. You can become attached to a dog, but nothing like a human being, you know.”

This, Kohlberg says, is a stage 3 view, “based on a husband’s distinctively human empathy and love for someone in his family.” The emphasis is not the universal value of a human being but the family’s attachment.

At the same age, another boy, Richard, displays stage 4 reasoning in saying, “God put life into everybody on earth and you’re taking away something from that person that came directly from God, and you’re destroying something from that person that is very sacred. It’s in a way a part of God and it’s almost destroying a part of God.”

At age 20, Richard said, “There are more and more people in the medical profession who think it is a hardship on everyone, the person, the family, when you know they are going to die. When a person is kept alive by an artificial lung or kidney, it’s more like being a vegetable than a human. If it’s her choice, I think there are certain rights and privileges that go along with being a human being. ... You have a world of which you are the center and everybody else does too and in that sense we are all equal.

This is clearly stage 5 reasoning, universal rights but in a context of relativity.

At age 24 Richard says, “A human life takes precedence over any other moral or legal value, whatever it is. A human life has inherent value whether or not it is valued by the particular individual. The worth of the individual human being is central where the principles of justice and love are normative for all human relationships.”

This represents stage 6 because it expresses the value of a human life “as absolute in representing a universal and equal respect for the human as an individual.”

Kohlberg’s summary is particularly helpful:

*The person at stage 6 has disentangled his judgments of – or language about – human life from status and property values (stage 1), from its uses to others (stage 2), from interpersonal affection (stage 3), and so on; he has a means of judgment which is universal and impersonal.*⁷

Cross-cultural Study

It is difficult to believe that this same process could be common to the whole human race, so it is necessary to give an illustration of the cross-cultural studies Kohlberg did or supervised. The context and content of morality may be quite different, he says, but the stages are the same.

Ten year old boys in Taiwan and Malaya were posed a similar dilemma: A man’s wife is starving to death and the store owner won’t give him food unless he can pay, which he can’t. Should he break in and steal food?

The Taiwan boy replies that he should steal the food because funerals are expensive. The Malayan boy says he should steal the food because he needs his wife to cook for him. Both are stage 2 reasoning, but the answers indicate a different content in the values and priorities of the culture.

Shortly after Kohlberg’s death, an article was published in *Psychology Today* by John Snarey, associate professor at Northwestern University, which confirms the results of earlier research. He surveyed all the cross-cultural studies available based on Kohlberg’s work, some forty-five research reports completed in twenty-seven different cultures. He concluded that while there were cultural differences in the content of the answers, the stage structure are the same. The first four stages appear in all cultures in basically the same forms they appear in ours. He found, however, that for the higher stages, significant variations in answers appear in collective or communal cultures, such as an Israeli kibbutz. He noted:

Stage 1 was present in about 90 percent of the 19 studies that included people age 10 or younger; stages 2,3 and 4 were present in about 90 percent of all 45 studies; but stage 4/5 or 5 was reported in only 64 percent of the 25 studies that included people 18 or older. Thus, with the exception of the highest stages, all were virtually universal. ⁸

Note that half stages also are considered often in scoring. 4/5 would be scoring between the two stages. In my own testing at about the age of 60, I scored between stages 5 and 6, or 5/6.

Is There a Stage 7?

Kohlberg speculated about a possible stage 7. In one place he suggests it represents the difference between most of us and such special persons as Jesus, Gautama Buddha or Socrates.

A definition of stage 7 is offered in chapter nine of *The Philosophy of Moral Development*.⁸ Here he says that stage 6 universal moral values represent the culmination of the natural development of a sense of justice in the child. This sense of justice is derived from an expansion of the self and identification with others in an ever enlarging circle, finally including all humanity. This is basically a Kantian sort of justice. It arises, he said, from the implications of life itself. The critique of this disputed point is taken up in Appendix B.

Reasoning including all people would seem to the end of the growth process. What could lie beyond?

According to Kohlberg, the “metaphorical notion” of a stage 7 represents a cosmic as opposed to a universal humanistic perspective. While such a viewpoint may be religious and theistic, he contended that it need not be. He wrote:

In religious writing the movement to Stage 7 starts with despair. Such despair involves the beginning of a cosmic perspective. It is when we begin to see our lives as finite from some more infinite perspective that we feel despair. The meaninglessness of our lives in the face of death is the meaninglessness of the finite from the perspective of the infinite. The resolution of the despair which we call “Stage 7” represents a continuation of the process of taking a more cosmic perspective whose first phase is despair. It represents, in a sense, a shift from figure to ground. In despair we are the self seen from the distance of the cosmic or infinite. In the state of mind we identify ourselves with the cosmic or infinite perspective itself, we value life from its perspective.⁹

The key phrase here is “a continuation of the process of taking in a more cosmic perspective.” The expanding sphere of the self, eventually, reaches the developmental crisis of despair over finiteness and death.

People, if they reflect on existence, have to incorporate into their perspective the whole cosmos, all history, all of time and space, and the necessity of coming to terms with their own deaths. Coming to terms means establishing some faith perspective, even if it is a conclusion that all life is meaningless.

Kohlberg notes that at stage 7 we stand outside the self and view it from a cosmic perspective. The question arises, he said, “Why be moral ... particularly given the fact that I must die and all is seemingly meaningless?” The answer does not emerge from within the process, not in the same way that a Kantian universal perspective on justice arises at stage 6 as a consequence of reflection on universality and fairness to all. At that point it was clear that reciprocity in matters of justice was an inevitable consequence of identification with humanity as a whole rather than with a narrower circle which left some persons outside.

Kohlberg insisted that stage 7 is only a hypothesis to be tested. We have so few examples of persons at the cosmic stage (if any) that we are not clear what it is like. It is primarily, at this point, a matter of extrapolation from stage 6, which is itself not as securely established and defined scientifically as are the first five stages.

I consider stage 7 to be a hypothesis to be tested. I call it the cosmic/transcendent/ecstatic stage, in the same sense that stage 2 is referred to as the instrumental stage.

Note that all growth in maturity involves a greater and greater ability to stand outside oneself and look objectively at self, others and universe. The other pole of this ability is growth in empathy and compassion.

To fully inhabit stage 6, we must include in our perspective all persons, and not just as an intellectual process. To integrate at that level, our lives have to be reorganized around the revolutionary facts that all persons are enormously valuable to God and that all our decisions are to be made on that basis.

Becoming integrated as a personality on a particular stage level, and not just reasoning at that level, is a step beyond Kohlberg’s definition of operation. He is talking about reasoning, not action. This difference will be spelled out later.

The logic of the process of expansion is this: If we are to reach stage 7 and integrate fully there, we have to experience the infinite Void and our own personal death, including the impact of despair involved in full acceptance of our finitude. To reach stage 6 and integrate there requires a universal love. To reach stage 7 to the same degree requires overcoming death in this life, whatever else may be involved. This is examined in chapter 9.

Qualifications

There are several additional points about the social significance of the stages which are important to this study. They include the following.

Both individuals and societies today tend to be strung out across all the stages. All the stages and their values are alive and active within us and around us continuously.

Even those hung up at a lower stage than the average societal level suffer the impact from stages 5 and 6 as seen in the lives of others around them.

This is the greater complexity we have to deal with today in comparison to earlier centuries. The conflicts among such a variety of diverse values makes interpersonal communication more difficult. It is not so simple as in Transactional Analysis where a person is said to speak in the logic and voice of a child, adult or parent at various times, and must learn to sort out incoming messages by the same trilogy. If, in fact, we are speaking out of six different levels of development and maturity, then the potential for cross-communication conflicts and potential misunderstandings is enormous.

Similarly, modern societies have an much more difficult time reaching consensus on any issue, facing five or six different levels of interpretation on any one piece of legislation. On the other hand, having more stage 5 people, with their greater objectivity, helps.

In the first volume of his papers on moral development, Kohlberg included an article on the relationship of stages to Supreme Court justices’ viewpoints on capital punishment, which is a first rate illustration of the above point. He shows how arguments in opposition to capital punishment show influence of a stage 6 perspective, while advocacy of death penalties reveals a preponderance of stage 4 and 5 influence.

Primitive societies which had not reached beyond stage 3, a kind of familial/tribal orientation, issues were much simpler and more direct.

This introduction to the stages is too brief. The thoughtful objections by experts are dealt with in Appendix B. We will come back in subsequent chapters to the stages in relationship to history, biblical interpretation, renewal of the church, and personal and

social issues.

Next, in session 4, the god-self, is defined and examined. This is followed by two chapters on the nature of evil, individual and social, which lay the foundation for demonstrating how the god-self and the stages interact in individuals and society.

Our becoming the wholistic love of God depends, in part, on the expansion of the boundaries of the self to the universal, and ultimately, the cosmic. Only the god-self has the pattern big and strong enough to contain such scope and diversity without disintegration. Expansion is only one of the four poles of our complex developmental process.

This means we will not have to defend ourselves against all those critics of Kohlberg who contend that the system is too formal and cold, leaving out compassion and creativity. All four dimensions are essential and in Kohlberg we find only the one. If expansion of the boundaries of the self were the only element, then we might well all become cosmic moral monsters with the lust for control and domination of a Darth Vader.

Questions for Thought

1. Consider or discuss: Kohlberg, in an article analyzed the votes of Supreme Court justices in capital punishment cases. He found that those who voted for capital punishment tended to be a state lower (stage 4) than those who voted against (stage 5). What is the difference between these two stages, and why should it affect such decisions?
2. Where would you score yourself on Kohlberg's scale. And why?

Notes

1. Sampson, Edward E., *Ego at the Threshold*, 169-170
2. Hampdon-Turner, Charles, *Radical Man: The Process of Psycho-social Development*, etc., p. 138
3. This table is a construct in Kohlberg language from the following references: The article, "Moral Development" in *The International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences*, Vol. 10, pp. 483-494; Duska, Ronald and Whelan, Mariellen, *A Guide to Piaget and Kohlberg*, Paulist Press, NY, 1975, pp. 42-70; and the article by Kohlberg, "The Child as Moral Philosopher," *Colloquy*, May-June, 1973, Vol. 6, No. 5, pp. 10-15.
4. *Colloquy*, op cit., pp. 12-13
5. *A Guide to Piaget and Kohlberg*, op. cit. p. 52. See also the other references mentioned previously.
6. *Colloquy*, op. cit., pp. 13-14
7. *ibid.*, p. 14
8. *Psychology Today*, June, 1987, pages 6-8
9. Lawrence Kohlberg, *The Philosophy of Moral Development*, Harper & Row, 1981.

4. Our Job is to Become the God-self Within Us

Salvation is not just justification, but the acquiring of perfection.

- Nicholas Berdyaev ¹

The seed of God is in us. ... God himself has sown this seed and inserted it and bourned it. Thus while this seed may be crowded, hidden away, and never cultivated, it will still never be obliterated. It glows and shines, gives off light, burns, and is unceasingly inclined toward God.

- Meister Eckhardt ²

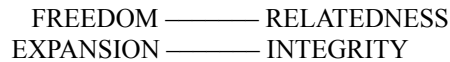
Put in Jungian terms I might ask: When I go beyond the personal unconscious, beyond the collective unconscious, beyond the archetypes, what do I find? And in answer to this all the great religions speak of a mystery which they call by various names: the Buddha nature, Brahman and Atman, the divine spark, the ground of being, the centre of the soul, the Kingdom of God, the image of God, and so on. They use different terms but all, I believe, are pointing to a single reality.

- William Johnston ³

A faith for the 21st century knits up the conflicted elements of our lives into a personal Omega Point of unification and rich creative complexity. Here suddenly we find salvation means becoming godlike. It is not a matter of going to a place called heaven or hell. We can no longer believe that God could condemn any part of the human race to a hell of eternal punishment. Only a god of stages 1-4 could do that. At those stages of human development it seems logical and necessary that sins and crimes should be punished. Stage 6-7 is partly defined by the liberating discovery that God doesn't punish and has no need to do so.

In this session we explore what it means to say salvation is, ultimately and in its essence, becoming like God. I know this seems to leap over prior questions of faith and justification. But this takes off from the obvious to deal with the neglected area of sanctification, that is, God's ultimate purposes and ends for us.

The shape of this godlikeness which God wishes us to become is the pattern of the four-fold structure of God's kind of wholistic over-flowing love (agape):



At least, this is as close to a summary definition of it as we are likely to come as persons still confined to the narrower stages of our development.

These are the four basic polarities in our life. Where these cross we are crucified daily. They are knit up into unity only within the wholistic core we can call the god-self.

The word polarity means, for example, that freedom and relatedness are opposites which seemingly can never be brought into harmony. How can one be truly free from people and at the same time bound by covenants to them?

The same is true of the other polarity formed by expansion into greater and greater complexity, which seems inevitably to defeat our efforts to be unified and harmonious within.

The god-self does not just work out limited compromises among these two sets of opposites. It unites them in a harmonious unity. This harmony does not eliminate painful choices, but it sets them into a new hierarchy of values.

Mature Love

An example of the fusion of the opposite poles at a higher level would be the way truly mature love between two persons works. A mature lover is related but independent. She does not depend on her lover nor seek to dominate him. She has more facets to her life than this relationship. Her love seeks what is best and highest for the lover as she does for herself, and this the greatest joy of the relationship for her. Seeing the other grow and achieve is a joy as great as that taken in her own growth and creativity. If the relationship ends she grieves but is not devastated, again because there is much more to her life as a whole.

We will return to this chart of polarities repeatedly to show how the god-self is also the god-pattern; it is the center within which human beings incarnate the innermost being of God. We have within us, by the grace of God and other people, the structure of God without possessing or needing to possess God's infinite power and knowledge.

Plateaus of Rest

One aspect of this godlike self is the expansion of the boundaries of the self to take in all people and eventually all of time and space. But salvation also involves a deepening and strengthening of the other three poles of our wholeness: empathy and compassion, freedom, and inner unity.

Expanding the boundaries of the personality requires a constant incorporation of threatening strangeness, what Paul Tillich called non-being. The movement from one stage to the next is often like a leap into nothingness. This in-pouring of the unknown at each new stage attacks our inner unity. It sometimes seems to threaten our very existence.

One reason why it is necessary for us to expand by stages is that we must periodically stop and rest and find a new centering at the higher level before we can expand further. Like the chambered nautilus which moves successively to larger and larger chambers of its shell, each stage becomes for us a new home and eventually also a prison.

The God-self

The god-self is what holds us together throughout these recurring disruptions. This is a wholistic core self, a heavy gravitational center which helps prevent us from flying apart.

Historically, this inner spiritual self has been called different names, depending on who was speaking.

For theology, it starts as the image of God within us. To some psychologists it is the true self, the core self, the wholistic self. Philosophers speak of the ground of being. Quakers and mystics have called it the Inner Light, the Seed, or "that of God in us". It is reflected in the Hindu concept Atman-Brahman and the Buddhist idea of the Buddha self.

I do not include the word "soul" because it is used more to describe the whole personality while the god-self is seen as the wholistic part of the total self and its systems.

I am not suggesting that all of these views define the inner reality the same way I do. They reflect an intuition common to many people in history. And each of them defines it according to his world view, scientific, religious, mystical, or whatever.

The god-self is not a soul in the traditional sense. There doesn't seem to be any ectoplasmic self which survives the death of the brain. It seems better to think of ourselves as a psycho-physical unity of body, mind and spirit. When the body dies, our consciousness and memories die. This does not mean the individual ceases to be. We all swim in the sea of God's being. We cannot by any means fall out of it. A modern understanding of hell would be to have to exist within God without being able to understand or experience the divine love.

Eternal life does not depend on some indestructible kernel within us. We continue to exist beyond physical death as personal centers within the divine being. It would be better to say we will exist as interpersonal centers within God, centers open fully to and in continual intimate communication with other beings.

The god-self is the inner reality through which we find and express our likeness to God. It is simultaneously the fulfillment

of our humanity in freedom, inner coherence, compassion, and universal perspective.

To be like God is to become free of all inner and outer constraints and pressures except agape; it is to be related to all beings and to nature in compassion, caring and nurture; it is to extend across the cosmos in consciousness and concern; and it is to be unified and harmonious within oneself.

Note how similar this is to Berdyaev's statement:

Here we meet the fundamental paradox in the existence of personality. Personality must construct itself, enrich itself, fill itself with universal content, achieve unity in wholeness in the whole extent of its life. But for this, it must already exist. There must already exist that subject which is called upon to construct itself. Personality is at the beginning of the road and it is only at the end of the road. Personality is not made up of parts, it is not an aggregate, not a composition, it is a primary whole, which is not brought out of anything and not put together from anything. The form of personality is integral, it is present as a whole in all the acts of personality, personality has a unique, and unrepeatable form, gestalt. ⁴

Berdyaev uses the word personality to mean that within human beings which makes us free persons rather than sub-humans in bondage to cultural brain-washing. He is referring to that spiritual center which he elsewhere calls the God-man. This is personality in contrast to all the objectified, socialized parts of the complex self.

The god-self is center and salvation.

The Image of God

We are created, the author of one of the Creation stories tells us, in the image of God.

Traditionally, the image of God includes our intelligence, our ability to reason. Most theologians have seen it as a kind of ability to receive God's love and respond to it. Emil Brunner spoke of it as "addressibility," a capacity for relationship with God. ⁵

Within this complex bundle of conflicting drives, desires and voices we call the self, where does the image of God reside and in what language does it speak? If it is, as Brunner suggests, a capacity for relationship, who or what is capable of such relating?

I am suggesting that in order for us to hear and relate to God, there has to be within each of us already a self-system which fits into God because it is, at least in its shape or pattern, an incarnation of God's inner nature.

Kohlberg's system helps us understand scientifically the process of expansion. In a similar way, the pattern-forming function of the brain helps us see a scientific basis for the formation of the god-self within us and how it is distinct from the other self-systems.

Properly understood, the god-self has roots in the Bible, in philosophy, in theology and philosophy and in modern psychology. It is an idea whose time has come.

Buried Not Damaged

First off, we need to get rid of some historic prejudices about the image of God. I suggest that we try thinking of it not as lost in the Fall (as some Protestants have suggested), or even as defaced (as some Catholic theology maintains), but rather as buried under the clutter of other internal self-systems which operate according to immature and fragmenting values.

It is refreshing then to hear 14th century mystic and preacher, Meister Eckhardt, quoted at the head of this session, speak of the Seed of God within which can be covered up but not eliminated.

Sources of the God-self

The god-self is formed by God in history through people and events.

Much error in theology arises from a misunderstanding of the nature of general revelation, that knowledge of God which is common to all peoples everywhere.

The Bible, from Abraham through Hosea to Jesus, is packed with very human life histories which connect marriage and parent-child relationships to God's revelation. From these love relationships comes the very possibility of thinking of God as loving Parent.

Theology has tended to underemphasize this underground stream of grace, which has constantly fed the forces humanizing us in a powerful yet gentle counter movement to greed and violence.

God put in history from the beginning relationships which speak indirectly but effectively of the inner divine nature.

In addition to this relational compassion side of our godlikeness, there are universal experiences which feed into the other dimensions of wholeness. Peak experiences of ecstasy of joy, mystical experiences of oneness with all reality, children's laughter in play, and the awesome immensity of the heavens above. These experiences of transcendence and ecstasy feed into the wholistic core self. All of these experiences become magic doorways by which in later years we access the wholistic self and draw, intuitively and even unconsciously, strength and motivation, new revelations, inspirations, creative impulses and ideas.

Nicholas Berdyaev says in several places that the god-self within each of us, which he calls the God-man, has nothing to do with the naturalistic process of evolution.

Evolution, he maintained, is determined, not free. But the god-self is the very center from which our true freedom emerges and is the source, he says, of all the creativity which is genuinely new and not just repetition. It is beyond influence and control by the idolatrous values of the societies around us.

The god-self is unique, it has its own creative sources, different from the demonic self-systems. It is begotten in the wholistic pattern of the divine love. It is God and yet not God. Berdyaev also called it God's "other self" and wrote, "(Man) contains

within himself a divine element. This element is the divine otherness.”⁶

It is created by God and yet only with human permission, cooperation, action, and sacrifice. The god-self is the one self which can enter into close communion with God. It is truly divine and truly human, the perfect melding of both.

Because of its unique insulation, the god-self does not absorb the evil, idolatrous values of the societies around it.

The other self-systems within us, on the other hand, incarnate the personality dynamics and patterns which arise from fear and anxiety. They are formed around the value systems of the lower Kohlberg stages, through which we have passed but which we have not left behind.

Out of these sub-selves come hatred, lust for security and power of being, envy, greed and violence. This is an anthropomorphic way of putting it, but the demonic self-systems “lust” after security and being.

Definitions

The divine love can only appear in history with any purity in the form of human personality which is wholistic in the sense of being a unity to the fullest degree of: (1) freedom (autonomy); (2) inner unity; (3) expanded awareness and varied content; and (4) ability to give oneself, spontaneously, in unselfish caring.

This inner wholistic self is begotten from the love of God acting in history through human beings. It is the structure of a kind of being, the only kind which is capable of relating to God, others and self in terms of this divine love. It is the only kind of personality capable of producing this love in others.

I use the term “demonic self-systems” for those organized but fragmentary parts of the total self outside of the wholistic god-self. These are not fallen angels or imps under the control of the devil. These are quasi-personal parts of the self which are formed under the impact of alienation, fear, anxiety, or abuse, and they are the locus of evil within us. This is true not only because they represent immaturity, but because these “persona” of undigested earlier stages of our development are soured and twisted by subsequent experience. Sessions 5 and 6 describe in detail how this takes place. This is admittedly a set of hypotheses, but the author urges the reader to test them against other alternative possibilities.

In the following descriptions I have deliberately put word pictures side by side which come from Bible and theology, philosophy, psychology and everyday experience in order to help bridge across these battling disciplines and make the riches in each available to all.

Locating the True Self

The god-self is not something we can observe directly.

psychologists might perhaps say that since we are immature and fragmented, it is not open to us fully to understand what a wholistic or mature self looks like.

The theologian would say that we are alienated from our true being, in that we live by illusions, partial images and images distorted by sin. Therefore, we can never see this reality which Berdyaev speaks of as “wholly other” until in a very real sense we become it.

The philosopher might say that since the ground of being is that in which all the parts are planted, that in which they find their unity and deeper meaning, it is then rather like the fish which swims in the sea but is unaware of being in water.

All three might agree that since the self is split into parts, we are in various ways and to various degrees unable to see clearly any underlying unity of being or purpose, and doubt therefore that any such thing exists.

Finding the god-self is like locating a planet which we suspect exists only because we can see other planets being pulled by an unseen force. We can intuit a center of gravity within ourselves which must exist because of the health and unity which cannot be otherwise explained.

Why a Self?

Why call the image of God a self? Isn't the self the totality of our being?

Self, personality and ego are used quite differently in various systems. I use self-system to indicate an organized, structured pattern of purpose, meaning and values which exists as a part of our more complex total self. Each self-system has distinctive ways of perceiving, thinking, deciding and sparks its own strong emotions.

Persons have a number of these systems as parts of the total self, each of which has power over us when activated and lived in. The god-self is the one sub-self which is wholistic, healthy. The other parts of the personality are organized also as self-systems, but as fragmentary ones.

Their inner structure or logos does not have a place for all the forms of reality and experience which belong to the healthy self. Their telos, or targeting, is toward ends that are frustrating and abortive.

Each of the fragment self-systems represents values and purposes which arise from wholistic and healthy values and ends, but which have become twisted and soured because of being split off from the whole and from the process of growth and change. This is why we can define evil as a distorting of something originally good.

How Wholistic Good Prevails

The fragment sub-selves root in the core self and draw power of being from it, while being organized around different values. Ultimate victory over evil takes place because the core self has the structure of being required to endure, while the demonic self-systems do not have power of being sufficient to exist apart from their roots in the core self. The demonic self-systems shrivel away leaving the god-self as the totality.

The demonic sub-selves are rooted in the core self in that they intersect with its wholistic pattern at the point in which their value systems contain fragments of a wholistic good. Nothing good is ever lost.

One example: the death of the demonic self-systems is a shrinking away of the anxious, defensive childishness while the god-self has nourished and kept safe our playful childlikeness all the way along.

In the psychodynamics of the total self, the sub-selves experience all that we go through. But, and this is an important point, each of them has a different filtering system and interpretive framework for evaluating those experiences.

The voices and powers in the self overlap, shift, merge and support or oppose one another. The theological term wrath of God symbolizes, in part, the way forms of evil are often in conflict with one another and frequently cancel each other out.

Two Brain Functions

There is now a scientific basis for formulating hypotheses as to how the patterned self-systems develop, beginning from our earliest experiences. The brain engages in two parallel but different forms of functioning. It processes perceptions in bits and pieces in linear fashion. At the same time, it apparently, processes all the same perceptions in another way. It has the ability to fit material into various patterns in a process which is largely unconscious.

Developmental psychologists puzzle as to how the child is able to move from the simpler to the more complex unless, somehow, the pattern of the more complex structure is already there for the child to land on psychologically.

Dual brain function suggests an answer to this question: the higher cognitive stage had been taking shape for years through the brain's unconscious pattern-forming function. It evidently files all that more complex stuff in another place on the brain's hard disk with a code for access which pops up when the need arises.

"Another place" doesn't indicate a location in the physical brain, but rather that it is an organizing of material into structures which the conscious mind cannot yet use. By the time the child is ready to move, the next cognitive stage is formed, at least in outline form. At the same time later stages are also being prepared.

This is not as revolutionary an idea as first appears. The child is constantly receiving input from the environment which it cannot yet fit into its linguistic-cultural framework. These ideas/values have connections to one another which the brain intuitively recognizes, so it puts them together into wholes and files them for future reference.

The sub-selves reflect, to a considerable extent the age-related value systems which precede us in our future and remain behind us as we move on, rather like the stepping stones in a garden path.

Wholeness Breeds Wholeness

The god-self is that most mature sub-self, formed in its structure by the input of the god-selves of others around us. It appears to me that it always breeds true. It is transmitted as a total pattern or not at all.

By wholistic structure I mean that its elements fit together harmoniously, reinforcing the strength of the whole, rather like a Buckminster Fuller geodesic dome.

The polarities which normally pull apart have their poles reversed, to use the example of magnets, so that they attract rather than repel. The ultimate of personal freedom reinforces the ultimate in ability to be compassionate, and vice versa. The ultimate in expansion of perspective and concern reinforces inner unity and harmony, and vice versa. No matter how far the psyche expands the structural strength of the elements remains because the parts fit together and sustain one another.

There is a place within the god-pattern for every form of reality. It is the one self which has no inner need to shut out any part of reality because of anxiety, not even knowledge of evil.

Berdyaev says we are microcosmos and microtheos. We may not have the brain capacity for infinity but we have a filing system in the core self which can handle all its varieties. This is the logos of the god-self.

Communication and Frequency

How is it that good holds together in the core self and how does it manage to be separate from the other self-systems?

All the self-systems share the same reservoir of biological energy. All of them have access to the computer-like bank of information and experience. What gives the various self-systems their boundaries is their selectivity as to what is remembered and with what emotional drive.

Each of the sub-selves in a sense receives and broadcasts on a different frequency. Each selects from experience and interprets according to different needs, anxieties, dreams and ambitions.

Or we could compare the process to an audio filter system which entirely eliminates some frequencies of sound and admits others.

The boundaries separating these sub-selves are drawn by the patterns of their quite different value systems and targeted ends. They become operationally separate embryonic self-systems on the basis of the likes, dislikes, prejudices, anxieties and desires of that persona.

Read again the valentines in Session 2 for a practical example of this kind of difference, or the value gaps separating the various gods in the Introduction.

Voices and Filters

For a moment let's not think of these systems as sub-selves. Think of them as filtering systems. Imagine the operational ego, that "I" floating in the stream of consciousness, putting on and taking off earphones which shut out some data and distort some of the rest.

The true self has the ability to hear the intrinsic goodness hidden in events and voices. In this respect the core self is qualitatively different from the demonic self-systems. The fragment selves are limited to receiving and broadcasting on only a few frequencies and often hearing only in squeaks and squawks. The god-self receives on all frequencies. It alone has the ability to understand the truth behind a deception, to re-code or translate these messages wholistically. It broadcasts, however, on only its own wholistic frequency, and only the recoded wholistic truth.

Philosopher John Locke thought the infant is born into the world a totally blank tablet on which, from birth, writings are inscribed. We know now that some patterning has already taken place. Perhaps 15% of our personality makeup comes from inherited genetic influences.⁷ Some additional minor patterning takes place within the womb. The embryo feels and hears and experiences rushes of emotion-related chemicals.

It is in the earliest experiences of cuddling and care in the womb and just after birth that the unique outline of the god-self begins to be formed. To what extent the wholistic self-system has a genetically prerecorded pocket we are as yet too ignorant to judge.

This first recordings we might call the Garden of Eden experience. Along with these warm and loving experiences come shocks of fear and anxiety and betrayal, but these are recorded elsewhere. These jangling notes go to the demonic self-systems and start them on the way to their soured and fragmented value systems.

Of the Logos which is Christ, the Gospel of John says, "The light shines in the darkness and the darkness cannot understand it at all." (John 1:5)

The same can be said for the logos of the god-self. It cannot be understood by the fragmented self-systems, but remains a mystery to them. Or, as in the other translation of this passage, neither can their darkness overcome it.

Mixed Messages

When people speak they are often sending on several frequencies simultaneously. A number of inner voices are joining to say the same thing but out of different motivations. We often send messages and then contradict them on another frequency. Or one sub-self sends a message and some gesture we make expresses the opposite opinion of another sub-self. The famous yes which really means no is a case of different sub-selves with different opinions, desires, or motivations.

Messages are received the same way. When we say that a person has a mixed reaction or mixed feelings, it often means that different sub-selves are receiving the same message but reacting to it with characteristically different emotions.

A rough example: the reaction of the inner sub-selves of an adult male to the news of his mother's death:

-3-year-old: Terror! Wail!

-5-year-old: How will I survive now? Who will hold the family together? Anxiety!

-10-year-old: Thank God the tyrant is dead! Triumph!

-16-year-old: My God, did I say that? Guilt!

-45-year-old: In spite of her faults she really cared about me and I'll miss her. Weep!

Putting on and taking off different self-systems has been described as a clicking in and clicking out. Both the person making the shift and observers are often aware of a distinct, sudden shift, as though one person had left the room and another come in.

Gestalt psychologists speak of this as moving one thing to the foreground and shifting others to the back. The Transactional Analysis people speak of it as playing old tapes. I remember reading the account of a 30-year-old women who complained that whenever she visited her sister they both started acting and sounding like teenagers, fighting the same fights. Even their voices became higher pitched.

When we speak of age-determined voices within us, we do not mean that it is the original 2-year-old or 5-year-old who speaks. A sub-self is formed around a value system and may be supported by a number of age levels. When the 40-year-old hears the voice of his 5-year-old it is enhanced and changed by subsequent experiences. It has been reinforced in its fragment values many times, exercised in imagination and day-dreams, built into a system of rationalizations over the years. The 60-year-old man who threw a 2-year-old's tantrum had done this often enough that, even though it made him look foolish, the ecstasy of a binge of rage outweighed the shame.

The woman who heard her husband criticizing her even when he was trying to be complimentary was still fighting her 13-year-old's battle to salvage her self-esteem against parents and older siblings. The 13-year-old's hurts and angers have been rationalized over the intervening years of re-fighting those inner battles. It is this elaborated filtering system which hears innocuous comments as put-downs.

Often compliments do have put-downs in them. We say that a person's comment was half-sincere. Underneath a genuine compliment another sub-self was getting in a dig. The woman's filtering system was trained to hear the dig, but not the compliment.

Grandpa Sam says, "The world is a jungle. Look out for yourself first." But the child who hears this philosophy is also getting a hug and seeing a smile. In the child's filter system, the jungle message goes to the sub-self organizing around that kind of cynicism. The hug and smile go straight to the god-self.

Cell vs. Virus

There is another metaphor which is helpful. A virus is a bit of genetic material akin to that in the nucleus of a cell. It has no cell wall. It can exist outside a cell only in semi-crystallized form. It can reproduce only by invading a whole, healthy cell and

drawing on the nutrients and protective structure of that cell.

The normal cell reproduces true to its kind and fulfills its creative purpose. It has logos, orderly structure, and telos, a natural function in a larger whole.

The virus is a fragment, so its communications system, based also on DNA, transmits garbled messages. Viruses appear to have no purpose beyond producing another destructive virus. The virus is a sneak-thief with a passkey to enter a healthy cell and steal its substance.

Because they are fragment parasites viruses can never become whole in the same way a cell has power to exist in harmony with and support of the whole body.

Evil in us is like that. It is nonbeing. It is parasitic on the whole, the good, the loving. The demonic self-systems often hear love as hate so generally get things wrong. They can put nothing right except by accident. This is the sense in which the Bible speaks of sin as blindness, foolishness, stupidity.

Demons

Traditionally, demons lust. Their hungers can never be satisfied. The demonic self-systems, which are perhaps the source of demon mythology, also lust. For example, a child who has been deprived of basic love may grow up to be a person who turns off and drives away one friend after another. Friends sense that she is trying to fill a void within herself which cannot be filled, that she would eat them up and devour a dozen more in one day.

The demonic self-systems lust because they express kinds of hungers which cannot be satisfied. In a biological analogy, they are unable to digest food. They can take in genuine love and their psychic gastric juices turn it into envy, hate, or some other form of poisonous junk.

In communications terms, we could say that whenever we put on the earphones of a particular sub-self, we become that sub-self for as long as we wear that persona. We enter into its interpretation of the world which becomes for that time our way of life. While we are beguiled by its illusions, seduced by its neurotic nonsolutions, we also experience its lust for being as if that self were our total being.

And we restlessly sense its inadequacy. So long as we are jumping from one demonic self-system to another like Little Eva escaping over cakes of ice in the river, we are victimized by these lusts and their attendant anxieties.

Second Death

The god-self is born of the god-selves of other people. It breeds true as a pattern or not at all.

What if the god-self is never formed in a person? What if a child's treatment is so severe that at an early age the god-self is crushed out? Simone Weil suggested at one point that in some people evil becomes so powerful that they cease to be human. If the god-self did cease to exist that person would indeed no longer be human.

I suppose that's what the New Testament calls the second death. The second death is a symbol for what is at the end of the road in traveling away from God, should anyone ever reach the end of that road. To travel away from God is simultaneously to run from our god-selves, to bury them more deeply. If it were possible to become wholly evil, the god-self would presumably simply be crushed out of existence by the weight of the other self-systems. The image of God would have shriveled away and died of neglect. The person would fall into fragments and disintegrate. Having lost its anchor the self would smash to pieces on the rocks.

Are there those who reach the second death and pass out of existence? If so, what can we say about the completeness of God's victory?

The "wolf boy" who was raised in the wilds experienced no human communication until he was half-grown. His humanity, his god-self, was not conferred until he received touch, kindness, attention and other evidences of love.

As with the wolf boy, it is long-term self-giving love expressed in patient attention on the part of parent-surrogates which can bring to birth or rebirth this basic humanity. His god-self was held in trust for him by other people until he was ready and able to receive it. This may have something to say about the long-term prospects of autistic children, the mentally retarded, the sociopath, and the seemingly hopelessly insane.

This is also, I assume, a clue to what we will be doing during all those eons of life beyond this one to keep from being bored and to develop further our own ability to love and be creative as God is. We will continue the conferring of love and power of being upon one another in the same stream of grace which has brought humanity this far. What you and I lack another will give.

We cannot escape from God anywhere because we carry the divine logos within us. It is the personal Hound of Heaven for each of us. Often, our most frenzied and genocidal evil, as in the case of Paul and the stoning of Stephen, is the final desperate resistance to that inexorable inner tug of our true being.

The Issue

Many psychologists and theologians believe in a wholistic self. They do not believe it exists from the beginning. They see it as the mature self which emerges, not perfectly but with increasing strength, as experience is gained. Its wholeness and strength are a culmination of the process of growth.

It is of course true that the god-self is filled with its rich content with the passage of the years, but I believe the outline pattern begins to be formed from the earliest days, perhaps even within the warmth and security of the womb.

Fortunately, it is not necessary to believe that the god-self is with us from soon after birth. Most of the important points in this book still stand if it turns out that the god-self is gradually formed in us as we mature.

To those behaviorists, linguistic analysts, and other latter day nominalists, who consider us all a bundle of knee-jerks

anyway, I would only suggest that they listen more carefully to their own inner voices. There is one that is different from all the rest.

A Revolution

Salvation is in the end to become like God. This is the basis for the revolution in theology which we need in our age. It opens the way to the best answers to the question, "What must I do to be saved?" It gives the best guidance to what the church should be and a revolutionary style of life appropriate to the problems of our day.

The elements of this faith are not really new. They appear through the Bible wherever the familial and interpersonal prevail over the magical, mechanical, organic and control-oriented metaphors. We see them in the intuitions of the great sages such as Eckhardt and Julian of Norwich. We find them especially in the thought of the spiritual reformers of the 16th and 17th centuries, as detailed in chapter 16. What is new is the way the pieces are fitted together, and the way they are related to the Kohlberg system of expansion by stages and the unconscious pattern-forming brain function.

The process of salvation is to share as a community of believers with one another the power to overcome and put to death the demonic self-systems and let the god-self be ôall in all.ö

After examining the nature of evil, we'll come back to the god-self again and its relation to the stages of development. We'll see that it is because we stand on, or within view of, higher levels of moral development today that we are able more clearly to identify and define the god-self and the way to activate it. And that is very much a part of God's eventual success. The gates of hell do not prevail against the pattern of the kingdom of God within us.

Questions for Thought

When you get angry do you act like a seven year old? Do you detect levels of morality and emotional response in yourself? Consider or discuss: how one can in a single day inhabit various sub-selves: The man goes to the office and behaves in an orderly stage 4 manner. On the way home a car cut him off and he goes into the kind of rage he used to experience as a two year old and entering the door he kicks the dog.. At home, he demands in a teenage stage 3 fashion that wife and children serve him like a potentate.

Notes

1. *Freedom and the Spirit*, page 1182.
 2. Quoted in *Breakthrough: Meister Eckhardt's Creation Spirituality in New Translation*, op. cit., page 118
 3. *The Inner Eye of Love, Mysticism and Religion*, Collins, NY, 1978, page 32
- See also:

We are God's Thou and our spiritual self is at the deepest core of our being. ... On a principle similar to that of a percolator coffee pot, the spiritual self bubbles up and transforms the personality. Because each ego state is useful and necessary, the core of being – which is the loving spiritual self – can permeate all ego states, the entire person, body and mind.

-Muriel M. James, *Born to Love*, Bantam Books, New York, 1973, page 219

4. *Slavery and Freedom*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1944, page 23
5. Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption*, Systematics, Vol. II, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1952, pages 77-9
6. *The Realm of the Spirit*, page 29
7. Carl Sagan, *The Dragons of Eden*, Ballantine Books, NY, 1977, page

5. Evil is Twisted Good

Badness is goodness damned up, just as hell is heaven damned up.

- Earl A. Loomis ¹

In rare cases it is a smooth, gradual, incremental transformation. In most cases stage transition comes with pain. It involves enduring the dissolution of your world. You must be able to endure the falling apart of that which holds together. ... In entering a new stage there is often the experience of a dark night of the soul. There is a time when God is the abyss, the void, or the enemy. The structure may be unconscious, but the experience of that transition is very much conscious and often painful.

- James W. Fowler ²

... we also say that wholeness does not include evil, and that when wholeness is either established or destroyed, evil also ceases to be.

- John A. Sanford ³

A faith which asserts we are moving toward an Omega Point of unification, complexity and creativity must above all else have a convincing understanding and interpretation of evil.

To start with, I join those from Augustine through Berdyaev and Barth who define evil as non-being. Evil is fragmented and soured good. It grows out of the sickening within those fragments inside us which sour because they can never be whole. Evil is parasitic on the structure of good in the human personality. It grows like mistletoe clings to a tree with no independent power of life of its own. It borrows from the true self within and transmutes what it borrows into poison.

This instability makes victory over evil sound easy. But it often appears that God and good are losing the war. There are shootings and muggings almost nightly where I am writing these words.

A 21st century faith has to account for the three thirteen year old boys who poured gasoline over a sleeping homeless man and set him afire.

It has to explain how God's love relates to the Argentine army officer who led a rightist death brigade. They broke down the door and abducted a friend of mine. For four days she was terrorized, tortured and raped. Her only crime was to be the friend of a young woman whose boyfriend was being sought for questioning. This torturer goes to Mass and considers himself a loving parent.

An adequate interpretation of evil must account somehow for the holocaust under Hitler.

Evil cannot be fully explained. There is always a margin of mystery. However, stage development and the functioning of the human brain bring us to the subject from a fresh angle and perhaps offer a more accurate diagnosis.

Our Inner Fragmentation

First, we must look at the way we are split up into pieces inside. Our operational ego or observer ego (whatever we call the "I" who reflects and decides) actually presides like some anxious parent a whole bundle of sub-selves and has to deal daily with a cacophony of conflicting voices. Paul complained bitterly that he did things he didn't want to do and he hated them. Who is doing it, and who is hating it? Different self-systems.

Sociologists and psychologists sometimes refer to these inner forces as masks, roles, or persona, words which suggest perhaps more inner unity exists.

These terms also fail to express adequately the quasi-personal form these sub-self systems exhibit. Those persona which we live in for periods of time are powerful in part because they speak with the voices of persons from our past lives and these powerful voices tempt us to move into that persona and to live there permanently. They call on us to become that sub-self.

Robert J. Stoller describes these inner powers vividly:

Being a clinician, Freud could never shake off the problem of the multiple voices – personages – all present and speaking at different levels of consciousness in the same person. And, of course, he did not want to. No practical analyst fails to sense those voices. ... when we dream at night, the people come out and play. Their names, however, are not the conscious, the pre-conscious, the unconscious; or the ego, the superego, the id; or the libido; or the death instinct, or the primary processes, or the secondary processes. Nor are they "agencies" and "processes," for those also do not decide, think, want, demand, say, feel or need. ... Yes, there are these inner creatures, their talk spun out, often several at the same instant and somehow managing not to know of or at least not to acknowledge one another's presence. They act as if they were separate fragments, "splinters of the mind," unaware of the others who are simultaneously playing out their own scenes. ⁴

Moving from sub-self to sub-self we are sometimes aware of a clicking in and out of quite different identities with their own values and desires. It is as though we had put on a helmet (Imagine one like Darth Vader's.), which filters out some memories and distorts others. Or, imagine that when the helmet is clicked into place certain tapes from out of the past begin to play, events and voices representing the needs, desires, and ends of a particular way of life, and that because of their emotional drive and selectivity these tapes filter out the values and voices of other internal persona.

I remember once seeing a sixty year old man throw a two year old's tantrum. He had slipped on his narrowest and most confining helmet.

The Self and Its Selves

One thing which helped put me on the track of the various self-systems was the remark of a wise therapist, “Behind every feeling, if you trace it back, lies a whole value system.” I immediately said to myself, “Eureka! And behind every value system is a whole embryonic personality, which as long as its voices have power in my life, is trying to push to the center of my being and take over.”

If I feel angry or guilty, the therapist meant, someone or some group of people have in the past led me, directly or indirectly, to be guilty or angry at the point And I have, through imagination and reinforcing actions over the years, built those experiences at that age level into a fragment personality.

Because I also know and have been told that such negative emotions are immature and unhealthy, I never have lived in this partial self enough to bring it to the center more than a few moments at a time. But when I choose to put on this identity helmet and live in it, I am that person and feel guilty and angry the same way. Like Paul, I feel almost compelled by some alien force to do things which in my healthy inner core I know I shouldn't be doing.

The voices I now hear are burned into my neural pathways to be replayed over and over until they are filed away and no longer sought out. So long as I wear that helmet and play those tapes I am living the life others designed for me. And a very demonic life that is, full of guilt which can not possibility be resolved, not even if I give my body to be burned.

These sub-selves are seductive, not only because they involve voices of people we love and hate. They seduce us also because they offer ways to avoid or superficially resolve problems we don't want to face. For instance, I can wallow in this massive abstract guilt, suffering a manageable pain, over the ills of the whole world and so, feeling helpless, avoid the perhaps greater pain of grappling with any one problem or any one person. We cling to these demonic self-systems because they provide underground shelters from the complex business of living with life as it really is.

It appears that all of us have more than one self-system within us. They are built up to varying degrees of power.

Some are poorly formed and weak; others are so well-shaped as alternative persona that they haunt us constantly with tempting voices, teasing, cajoling, threatening, insinuating their arguments into our daydreams and our nightmares.

George Brown speaks of sub-selves in the terms of Gestalt psychology:

*The total phenomenal self may be thought of as a kind of multi-dimensional mosaic that continually changes in characteristics and modifies its organization as sub-selves move into figure, into prominence and dominance, replacing other sub-selves, only to fade in turn into ground or background as each is itself replaced.*⁵

Ben Young says much the same thing in relation to different value systems:

*We all have distinguishing sub-selves. Whether you use Freud, Jung, Berne, Assagioli, Shapiro, brain hemisphere functioning, moods, etc., as your distinguishing base, different sub-selves with different perceptions, awareness, assumptions, expectations, attitudes and energy flow can be experienced and determined to be congruent or non-congruent in saying, doing, being aspects. So in the traditional way of looking at values, the question is whose values? What sub-self or selves? And without a “new” context and language system within which to discover the differences we leave gaps in our internally rationalized and coped with automatically and we leave different impressions with others than we intend, and defend those unintended impressions. We get identified with values, idealize them, and act as if those values we espouse are “us.” We not only give mixed messages internally (and don't know it), but different situations will trigger internal dissonance.*⁶

To summarize, the hypotheses I'm suggesting are:

1. Sub-selves are fragment personalities. At least some of them are too strong, substantial, and quasi-personal to be thought of merely as masks or crystallized roles.

2. Among the self-systems is the one I call the god-self. This wholistic self-system, I postulate to be the ground of being or anchor which holds together all the fragments. This core self is qualitatively different from all the other self-systems. Without its wholistic gestalt, the other sub-selves would disintegrate.

At this point just note these as hypotheses and hold them at arms length until the discussion is further along.

Berdyayev

Shift for a moment to the philosophic key. Nicholas Berdyayev wrote:

*Evil is above all a loss of integrity, a breaking away from the spiritual centre and the formation of autonomous parts which begin to have an independent existence.*⁷

Evil does not exist in the wholistic center of the person. It can only have power in the fragments of the self, which are organized around partial, immature, and illusory values.

The lie of evil is to lead us to believe that any of these sub-selves except the wholistic one we can offer life in fullness, being, glory, enduring meaning.

The fragment can dream of being whole, but cannot achieve it. And this dreaming of the fragment is what we properly call lust. The demonic self-systems are demonically hungry for full being they can never achieve. Their hunger is the source of their evil

and the nature of that hunger defines each self-system's kind of destructiveness.

To put it in psychological terms, whenever I put on one of the fragment selves and live in its world, I must suffer the frustration of its immature and/or neurotic solutions to the challenges of life. At the same time I am subliminally aware of my wholistic center and so intuit that this fragment self lacks the necessary structure of being ever to sustain a fully loving and creative life in relationship to the real world around me.

It is in this sense that Augustine, Berdyaev, Karl Barth, and other major theologians, refer to evil as non-being.

Before going on in the next session to talk of social evil, we must pin down several of the above points through illustrations: (1) how evil roots in the fragmentation of the whole; (2) how the fragment lacks the power to live a full life; (3) how, figuratively speaking, each fragment seeks to push to the center and take control; and (4) how victory by God is assured in part by the very nature of evil as rooted in the good center.

The Teen Struggle for Identity

Depending on their degree of self-esteem, teenagers are obliquely aware that there is almost literally nothing within them that is uniquely theirs. The raw materials they have for shaping a self, the skills, the patterns available, all were poured into them by others.

In this period, many are literally held into existence by those around them who persist in treating them as important and as if they already are unified persons. "If other people survived this age," I remember saying through gritting teeth, "I can too!"

At this time our insides are filled to the bursting point with conflicting pressures and advice.

Voices

Consider the voices that Bertie, one fifteen year old hears:

The voice of Mother inside says, "Don't be a failure like your Father. Get out and do something. Be a success!"

Father says, "Just try to get by. Avoid commitments and stay out of trouble. Working hard like I have just isn't worth it. Try to have some fun."

Aunt Hattie, who makes the most marvelous cookies, says, "You know, Bertie, the only thing that counts is serving God and humanity. Imitate great people, like Albert Schweitzer, who gave up fame and fortune to heal the Africans with his own hands."

And, there is Grandpa Sam, a tobacco-smelling horse of a man, delightful to sit on and walk with, whose booming confident voice allows no room for dissent, "The world is a jungle, Bertie, Look out for yourself first. No one else will."

Of course, the inner confusion is compounded by the fact that Aunt Hattie is a notorious shrew and gossip and Grandpa Sam is loved by everyone and seems always to have just given his last dollar to some beggar.

To complicate it further, these value systems find support within the various age levels, the Kohlberg stages, which remain within us not fully integrated. Besides Mother's voice urging and nagging within there is the voice of our own rebellious five year old arguing endlessly and ineffectively with her and feeling all the surges of unreasonable anger over those lost battles. The tapes play on and on. The five year old wages that battle daily but will never win it.

The boy who sat on Grandpa Sam's lap already believed in looking out for number one first and he always will. And he and Grandpa Sam are going to get a lot of reinforcement from betrayals, competition and viciousness the teenager is meeting in the world. Clustering together, these voices tend to become one voice, an embryo self which, if it gets to the center and controls, could feel quite at home in the Hitler Youth. Even if this self-system doesn't get control, it will remain a demonic presence so that at one moment the teenager is extolling the sacrifices of Albert Schweitzer and at the next loudly proclaiming that the world is no damn good and he will do as he damn well pleases.

This all means that it is rather foolish to tell a teenager, "Just be yourself!" He would love to, if he could only figure out which self to be, and how if he becomes any of the selves he knows he will be more than a carbon copy of someone else.

Each of us has a different set of voices. There are also the various age levels we've passed through not completely digested. Each of these age levels will have a different reaction to each voice, positively or negatively. There are fragmented memories of a good mother and a bad mother. There are rejected and repressed traits, some good and some bad.

Some of these forces, at any given time, will move in to support or oppose a given influence or decision, or cluster to strengthen or weaken the influence of a particular self-system.

Abstract ideas and ideals really have little power here to help us or hurt us except as they are incarnate within us in the gestalt of a self-system.

Internal Dialogues

In any given situation, then, we can count on getting a rash of conflicting advice and orders from inside ourselves.

Here is a woman who has been promoted to comptroller. The boss insists that she change some entries to cover up illegal political contributions. She consults her conscience in the far reaches of the night. Does her inner self speak with one voice? You're kidding!

Grandpa Sam: Sure, do it. Keep in good with the boss. Get promoted again.

Mother: Don't bring shame on the family! I could never hold my head up again.

Aunt Hattie: God will punish you if you do.

Nine year old: Do it. Who cares?

Daddy: I don't know, honey. It's risky. Maybe you should quietly look for another job.

Twelve year old: Let's go to the mall!

A few people, like Madam Curie or Lenin, seem to achieve an overwhelming unity out of their chaos without trying, through the power of an overriding purpose in life. So does the ruthless businessman who climbs steadily upward over the bodies of friends and competitors, or even the bachelor son who remains living with his mother all her life. But are they united? What other voices do they hear, creating anxiety and self-doubt, in the depths of the night?

Every evil message that is a twisted piece of the whole good.

Of course, a lot the voices speak is not evil in itself. They sometimes push limited goods, a change in the hierarchy of our goods, and so on. They are evil when they urge us to take a twisted partial good and try to make it the whole, a substitute for real wholeness. The Bible calls this idolatry, worshiping powers which, in the end offer deeply satisfying existence filled with love, creativity and enduring meaning.

The drive for power and control is a distortion, out of loneliness and insecurity, of the need to be free, strong and autonomous, not to have to lean on anybody or anything.

The need to submerge oneself in others or in causes (to “be a part” as Paul Tillich put it) is a way of escape from the anxiety and loneliness of freedom. It is a twisting of the healthy need to give and receive love.

The need to be free of entanglements and commitments is an exaggerated expression of the legitimate need to be a unique person and to be really in control of one’s destiny. This may be expressed, as here, in running away rather than seeking to control others.

The same is true of the effort to please Mother or Aunt Hattie or Grandpa Sam, to fulfill another’s vision of what we should be rather than our own. This is a another form of submerging or giving the self away.

Calling these inner value clusters demonic self-systems or sub-selves does not mean that they always give bad advice or their temptations are always toward evil. They often counsel good or represent struggles among the relatively good choices. The word demonic means that their voices are heard as a threat or a seduction. They come to us as a threat to the unity we seek and to the existence of other self-systems within which contain comfortable or exciting parts of ourselves we are not really willing to give up. Every voice is heard as a demonic voice so long as it is not at the center and does not have the power to actually unify us within.

The god-self is the one which can hear the good in every partial and distorted message

Mother says, “You’ve got to succeed and be the success I wasn’t or you’ve failed me.” The god-self can filter out the selfishness and hear mother saying instead, “Achievement and mastery and work are a part of being healthy and feeling worth something.”

The underlying love and concern of all of the main actors can be translated and understood as necessary parts of the wholistic self.

No good word or good experience is ever lost. It goes to the center and strengthens the god-self. When the god-self moves to the center and takes over, the best of the memories of Mother, Father, Aunt Hattie and Grandpa Sam are preserved.

At this point we become able to say, “I hated Mother at that time, but now I can see that she was trying her best to love me, and what she was really saying from the depths of her own god-self was, ‘Be a success because that will be a fulfilling life and I want only the best for you.’”

The god-self is the inner power that turns all the cacophony of warring voices into a harmonious chorus. As the author of Hebrews speaks of a great “cloud of witnesses” from all of history, so are all our forerunners to become within us a chorus singing a tremendous harmonious hymn to agape.

As we look later at Kohlberg’s stages in more detail we see how in our god-self all our child stages are still with us adding to our creativity and enjoyment of life. Here our masculine and feminine sides unite. All of Jung’s archetypes come out of the shadow, join hands and circle dance. What we saw but darkly, as in a distorted mirror, we now see face to face.

My grandmother would take me on her lap and hug me tight and rock for a long long time. She would talk about how she loved me, and how wonderful it was to have a grandson like me. She called these her “petting parties”.

Since then, it has been impossible for me to take seriously any view of the world in which there is no such thing as genuine love, the notion that society is a jungle made up only of selfish people. It has also been difficult for me to believe that this world in which there is real love could have emerged without the initiative and suffering of a Divine Lover.

Her words and caresses went straight to the core of my being and clustered there together with all the other caresses and words and acts of caring and trust and support. These became the core of my god-self. These cemented its universal gestalt into place establishing a center of gravity of health and good which would hold firm even though it was betrayed and hammered by subsequent words and deeds of betrayal.

Now, we must examine another dimension of evil: death. The futile attempt to escape from death and finitude empowers all evil. In addition, we must show how our frantic and irrational lust for immortality substitutes and glory fixes explains the relationship of society and social systems to the perpetuation of evil both in society and individuals.

Questions for Thought

1. Consider and discuss: What does it mean to say evil is twisted or partial good? Look at your own life and dredge up some examples.

Notes

1. *The Self in Pilgrimage*, page 6

2. Jim Fowler and Sam Keen, *Life Maps, Conversations on the Journey of Faith*, edited by Jerome Berryman, Winston Press and Word Books, Word, Incorporated, Waco, TX, 1978

3. *Evil, The Shadow Side of Reality*, page 152
4. *Sexual Excitement, Dynamics of Erotic Life*, Pantheon Books, 1979, pages 186-7
5. "The Creative Sub-Self," *Ways of Growth*, Herbert A. Otto and John Mann, editors, Pocket Books, New York, 1971, pages 158-9
6. Unpublished correspondence
7. *Divine and the Human*, page 107

6. Evil and the Ultimate Enemy

...we don't want to admit that we do not stand alone, that we always rely on something that transcends us, some system of ideas and powers in which we are embedded and which supports us. (Augustine, Kierkegaard, Scheler and Tillich) saw that man could strut and boast all he wanted, but that he really drew his "courage to be" from a god, a string of sexual conquests, a Big Brother, a flag, the proletariat and the fetish of money, and the size of his bank balance.

The irony of man's condition is that the deepest need is to be free of the anxiety of death and annihilation, but it is life itself which awakens it, and so we must shrink from being fully alive.

... What exactly would it mean on this earth to be wholly unrepressed, to live in full bodily and psychic expansiveness? It can only mean to be reborn into madness.

- Ernest Becker ¹

A new, more accurate perspective on evil should show how God's nonviolent and non-manipulative love can overcome not only evil in individuals but also can eliminate the structural evil which is incarnate in history and in our societies today. In this session we attempt to understand the origin and nature of social evil and the way it interacts with evil in the individual.

The institutionalized forms of power in the external world are mirrored in the structure of the self-systems within individuals.

In religious imagery, the external "principalities and powers" are idols and within the personality are the mirror image demonic powers. These create and reinforce each other. The demonic sub-selves worship external idols and the social powers derive their power from these on-going worshipping congregations.

The way TV, movies, video games and comic books brainwash our children into worship of the "myth of redemptive violence" is a vivid example of this, as described by Walter Wink:

The psychodynamics of the television cartoon or comic book are marvelously simple: children identify with the good guy so that they can think of themselves as good. This enables them to project onto the bad guy their own repressed anger, violence, rebelliousness, or lust, and then vicariously enjoy their own evil by watching the bad guy initially prevail. (This segment of the show actually consumes all but the closing minutes, and thus allows ample time for indulging the dark side of the self.) When the good guy finally wins, the viewers are then able to reassert control over their own inner tendencies, repress them, and reestablish a sense of goodness. Salvation is guaranteed through identification with the hero. ²

This makes them worshipers of the society's view of "redemption through violence," and perpetuates the scapegoating syndrome from generation to generation:

Once children are indoctrinated into the expectations of a domination society, they may never outgrow the need to locate all evil outside themselves. Even as adults they tend to scapegoat others (the Commies, the Americans, the gays, the straights, the blacks, the whites) for all that is wrong in the world. ³

Demon and idol are not used here in a narrow religious sense. They express, rather, psychological relationships characterizing all people and all dimensions of our lives.

The three examples of irrational, genocidal evil cited above make it seem fantastically utopian to talk about higher values, or growing up into a transcendent existence characterized by ecstasy, intimacy, strength, excellence, love and creativity. Where does this monstrous evil come from?

The Origin of Evil

The late Ernest Becker, a professor of anthropology and psychology, has helped us understand the origins of evil, how it arises from a good impulse, the desire to escape the anxiety related to death and finitude. The attempt to escape is inevitable, he says, given our capacity for imaginatively entertaining infinity and eternity. Becker believed that the attempt to escape, since it is impossible, involves us in all kinds of neurotic manipulations which falsify reality.

In his 1973 work, *The Denial of Death*, Becker argued that it is the fear of death which underlies all evil, the harm that we do to each other, and the destructive, manipulative, suffocating and oppressing institutions we create.

Throughout this analysis of Becker's theories keep in mind we are not talking about simple fear of dying. We are talking about a deep level fear and loathing of death which sickens life itself, a fear and loathing of having everything we do rendered meaningless by having to die. Religious faith is for many a bulwark against this, but too often even for the faithful, underneath there exist on-going doubts which poison life itself.

And so many of us seek to escape this fear, loathing, and depression by not thinking about death at all. Our society insulates us from such depth of feeling and so also takes the edge off of joy and spontaneity.

In between those who consciously experience this cosmic fear and those who live behind walls to escape it, I'm sure there are some people who are basically so healthy because of how they've been raised that they are puzzled by this analysis.

We have inherited and we invent strategies, he believed, to give us an illusion of immortality created from feelings of transcendent meaning and significance which he often called "glory." The following is a summary of Becker's argument.

Illusions of Immortality

These human fabricated strategies to beat death do not work. We find ourselves continually forced to jump from one kind of false salvation to another, from one immortality strategy and glory fix to some other and back again and again.

As both Pascal and Kierkegaard saw clearly, human beings are a mixture of angel and beast. We are the only animal which binds time, which has the wine of infinity in its veins, and yet at the same time knows death and annihilation await just down the road.

We experience, in our infancy the heady narcissism of being the center of the universe. This Garden of Eden haunts us throughout our lives. We feel the need to stand out, to be somebody, to know grandeur, heroism, transcendence. On the other hand, we experience our mortality, know that we must die. We drag death around with us daily in our bodies, the experience of excrement, bleeding, aches, and failing powers.

More importantly, we experience the power of other persons and institutions to smear our dreams, control us, reduce us to insignificance, destroy us at will.

In speaking of immortality, Becker is not talking about simple religious belief in life after death. This religious immortality head trip, throughout history, has shown little power to hold back the flood of gall which turns our endeavors bitter.

Becker builds on the work of psychoanalyst Otto Rank, "... in his insistence on the fundamental dynamic of the fear of life and death, and man's urge to transcend this fear in a culturally constituted heroism." ⁴

We are, Becker contends, afraid of life as well as death. For most of us life holds no heroism or excitement of growth and creativity because we are hiding behind neurotic defenses in order not to have to look death in the face. We find our immortality significance, rather, in the military triumphs of our countries, the glory of rulers. Or, we participate vicariously in the glory of movie stars and baseball players, as in the ancient world it was gladiators and chariot racers.

Becker believed that if we became suddenly free of all our illusions and neurotic defenses of this sort we would go mad. Our "character structure" is held in shape and in place by the scaffolding of these immortality and glory systems. Without them we would crumble psychologically.

Sickness from Death

The history of culture, for Becker, is essentially the story of our effort to erect impressive monuments to our importance and to locate some assurance of personal immortality.

It is not just that individuals are sick, living by illusions. Society is made up of institutions which were constructed to operate, in part, as substitutes for immortality, to confer grandeur and meaning where there are none. This neurotic drive to escape finitude undergirds with powerful irrational emotions all the evil we do.

In his last book, *Escape from Evil*, Becker carried his analysis back as an anthropologist to the beginnings of human culture and traces his thesis to the present. He describes the difference between his two books on this subject as follows:

In The Denial of Death, I argued that man's innate and all-encompassing fear of death drives him to attempt to transcend death through culturally standardized hero systems and symbols. In this book I attempt to show that man's natural and inevitable urge to deny mortality and achieve a heroic self-image are the root causes of human evil. ... the two books should be read side by side. ⁵

In this final work, Becker tried to take seriously truly vicious human behavior. He says, "If man is as bad as he seems, then either we have to behaviorally coerce him into the good life, or else we have to abandon the hope of science of man entirely." ⁶

He continued to the end to search for a third alternative. He concluded that perhaps, as a long shot, human rationality would assert itself and help turn things for the better. Slight improvements, no utopia.

Evil in History

From the dawn of humanity, self-consciousness itself, Becker believed, nurtured the seeds of evil because awareness of self binds humanity to the awareness of the relentless turning of the wheel of time. Heightened self-awareness poignantly anticipates death. The resultant overwhelming anxiety gave rise to the felt need to transcend this inevitable fate through immortality or some substitute for it. This usually took the form both of faith in some supernatural power and at the same time the more tangible

substitutes for life after death of our cultural glory structures.

An example is the power of a ruler or priest or that conferred by great wealth. These give the possessor a potent illusion of possessing a grandeur larger than mortal. History is really the story of the development of religion, state, military forces, family, and other structures into cultural substitutes for immortality. Every society is composed of cultural mechanisms, Becker says, to give everyone at least some participation in the illusion of victory over death through being a part of some grand destiny.

Evil then, arises from a good impulse, the attempt to conquer death by participation in a heroic self-image, of being somebody.

Destructiveness

Why do the cultural solutions to the dilemma of death seem to have led to such blood-shed and viciousness as human sacrifice, torture, executions, and wars? Why didn't this impulse lead instead to harmony and peace?

The destructiveness arises, Becker taught, from the need to experience prestige and power on the one hand, and the need, on the other, for expiation of guilt.

The need for power and prestige is obvious. The role of expiation for guilt requires some explanation. This is not the ordinary guilt we feel when we betray a friend. This is a more cosmic guilt, the kind arising from what the Greeks called hubris. It is the guilt which comes from trying to stick out above humanity's station, of challenging, by implication, the glory of the gods. It is the guilt arising from trying to exist and live heroically.

Such guilt is the corollary of the cultural constructions which are designed to gather to themselves eternal and infinite meaning and power. The two go together like the two sides of a coin.

The expiation of this kind of guilt in history seems to have almost always involved the shedding of blood, especially that of the enemy in war.

The Mechanism of Scapegoating

Expiation of guilt is one reason why the victim must die in our place. There is another and perhaps more important reason.

Victims must die in order to certify that the immortality system is intact and potent, because if our national or religious immortality chariot isn't absolutely intact, then it might not carry us to glory. The heretic who questions the true faith and/or the faithful of a neighboring country with a different system must die to assure us that our way is truth, absolute truth, the real and powerful and saving truth which cradles and shelters us from the Void.

The frenzy of destruction and the rejoicing in blood and ritualized murder arise from the fact that few can admit that none of our immortality systems or our glory fixes works at all. They are elaborate deceptions, illusions, rituals with no power to save. No matter how much wealth the rich person accumulates, or how great the power wielded by the king, everyone knows that the relatives will be fighting over the spoils before the body gets cold. Everyone knows that no Reich lasts a thousand years and no family line is assured of perpetuation. Furthermore, insofar as I derive my glory from merging myself with another person or system, to that degree I am less than whole. Borrowed glory is not my glory.

But these are the only buffers people have to shield themselves from the terrible dark and cold of the Void. The frenzy arises from the constant undercurrent of realization that the immortality strategies are illusion. The fact that they cannot save must be denied, hidden, repressed.

Rather than to doubt the meaning-conferring system, the group simply presses all the more hysterically the "just war" against internal and external heresy. Far from being sorrowful, says Becker, these ritual murders become ecstatic rituals of expiation of guilt and celebration of our righteousness.

The institutions and rituals of society parallel the situation of the inner psyche. The greater the threat to the walls of the self or the system the more frenzied and irrational becomes the effort to shore them up and make them impregnable.

Deviants, Becker says, are "dying in our place."⁷ They are at once scapegoats freeing us of our cosmic guilt for a passing moment at least, and at the same time the certification of the adequacy of our immortality systems and glory fixes, again for the moment. As the victims die, we find our lives perpetuated and enhanced by their death. The blazing bodies of heretics casts light, if briefly, against the inexorable darkness of infinity. But as with all narcotic fixes, the effects do not last.

The most vivid modern illustration is the Nazi Third Reich, with its elaborate funerals for dead heroes of the Fatherland, its genocide against the scapegoat Jews and others, and finally its suicidal, fanatic war against everyone outside the citadel of Aryan glory.

Hitler was not a throw-back to some ancient animosity. Quite the opposite. He was the madness and futility and frenzy of all our immortality/glory systems taken to their fulfillment and backed by modern technology.

The machinations of the political far right and the fundamentalist Christians in the United States are a less violent example of this kind of drive to control. Something more like Whittlers is mirrored in the genocide wars and executions by the Shiite fundamentalists in Iran.

Matthew Fox writes eloquently of the linkage among fundamentalism, fascism, sado-masochism and patriarchal authoritarianism:

An almost fashionable fascism arises wherever religion or society repress the mother principle in the name of patriarchy. Power struggles, not mutual love, support and solidarity, characterize such systems. This same kind of competition can be observed in fundamentalist church structures. The authoritarian character who thrives in such a system "is essentially sado-masochistic," according to psychiatrist Anthony Stevens, and is compelled to categorize others as either strong or weak. He

worships the former and has contempt for the latter. ... Every sadist has a masochistic side: the bullying adult is trying to free himself from having been bullied as a child. Such a person deeply enjoys submission to a leader, God, or fate.⁷

And he goes on to write:

In a fascist society or religions two areas of the self are aborted or forbidden to develop naturally: sexuality and aggression. Persons are not educated to be true selves but to wear false personas modeled (on the demands of the parents.) ... The child thus instructed often channels these powers of sexuality and aggression into self-loathing and self-contempt. I call this the original sin mentality – the notion that I came into the world despised, unwanted, ugly and powerless. It may be displaced onto a scapegoat, for example, racial minorities, women or homosexuals. It can be transformed into worship of the oppressor who is “always right.” Finally, it can be eroticized in sado-masochistic fantasies and practices. This kind of energy pervades patriarchal institutions including the church.⁸

Fox helps us understand more clearly the links among different aspects of evil which continually confuse us. It shows us how self-hate becomes hatred of others and persecution of them. It shows why the macho man, who denies motherly compassion within, comes to divide the world into two categories: my kind and the kind it's OK to kill. It indicates how sexuality becomes linked with rage in the form of sado-masochism. And it shows how this all arises from the seeking of power of being by avenues other than compassionate agape.

Those who hurt and kill are most often people who were abused and neglected as children. This abuse results in feelings of worthlessness and powerlessness and extreme rage over past mistreatment. They live within the narrow boundaries of the self-systems which are still battling or cringing before abusive parents. These may be as narrow as stage 1 and 2, where there is only “me and my suffering and rage” rebounding back and forth off the walls.

These narrow boundaries are threatened over and over every day by exposure to people who live by more out-going values. To defend those walls requires lashing out again and again against others in rituals of demonic sacrifice which assure the abuser that his walls still hold against the invasion of a compassion which would demand giving up rage and revenge for forgiveness.

A perceptive expert on Islam has suggested that the fanatic extremism among fundamentalists of that faith arises from their perception that the modern societies are calling them outmoded, shoving them into a side eddy of history. This sense of insecurity fuels the kind of fanaticism which causes Khomeini to call for the death of the author of *The Satanic Letters*. More shocking is that so many believers to support that call to defend the honor and truth of Allah. Roger Rosenblatt writes:

*Zealotry is essentially a wild act of self-protection. It is born out of doubt and fear, and it rises acutely when people feel they have lost control of their moral environment.*⁹

Translate that into Kohlberg language: The narrower and more exclusive the boundaries of the self or culture, the more fanatic will be the energy expended in protecting those boundaries.

As persons advance up the Kohlberg stages, we shall see, they become progressively liberated from the more fanatic and compulsive idolatries, but remain under the control of the more subtle ones. Not until stage 7 do they float completely free. That is, assuming that they advance in all four dimensions of agape and not just expansion.

In primitive societies, and up until the Enlightenment, Becker thought, the immortality systems were largely a matter of ritual and religion. The scale was smaller, the confrontations often more gentle. Competition often took place through ritual conflicts, like potlatches or games between moieties. Intertribal wars were ritualized to minimize the loss of life and great attention was given to saving the faces of the losers, recognizing that they would be just over the hill for a long time to come.

By the time of the Pharaohs, increased population, the scale of administrative problems, threats of invasion, and the maturation of the god-systems, took all the fun out of the immortality games. They became deadly serious. If the Pharaoh needed a tomb to guarantee his survival and comfort in the next world, thousands must die to produce it. To mobilize the nations for big enough glory wars, the national and religious immortality system had to be cranked up to an oppressive peak. There were both psychological and economic reasons for the increasing piles of bodies the glory juggernauts left crushed on the plains of history.

Leaders and Followers

One of the earliest consequences of immortality seeking was inequality. Becker analyzes in depth how money and other symbolic forms of wealth became a piled up surplus demanded by the internal glory dynamics and the social expressions of it. The amassing of wealth and the focusing of power and glory on a few leaders led to a division in society. At the top were a few who represented and embodied glory for everyone else. This was especially the role of the king. All others experienced immortality vicariously through the king and his priests.

This does not ignore the place of religions and the gods, but puts them in proper perspective. Religion has from the beginning been imprisoned in the glory systems and the gods were cut to fit their needs. Exceptions are mainly at the beginnings of the great religions: the Hebrew prophets, individual figures like Socrates, Buddha, Jesus, and the early Christian church before Constantine chained it to the chariots of the Roman Empire.

In Summary

Driven by a depth fear of death and by narcissistic expansiveness, we tend to exhibit a need for self-esteem, once more basic needs are supplied. But this is not the watery self-esteem of Fromm and Maslow. This kind of esteem is cosmic; it has to be huge enough to hold back the ultimate Dark. It is a kind of self-esteem which can only be satisfied by a heroic self-image.

Evil springs from the same roots that make us human and generate the heights of good and love and creativity within us.

Seemingly mad leaders like Hitler and Saddam Hussein do not come to power and stay in power by accident. The masses of people living at Kohlberg's stages one through four, who feel condemned to die in littleness and insignificance after lives of boredom and pain, rise up in time of crisis and put such leaders into power and follow them. They want to believe in the glory of the system. They want to writhe ecstatically in the streets, participating in the god-state which confers long-range meaning and short-term excitement on their tawdry lives. They want to dance in the torch-light parades which hold back, though momentarily, the final darkness. They want to kill and to even to die to relieve the boredom, the guilt, and the agonizing sense of meaninglessness.

The simple optimism of the Enlightenment was misplaced, Becker thought. The sickness of humanity is more deeply rooted. It lurks in the depths of the psyche and the complexity of social institutions. Education by itself is no solution because the problem is not just ignorance. Child-rearing is important, but within the larger environment of deception and violence this art becomes more difficult every year.

In such a world, no child can grow up unscathed. The teenagers who burned an man to death had not rationalized their act as well as did Hitler or the Argentine army officer. The adults wrapped their sadism artistically in a crimson tissue of rationalization centuries old. The children merely believed that the only meaning and glory they could expect to have in their blighted and boring lives is to strut such heroic achievements before their peers in a sub-culture where that is the only immortality substitute they have. Anonymity amidst desperate loneliness is psychologically intolerable. So the worshiping community of their blighted sub-culture offers blood sacrifices to assure the worshipers that they are somebody. The vaster murders of state and rulers continually legitimate these small demonic congregations. All are a part of what Walter Wink calls the Domination Society.

There are those who dispute some of the details of Becker's analysis. But the main point and devastating impact will stand.

The conquest of the fear of death, which can cut the ground out from under evil, is discussed in Session 10. Before we get to that, we must consider further Becker's immortality substitutes in relation to the god-self and Kohlberg's stages.

Evil and Ego Development Stages

Kohlberg's stages involve expansion of the boundaries of the self followed by a pause to assimilate and readjust balance, and then further expansion.

To get another view of this process, let's look at the work of Harvard educational psychologist, Robert Kegan, author of *The Evolving Self: Problem and Process in Human Development*.¹⁰ Kegan uses a different paradigm which is complementary to Kohlberg's stages. He also builds on the work of Piaget.

Kegan says more about the origin of evil within and how it can be prevented than Kohlberg does.

Kegan sees ego development to also be a matter of stages, but with a slightly different root metaphor. It is important to remember that he is talking about total ego development and not just moral development.

I suggest that human development involves a succession of renegotiated balances or "biologies," which come to organize the experience of the individual in qualitatively different ways. In this sense evolutionary activity is intrinsically cognitive, but it is no less affective: we are this activity and we experience it. ... I am suggesting that the source of our emotions is the phenomenological experience of evolving – of defending, surrendering and constructing a center.¹¹

He points to the separation anxiety suffered by an infant between nine and twenty-one months. This he sees to be the reorganization of the infant ego to incorporate the fact of a separate existence from the mother. The child's anxiety at first attending school is paralleled to the college freshman's sometimes suicidal depression relating to feelings of being cut off and abandoned. Crises such as death and separation are far more damaging, he says, if they hit when the person is in the unbalanced state of transition from one ego state to another. At these points we are particularly vulnerable. Mid-life crisis is another example.

The idea of evolutionary truce or evolutionary balance is a root metaphor as is thinking of stages as circles that abruptly expand and then expand again. These are complementary images, each highlighting one aspect of a complex reality.

Kegan speaks of five stages. He puts them in the form of an upward spiral, because the dynamics of the transitions at stages one, three and five are similar. Each of these crises reflects feelings, to some degree, of being cut off and abandoned. The crises at stages two and four, on the other hand, are characterized by anxieties relating more to being submerged in some greater whole. These anxieties express the extremes at the polarity of individuation/autonomy and participation/belonging.

INTER INDIVIDUAL
(Stage 5)

INSTITUTIONAL
(Stage 4)

INTERPERSONAL
(Stage 3)

IMPERIAL
(Stage 2)

IMPULSIVE
(Stage 1)

INCORPORATE
(Stage 0)

Kegan comes closer than Kohlberg to dealing with evil. He says that the conditions for a successful transition from one evolutionary balance to another with a minimum of trauma, require that the environment (particularly the psychologically important people) perform three functions: (1) It must hold or cradle the person with sympathy and understanding of the pain, confusion and anger involved in feeling no longer a part of the old adjustment and yet not seeing yet where feet are to be set down on secure ground in the new. (2) It must let go of the person at the right time, not try to hold her back. (3) It must stay in place during the transition. The parents and others in the environment at each stage are to encourage more separation and independence and help to bridge the move to the new environment, interpreting what is happening.¹²

Earlier, I stated that it seems to me that each of Kohlberg's stages looks like a different kind of personality from the preceding stage. Kegan speaks of a qualitative difference and of the transition as a sort of death. In the same analogy, we can speak of arrival at the next stage as a kind of resurrection.

The process reminds me of the mythical town council which voted that they must have a new courthouse, but that it had to be built on the same site, out of the materials of the old building, and that business must continue in the location during construction.

When we shrink back from change or have stressful passages between stages it strengthens the inner demonic self-systems and results in evil. Kegan writes of the need for our environment to cradle us, let us go, and also be an enduring bridge for us to the new. Our key lovers are always deficient in one or more of these three functions, so our passage is imperfect; the unresolved problems are carried forward.

This means that when we must jump to the next stage level, it is without the institutional and personal support we need. Instead of digesting and assimilating all the aspects of the new stage, we drag along with us powerful inner persona. These continue to push the fragmentary values and dreams of the previous stages. We are unwilling and unable to let them go, so we are fragmented. We repeatedly bring forward old recorded tapes of previous relationships, adjustments and values, including the neurotic defenses and immature reactions to events and people. These do not fit the gestalt of the new more expansive environment. They can exist only behind separating boundaries. They are continually at war with the more mature emerging self and with one another. These demonic self-systems are constantly reinforced and elaborated by the glory systems of society and by the inner voices of influential others from the past who worship at those shrines.

Some people draw back, as Samson suggests, and refuse to make the transition. Kohlberg found inmates in prisons who were still living within the tight boundaries of stages 1 and 2. Multitudes – the majority of our society according to testing – are seemingly stuck as stages 3 and 4 and not moving at all. Others have found a center of gravity in stage 5, and yet, under stress, are all too ready to play the old tapes and regress in their values to previous stages. Very few have reached stage 6, evidently, and we are not sure anyone is fully at stage 7, if such a stage can be defined.

We live in a society which stretches across all the stages. There are influences from stages 5 and 6, and even stage 7, around us. We can see stage 6 and 7 values in the Sermon on the Mount and the 13th chapter of I Corinthians, for instance, and see them acted out in deeds of persons who momentarily transcend their operational stage level.

Those who confine themselves within the narrower boundaries of the first four stages find themselves forced increasingly to deny the existence and validity of the higher stages. If one is stuck at stage 1 or 2 or 3, or even if those stages remain strongly influential among the fragments of the self, these influences are not merely benign immaturity. These narrow self-systems have to maintain strong walls against constant outside pressure. This leads to the twisting and souring which we call evil. This accounts for the destructiveness which accompanies the winding, lunging path of an adult trying to live by and justify a child's value system. The narrower the boundaries, the more strongly the walls must be built and the more vehemently they must be defended to hold out the anxiety of confronting change which appears to involve stepping into the dark well of death.

This is the main point of connection to Ernest Becker's analysis. To resist the external threat to our psychological integrity, we define those outside as the enemy. They become the heretics who must be resisted. We may then make of this external enemy a sacrificial scapegoat to expiate our own guilt. We project that guilt on the scapegoat and then eliminate it with the victim, though it

always returns.

Thus it is that growth refused sours, and can turn into malignant evil. We now understand better the teenagers who burned the old derelict. We can see inside the motivation of the Argentine officer who tortured and raped to the glory of the anti-communist god. We understand better why Hitler turned on the Jews, and why Martin Luther King, Jr., who Kohlberg thought embodied stage 6 universal values, was killed, and the striving for glory of the nobody loner assassin.

On the other hand, growth accepted, leads through suffering to greater strength and freedom. As we will see in subsequent sessions, the person who moves from stage to stage and makes the transitions relatively successfully, gains experience in growth itself, learns techniques for incorporating nonbeing, and how to contain and even use anxiety creatively. We shall see how the only sure defense against the souring and sickening effects of the partial fragment stage remnants is (1) to be closely held in loving community because all growth is actually a gracious gift at the hands of others, if we trace it back far enough; and (2) to step forth daringly into the higher stages, with the best support we can get.

Fear of Life

There is another reason why our growth is irregular and dotted with hesitations, costly retreats, and painful detours. As Becker suggests, we are not only afraid of death, we are afraid of life. The new is terrifying precisely because it confronts us once again with death. We have to die to the old without any clear evidence that we will rise to the new.

The little death of such change triggers within us all the anxiety of the Void.

Paul Tillich's brilliant analysis of the fall into sin begins with the "dreaming innocence" of the primitive person or the child, trembling on the brink of actualization of a particular self-conscious, reflective self. The step of entering into experience and relationships involves tremendous risk. It is fraught with anxiety, both the fear of losing what one has and of dying in the transition. The agony of the little death and resurrection involved in the transition from any stage to the next can be enormously painful.

Tillich speaks of the expansion part of growth as taking in threatening nonbeing. To expand we have to incorporate reality which is threatening to our personality organization. Its effervescence strains our old wineskins.

Edward E. Samson speaks of this as entering into the realm of the transcendent. He describes the terror involved in the venture:

We are cast adrift: no sea, no raft, no shore, nothing but adroitness, loss, engulfment in limitless space. Agony floats, we sense it is we who experience this agony, yet find not referent for that we. The underpinnings which kept us in place and propped us up have been cut out; we fall, fall, fall, fall, fall until there is only a falling, not even a we to whom it is happening.

To be reborn we must first die. Liberation is a process of rebirth. Yet to die is so frightening and so fearful that the pull of looking beyond is forever met by the forces of keeping us well within the grasp of our ego's everyday perspective. It is this fear of death that keeps us from living fully.¹²

This fear of this seeming death causes us to draw back from entering upon a more expansive joyous life. It shapes the loom and provides the energy for the weaving of patterns of destructive evil within us. To this fountainhead we can trace the poisoning of society, the creation of institutions dedicated to providing dizzying glory fixes and seductive substitutes for immortality.

Evil is nonbeing; it is based on illusion; it is self-defeating and self-destructive. It is inevitably expressed in styles of life which lead to frustrating dead ends. Evil can eventually be eliminated because the true, wholistic self has the four-fold ontological structure and inner strength to overcome death.

In the end, the demonic self-systems are put to death by the ecstatic exhilaration of the unlimited perspective and the joy of creativeness in love, together with others, out of a plenitude of strength and resources.

The next session offers a picture of this highest, grandest, whole person.

Questions for Thought

1. If evil is nonbeing, how is it so strong in individuals and society?
2. Consider or discuss: How does evil in the individual influence evil in society, and vice versa?

Notes

1. *The Denial of Death*, The Free Press (MacMillan), 1973, pages 55-6,66
2. *Engaging the Powers, Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1992, pages 18,9
3. *ibid.*, page 22
4. *Escape from Evil*, The Free Press (Macmillan), NY, 1975, page xvii
5. *ibid.*, page xvii
6. *ibid.*, pages xvii-xviii
7. *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ*, op. cit., page 28
8. *ibid.*, page 29
9. "Zealots with Fear in their Eyes," *U. S. News and World Report*, February 27, 1989, page 10
10. Harvard University Press, 1983
11. *The Evolving Self*, op. cit., pages 80, 81
12. *Ego at the Threshold*, pages 171, 172

7. A Picture of the Highest

These are the most inspiring values of life; these are the ones that people are willing to die for; these are the ones they are willing to pay for with effort, pain and torture. These are also the "highest" values in the sense that they come most often to the best people in their best moments, under the best conditions. These are the definitions of the higher life, of the good life, of the spiritual life, and I may also add, these are the far goals of psychotherapy, and the far goals of education in the broadest sense.

- Abraham Maslow ¹

The children of God should not have any other country here below but the universe itself, with the totality of all the reasoning creatures it ever has contained, contains, or ever will contain. That is the native city to which we owe our love. ... Our love should stretch as widely across all space, and should be as equally distributed in every portion of it, as is the very light of the sun. Christ has bidden us to attain to the perfection of our heavenly Father by imitating his indiscriminate bestowal of light. Our intelligence too should have the same impartiality.

- Simone Weil ²

In the breakthrough ... where I stand free of my own will and of the will of God and of all his works and of God himself, there I am above all creatures and am neither God nor creature. Rather, I am what I was and what I shall remain now and forever. Then I receive an impulse which shall bring me above all the angels. In this impulse I receive wealth so vast that God cannot be enough for me in all that makes him God, and with all his divine works. For in this breakthrough I discover that I and God are one.

- Meister Eckhardt ³

The revolutionary new faith for the 21st century is based upon nothing less than the whole, healthy, strong, loving, joyful nature which, in our most perceptive moments, we all desire. This is the divine excellence which has been designed for us by God. We can see flashes and fragments of it in ourselves and in others around us.

In this session I will attempt to draw an outline of the highest that human beings can attain in excellence, what Abraham Maslow referred to in the title of his book, *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature*.

Kohlberg discovered in his research that we are unable to see clearly or believe fully in the morality which lies more than one stage above where we currently are operating. In a parallel sense, we are unable to envision clearly what the highest and best kind of person would look like because even the best of us have only begun to draw near to it. We can only understand God as we become like God, and we can only see clearly the shape of the highest as we become it.

The attempt to understand the highest, however, is necessary. We inevitably do project upon the horizon our own pictures of the highest and in our best moments we try to copy them. From antiquity people have attempted such pictures. We must attempt to make them as scientific and accurate as possible.

We are able to do this meaningfully because we draw from the experience of the highest we have seen. We also incorporate the best of the researches to which we have access from the social sciences. And we use all of the tools of reason available to us, testing each part continually for consistency, inclusiveness, non-contradiction and coherence.

In this session we see the answers to our two key questions come together most dramatically. These are:

1. What difference does it make in style of life if a person is at stage 6-7?
2. What difference does it make if salvation is seen more as becoming like God than going to a place called heaven?

We see here why the road to a stage 6-7 nature is also the pathway to godlikeness.

We begin with the findings of a person who gave his life to attempting to define the highest, Abraham Maslow.

Starting with Health

At the time Abraham Maslow moved to New York as a young man, having just received his doctorate, he had been deeply impressed by two of his teachers, Ruth Benedict and Max Wertheimer. They seemed to him to be exceptional, superior persons. Yet he found nothing in his psychological training which accounted for this. He decided to observe exceptional people and take notes.

He listed the traits he found in outstanding people. He examined and analyzed the peak experiences of people, those rare and high moments of joy, ecstasy or mystical exultation. He asked how people felt at those peaks. He compiled lists of these feelings, defined and classified them.

Maslow felt that Freud had made the mistake of concentrating on analyzing illness. It seemed to Maslow more valuable to look first at what health is. It seemed to him that the experiences and feelings people had in peak experiences, along with the traits exhibited by mature, healthy, excelling people, should offer clues to health and so to the nature of the highest and best we can become.

These are the feelings which Maslow found people tend to experience during peak experiences:

... integrated, unified; strength to feel one with the world and autonomous, egoless; fully functioning; grace; effortless; more determined, in charge, free of blocks, inhibitions; spontaneous, innocent; more creative, unique; in tune with present

and surroundings; more a pure self and less a thing or object, more free of striving and need; more artistic in expression; sense of completion; playfulness; fortune and joy. ⁴

Note that these people, functioning seemingly at their highest, are characterized by great freedom and spontaneity; have a tremendous empathy with their inner selves, others and their larger environment; feel expansive and unthreatened by variety and complexity; and have a tremendous sense of inner unity and strength. These characteristics correspond exactly to the four poles of the divine wholeness we've looked at before.

Maslow noted two other things about those he came to call self-actualizing people:

1. They seem to unite the divisive polarities of life, such as autonomy and participation. They can experience all of these traits, even those which seem to contradict one another, and harmonize the contrary feelings that come with this tension within a larger, synthesizing whole.

Kohlberg had a parallel hypothesis. He believed that he had observed in the lives of stage 6 people the ability increasingly to unite the polarities of their lives in higher syntheses, to transcend and overcome the negative power of these inner divisions. He also observed that persons who he judged to be functioning at near stage 7 exhibit an extraordinary freedom from fear of death and a willingness to take risks, to sacrifice for achievement of their values.

2. The other important discovery of Maslow for this study is his observation that in the healthy, self-actualizing person, where two or three of these traits are found, all of them tend to be present.

This suggests that where the highest freedom is found, it is accompanied by the highest love, the greatest internal integrity and strength, and the widest expansion of the boundaries of the self and greatest variety of content. Rather than being isolated traits, these are all necessary dimensions of a particular kind of fully developed, mature person. We do not find one of the traits highly developed without the powerful presence of the others.

This helps us define the love called agape more clearly. It is the mode of relationship of the truly mature and healthy person to other people, to self, to things and to death and infinity.

These four dimensions must develop in relation to one another. Stage development, as expansion (Kohlberg), is only one of the dimensions. If one pole develops without its opposite it is as if the buttresses were missing on one side of a cathedral. The whole building would be unstable. Or in a better metaphor, it could never be built so high in the first place.

For example, the person who seems strong in autonomy, a loner without need for other people, is in fact running from agape. He is suffering from the debilitating anxiety related to loneliness, whether this is understood consciously or not. The anxiety expresses itself in an eroding boredom, anger at those who do not love him as he wishes to be loved, a constant restlessness and hunger for exotic excitements.

Expansion of the boundaries of the self is essential, to the point where all people are included and the cosmic Void is confronted along with personal death. This expansion must take place when or before we reach true freedom, inner unification and fully mature compassion.

False Growth

When we seem to grow on one of the four dimensions of agape far beyond the other three, this turns out to be pseudo-growth. If our declarations of independence out-pace the reality of our compassion we are becoming more insensitive and not really more free. If our empathy side seems to shoot ahead beyond our actual autonomy, then we are in danger of a sentimentality which depends upon or gives in to others rather than relating to them in the tough love of agape.

The pattern of the god-self within, however, is always in balance, so an uneven surge of growth on one pole is recorded elsewhere in a demonic self-system and becomes demonic in its effect.

Stage 8

Are there perhaps stages 8 and 9 and beyond? If there are any stage 8 people around the one thing sure is that we would think them strange. They would not necessarily be sitting on mountains meditating. But one would expect that if a seeker asks for the ultimate truth, the reply would very likely be, "If you have to ask, you can't really understand." Or, would she more likely speak to us in the indirect language of parables to make us think and struggle upward? And, would she, in addition, give us short two or three word commands, such as "Love your enemies!", knowing that only by striving to do just that sort of thing can we put ourselves in the way of the grace which alone can impel us stage by stage godward?

Instead of speculating about a stage 8 and beyond, we might better speak of stage 7n. Since stage 7 is the highest which we dare talk about, stage 7n indicates that it incorporates for us all the higher stages for now. 7n symbolizes stage 7 to the Nth or infinite power.

Agape and Being-Love

One of the valuable contributions of Maslow is the distinction between what he calls Being-love and Deprivational-love. B-love and D-love correspond very closely to the distinction theologians make between agape and eros.

Deprivational-love is needy, anxious, dependent, driven love. Being-love is overflowing, out-going, unanxious love.

D-love results when as children people are deprived of adequate security, care, trust and recognition. Their perception is distorted and they are split into parts. This is when the tapes are recorded which relate to particular inner persona. In these persona everything and everybody are seen through the garishly tinted spectacles of unmet inner needs.

It is this sense in which the demonic self-systems lust. They are driven by needs which cannot be satisfied, or can be filled

only as a temporary fix.

There are higher needs at higher levels, Maslow taught, meta-needs. Neglect of these produces meta-pathologies. These the medieval spiritual guides called illnesses of the spirit. Modern existentialists use words like boredom, angst, loss of boundaries and meaninglessness.

Maslow says that in order to be aware of these higher hungers the earlier needs for security, care, trust, recognition and achievement have to be to some degree met.

Otherwise, the stomach pains of the more basic needs block out the higher hungers.

Because our passage through the stages is so troubled, there are self-systems within us which reflect most or all the levels of unmet needs. This is why at one time a person can be driven by a seemingly very immature need for recognition and at another time by meta-needs such as boredom or a sense of meaninglessness. We also know that a feeling of boredom or guilt may be even more complex. Boredom can simultaneously represent a mixture of influences from a genuine feeling of cosmic futility to the covered form of an unacceptable rage felt towards one's parents dating from a very early age.

Characteristics of the Best

The following characteristics of the highest may appear to be an examination of a number of separate traits, but each is a necessary part of a larger whole. Each expresses some aspect of or combination of (1) inner cohesion, (2) empathy and compassion, (3) expanded boundaries and enriched content, and (4) autonomous freedom. These are the interdependent characteristics of the truly mature person:

FREEDOM ——— RELATEDNESS
EXPANSION ——— INTEGRITY

As a mnemonic device to help keep these four dimensions in mind think of FIRE OF THE SPIRIT:

F freedom
I integrity
R relatedness
E expansion

Maturity which can bring into harmonious unity these opposites rests by necessity on all four of these legs. That's what we mean by wholeness.

1. Floating Free

The stage 7 person floats free from attachments to persons, institutions, ideologies, causes and things, just as she is indifferent to fame, wealth, prestige and power. These attachments, which always reflect dependency, are the scaffoldings which have held her into existence during the transitions through the stages of growth. The stage 7 person relates responsibly, lovingly, and creatively to persons and institutions, but not out of need. She is not at all exploitative, manipulative or compulsive.

Imagine now two circles, side by side. In the circle on the left is a stick figure with many lines extending from the body to the sides of the circle. This illustrates how at the lower levels of development we are literally held in being by strands of relationship to others, to organizations and causes, to things. We derive from them what Paul Tillich called "power of being". This includes certain shapes, boundaries, vectors of purposiveness in our inner sub-selves, corresponding to the pull and tug of these strings.

These are all dependencies in the root meaning of the word: to hang from. These relationships represent deficient forms of love, D-loves, loves of the demonic self-systems within their straitjacket boundaries. They are characterized by words such as need, want, lust, yearn, demand.

This also illustrates (as in Kegan) the reason for anxiety at stage transition. Each time we cross from one stage level into another, we must let some of these lines be cut, or at least go slack. Amidst uncertainty we must then take on new attachments, a new scaffolding. Each dependency has a different object with different demands and emotions related to it.

The child in the first day of kindergarten is subconsciously aware that the lines of support from parents are slackening, but does not yet feel the tug of lines of support from teacher and fellow students. It is no accident that she digs out her security blanket that night and clutches it to her cheek as she slurps her thumb.

The figure on the right illustrates one of the defining characteristics of stage 7, how finally all the lines are cast off and we are free-floating. When the last line is dropped, we are surprised to find that we do not fall. Or, perhaps we are not so surprised since this takes place at the culmination of the long development during which we have become increasingly aware that we are buoyant in the universe. There is no place to fall. The gravity we felt was the drag of the demonic self-systems. That dream of endlessly falling through the darkness, neither alive nor dead, is anxiety of the demonic self-systems.

The god-self does not incorporate all the content of the universe; it is not God save in the structure of its inclusive, strong pattern. But, by now, it has sampled all the kinds, sorts, and qualities of existence. If not all were found to be good, at least none were found to threaten ultimate harm.

It is not the idea of God which is our support, but the direct experience of God. The god-self is aware of swimming in a sea of God; it knows at all times it is borne up and has no place to fall.

This is the vision George Fox, founder of Quakerism, had which transformed his life, the vision of a great darkness which

was overwhelmed by an enormous light. It was the source of his belief that in every person is an Inner Light which glows with the Great Light. This intuition which arose from his inner depths in a mystical experience of great power. The god-self is surely the source of such intuitions.

Fox believed this is the possession of every human being whether she knows of God, has ever heard of Jesus Christ, is an atheist, agnostic, Buddhist or animist.

2. Permeable Boundaries

Now, imagine two other circles, side by side. Each of them has a smaller circle within, which represent the inner and outer boundaries of our self-systems. On the left the boundary lines of the inner and outer circles are almost totally closed. On the right, representing stage 7n, they are open, permeable to outside and inner reality, even that which terrifies.

To grow we have to take in both external and internal material foreign to our present personality balance. We are recovering and reintegrating parts of the self within which have been rejected, mislabeled, repressed or otherwise mislaid into the unconscious.

At the same time we are expanding outwardly to take in the nonbeing which comes in the form of new relationships, new environments, new and risky decisions. Both these movements are involved in the expansion of the boundaries of the personality.

The left hand diagram illustrates how at stage 1 the boundaries of the self, both internal and external can be spoken of as comparatively rigid and closed. The child is pushed into change by outside pressures and the inner playful urges to explore and experience.

When transitions are made to higher stages it is against resistance and with anxiety. As we progress, with practice, the jumps may be made with less anxiety. Insofar as we fairly successfully integrate the newly incorporated material and reinterpret the carryover parts of the old self-systems, boundaries become more permeable. This is symbolized by the broken lines in the right hand figure. Taking in nonbeing becomes more a matter of choice, under conscious control, more of a steady process, less of an anxious activity, and less a matter of cataclysmic jumps.

3. Letting Be

Stage 7 also represents the fulfillment of the Tao, the way of letting be. The stage 7 person is not anxious about self, others, or the fate of institutions or causes. She may dedicate herself to achieving various penultimate goals, but is much more willing to let individuals be who they are, find their own way, make their own decisions and suffer the consequences.

The stage 7 person recognizes that no loss is final or ultimate tragedy. This is also the Christian eschatological faith, but it is not resident in the guts until stage 7 is reached. There are suffering and sense of loss, but no final tragedy where God and the god-self have the last word.

Letting be is also the recognition that this is the way God has treated us. It does not mean we hold ourselves aloof or that we are not available in time of need. It does not mean that we always avoid offering advice and help. It means that we do not meddle or nag, are not anxious, do not seek to control or manipulate or deceive in order to produce a good end. Often the stage 7 person holds back in order to make room for growth in the other.⁵

The stage 7 person is empowered to follow Jesus' command: Do not be anxious; who by being anxious can add eighteen inches to her height?

In subsequent sessions there will be an opportunity to talk about exactly how God is involved in the world. To give a hint: I am not a Deist who believes God set the world running and then withdrew to knit other sweaters. I believe God is involved as deeply and directly as possible given the difficulty of producing free and loving beings.

Letting be means living a hard love. Nietzsche was right to deplore the sentimental pity which Christians of his day were substituting for real love. He wrote, "Be a bed for your friend in time of need, but be a hard bed." Agape deals with the other in terms of his highest needs; it is willing to allow or even precipitate suffering for the sake of the others' growth.

Nietzsche also said, "That you have done it (evil) to me, I can forgive. But how can I forgive what you have done to yourself?"

4. Kenotic Leadership

The fully realized person, to use Maslow's term, is free of need for prestige, honor, achievement. These people will often withhold their leadership or withdraw from leadership in organizations, another kind of letting be. This may be to make a place for another's growth experience. The one who withdraws then takes up a more humble position of help and support to the new leaders.

It may also be to avoid compromising conscience. Stage 7 persons are often willing to see groups or causes fail rather than to allow themselves to be made charismatic leaders. They take a dim view of letting the cause or organization rest on them personally rather than being a communal effort. This is why stage 7 people would find it difficult. I think, to be ordained ministers, given the expectations that go with the vocation.

The stage 7 person is capable often of seeing beyond the immediate goal to the long-range consequences, rather as Jesus in the temptations on the mountain was able to see that magic, charisma or military might could not establish the loving rule of God on earth, not without continuing the falsehood that God supports violence or manipulation in good causes.

5. Effortlessness, Grace and Play

The stage 7 person, insofar as she integrates the previous stages in unity, has recovered childlikeness from the earlier stages. She now sees God more and more as one who is engaged in creative play, and who invites us to join the game and play it with joy.

Maslow detected a dancing and soaring quality in the peak experience, a kind of effortlessness, grace, spontaneity,

innocence, lack of inhibition, play, capacity for ecstasy. Nietzsche, struggling to understand the supra-human, spoke of soaring like a bird.

The anxieties, hates and resentments, envies, lusts and possessiveness of the demonic self-systems are what make us awkward, self-conscious, up-tight, fearful of what people may think of us. So long as we are held in being by the scaffolding of other persons or institutions, then we are anxious about what people think. We believe that their opinions about us have power to hurt.

I have dubbed stage 7 the cosmic, transcendent, ecstatic stage. It represents ecstasy (root meaning: to stand out or apart) in that it is where we are able to stand outside anxiety about what other people are saying or thinking about us.

6. Old Age

The stage 7 person has solved the problems of old age, except for the weakening and failing of physical and mental powers. The stage 7 person is aware of being on an upward spiral toward more and more richness and meaning in life rather than feeling he is running down like a wind-up clock.

Though the body is wasting away, Paul wrote, spiritually we are being continually renewed and built up. Death has lost its sting. With the elimination of guilt, events of the past are purified and reinterpreted and comes to glow with lovely memories. Creativity and play come to the fore.

We have inner conversations with all the others of the past, dead or alive. We are reconciled and hold fellowship even with those we have hated or who have hated us.

Anxiety about the future likewise is overcome. We have laid up treasures in heaven where moth and rust cannot corrupt by investing in the god-self. Nothing invested in this god-pattern is ever lost. Such investment does not affect the shape of the god-self but enriches and fills it ever fuller.

7. Eternity

Stage 7 is participation in eternity and infinity. Berdyaev spoke of the God-man within us as dwelling in or having eternity. This is not a duration of time. It is, he believed, the redemption of fallen time. It is time freed of all anxiety, guilt, lust, envy, greed, and hate, all the negative emotions of the demonic self-systems. It is eternal life, that is, life in the tempo of eternity.

Jesus often spoke of eternal life as a quality of life first and only secondarily as a quantity of time. This quality of time is the only kind of life which would be endurable for an eternity of linear time, though we should not think that we are limited to linear time beyond this life.

Emil Brunner gave a series of lectures published in a book titled, *Faith, Hope and Love*. Faith, he said, overcomes the guilt-burdened past. Hope overcomes the anxious future. And love overcomes the suffocating drag and temptations of the present moment.

Eternal life is time as peace, suffused with joy, filled with concrete exchanges of love, decorated with playful creativity. It is time that lives lovingly in the present; playfully rather than guiltily in the past; and hopefully, not anxiously, in the future.

Here, the poisoned fangs of time, past, future and present, are pulled. We become able to live spontaneously and soaringly in the eternal now of agape.

8. Non-repetition

The stage 7 person does not need the repetition of any experience. Having heard Beethoven's 9th symphony once, she does not need to hear it again. Having been with a person once, made love once, read a poem once, afterward none of these need be repeated.

The stage 7 person chooses to do many things again, but does not need to. The stage 7 person is self-sufficient within.

This freedom in relating to others is important for the health of the loved ones. It eliminates the need to control, to be dependent or to manipulate or deceive.

The stage 7 person also does not need to have children, not to perpetuate a family name, to prove virility or motherhood, or to have someone to love. These motivations belong to the lower stages. The stage 7 person is free to have children and to love them, but may well choose to give love to someone else's children or to adopt. Those who have children out of need love often do not make very good parents.

A reader suggests this is ridiculous. How could the author know? Well, all of this is extrapolation. If it doesn't speak to your condition, as the Quakers say, ignore it.

9. The Inner Community

The stage 7 person is so self-sufficient partly because he is so rich inside. He is a community of persons and a cosmos within. The stage 7 person has more interesting conversations and experiences within her own head than most of the conversations and experiences which go on outside. This is perhaps only a faint foretaste of the much greater interpenetration and communication we will have with one another and with God in future lives.

10. No More Worship

The person who integrates at stage 7 will have a dramatically different relation to God. At this point it becomes clear that God does not want worship and never did. God wants loving companionship on as near equal terms as is possible. Worship as we use the word has bad connotations of dependence, subservient awe, and the need to give preplanned times to thinking of God.

At the peak of our growth every moment, act and thought become relationship to God. To the extent worship takes place it

is in the form of celebration and thanksgiving for God's gift to us of her own inner nature. It is no longer characterized by fear or dependence.

Theologies commonly contend that we remain dependent upon God because the gap between God's power and goodness and our weakness and debased morality continues forever to be all but infinite. We must worship in awe and humility, it is said, for the sake of our growth, even if God does not need or seek it.

But humility is implicit in the stage 7 person's celebrative, playful, thankful, loving relationship to God, which is echoed exactly in all relationship to other beings and to nature. Jesus didn't "think equality with God a thing to be grabbed at." So right. But it is God's to confer, if S/He wants to. We now are made aware of the lower enjoyments not as filling "needs" but as sweet icing on the cake of solid inner wholistic being.

A Summing Up

Irenaeus said that the divine-human nature of Jesus came into being, in part, because he "recapitulated" the faithful devotion of those who had lived before: Abraham, Moses, David, Esther, and so on. Jesus was the culmination and distillation of the highest which had gone before. Since their lives were examples of joint divine and human action, Jesus is also divine and human in one personality. He is also the "first fruits" of what we are to become.

Stage 7 for all of us, insofar as we successfully integrate at that level, is the recapitulation of all our previous good, both that which others put in us and that which we have created. It is also the unpoisoning and healing of all evil experiences. As the demonic self-systems shrivel away, positive aspects of the sub-selves are united to and fulfilled within the wholistic agape self. Nothing good is lost and much poisoned by evil is regained in renovated form.

The childlikeness, innocence, wonder, creativity and play of stages 1 and 2 are brought in. The idealism, romanticism, poetry and pietism of stage 3 are recaptured, renewed and treasured. The discipline, order and organizing logos of stage 4 are there to be brought to every problem and task. The openness to the new and the democratic sense of stage 5 contribute tolerance, leadership qualities and balanced responsibility. The universal perspective of stage 6, the vision of the infinite worth and equality of all God's children, is constantly brought to bear on every issue and problem.

To picture more clearly the knitting up of the stages within imagine this: One of the most common fantasies in our daydreams is having given a great speech or performance and having the whole audience arise, applaud and cheer. Assuming that we have done something which serves the kingdom of love, all of the levels of our personality, all of our inner persona reflecting all the stages of our development, join in enjoying the applause. Each level has its own quality of enjoyment. Stages 1 and 2 within us are like a little girl who having tap-danced is performing a sweet curtsy and being applauded. She anticipates the hugs and praise her parents will give her afterward. The stage 3 adolescent within us is imagining as he smiles and bows how his friends in the peer group will envy him and stand in awe of him and how his enemies who have put him down will be silenced. This is much the way King David writes in his psalms when he calls upon God for a victory so clever that it will send his enemies slinking away in shame. The stage 4 and 5 persona will smile while he sedately lifts a hand to acknowledge the storm of approbation, is thinking of awards and testimonial dinners which will reward his services to humanity. The stage 6 sub-self (assuming we are now far enough along to be sensitive to its presence), simply smiles at having brought knowledge, aesthetic satisfaction or laughter to many people. It is reward enough simply to have done it. And the stage 7 persona, to the extent we are aware of its power within us at all, is lifting eyes upward, barely hearing the applause, enjoying the way the whole experience joins the music of the spheres and swings in harmony with the love of God in and through all creation.

All of this rejoicing is ours simultaneously, like a seven part chorus, singing in harmony. And it is all of it quite healthy, the lower being cleansed by and integrated with the higher.

This does not include the grand likelihood that in other lives we shall be in close, perhaps telepathic, communications with multitudes.

Perfection

Berdyaev said we are destined not just for justification and forgiveness but for perfection. The god-self, as we have seen, is perfect in the same pattern as God's perfection.

Perfect freedom is the necessary condition for perfect love. Perfect inner unity is the condition for perfect freedom. Cosmic expansion is a condition for all three.

The word perfection can be misleading. It does not (or should not) mean complete or finished. The god-pattern is perfect in the sense that it can exist only as a fusion of the four polarities in their unity and interdependence. We are never complete. We can always be enriched further and go on to ever more elaborate and exciting creative play just as God does. There is no outer limit on our growth because there is no limit to the variety implied in loving creativity in community joined to endless time and limitless power.

The way of salvation, in this life, is to choose resolutely to live in the god-self as much as possible, in community with other seekers, and to put to death the old selves – the demonic self-systems – through disciplined neglect. It is to accept forgiveness for all our failures and to forgive others. It is to deliberately put ourselves in the path of the struggle, suffering and grace which will change us. That means to go deliberately into new challenging relationships and new environments of struggle for justice.

And to do all these things with celebration, enjoyment and play.

Consider or discuss perfection and godliness. Notice that in Matthew's version of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus commands us to be perfect as God is perfect, but in Luke's parallel version in the 6th chapter, we are commanded to be merciful as God is merciful, and the basic import is that we are to be as forgiving as God is.

Notes

1. *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature*, The Viking Press, NY, 1971, page 109
2. *Waiting for God*, Harper & Row, Publishers, San Francisco, 1951, 1973, page 97
3. Quoted in *Breakthrough*, page 302
4. Summarized from Maslow, Abraham, *Toward a Psychology of Being*, (2nd edition), D. Van Nostrand Co., Inc., NY, 1962, pages 104-114
5. See Geddes MacGregor, *He Who Lets Us Be, A New Theology of Love*, Seabury Press, 1975, Paragon Publishers, New York, 1987

8. Liberation in the Age of the Spirit

The third creative revelation in the Spirit will have no holy scripture, it will be no voice from on high, it will be accomplished in man and humanity – it is an anthropological revelation, an unveiling of the Christology of man.

- Nicholas Berdyaev ¹

Berdyaev's vision of the "Third Age" has implications for personal spirituality as well as for the evolution of Christianity. In respect to the individual, he claims that a higher creative being is unattainable when God is seen as transcendent to man, and that it is only possible in another stage of religious life, "when God in man is immanent." In cultural terms, the "Third Age" will mean the exodus of humanity from religious guardianship, from a Church that has been more intellectual and physical than spiritual, concretizing itself in institutional structures and dogmatic codes. He insists that the first task of a Christian renaissance, of religious maturity, is "to overcome this heteronomous consciousness." In the new age, humanity will turn "not to the physical but to the spiritual body of the Church."

- Madonna Kolbenschlag ²

Part II of this study is about faith and life in the age of the Spirit.

The age of the Spirit has two strategic meanings for this course: (1) The term symbolizes that theology has to change as we change, as society changes, and as history brings new challenges. God hasn't changed; rather, we have to continually play catch-up.

God precedes us in history, like a cloud or pillar of fire, leaving signposts, hints and clues which we must interpret. And the only way we catch up is to become more like God and to reflect on the changes in and around us.

(2) In a slightly narrower focus, the age of the Spirit indicates that religion centered on justification, redemption and forgiveness is too narrow. This has been the limitation of the old Catholicism and the Protestantism of the Reformation. It could take growth and change only so far in the right direction.

Before law and redemption comes thanksgiving for the creation and celebration of it. Otherwise, nothing about law and justification fall happily into place. Beyond law and redemption is creativity, the flowering of human freedom and creative response to God's love.

- + Thanksgiving/Celebration
- + Justification/Forgiveness
- + Creativity/Co-creation with God

There has been qualitative change in history. It can be traced and defined and analyzed. The long-term trend is toward greater freedom, away from heteronomous authority, rules and laws and customs which control us arbitrarily and seek to compress us into little socially approved boxes.

Liberation, Freedom and Wholeness

Liberation, as in Liberation Theology, has become a code word for the total liberation of humanity from all forms of bondage, inner and outer. It is in this course..

More often, I use the word wholeness, but in a way which includes all the senses of liberation. Total liberation presupposes the inner wholeness which has power at all the four poles of agape, and it is such liberated people who most effectively accomplish the social liberation of equality, justice and peace.

This is not to say that social restructuring must await the individual fulfillment of all. Not at all. In fact, the struggle for justice is an essential part of our process of arriving at total liberation as individuals.

The word liberation is broader and more inclusive than freedom. Liberation is the freedom granted by power at all four

poles of the structure of agape: that is, freedom, inclusiveness, compassion and inner unification.

Godlike freedom is one dimension of the new strong person we are intended to become. To fulfill God's plan for every individual it is necessary for all of us eventually to be liberated from the brain-washing we undergo in any culture. We have to cut the umbilical cord of dependence upon society and other people in order to float free and attain godly autonomy. We must come to autonomy, but unless we come to it in unity with the other three dimensions of wholeness, including compassion, it is a false kind of freedom and highly destructive.

What Berdyaev and Kolbenschlag call the age of the Spirit awaits the emergence of such children of God. See the eighth chapter of Romans.

The age of the Spirit does not mean, as in Joachim of Fiore, that there are three successive ages which correspond to the three persons of the Trinity. This is only a bit of poetic fancy. What is important is rather that there is change and development in history following the trajectory of the Omega Point, toward a culmination in which the unity of all beings is accomplished in harmony with the ultimate in individual freedom and creativity. It is oneness enclosing a fecund variety and complexity.

The sessions following this deal with various aspects of the age of the Spirit as it is expressed in faith, life and social organization.

Autonomy to Theonomy

Kolbenschlag sees a movement from heteronomous to autonomous and calls us beyond that theonomous.

Heteronomy is control by outside authority imposed by sanctions and social conditioning. Autonomy is freedom from such authority, but one which may eventuate only in devastating loneliness and new forms of bondage. Theonomy means the rule of God, but a rule in the form of an inner self-control based upon a perception of the higher satisfactions and joy of godlike wholeness. It is a self-chosen inner rule.

Kolbenschlag's interpretation of theonomy draws upon Kierkegaard and Tillich:

*Tillich's notion of theonomy, like Kierkegaard's concept of the religious existence, is a synthesis and equilibrium sustained between the tendency to self-sufficiency and to self-transcendence. It is "autonomous reason united to its own depth," to the ground of its own existence, God. Human relations and personal fulfillment are not surrendered to the destruction of the will-to-power or libido, and at the same time they are not sacrificed to social, ecclesiastical or political norms.*³

We must go beyond radical individualism. We transcend the false autonomy into a fullness of being which liberates us into community, into the free giving and receiving of compassion and caring.

Berdyaev pointed out often in his writings that while the modern trek into radical individualism has been necessary in the movement of God's purpose in history, it is also tremendously destructive, socially and individually.

Theonomy is the opposite to theocracy. Theocracy, either in ancient Israel or modern Iran, means that religious absolutes are legislated into law and enforced by the state; one religion is united with the government and dominates all of life in the name of God. Theonomy means the rule of God, but through an inner gyroscope which is liberating rather than stifling to human creativity.

Theonomy does not mean the individual moral judgment is sole monarch. Individual opinion is put to the test of the religious and secular communities. The age of the Spirit inevitably affirms some form of democracy wherein laws are enacted according to the will of all the people with due respect to right of dissent and the rights of minorities.

A democracy which was made up of a majority of persons with a stage 6-7 perspective, note in passing, would be a much more effective and compassionate form of government. It would be undergirded by strong individual convictions about the equality and rights of all people.

Summary

Let's summarize here the various directions from which we have looked at and defined this liberating fullness of God's immanent power in the previous six seven sessions:

Kohlberg's Stages

1. Kohlberg's stages of moral development help us understand the dynamics and direction of qualitative change in individuals and in history. We see how laws, customs and mores have served as scaffolding. The external forms have held us in being and held people together in tribes and nations while we advanced through the early stages of our cultural childhood.

Mature freedom is made possible eventually as we come to incarnate the more inclusive, complex and wholistic structures of the post-conventional stages 5, 6 and 7. From the exalted perspective of these stages we see that our institutions and mores must be rebuilt around the universal/cosmic perspective of stages 6 and 7, where morality becomes increasingly a matter of internalized, self-affirmed principles and social perspectives based on the equal rights of all people. It is also where the right of every individual to become the fullness of the four-fold agape redefines the inner meaning of every law, rule and other form of social restraint.

Agape

2. The Structure of Agape: In session 7, we defined the transformation and fulfillment of individual freedom and why it comes with stage 7n. 7n indicates stage 7 and all the unimaginable stages which may lie beyond it. It is here for the first time we float free from lusts, desires, ambitions, needs, and dependencies and become determiners of our fate rather than having our wills controlled by internal or external demonic powers.

Wholistic freedom is the autonomy which is proper and possible only in the form it takes as one corner of the four-fold structure of agape. This is freedom integrally related to and a part of a higher synthesis with the other three corners of full being: empathetic compassion, cosmic inclusiveness, and internal unity. These four dimensions define the inner wholistic pattern which alone sustains healthy autonomy.

Those who approach the subject from a nonreligious point of view can find common ground with what here is called theonomy through the direct experience of the four-fold structure of wholeness.

Emptying and Idolatry

3. Meister Eckhardt and the *via negativa*. There are two paradigms in the Christian tradition which help define godlike autonomy. The one is the image of emptying or denying oneself, and the other is the image of freedom from idolatry.

The freedom which arises at stages 6 and 7 correlates with what Meister Eckhardt teaches about emptying ourselves to make room for God, the negative way. This is the truth in the egolessness urged by both eastern and western mysticism.

This seems to advocate that we extinguish the ego in order that God may be all. What it actually means is that we empty out the egocentrism of the demonic self-systems. We do this by refusing to live in them and instead live only in the wholistic god-self. In this way, the immature and destructive wants and needs within us cease to intrigue and tempt us with their neurotic non-solutions to life's problems.

This is also the truth behind the assertion in the letters of John in the New Testament that no one who loves the world can also love God. It underlies Jesus' radical command to hate father and mother for the sake of the kingdom.

This negative way involves leaving behind the wants, dependencies, needs, desires, lusts and ambitions of the demonic self-systems. We choose to live rather in the inner god-self, the self-system which incarnates the fullness of God's agape. We become that love, which is to be like God and one with God.

Superficially, the negative way sounds like a depreciation of the body and the sensuous pleasures of body and mind. Actually, the opposite is the case. Only as we are freed from control by immature and self-defeating wants, desires, lusts and ambitions are we liberated to the full enjoyment, without guilt, of all sensuous and aesthetic pleasures. This is the truth behind Jesus' command, "Seek the kingdom of heaven and its justice first and all these other things will also be added to you." We lose all to gain all. We die to the dull painful monochrome of the humdrum world to live to the Technicolor of God's sensuous, good creation.

Idolatry

The other biblical image is idolatry. Idolatry for us moderns is not worship of other gods, literally. It is dependence for power of being upon anything which is weaker and less loving than God. Idolatrous attachments reshape us in the image of the lesser power and bind us to its truncated and demonic values.

Kolbenschlag helps make these images of emptying and idolatry clearer to modern people through the example of a woman's freeing herself from dependency. She must pass through nothingness (no-thing) when she sheds all the forms of identity society has fixed upon her, most of them forms of dependency. There is an emptying out of the old selves (the demonic, deficient fragments) to make way for a new strong identity of her own. In the time of passage there is a devastating experience of nothingness, of being no one.

Finally, liberated from all dependencies and the self-hate and insecurity which accompany them, she passes through autonomy to the full flowering of freedom in a new powerful self-sustaining identity.⁴ One of the elegant passages in this beautiful book is this:

*One cannot love another until one has properly loved oneself. One cannot love others or God unless one has power over oneself, the power to choose and act. A sense of self-worth and a sense of self-creation are fundamental to spiritual maturity. The kiss that Sleeping Beauty waits for is not that of any Prince, but the embrace of her own being.*⁵

God yearns for us to get out from under all dependencies, including dependence on God. This is done only as we are embraced by and embrace our own god-selves as the four-fold structure of agape.

The God-self

4. This course contends that there is within each of us the pattern of a whole or core self. As we identify with and live in this self, we rob the demonic self-systems within us of their strength and eventually put them to death.

When we understand theonomy or the rule of God in this way we see how it is a different kind of control from all others. It is an inner self-control of godlikeness. We have to voluntarily make that free, creative, expansive, loving self and destiny our own.

Liberation from the Past

We are in a time when social authority must arise through the participation and free consent of all the members. No longer may the long-faced custodians of wisdom and revelation give us a pat on the head and tell us, "We know best. We speak God's Word!" This is as true of the churches as it is of the state.

We are in an age of radical freedom, moreover, because the customs, laws and mores of the past no longer speak to our problems and certainly do not give us definitive guidance as to how to seek and find the wholeness and open-ended creativity which is godlikeness.

People are unsettled by the thought of this much individual freedom. Of course, there must continue to be laws regulating

morality, for instance, those protecting people against exploitation and violence. There will also continue to be social mores. But these must not be established by arbitrary authority from above, especially any form of theocracy which imposes some human view of God's laws on everyone as though God were a stifling law-giver rather than a parent full of liberating love.

Society must not refuse to move on to greater freedom. As the power of the higher stages begins increasingly to be released into history, it is not possible to go back again into the bondage of the past without such retreat taking the form of something far more destructive than past forms of oppression.

Prime examples of the demonism of such regressions are Hitler's Germany, Stalin's Soviet Union and Iran's Islamic fundamentalism. The new freedom presses powerfully from underneath. The modern state, to keep such control over people, finds it necessary to become more cruelly repressive than any tyranny of the past.

People who are engaged in what Erich Fromm called the "escape from freedom" support such regimes out of fear of chaos. They also support them, as we saw in session 6, in the frustrating search for a kind of glory fix which can allay the numbing fear of death and psychological insult of finitude.

Two Religions

We see here the confrontation of two kinds of religion. The one is a religion of law and dogma. The other approaches life characteristically with compassion, justice, openness, creativity, playfulness, freedom and joy, because it is intuited that these express God's own inner nature. God did not create the world to see a few people to heaven and to discard the multitudes into hell. God's creation is loving, creative play. Christian faith should imitate this in doctrine and practice.

This is what Berdyaev means by the age of the Spirit. It is the time when human beings are to make their creative contribution to God's plan.

Paul Tillich, quite independently from Berdyaev, referred to three ages in terms of the dominant forms which anxiety takes in each age. These three forms of anxiety correspond in a fascinating serendipitous way to Berdyaev's three ages. In the classical period, Tillich suggested, the dominant problem, spiritually and psychologically, was death and the anxiety related to dying. In medieval Europe, it was fear of hell and the anxiety related to punishment. In modern times, both of these are transcended and the dominant anxiety relates to loss of meaning. None of the three forms of anxiety passes away, but two are submerged in the dominant form.

These three anxieties tend to be re-lived in the same order by each of us in our development from childhood to adult. Maslow would probably have called the anxiety relating to loss of meaning a meta-anxiety. It is linked to age and development, arising from the more complex structures of stages 4 and above.

Creativity is seen to be central to salvation, then, at this stage where meta-anxiety of meaning comes to the fore.

In terms of morality and motivation, only the challenge of human creativity can enable us to rise above and finally conquer sin, death and the law (to use Paul's trio of ultimate enemies).

The fire of creativity propels us beyond ourselves as neither the cold commands of law nor the liberating warmth of forgiveness can. To use a modern analogy, freedom and creativity fuel the third stage of our rocket, after law and redemption have burned out.

Of course, as Berdyaev notes in the quote at the beginning of this session, neither law nor redemption have completed their work; they are still at work among those who have not yet resolved the challenges they raise. That includes myself and everyone I know. But God has far more in store for us and we have far more to contribute than is dreamed of within the narrow confines of law and redemption.

Creativity answers the questions of our age, the questions related to meaning: What are we saved to? What is the content of our lives supposed to be after we have been forgiven and have accepted that forgiveness? What could possibly be interesting enough to keep eternal life from being hellishly boring?

In traditional theology, what is being termed here the age of the Spirit comes under the heading of sanctification. This is the growth into holiness or godlikeness which follows upon repentance and forgiveness of sins. The difficulty in living with the traditional definitions is that they assume that with forgiveness and justification one is eligible to get into heaven. Thus sanctification becomes desirable but not necessary. I have suggested, rather, that salvation is becoming like God not mainly understood as going to a place called heaven. This puts sanctification, becoming godlike, in a pivotal place.

Creativity as Redemption

In our age, it seems to be increasingly true that creativity is the power which will save even those who have not yet fully recognized the desirability of being law-abiding.

An example: In working with street boys who were caught up in crime and violence, a man found that he could reach and change them by forming a club dedicated to repairing and operating motorcycles. The creativity and challenge involved in this activity began to lift these boys, for the first time, above issues of law and order, right and wrong, self or others. It created space in their lives for relationships and caused them to see something more to life than thrill-seeking. Creativity properly operates in the form of exploration and play at the beginning of our lives as well as later. The age of the Spirit is at the beginning of the human race and of each life as well as at the end.

At this point we must clarify the question of what is natural, both as the word is used in the term natural law and in everyday life.

Natural Law

Natural law is the main form of seductive bondage which is hidden in the religions in our day. Our liberation from the strictures of natural law becomes a high priority in our quest for godlike freedom and creativity for all.

From the earliest times, practices which seemed detrimental to social order on the part of the rulers of society were taboo, forbidden by the gods. Violation of the taboos brought sanctions ranging from acts of penance to exile or execution.

The content of some taboos made sense. Prohibition of incest protected the tribe from the dangers of inbreeding. Draining blood from slaughtered animals dealt realistically with the health threat of rotting meat in a hot climate.

Other taboos were based on superstition. They were at first a psychological survival mechanism, a primitive means of decoding and controlling a dangerous environment. Then, taboos became a primary means by which shaman and chief kept control of all the aspects of the life of the tribe and eliminated potential revolutionaries.

There is a sly wisdom in this system. Taboos, as with the structure of Christian natural law, are based on the prejudice of Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor. He really believed that people don't want freedom and have to be controlled for their own good. To keep people in line, the theory goes, it's a good idea to put them under discipline by denying them most of the pleasures of life. Or at least you allow fun only within prescribed bounds for those who conform. Along with this goes the senseless commonsense intuition that unless medicine tastes bad it is no good. Redemption and social order require superimposed suffering. If something feels good it must be bad for you. This religiously imposed suffering gives the poor something to struggle with and think about instead of rebelling to improve their lot.

Paul declared that Christ sets us all free from the Mosaic law. That left the job of redefining right and wrong, natural and unnatural to the church leaders. Paul and the other leaders had to struggle from the beginning against the antinomians who taught that freedom in Christ meant there are no more laws or rules, that anything and everything goes for Christians. At the other extreme were the Judaizers who wanted to bring back legalism.

New moralities are always built on the old. Paul borrowed from Stoicism as well as from Judaism. The rules and regulations of such moral reasoning is inevitably time- and culture-bound, reflecting the dominant prejudices of the age.

From the time of Constantine, the churches became chaplain to the nations of Christendom, advising the secular powers as to what is natural and unnatural. The sword of the state enforced a morality which the church defined.

Unfortunately, to keep its status in the Roman Empire, the church accommodated its morality to existing empire practice. Gradually the church moved from pacifism to allowing members to participate in war, and from there to blessing "just" wars. Having once gotten in bed with the state, the church found itself hard-pressed to gather up the tatters of its virginal moral indignation on any issue.

Aquinas

In the 13th century Thomas Aquinas came along with his definition of the relationship of nature and grace, laying the foundation for modern natural law theory. Humanity had indeed fallen and required God's intervention, he contended. But the God-given human faculty of reason had not been so distorted in the fall that it could not function to show the difference between right and wrong, natural and unnatural, in most matters. The Angelic Doctor turned to Aristotle for examples of reason observing nature and digging out a universal morality. Aristotle was an exemplar of how the divinely created reason of humanity, even operating in a pagan, could see and develop God's own natural law.

Unfortunately for the credibility of the presuppositions, Aristotle required considerable correction and emendation from the scriptures.

To control behavior the church leadership felt it necessary eventually to be specific on all moral issues. The goal was to give every believer a simple yes or no on every moral alternative. Inevitably, there was disagreement among authorities. The Bible is not all that detailed and has outright contradictions in it. Just as few dogmas have been "always and everywhere believed," so few moral principles are universal or will even stand up to the test of reason, given different cultural perspectives. There is a wide degree of divergence of belief and practice as to what is natural and unnatural across the human race and across history. It was necessary to appeal to authority and to have such differences resolved by the magisterium.

Aquinas's definition of natural law became largely normative for the Catholic Church until the early 20th century. A great deal of its content had also spilled over into the churches of the Reformation, as a matter of unexamined common assumptions.

With the Enlightenment, large cracks began to appear in the natural law system. Substantial parts of it were simply cast out, especially with the rise of capitalism and democracy.

Two examples: usury and kings. Aquinas's formulation of the natural and unnatural had assumed, with parts of the Bible, that taking interest on money loaned was against the will of God. He also supported earlier authorities who contended that there would always be kings and always should be.

Mercantile capitalism knocked the first in the head and the American Constitution and French Revolution did in the other.

It is interesting to speculate what would have occurred if the church had followed the contemporary of Aquinas, Meister Eckhardt, instead. Eckhardt was condemned as a heretic. Aquinas was first condemned and then exonerated. In this century, interestingly, Eckhardt is being resurrected while Aquinas has fallen into great neglect.

The theology of Aquinas is like a formal English garden, all diamond shaped and round plots of flowers separated by orderly graveled paths of uniform width and carefully trimmed hedges. There is a place for everything and everything is in its place. It is clear where every boundary is and what is outside the bounds.

In Eckhardt, however, we have the sense of entering a dark forest, where each turning brings something new and amazing, where we are on dry ground at one moment and up to our ankles in mud the next admiring a water lily. Eckhardt is open to the

ecstasy of new discovery, enjoyment, play, freedom and creativity. In comparison, Aquinas is pretty dull.

Berdyayev saw the overthrow of natural law as part of a larger process of human liberation which God had set in motion from the beginning. Humanity becomes directly involved as a co-creator only in the age of the Spirit:

*Authority, any form of authority, is in essence a relative thing, it is not sacred, there is nothing noumenal about it, it has merely a transitional and functional importance in the life of society.*⁶

*The religion of the Spirit will be the religion of man when he has come of age; it will constitute his emergence from childhood and youth.*⁷

Real development and progress in the world are the result not of a regularly-working and necessary process, but of creative acts, of the invasion of the realm of necessity by the realm of freedom. There is nothing more untrue and enslaving than to invest with a sacrosanct character all those concrete forms which have found embodiment in history, those solid bodies of history, in which men are wont to see either the direct action of the Divine Spirit or a manifestation of objective spirit.

*The truth is that all these "sacred" historical embodiments have been relative forms of objectification, an adjustment of the spirit to the weighty burden of the world in its disintegration and at the same time shackled condition.*⁸

One of God's objectives seems clearly to be getting us out from under external control and into inner control under the guidance of the joyous, playful community of the Spirit. This is essential to God's project to make us godlike in the pattern of creative love. The taboos of the past are to be reexamined. Some are to be eliminated and others totally redefined, under the guidance of the Spirit

Conclusion

Natural law, in all its traditional senses, is dead. We are cast, evidently by God's will and intention, on a new search for what is natural and what is unnatural. This opens the way for exciting, liberating experiment, which I am certain is crucial to our growing into godlikeness.

Our fall into sin, into distrust, anxiety, hatred, lust for power and security, has twisted beyond recognition whatever human nature was originally. Our way out is not back to original nature, but rather forward toward the realization of what Berdyayev and others have called a "transformed nature", a new being. Its corollary is a new society, crafted intentionally with justice, compassion and creativity.

Some believe this opens the way to moral anarchy. It need not at all! We have the whole history of successes and failures of all the human race. We all know enough of good and of justice to create a utopia if we only lived the highest we know. We have the intuitions and conscience of the god-self within. Within the inner sanctuary of each individual we have the steady pressure of the sensed Yes and No of the Holy Spirit.

And finally we have one another in the community of the Spirit.

The first seven sessions of this study attempt to show how to transcend a shallow, unguided pragmatism by defining what is meant by agape both in terms of the four-fold structure of wholeness and the enrichment of this definition by the results of the researches of Abraham Maslow and the insights of developmental psychology both in Kohlberg's work and Robert Kegan's.

It is only necessary for us to follow at each turning the highest way, the clearly charted pathway of the structure of agape.

As the god-self emerges from under oppression by the anxiety- and resentment-ridden demonic self-systems, we are guided individually and collectively toward a healthy, creative freedom in all areas of life.

As Berdyayev taught, God waits with eager anticipation for the new and beautiful wonders humanity will create as we emerge from the sheltering scaffold of law and custom into the glorious freedom of a transformed and transforming new nature.

The next session discusses the implications of our rejection of natural law for human sexuality.

Questions for Thought

Consider or discuss: Try to list other taboos or assumptions which fall under the category, roughly, of natural law? Which should be eliminated? What would replace them in ethics or morality? By what criteria or principles would you establish the morality of the replacement? Read ahead in session 14 if you wish.

1. Quoted by Madonna Kolbenschlag in *Kiss Sleeping Beauty Good-bye*, page 179, from *The Meaning of the Creative Act*, pages 107, 320

2. *ibid.*, pages 178-9

3. *op. cit.*, page 25

4. *op. cit.*, page 200

5. *op. cit.*, page 28

6. *The Beginning and the End*, page 150

7. *The Spirit and Reality*, page 195

8. *ibid.*, page 147

9. Sex in the Age of the Spirit

... it must be made clear that to hold that an external pattern of morality is inapplicable in some instances does not imply that we condone fornication and adultery: wayward sexuality is often appallingly destructive. Those who read this essay with care will realize that we are asking for an approach that starts from something deeper than a conventional moral judgment: rather it is from a concern for full responsibility in personal relationships. ... Christianity is not a book of rules, the application of which has to be worked out in a pattern. It springs from a living relationship and its fulfillment is in relationship. Its implications can, therefore be reached only through an understanding which is personal and intimate; without compassion there can be no understanding at all. The compassion of Jesus was his point of entry into each human situation. We must accept and begin from the truth about each human being in his own predicament, here and now in the modern world.

- Towards a Quaker View of Sex¹

The revolution in values and behavior in sexuality is faster moving and deeper than in almost any other area of life. These changes illustrate most dramatically what going beyond natural law and other legalistic systems involves.

In place of the arbitrary straitjacket of natural law we will take the structure of agape as our guide. I am talking about the four-fold structure of wholeness spelled out in the first seven sessions of this study:

FREEDOM ——— RELATEDNESS
EXPANSION ——— INTEGRITY

There is a common meeting ground here for religious and secular theorists and practitioners. There will be, of course, differences of opinion, but they are of the kind which can be argued and put to the test without any appeal to scripture or divine revelation.

Defining Responsible Sexuality

The basic principles which undergird a new ethics of creativity and freedom are presented in session 14. The same ethical and moral principles apply in the area of sex as will in all the other areas of life.

A healthy, creative Christian sexual ethics is based upon agape. This means that we have to treat all other **persons as of enormous value to God, as ends in themselves**, and never merely as means to our satisfaction. We are required always to **put first the development of the god-self of the other** alongside our own.

When we consider matters of sex, three corollaries of this stance are especially important:

1. **Honesty, openness, and truth-telling.** Whenever a right-thinking person steps wrong in matters of sex you almost always find that he did something he was not willing to talk about to others. I am not speaking here of the reluctance of a gay man, for instance, to expose himself to possible persecution, or of other such revelations. I am speaking of two lovers committed to a long-term relationship when one is tempted to sexual adventuring of which the partner would not approve. Another example would be where one partner fails to admit to an infectious disease.

A dependable rule of thumb when one is uncertain is to ask, "Would I feel ashamed or guilty if the ones I love most knew about this?" If the answer is yes, then it is probably not a moral act for that person. And in most cases the act will also be injurious to one or more persons.

2. **Keeping our commitments and covenants.** This does not mean that the vows involved in marriage, for instance, should never be altered or reversed. But it means that we are to exhaust other alternatives before we break a relationship to which we have pledged ourselves. And we labor to make the decisions involved joint decisions if at all possible, and decisions which both partners feel will serve to the greatest degree the four-fold development of themselves and the children.

The same applies to other covenants and promises; they are kept until, in a process of open communication, they are with due deliberation altered or abandoned.

3. **Protecting the defenseless.** Those seeking to live by agape will put a special emphasis on protecting those unable to make adult decisions or defend themselves from exploitation, such as the mentally handicapped and children.

Middle Principles

These three principles operate as what have been called middle axioms. They are rules of thumb which help in decision-making, more specific than general terms like love or justice, but they are less specific and confining than laws and rules and mores which apply to a particular act or class of acts.

Natural is what nurtures, cherishes and builds up. The unnatural is that which is hurtful, which works to strengthen the demonic self-systems with their lusts, envies, jealousies, anxieties, hates, and violence.

This re-definition of natural and unnatural is a meeting ground for experiment by all peoples, whatever their faith.

For us as Christians it is that and something more. For us, health, love, and goodness are grounded not only in the cumulative experience of humanity as to what is helpful and hurtful. It is also grounded in the inner god-self and its wholistic vision of what we are intended to become as individuals and as members of the human family. See again session 7.

People who are consistently guided by agape are more careful not to hurt others, much more careful in what they do in the

lives of the young, the weak, the mentally limited, those who are vulnerable. The judgments which fall on us due to careless words, of which Jesus speaks, is that we are actually injured. We suffer an inner contraction, further inner fragmentation, and a strengthening of one or more demonic self-system within us. Our victims are similarly injured.

In this sense, all sins are punished. Hurt and damage continue even after we have been forgiven and have accepted forgiveness.

The perils of sexual freedom under agape would seem to dictate a hands off policy in sexuality so that more damage will not be done. But if we are honest we have to recognize that our hands are all over sexuality everywhere all the time. Humanity is carrying on debilitating and destructive experiments every day, both in Iran's repressive society and our permissive one.

The taboo mentality of natural law and the conflicted practices of the present have produced multitudes of deeply injured people, crippled sexually, whipsawed by all the demonic emotions the race is subject to. If we fail to meet the challenge in the area of human sexuality, I doubt we can solve any of our other major social problems with any finality.

From this springboard we plunge into the angry waves whipped by the hot issues surrounding sexuality.

Male and Female

Natural law is most discredited in our day because of the way it allowed women's lives and bodies to be owned and controlled. This was assumed to be the natural order willed by God, that women were property of their fathers until they were married, after which their husbands took over command.

Prohibitions against premarital sex and adultery have been directed mainly against women. Property could not be used without permission of the owner. This was true in most cultures, not just in Judaism and Christianity.

Women suffered especially because of misappropriation of the Adam and Eve story. Eve was assumed to be responsible for the fall of humanity. This was extended to mean that woman are weak, seductive, vessels of uncleanness. Women have to be sheltered and men have to be protected from them.

It was bizarre to draw these conclusions from the simple narratives of Genesis. This portrait of unclean, seductive woman was a central pillar of the whole edifice built by men to regulate sex according to their patriarchal prejudices.

This one example indicates perhaps more powerfully than any other how outmoded the concept of natural law is.

Under the implications of wholistic agape, men and women are equally loved by God and each gender is entitled to all the freedoms and opportunities accorded to the other.

Nothing else I could say on this could compare with the excellent recent writings by feminist theologians and biblical scholars.

Sex Between Partners

One of the great crimes of natural law has been to make all kinds of sex sinful except that between husband and wife within the marital relation.

Even here it has been wrong to feel good unless copulation included the possibility of conception. Most of the Church Fathers (sic) would have been happier if there were no good feelings connected with conceiving children. This is a bizarre judgment and wrong-headed reductionism.

Sex to orgasm is only a more strongly felt sensual pleasure. There is no "natural" reason for limiting it to any age or relationship. Babies should be allowed to play with their genitals and children to masturbate. These are healthy.

For Christians the new morality and ethics derives societal permissions and prohibitions from agape. Others can think in terms of what produces healthy people who are strong, loving, playful, free and peaceful.

The words sexual freedom have been misused by those who would exploit others sexually. True freedom is always freedom under the control of the agape. So wherever the words sexual freedom appear in this session we are talking of sex under agape. This is not an absence of controls but a different kind of control. This will make it clear that we are only free to engage in sexual activity when it does not harm another.

Indeed, agape goes much further. We can engage in sexual activity only when it can potentially help the other toward healthy wholeness. This rules out all kinds of exploitative, manipulative and violent sex. But, of course, the same principle of seeking the highest for the other and self is what must also govern all our decisions.

Sex and Love

One question which misrepresents sexual freedom is this: Doesn't it separate sex from love? This assumes that the word love has some one meaning. It does not. True sexual freedom, redefined and fitted into a new moral framework, will indeed begin to separate sexual activity from immature love and put it instead under the control of agape, just as every other aspect of life must be. Sexual activity has to be brought out from under the control of lust, need, striving for power over others or submission to them.

This is a matter of overall maturation, as discussed in sessions 4 through 7. As we move through Kohlberg's six stages, if such expansion of the boundaries of the personality is matched by a depth of compassion and empathy, freedom, and internal unification, then our sexuality also comes under that control and is liberated into joy, playfulness, caring and sensuous delight.

Is it safe for immature people to engage in love-making? Well, it's as safe as any other activity in this adventure of living. We immature people harm each other all the time, but we don't call a halt to other human interaction because of such dangers.

One poor argument against responsible free sexual activity is the contention that it will cheapen or depreciate sex through overuse, the boredom of familiarity. People get tired of sex with a particular partner because the demonic self-systems are inherently restless; nothing they do is satisfying.

Mature people continue enjoying and elaborating sex with one partner to a growing enrichment of both the sensuous and the spiritual dimensions of the experience.

Sexual relations do settle down to some routine with time, as with all the activities of life. But a continually growing and enriching mutual relationship between two people can keep sex play and love-making also continually renewed. With immature, driven people all relationships are somewhat exploitative and get boring.

Nor is such freedom any danger to that madness we call romantic love. We have all seen two older people, who have had a wide variety of sexual experiences and partners, go crazy over each other. The future of romantic love, for such limited value as it has, is quite safe.

The Right to Intimacy

Long-term intimate relationships, with or without sex, are essential to our growth into godlikeness. If we miss such nurture in intimacy when we are young, the deficiency must be made up later.

Sex, particularly loving sex play, is a valuable gateway into the practice of intimacy. Once the decision is made that sex play is not confined to marriage by a natural law perspective, then it becomes possible for others in society to enjoy this opening outward to mutual enjoyment and intimacy of other kinds. Not only possible. The question must be reversed: Why should anyone be denied practice in the physical aspects of intimacy?

Sex play becomes an important preparation for mature intimacy. Moreover, it plays an important new and creative role as it helps defuse the unrealistic expectations with which people often enter relationships.

The intimacy which is most upbuilding takes place in long-term relationships that are at the same time physical, psychological and spiritual. We see the negative evidence all around us of people who lack this depth intimacy. We see the disorientation, loneliness and violence of people who have not experienced and learned such intimacy in a community of dependable caring.

Without the experience and learning of intimacy, the other three aspects of our four-fold wholeness also cannot be made to flourish. Without intimacy and compassion, freedom becomes license. Expansion of the self becomes the miscellaneous collection of facts or the focus of our expanded content on demonic ends. And inner coherence deteriorates, as energies are turned increasingly to the strengthening of the fragmenting demonic self-systems rather than the unifying god-self. Intimacy breeds the only real compassion the human race knows, and without compassion we are all lost.

If this is true, then church and society are evading one of the deepest problems in our society. Church and society still push the nuclear family of husband, wife and children as the only social grouping which can teach true intimacy. But, if this is the case, then the majority of people in modern society are now left out. They are expected to do without the creative stimulation of sex play which can help draw people out of egocentrism into further advance into godliness. What are single people, gays and lesbians, the physically deformed or otherwise unattractive to do? Evidently, they are to do without.

This is not to say that all forms of intimacy involve sex play or sexual fulfillment. It rather suggests that sex can be an opening to intimacy for many. And for all the rest, you have to turn the question around and ask why anyone should be denied sexual fulfillment.

Touch is vital to health and important to all kinds of intimacy. Yet people shy from hugs because of fear of sex or being thought to be seeking sex. Should not life be, from one end to the other, a rich, full, joyous and sensuous experience? Yes, and this is evidently God's plan that it should, since S/He gave us these wonderful sensuous bodies to enjoy.

The need of all for sensuous/sexual experience is a problem the larger society can't tackle comprehensively because it is too deeply divided. The churches are unwilling to experiment creatively because they are structured to avoid controversy rather than deal with it. This passes the task to small experimental groups to try to show the way.

I've already suggested that we must redefine sexual arousal and climax as simply more intense caresses, occupying the strongest points on the continuum of sensual pleasures. They are not in themselves intrinsically good or evil, but only in relation to the motives and ends involved in their experience.

Society seems to be preoccupied with the damage done by sexual lust and obsession. But these have to do with the way the demonic self-systems love, obsessively and immaturely, and do not have to do really with results of sexual freedom.

Lust is more basic than sex. Lust is at root always lust for power of being. This ontological lust has a way of attaching itself to sex in the form of sadism, masochism, obsessions of various kinds and dashing in and out of relationships.

Problems in sex are most often problems in power relationships. But abuse in sex is not curbed and certainly cannot be eliminated by a sexually repressive climate. In fact, there is considerable evidence that a freer climate of sexuality, if combined with healthy education and experience, will begin the process of eliminating such damaging perversions and obsessions. Surely, if all children enjoyed carefully regulated and appropriate sexual fulfillment from an early age, accompanied by genuine affection, caring and nurturing attention, there would be an enormous reduction in the internal rage and self-hate which fuel the violence related to sex and all other relations in our sick society.

One corollary: greater sexual freedom requires even more effort to protect children and others who are vulnerable from sexual abuse.

Homosexuality

Defining natural as we have above, setting it free from cultural prejudices, we will now find no obstacle to viewing gay and lesbian people as just as normal as heterosexuals.

Once one is liberated from the need to control sex for the sake of bearing children, perpetuating the family line, managing

the lives and bodies of women, or just because it feels good, prohibitions against same sex loving and marriage are seen to be irrational.

There is no need to examine the seven scriptural passages which seem to condemn same sex loving. Excellent scholars have shown convincingly how such prohibitions are culture related prejudices similar to those directed against woman.

The argument that same sex loving produces neurotic or socially maladjusted people is not supported by evidence. The twenty or so gay and lesbian friends I've had are, I would say, better adjusted and more saintly than most of the other people I know. Most are Quaker Christians. We would be hard pressed to establish that homosexuals are less well adjusted emotionally than heterosexuals. Of course, being called deviant, in itself, places an abnormally powerful stress on people on top of the other considerable stresses of life.

Gay and lesbian people have some unique and wonderful gifts to share with the rest of us, and a special role to play in God's strategy.

This ethical stance applies whether homosexual orientation is genetic or learned or some of both.

In a time of severe overpopulation in the world, it would make sense not to discourage such relationships.

Abortion

Abortion is left to last because it is, in many ways, the most painfully divisive issue we face. It gives me the most personal agony and uncertainty.

I believe abortion should be permitted, but not necessarily for all the reasons its advocates give. Christians cannot consistently argue that a woman's body belongs to herself to do with as she pleases. We are all stewards and nurturers of our bodies, as we are gardeners of this world's environment; our lives are intertwined in interdependence. Our bodies are also, as Paul said, temples of the Holy Spirit. In addition, pregnancy introduces into the equation something which both belongs to the body and also has its own rights.

The right to life people also use specious arguments. They base their claim on natural law theory. They arbitrarily redefine the commandment, "Thou shalt not kill." This commandment is not about abortion directly, nor suicide.

Most Protestants, Jews and Catholics who hold the so-called pro-life viewpoint are inconsistent. They are quite willing to kill in war and to practice capital punishment. The only fully consistent anti-abortion advocates are the pacifists who hold all life sacred.

These three statements sum up my own opinions on abortion practice:

1. The personhood of a fetus does not begin until after birth. The conferring of a name is the symbol of the birth of the soul. This is consistent with the definitions of soul, self, and god-self in the first seven sessions.

Laws which rule that life begins with conception cloud the issue. The question rather is when personhood begins. Fetuses have human genetic structure but are not yet persons. The burden of proof is on those who say otherwise and the State should not intervene and mandate a particular decision.

2. Abortion normally should take place to protect the mother's life or health or to prevent the birth of a fetus which is unwanted or whose quality of life will be miserable. If at all possible, the abortion should take place in the first trimester.

3. There is no good evidence that God wants quantity instead of quality.

The world has too many people by far, too many to feed, too large a burden on the ecosystems, and too many for quality of life to be established for us all even if there were no further increase.

The birth of a child in the United States or another of the advanced countries is a special ecological disaster. That child will, during life, consume six to ten times more than a child in the poorer countries. Much of this is consumption of nonrenewable resources. This is a senseless squandering of the quality of life of future generations.

The anti-abortion people like to say sarcastically at this point: "Well, if there are too many people, I suppose next you'll be wanting to get rid of some of the useless old folks, maybe set a limit on how many years a person is allowed to live."

They are arguing that abortion produces a callousness toward all life which spills over into other areas. This is possible but not necessary. And they know well that there is a profound difference between the fetus, which as yet is not human except biologically, and older persons who have accrued valuable spirit and the freedom to decide whether they want to live or die.

Agape is not narrowly pragmatic; it does not base moral decisions only on results. Consequentialism does not an ethics make. Overpopulation is not an adequate argument for the rightness of abortion. But since there are other substantial reasons for the rightness of the practice, then overpopulation becomes an additional reason for permitting abortion. Unwanted children or those whom people cannot support and give quality lives have a right not to be born.

Pro-lifers urge that adoptive homes can be found for unwanted children. However, I haven't seen them advocating much concerning the million abandoned children wandering the streets of Brazilian cities (to mention only one country), who live by and for crime, drugs, and sex, and whose lives are miserable and short.

Most pro-lifers argue directly or indirectly from some natural law position. As with the arguments against birth control, the Catholic natural law assumption is based on a doctrine of providence which constricts human freedom down close to zero. This view holds that God directly controls or wills the conception of every child as well as its time of death. This implies that God wills the birth of every child once conceived. This is a wrong-headed doctrine of providence as we see in session 19.

While I have stated my opinions with customary force, I confess that on this issue especially I am not so certain I am right. This is why I would say that where possible abortions should be confined to the first trimester.

Conclusion

Towards a Quaker View of Sex adds:

A moral code, even when accepted for the best of reasons, necessarily tends to be negative rather than positive, to be concerned with "Thou shalt not" rather than with what an individual should give to his fellows. We are much concerned about the whole content of human relationship. ... Loving does not merely mean doing good works, it goes further than feeding the hungry and clothing the naked. It means warmth and intimacy, open-heartedness and overwhelming generosity of hand and spirit. It means a desire to know and a and a courageous willingness to be known. Loving implies commitment to the other person, involvement in that person's life, whatever it may cost in suffering, whether that suffering comes through being repudiated or through identification and sharing.

The life of society desperately needs this warmth of giving and receiving. Everywhere we see sociability without commitment or intimacy, and especially in our towns, intense isolation and loneliness. We see human energy that should be creative and loving deflected into activities that are coldly power-seeking; we see love inhibited, frustrated or denied, turning into its opposite – into ruthlessness and aggression. ²

One thing we can be sure of: the sexual revolution will continue and expand, with occasional predictable periods of backlash. It will continue to be both liberating and hurtful. Those who seek to live in the age of the Spirit will remember that God's objective is that we become the wholeness of the divine nature, summed up in the word agape.

Questions for Thought

Review session 8 on natural law. What taboos in sex are giving way? Which seem to be justified? Which seem to be injurious? Why? Feel free to read ahead to session 14 on ethical decision-making under agape.

Notes

1. Friends Home Service Committee, Friends House, Euston Road, London, N.W.1, Preface to the Second Edition, 1964
2. *ibid.*, page 12

10. Death in the Age of the Spirit

The emperor Marcus Aurelius, the philosopher who belongs with Socrates to the noblest figures of antiquity ... had the deepest contempt for Christianity. One might think that the death of the Christian martyrs would have inspired respect in this great Stoic who regarded death with equanimity. But it was just the martyrs' death with which he was least sympathetic. The alacrity with which the Christians met their death displeased him. The Stoic departed this life dispassionately, the Christian martyr on the other hand died with spirited passion for the cause of Christ, because he knew that by doing so he stood within a powerful redemptive process.

- Oscar Cullman ¹

If it is the case that those of us who flee life will also flee death, then it may also be the case that those of us who fully welcome life will welcome death as well. This is not a philosophical speculation or theological proclamation. Fear of death does not exist when a person lives at the peak of happiness. At the moment of high joy, death is neither feared nor ignored, and it is often embraced.

- Robert E. Neale ²

For me to live is Christ and to die is profitable.

- St. Paul ³

In session 6 we saw why death is the ultimate enemy to be defeated. In the age of the Spirit, stripping the power of death becomes possible for more people. Enlargement, liberation, unification and compassion at work within the human spirit and history can and will eliminate the fear of death, soon for those who live in the new possibility of stage 6-7 existence and the god-self, and eventually for all somewhere beyond this life.

The fear of death with its accompanying abhorrence of finitude is the on-going foundation of evil in the world. It does not directly cause all forms of evil, but underlies every one. Perhaps the existentialist term *angst* is better than fear. *Angst* incorporates conscious fear of the afterlife and dread of its alternative - extinction. It also incorporates the anxiety and uneasiness which we cannot label arising from our repression of these honest feelings.

If God exists and we all dwell within the loving Parent, all of us will eventually be made perfect in love and no past suffering and loss will be remembered as painful, as Paul implies in that symphonic 8th chapter of Romans: “I figure the sufferings of this age are not worth comparing to the glory that is to come.”

For those who believe God does not exist and there is no afterlife there is the cosmic nature mysticism of the Stoics, like Marcus Aurelius. Life can be accepted thankfully with daily appreciation for a wholly unmerited gift of fate. Life can then also be laid down with an emotionally fulfilling sense that we have had something wonderful which none of us deserved and are now moving on to make room for others. Without God, life has no enduring meaning anyway, so it might as well be savored as one rolls a rare wine on the tongue.

Such a secular salvation (a healthy, joyous wholeness) is open to atheists and agnostics who rise to stage 6-7 ego development and dwell in the wholistic god-self.

They cannot, of course, achieve it any more than the Christian can. Those who arrive at that exalted stage are opened up to it by the grace poured into their lives by others.

The over-coming of the fear of death – whether by mystical Stoicism or Christian faith – is essential to every aspect of quality of life. It is critical to the presence within us of love, joy, peace and the other so-called fruits of the Spirit.

Death is, for the Christian, the opening to another life. We are, through the grace of this inner conviction, able to come to love death. We are able to do this by seeing that she is merely one more mask of the loving Parent. We then can open our arms to her in ecstatic joy when she comes rather than fleeing in terror. We are able, moreover, to accomplish this earlier in our lives by pursuing a stage 6-7 style of life even though we are not yet fully at this level of development.

Some persons do not consider that this is a Christian view, to think in terms of welcoming death joyfully. Jacques Ellul wrote:

Precisely because death has been vanquished in Christ and resurrection is a fact, we can have no illusions about death. We cannot regard it as the natural end of life. We cannot depict it as a friend, solution, sleep. It is the king of terrors. It is a threat to creation. And it becomes the more rigorous precisely because of the resurrection and the victory. The cross of Jesus Christ tears away all illusions about it. our freedom to live is not, then, a suppression of necessities. It is freedom lived out within and by means of necessities. ⁴

Certainly, Ellul is right that death is the king of terrors, the grinning skull superimposed by our overheated imagination upon the fabric of the cosmos. For this very reason, as we have seen in session 6, it is the groundspring of all evil.

He is also right in saying that to be free we must shed all our illusions about death; each of us must face the cosmic skull directly and starkly. On the basis of stage development we can see how as one advances in growth he is forced to face his own personal death because he dwells more in the universal and cosmic.

He is wrong, however, to insist that death remains cold and alien and threatening for the mature person of faith. This is what the good news of the Resurrection is all about. No one has said it better than Paul, “For me to live is Christ and to die is profitable.”

Fear of death belongs to stages 1 through 6 of our ego development. Stage 7n, that transcendent, ecstatic, cosmic expansion of the self, which characterizes the god-self, does not fear death, but rather embraces her with joy.

Stage 5 is liberation from the narrow confines of a particular culture. Stage 6 is a liberation from all interpersonal bondage, in the sense of feeling any compulsion from others. Duty toward others becomes something one accepts freely and not of necessity. From another angle, stage 6 is seen as liberation from cultural chauvinism into a love and appreciation of all peoples, the psychological roots of a truly universal ethics.

Stage 7n, then, may be defined as liberation into the infinite reaches of space and time, the achievement of the power to move freely in and out of comforting self-boundaries without fragmentation or insanity. This involves the conquest, internally, of death and her demonic retainers, anxiety and lust. Stage 7n also is the reality of a power of being which has realized a total detachment from all possessiveness toward people and things; it is the opposite of idolatry.

Fear of death belongs to the fragment self-systems, which are frozen into the anxieties of earlier stages of our development.

Celebrating a Death

I have left instructions with my will to have my body cremated and the ashes scattered by a stranger in some spot only one or two will know, or else strewn in the ocean where they will disperse with the currents around the earth. This is to be done the cheapest possible way so that any financial resources I leave may be used by and for the living.

Then, I have suggested that in my congregation I be remembered during the course of the regular Sunday morning service in the pastoral prayer with a sentence thanking God for my contributions to this world and asking for forgiveness for my many sins.

In place of a funeral I have requested that there be a celebration, something like an Irish wake. I’d like this to be joyous, with celebration and thankfulness to God for life, good food and drink, songs and some memories of warm and humorous events from our lives together.

I know that the purveyors of funerals and caskets and the cluttering of good ground with expensive graves contend that people need “grief therapy,” to handle the potential long-range harm from unresolved guilt and unexpressed grief. They need rituals and events during which they are enabled to face the fact that the loved one is indeed dead and to resolve their mixed feelings.

My loved ones don’t. They have been prepared over the years by my continual emphasis on the necessity for coming to anticipate death with joy. I have been careful also to do everything possible to be reconciled with them over hurts I have caused. I

have forgiven all of them and have received their forgiveness. I leave them no legacy, I sincerely pray, of guilt or rage.

But even if this were not so, would not the prayers and the celebration I have suggested be more effective rituals to deal with guilt and grief than the traditional lugubrious funeral? Many add to grief guilt over the indebtedness they incur in the funeral costs.

The witness of a death in the fullness of agape is one of the best gifts we can give to others around us, empowering them to give up their destructive idolatrous attachments to things, to power, to success and adulation and to other people. To celebrate death is to bathe in the Holy Spirit, to savor the liberation of owning nothing except the superlative excellence of the god-self and truly mature relationships to God, to others and to things.

Beyond Fear of Death

To overcome the fear of death and its poisoning consequences we need not believe in either God or eternity. We have merely to occupy and live in our respective god-selves and put the demonic self-systems to death. The god-self has no fear of death. Not being dependent upon anything or anyone for its power of being, it always has its bag packed and is ready to go at a moment's notice.

In my experience, it is harder for an atheist to experience this liberation, not because formal faith makes life so different, but because a community of faith, hope and love is so vital to moving us by grace from stage to stage and helping us overpower the demonic self-systems. We need the intelligent, focused, loving help of others, even to see ourselves as we really are.

What Must I Do to Be Saved?

When I was preaching in a little church in rural Kansas as an undergraduate in 1947 I announced the sermon topic, "How Can I Know I am Saved?" This was for the Sunday night service which was usually attended by about 15 people. On this occasion it was raining, but 70 came and hung on every word. People do care about their eventual destiny.

This may seem a strange place in which to answer the question from the second chapter of Acts, "What must we do?" But salvation is as much about how to overcome the power of death to fragment and sour our lives as it is about anything. The means by which death is overcome is also the way in which we are saved from evil to become and do good.

Eckhardt's Four-fold Path

When I was a little boy, an evangelist who came to our church to seek and to save the lost, used what was called the five finger exercise. This is a device to burn into the minds of the hearers what is essential to salvation. Holding up five fingers, the evangelist assigned a word to each digit:

FAITH
 REPENTANCE
 CONFESSION
 BAPTISM
 GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

The important thing in that stage 3-4 view of God and salvation was to get into heaven at any cost. One was to be convinced, by argument in my church, to believe; then, to express as best one could, sorrow for one's sins; then to confess one's faith before the congregation; and finally to be baptized, after which according to a promise of God which could not be doubted, one received the gifts, guidance and empowerment of the Holy Spirit. But at least, if the first four fingers were activated, entrance into heaven was assured ... although one was also warned that he could fall from grace.

The five finger exercise is not wholly wrong, especially if it keeps the individual within a community where life-giving graceful faith, hope and love are exchanged. But its deficiencies are considerable. For one thing, we don't whip up a mature faith out of the ingredients around us. We still have to ask, rather pointedly, "Which God do you have faith in? How big is your God?"

This whole notion of salvation rested on a literal interpretation of certain Bible passages. The reasoning was this: God would not leave us uncertain about the way to salvation. It has to be crystal clear. So we will dig out the specific commands and do our best to obey them, then we can be sure God will keep his side. He can be counted on to keep his promises if we do our part.

But suppose, as this study urges, salvation ultimately means more basically becoming like God, and only incidentally going to a place called heaven. Then, notice how much more relevant Meister Eckhardt's four-fold path, as summarized by Matthew Fox, becomes.

1. The *via positiva*, the befriending of creation.⁵

This then is salvation: When we marvel at the beauty of created things and praise their Creator:

- Meister Eckhardt ⁶

If the only prayer you say in your whole life is "thank you," that would suffice.

- Meister Eckhardt ⁷

Every day should begin with joyous thanksgiving for life in a wondrous creation which we did not make and do not

deserve. This is a grace open to atheist as well as theist. However bad the quality of our lives we have no complaint against either God or Nature.

This attitude and practice prepares the way for a total process of development in life which confers the power to overcome death and evil individually, and lays the groundwork for a sustained struggle for justice for all.

It also undergirds and sustains a nurturing relationship to creation, to both life and non-life, where one lives out a sense of oneness and interdependent symbiosis rather than alienation and misuse.

2. The *via negativa* or befriending the darkness.

God is not found in the soul by adding anything but by a process of subtraction.

- Meister Eckhardt ⁸

What is the darkness? What is its name? Call it an aptitude for sensitivity. Call it a rich receptivity which will make you whole. Call it your potential for vulnerability.

- Meister Eckhardt ⁹

This is the movement in which idolatry is overcome, all forms of bondage and dependency, inner and outer. It is completed only as we reach stage 7n and enter fully into our god-selves, becoming thus one with God and all creation. This is essential if death and its smothering effects are to be conquered. The fear of death arises from the inadequate, fragmented gestalts of the demonic self-systems, which are held in existence and continue only by virtue of our dependency upon things, people or movements.

Freedom from all forms of idolatrous dependence is essential to the ultimate liberation. Eckhardt likes to speak of it as sinking into God, rather than a climbing or rising. There is a passive element in the negative way often criticized by activist westerners. But it reflects the reality of our situation and nature. The Taoists and the Zen Buddhists understand this movement of the soul better than we western activists.

But it is also true, and a vital truth, that this is only one of four movements. This is why I do not say that Taoism and Zen are adequate as paths to godlikeness. The passive negative way, our descent into the darkness of the non-being outside our constricted self-systems, is that which shatters our false pride. Unless and until that happens there is no further growth along the stages, and the demonic self-systems continue to block the way inward to the god-self.

3. The *via creativa*, befriending our divinity.

The soul among all creatures is generative like God.

- Meister Eckhardt ¹⁰

Asceticism is of no great importance for it creates more, instead of less, self-consciousness.

- Meister Eckhardt ¹¹

What does God do all day long? God gives birth. From all eternity God lies on a maternity bed giving birth.

- Meister Eckhardt ¹²

What good is it to me if Mary gave birth to the son of God fourteen hundred years ago and I do not also give birth to the son of God in my time and my culture?

- Meister Eckhardt ¹³

The process of entering into the god-self, of attaining maturity, of becoming one with God, Eckhardt likes to speak of as the birth of the son within us. This is simply another way of putting the same truth. Negatively, we are liberated from all idolatrous dependencies, and positively we become, to use Berdyaev's phrase, "engoded". As the possessive and anxious demonic self-systems are drained of power, the core god-self can emerge. It has knit up the contrary polarities of our lives into a new being of wholistic power. This is the birth of the son within us.

This is also, as Eckhardt recognizes, the flowering of creativity within us. As God eternally gives birth to the new, we come also to rejoice in joining God as co-creators into eternity.

4. The *via transformativa*, befriending new creation.

Compassion means justice. ... The person who understands what I have to say about justice understands everything I have to say.

- Meister Eckhardt ¹³

When people grow and become rooted in love and in God, they are ready to take upon themselves every attack, temptation, vexation and painful suffering willingly and gladly, eagerly and joyfully, as the prophets did.

- Meister Eckhardt ¹⁴

This is the realization of the blessed and joyous fruits of the Spirit, the living out of agape in justice and compassion in all our relationships.

The burgeoning creative love of the new being presses us constantly and joyously (not a spirit of grim duty) into the expression of compassion toward all and the struggle for justice, peace and equality. Suffering which comes in this path is accepted willingly, if not always gladly, because it is filled with eternal, redemptive meaning.

One Way, Four Movements

These four ways do not come one after the other in time, nor are they four different roads. We are engaged in all four of these ways throughout all of our lives, though at different seasons in our development one or the other of them may become a major concern to the temporary muting of the others. We are discovering and living aspects of all four of them constantly, and they interpenetrate one another. To celebrate and give thanks is to empower us for struggling for justice. To refuse to respond to the call of lust for power is to further weaken the demonic self-systems and strengthen the god-self. And so on.

Perhaps they could be thought of as processes of opening outward and inward, more as attitudes and qualities of relationship to events and others. This seems to be suggested where Eckhardt refers to the negative way as a “sensitivity” and a “vulnerability.” These movements all involve a risky opening up to the threatening non-being in and around us. Unless we drop the walls behind which the demonic self-systems crouch, sheltering themselves from both death and abundant life, there is no qualitative change in the direction of wholistic new being.

Atonement to Sanctification

This way of salvation is consistent, it seems to me, with what Garrett Green writes:

*Salvation must ... take the form of something that can release the imagination from its bondage to false images. ... Everything depends on the organization, the pattern, the gestalt. Sin, like heresy, is a “paradigmatic” disorder: it appropriates the parts to misrepresent the “whole.” Like the face hidden in the leaves of the tree in children’s puzzle books, all of the elements may be present without our being able to see the proper “aspect.” The decisive point theologically is that the image of true human nature in its relation to God is so distorted by sin that the resulting pattern ceases to mediate God to the human imagination.*¹⁵

Salvation is the opening of the eyes, the conversion to a totally new way of looking at things; in effect, a paradigm shift. For Green, it is the human creative imagination which has this ability to discover or create the new and more powerful paradigms which liberate and transform.

I do not wish to distort Green’s position; his view of the image of God is somewhat different from mine. However, at this point I agree with him fully.

Note that when this definition of the way of salvation is adopted we drift away from Luther and Calvin over more to the viewpoint of the left wing of the Reformation and the spiritual reformers of the 16th and 17th centuries. There is a gestalt shift from atonement to sanctification. The role of Christ as pattern of the divine becomes central and his sacrifice on the cross only a part of the pattern. Formal, doctrinally correct faith is not important compared to actually being conformed to God’s inner nature as seen in Christ. The former without the latter is empty, as the spiritual reformers so often contended. See session 18.

What Must I Do?

The one vital thing which is in our power to do immediately is to put ourselves where grace is operating. This is the first action. Since the new, innovative, liberating possibility comes to us from others, we need to go where we are challenged by the different, by those who are trying to love one another maturely and are striving for social justice.

Note how the following relate to Eckhardt’s four-fold path and also fulfill the requirements of Green, that of involving the imagination and a new transforming way of “seeing” reality revealed by more accurate paradigms

One essential way of putting ourselves in the path of grace is to become a member of a community of faith, hope and love which will constantly call us into loving and meaningful action. This distracts us from the siren voices of the demonic self-systems.

This is a modern form of the old admonitions about resisting temptation. It is also the inner meaning of Paul’s counsel that we put the old person to death. We kill off the old person through persistent neglect.

We do not resist temptation by thinking about it, by dwelling on sins and weaknesses. This achieves the opposite effect; it causes us to be preoccupied with the temptation. Rather, demons within should be disarmed and weakened by concentrating on those actions which are filled with wholeness, justice, love, creativity, ecstasy and play.

Prayer and meditation and the reading of the Bible and devotional literature are ways we remove ourselves from the temptations of the demonic self-systems. It is good always to start the day this way.

Another way we open our lives to grace is through intimate relationships with other individuals. We open our innermost selves to them and they to us. We confess our sins to each other and give each other absolution. We share our dreams, we weep and mourn, we sing, we dance, we play together. This is missing conspicuously from the churches.

Another place we go to receive saving grace is the world of visual arts, drama, fiction, poetry, music, dance, all the creative arts. I do not speak of this as the realm of creativity, because every aspect of life can and should be creative, including especially interpersonal relationships. Not everyone can be a great artist, but everyone can be a devoted and creative friend.

Last, and in no way least among the luminous paths of grace, is to put ourselves in the path of the special liberation which comes from the poor, the oppressed, those in immediate, pressing need. They have the power uniquely to break us out of the shell of our egocentrism, self-pity and defeatism. This is especially critical in effective movement from stage 5 to stage 6, so that we can

come to live a full, gut-felt commitment to the equality and God-loved infinite value of every person, and not just a head trip through an ivory tower.

The god-self which embodies agape is instinctively dedicated to justice without equivocation or hesitation. Love cannot be experienced sincerely and wholistically without our feeling so acutely the sufferings of the victims of injustice that we must participate in the struggle.

In this above involvements and actions all forms of liberation theology find their unification with true pietism, true mysticism, and a faith of joy, hope, and playful creativity.

Conclusion

To become godlike, to enter in and dwell exclusively in one's god-self, brings the actual experience of transcending all anxiety and fear relating to death and all resentment over finitude. This strength can be ours here and now. This is the ground of the only true, full and enduring liberation we can know. And this total liberation underlies all virtue, mature love and effective ethical behavior. These fruits can appear only on the tree rooted in agape in its wholistic, four-gated god-pattern.

Questions for Thought

Consider or discuss: Review sessions 5 and 6. Read again the Jacques Ellul quote above. Is he correct about the Christian's view of death? What difference does it make?

Notes

1. Oscar Cullman, "Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?," *Death in the Western World: Two Conflicting Currents of Thought*, edited by Krister Stendal, MacMillan, NY, 1964, page 46
2. *The Art of Dying*, Harper and Row, NY, 1973 (1976), page 43
3. Philippians 1:32. My translation.
4. *The Ethics of Freedom*, page 75
5. These headings and quotations are taken from Matthew Fox, *Original Blessing, A Primer in Creation Spirituality*, Bear & Company, Santa Fe, NM, 1983. I came upon this and the later Fox editing of Eckhardt's sermons after most of this had been written. Some of the basic concepts of the course, from Nicholas Berdyaev, evidently came to Berdyaev from Eckhardt or from Eckhardt's disciple, Tauler. I am glad to give the credit to Eckhardt, though Berdyaev also has many additional important things to say to us today.
6. Ibid., page 118
7. Ibid., page 109
8. Ibid., page 132
9. Ibid., page 157
10. Ibid., page 178
11. Ibid., page 201
12. Ibid., page 220
13. Ibid., page 221
14. Ibid., page 286
15. *Imagining God*, pages 90-1

11. Love in the Age of the Spirit

... the love with which we love should be so pure, so simple, so detached that it inclines neither to myself nor to my friend nor to anything else next to it. The teachers say that one can name no good work as a good work and no virtue as a virtue unless it has taken place in love. ... How has God loved us? He loved us when we did not yet exist and when we were his enemies. So great a need had God for our friendship that he could not wait until we asked him. ... It should be an equally serious matter with us to pray for those who do us harm. Why? So that we might fulfill God's will, that we should not wait until someone asks us. ... So unitary should our love be, for love will never be anywhere else than there where equality and unity are. Between a master and a servant there is no peace because there is no real equality. ... when God is in me and I am in God, then I am not less and God is not higher.

- Meister Eckhardt ¹

Agape conquers the ambiguities of love, spiritual power conquers the ambiguities of power; grace conquers the ambiguities of justice.

- Paul Tillich ²

A theology of the Omega Point and for the age of the Spirit requires that we define and interpret God's agape clearly and correctly.

I have been struggling with the meaning of love and loves since fifty years ago as a sophomore in college I was reading a sermon by the Unitarian preacher, Jefferson, on love. I arrived then at the dilemma of a lifetime: If I do not love others (and I didn't think I did) then how can I MAKE myself love?

When we struggle with the meaning of love we are pushed to the center of the most important issues facing humanity. Bound up in the question of the relation of the divine love (agape) to the various forms of needy human loves (eros) are the most important questions of life: How does God's love come to us and how does it relate to our flawed forms of love? What is worth loving ultimately? What is healthy love, wholistic love, and how does one become able to give and receive it?

In session 7, we looked at a picture of the highest. One psychological effect of such wholistic being, we saw, is the knitting up into oneness of the fragmenting polarities of life:

FREEDOM ——— RELATEDNESS
EXPANSION ——— INTEGRITY ³

This unity of opposites in a new and higher synthesis is a working definition and picture of the structure of God's kind of love. This is what it looks like in human beings. Each of these dimensions of the two polarities represents a power effect of the kind of self which is organized around agape. Such a self holds together strongly; it is universal in the scope of its concerns; it has power to stand alone against the whole world; and it relates selflessly and compassionately to others in community.

Meister Eckhardt

Read again the quotes above from a sermon of 14th century mystic, theologian and preacher, Meister Eckhardt. It would be hard to find a better definition within two pages of agape.

Agape is a love which originates with God's overflow of creativity and desire for companionship in creative play. It is a love poured out before we existed and which continues to be poured out in spite of our unworthiness. It is a love which demands of us the same unconditional giving, even to the extent of requiring that we seek out, forgive and love our enemies.

It is, moreover, a love which is based upon equality with all others and upon unity with them, an equality and unity, Eckhardt suggests, which anticipates and is necessary to our equality and unity with God. It is, moreover, an equality and unity symbolized by the relationship in the ideal marriage, within which two people become one and yet at the same time are enabled to preserve all the richness and uniqueness of their individuality: "A wife and a husband are not alike, but in love they are equal."

He goes on to say that while they are united to one another, their unique centeredness is the power that prevents the being of one becoming lost in the other. ⁴

It is unfortunate that the translator of Eckhardt used the word "need" to describe God's desire for us and our love. Need indicates a lack, while God's love is a desire arising out of the divine inner nature as overflowing, loving creativity. This is a far cry from need as we use the word.

What is necessary for us to become such a being that we can stand on some basis of equality with God? Eckhardt implies that God's own grace confers such power of being. Through it we come to possess a new and powerful inner being able to knit up all four dimensions of the polarities which split us into pieces and defeat all our good intentions.

As the polarities are transcended and united in a new and higher kind of being, we become so strong that we can stand alone, as God does. We are so strong that we can give ourselves over to other people in empathy and compassionate caring, as God does, and not lose be submerged in them. We are so strong that we can embrace all the world's people and the cosmos in a circle of concern, as God does, without flying apart. And finally, we are so strong that we are able to be centered and unified within, as God is, without losing either our capacity to embrace the universe or to enter into costly and delightful communion with individuals.

Again, to become like God does not mean that we have all knowledge and power. It means we become the wholistic pattern of the Divine One. We do not become God; we become like God in the power that symmetry brings to our inner being. It is like the strength of a geodesic dome, where every strut of the structure is supported in place by all the others.

This does not come about by our striving but by the gift of God through other people.

Love and Power

Note that all four of the characteristics of the healthy self described above are forms of power. The ability to love rests on the possession of what is often called power of being. This is power simultaneously in all the four dimensions of our basic polarities.

The corollary is also true. All of the evil in us, characterized by envy, hate, lust, anxiety, and the like, arises from a lack of such power of being.

Agape is a Kind of Being

Agape is not a feeling, though feeling is involved. It is not a response to the command to love, an act of will, though we are commanded to do our best to act toward others and ourselves in terms of agape. Agape is a kind of being; it is someone we become; it is an ontological reality. It can spring only from the divine root. Jesus asks if figs can come from thistles, and at another point whether good fruit can come from an evil tree. In the Gospel of John, he suggests that only if we abide in him, in God through him,

do we bear fruit. Only then are we attached to the root containing the healthy sap. Only then are we suckling at the divine breast. These are passages which underline the ontological nature of the divine love; it appears where it becomes incarnate in a self or self-system, or it does not appear at all.

In short, this kind of love is incarnate purely in our god-self; it does not appear in any of the other self-systems. When it appears in our immature lives it is by a momentary breakthrough out of the god-self.

So many of our good deeds are done from motives other than agape: to fend off punishment, as a child does at Kohlberg's stage 1; to get praise, as child does at stages 2 and 3; to gain approval or praise from people in authority, as stage 4 people do all the time; or as stage 4 or 5 people do we may perform a good deed because we think we ought to.

All of these fall under Paul's starkly realistic critique: Even if we should give our bodies to be burned and have not agape we are nothing.⁶

The motive force for all of these good deeds performed at the lower stages is need in some form. Agape, on the other hand, is an overflow out of abundant power, adequacy. Acts arising from need, to fill some emptiness, to assuage our anxiety, are not from agape; they do not arise from "that of God in us." These needy acts arise from a form of love called eros.

Agape and Eros

In session 7 we've already looked once at this distinction between eros and agape, noting that Paul Tillich listed four kinds of love, from the highest to the lowest:

- agape (God's kind of love)
- philia (love of friends)
- eros (upward striving for the reunification of what is separated)
- epithymia (lust)⁷

Tillich taught that these loves are more or less on a continuum from lowest to highest. Others, notably Anders Nyren and Karl Barth, insisted that there is a huge gulf between God's love and all human forms of love.

Eros received its classic definition in Plato, where it described the ascent of the soul, drawn like a magnet toward reunification with Absolute Being. For the Neoplatonists, who influenced much subsequent theology, this means an inner drive for reunification with God.

There is another use of eros, different from this, which must be mentioned. Eros is seen as a rich, creative, sensuous and interpersonal affective power. In contrast, agape is portrayed as a rather austere, objective and inhuman kind of feeling and action. This is not the distinction I am making.

Other writers, like Matthew Fox, celebrate eros and the erotic in opposition to a kind of Christian faith which depreciates the body, the sensuous, sexual and the aesthetic. I am in agreement with Fox on this. But I am making a different distinction, that of need love verses overflow love. Within the wholeness of agape nothing sensuous or erotic is lost. If anything, there is more of the sensuous, sexual and aesthetic in people controlled by agape, and certainly such experiences are enjoyed more to the extent such personality implies freedom from guilt, shame and anxiety.

Nyren and Barth believed that the kind of human striving implied in eros is futile because it cannot reach God. Only God's down-reaching agape can liberate humanity from selfish self-seeking to a true new being in Christ. The fountain of inner longing for wholeness, purity and power of being rises up nobly but can't come close to heaven, they thought.

Nyren's classic definition of God's love was summed up this way by Daniel Day Williams:

Agape is the love of God coming down to sinful man. It is spontaneous, unmotivated, poured out upon man without regard to merit. Man has no worth which gives him a claim upon the love of God, either before it is given or afterward. Man is brought into fellowship with God, but this is not the fellowship as in the eros way of holy men with a God to whom their holiness makes them acceptable, but it is fellowship of a forgiving God with forgiven sinners. Agape is completely self-giving love. God has given himself in Christ and thus makes possible salvation which man cannot in any way attain for himself.⁸

Williams pointed out a number of inconsistencies in Nyren's definition. For one thing, it removes all significance from God's general revelation to all peoples and from all human experience and history other than the Christian. This is the same fallacy which I pointed to earlier in considering definitions of the image of God within each of us.

If God does it all, and there is nothing of God in humanity, then the gap can only be bridged in some arbitrary fashion which undercuts human free choice. There has to be more of a connection between God and humanity to begin with.

This, I suggest, is in that innermost temple of the spirit, the god-self. There is a healthy center in us which is capable of altruism, of genuinely unselfish caring.

Williams added:

(Nyren) assumes that love must be either purely egocentric or completely spontaneous and unmotivated, when actually all love does combine the desire of the self with the good of the other. ... I can feel my neighbor's feelings, identify with his good. Nyren overlooks the fact that the relationship between man and his neighbor and between man and God is fundamentally a social relationship in which the good of one actually does become the good of the other.⁹

Grace operates in the love, health, wholeness, joy and trust which we give to one another. God uses us as the primary agents of love. This can be done because of the reality of the god-self which often communicates directly to the god-selves of others in spite of the dissonance and obstruction of the demonic self-systems.

This understanding renders a great deal of the debate about agape and eros irrelevant. There is no masochistic self-sacrifice by the god-self, but a celebration and rejoicing in giving and receiving. One cannot distinguish between self-affirmation and self-giving when speaking of God's action or the emotional responses of the god-self. They are one and the same. An enlightened view, Williams suggests, sees that my good is also your good and that seeking the one I also seek the other. Giving and receiving are the breathing out and breathing in of the god-self. It is only in the fragmented life of the demonic self-systems that self-giving becomes self-destructive and self-affirmation is expressed in the form of selfishness.

Barth and Nygren were right that agape is qualitatively different, just as Maslow saw that D-love based on need is qualitatively different from B-love which arises out of fullness of inner power. But Barth and Nygren were wrong in thinking that agape only appears in God. By God's grace it flows also from the inner god-self when we are able to live in that wholistic self-system or draw upon it.

It is the wholistic power of agape which enables it to transcend, purify, and reunite all the lower, needful forms of love. It is agape which unifies the four dimensions of our two basic polarities of life. It is agape which draws up the lower forms of love into itself, harvests all their value and spits out their evil, just as each higher stage, when entered smoothly and fully, harvests all the value from the lower stages, taking it into itself and uniting it to the new in a higher synthesis.

I Corinthians 13

The word agape should always be loaded with its full ontological weight, as Paul did in I Corinthians 13. There he separated agape from all needy forms of love, and equated it with the inner reality and wholeness of the new being in Christ. When agape is defined only as self-giving and self-surrender (as Father D'Arcy tended to do in *The Mind and Heart of Love*) then it is again made half of a wholistic love. Self-giving is only one movement of agape. Without the other three forms of power indicated in the diagram above – inner integrity, cosmic content and perspective, and assurance of individual uniqueness – giving oneself to others becomes throwing oneself away, a nihilistic act of self-abandonment.

Agape and Stage Development

We can resolve the dilemma posed by Nygren and Tillich, if we draw upon the analysis of stage development and the qualities of love possible to the person at each stage. The child at stage 1 has a sheer need for power of being, which can be accurately described as lust. It is a desperate need, and deprivation of care and attention at this stage leads to alienation from self and other, and to inner fragmentation from which evil of all sorts springs.

At stage 3, the kind of relationship Tillich calls *philia* begins to enter the picture more strongly. Friendships in which there is some genuine give and take become the source of a new kind of empathy. This is the beginning of compassion, which is, in turn, the seed of agape.

At stages 4 and 5 more of the level of love Tillich called *eros* in its classic meaning arrives. The personality, with its now broader boundaries and more diverse interests and concerns, finds itself pulled upward by the attraction of the Platonic trilogy of truth, good and beauty.

Knowledge, achievement, aesthetic creation and enjoyment, service to others – all of these express more than just narrow self-seeking. They begin to reflect the creative drive of God. Insofar as they arise from needy *eros* they reveal a still strangled form of creativity and enjoyment. But this is an important and necessary stage on the way.

Perhaps the stage 4 kind of *eros*, should be called "objectifying *eros*." This is the stage at life where the call of achievement in job and the effort to gain acceptance in the larger society modify and counterpoint the stage 3 intensity of those all-absorbing interpersonal relationships with the other sex. It creates in us a necessary greater objectivity in relationships.

This is good and necessary but also bad. We are driven still by needy love, so further fragmentation takes place. We are lonely and frightened at this transition point, so we are tempted to withdraw from close human relationships and/or to use people for our needy objectives rather than to love them maturely.

If we could move to each higher Kohlberg stage smoothly, enter them fully and bring up with us and integrate all the positive elements of the lower stages, then the demonic self-systems would not be formed. All the power would go directly to the inner wholistic core. We would see all the four dimensions of our polarities simultaneously strengthened.

Is Altruism Possible?

I will anticipate an outcry of protest. Is it never possible for a child to act selflessly, to give something or engage in an act of helpfulness without its being merely from the motive force of *epithemia* (lust for power of being), *eros* or *philia*?

Robert Coles, the Yale psychologist, wrote of Ruby Bridges, the six year old black girl who desegregated the Little Rock schools back in the mid-fifties. She bravely faced the obscenities and threats of violence of white adults. She said publicly, on several occasions, that she forgave her tormentors, and expressed love for them. How, asks Coles, can Kohlberg be right, that such mature morality is possible only to highly developed adults, when we see it quite clearly here? ¹⁰

There are three points to the answer to this; the second is the more important to our argument here:

1. Kohlberg made clear that, at various levels of development, we may steal or not steal, profess love of enemies or hatred toward them. The indication of stage level comes with the uncovering and analysis of the reason why we spoke or acted in one way

or the other.

One of the commonest phenomena at the girl's age is what I call the China doll syndrome. A little girl was told that the children of China need toys and she gave her dearest dolls in what appeared a burst of sincere generosity and love. But we note that the out-pouring of attention, praise and affection from her parents and others are a payment of enormously greater value to her than the dolls she sacrificed.

Similarly, the little girl in Little Rock saw the example of her parents who forgave their persecutors and interpreted it in terms of Jesus' command to love one's enemies. She was told this is the way one should behave. She conformed to her parents' expectations and received their praise, along with the recognition and admiration of many others. It does not take a stage 6 orientation to do what she did. This does not at all suggest that she was not an unusually spunky kid who acted with enormous courage.

2. The second answer is the one important at this point to the argument of this session: Agape is present with some power in all of us from the earliest days.

Every decision of our will and every act we perform has a complex cord of motivation. In any such act, several of our demonic self-systems may rally to support out of quite different motivations. If it is a decision or act compatible with agape, then the god-self also supports the cause with its own kind of motivation. Motivation is like a cord woven of separate strands. One of the strands, to use poetic license, is agape red. It may be thin, but it is there. And it is often the extra small effect of the god-self which pulls us beyond our limits to transcend our ordinary behavior in selfless out-pourings as did the girl in Little Rock.

3. There is a third point mentioned several times elsewhere which I hope does not get lost. All of us are a community of people inside and also in relationships where our self-systems overlap with others in real time. When the little girl acted so courageously she was drawing directly on the courage and love of the adults around her, like a light bulb plugged into a socket.

There is a gap between all the forms of eros and agape, the gap between need and overflow. Poetically speaking, it is the unbridgeable gulf between heaven and hell.

The Push of Eros and the Pull of Agape

Maslow does not draw a clear line between immaturity which is Deprivational-love and the maturity which is Being-love, but there is a crossing point.

The actual occupation of this promised land begins to occur at the passage into stage 6, when love becomes universal, and into stage 7, as death is overcome.

But, also, the god-gestalt of inner unity, expansion, others concern, and power to stand alone, is with us in embryonic form from the beginning, begotten in us by the graceful words and caresses of those around us, as well as by the awesome starry heavens above and the laughter and play of children.

When Jesus offered the woman at the well what she thought was freedom from drawing water, she jumped at the idea. There can be, Jesus was rather suggesting, a spring of water of life welling up within. This is the difference between God's love and the truncated forms of human love. The one is like an artesian well, springing up within in abundance, inexhaustible. The other is like a broken cistern which has to be filled continually, from which we draw, laboriously, subtly poisoned water.

With the help of developmental stage theory, and with a stop along the way at Abraham Maslow, we now see more clearly the answer to our two basic questions: what it means to be like God and what it means to integrate at stages 6-7.

It means the knitting up of the basic polarities of life into a healthy wholeness which overcomes evil and death. It delivers us into loving communion with our own selves, with God and with others through the unifying power of the four-walled god-self.

Needy eros pushes us from behind and over-flowing agape draws from within and beyond us. Thus we are pushed and pulled godward.

The hungers of need love within us fuel our booster rockets, lifting us away from a stage of development to seek another. With full integration at stage 7, we drop our last booster rocket and float free of need drives. We then are drawn only by the pull of the gravity of God's love within us.

As Eckhardt so well intuited, the pull of gravity exercised by agape is not up or down but inward. It draws us constantly toward our wholistic center which is also toward God. Agape never makes us feel like we are falling into darkness. Rather we sense we are falling into light, warmth and loving acceptance.

One final but important footnote: Needs cannot be met; hungers of the lesser loves cannot be filled. Deficiencies in caresses, security, trust, caring, affirmation missed in the past are forever lost and cannot be replaced. The demonic self-systems cannot be healed and made whole; they can only be put to death. When new caring and love come into our lives what happens is rather that the god-self at the center is progressively strengthened and its wholistic gestalt filled in, so that the demonic self-systems crouching elsewhere in the brain are enfeebled and cast gradually into the outer darkness.

Questions for Thought

1. Consider or discuss: How do the four levels of love according to Tillich correspond to the six stages of Kohlberg? You might want to refer again to the table in session 4.

2. We use the word love of: a mate, God, pizza, a dog and our home town? Can the word be salvaged?

Notes

1. From the sermon, "Our Divinity and God's Divinity: To Be God is to Give Birth," *Breakthrough: Meister Eckhardt's Creation Spirituality in New Translation*, Introduction and Commentaries by Matthew Fox, Doubleday & Company, Inc., Garden City, NY,

1980, pages 314, 315

2. *Love, Power and Justice*, Oxford University Press, NY, London, 1952, page 121

3. There are many ways of describing these polarities and this pattern is not exhaustive or exclusively correct. Paul Tillich, for instance in the Volume I of his *Systematic Theology* builds his analysis of the human situation around three polarities:

- Individuation and Participation
- Dynamics and Form
- Freedom and Destiny

This first dichotomy is essentially the same as my own Freedom vs. Relatedness.

The dichotomy of Dynamics vs. Form is the question of what remains the same and what changes and how we preserve our inner unity through change over our whole lives. This is dealt with in my contrast of Expansion (inclusiveness) vs. Integrity (inner unity). Expansion, in the context of Kohlberg's stages, involves the taking in, repeatedly, of threatening non-being both from within and outside the self. Dynamics and Form are considered throughout at every point in which we talk about dying to one stage and being reborn at another.

The question of Freedom vs. Destiny is the issue of the extent to which we are free to act as opposed to the ways in which our lives are determined by internal and external powers over which we do not have direct, effective control. This, again, appears in my system in the dichotomy between the demonic self-systems, which are driven and determined by need, and the god-self, which is uniquely free to create and to act *de novo* and *ex nihilo*.

4. Op. cit., page 315

5. Op. cit., page 315

6. I Corinthians 13

7. *Love, Power and Justice*, op. cit., pages 30ff.

8. *God's Grace and Man's Hope*, Harper and Brothers Publishers, NY, 1949

9. Ibid, pages 71-72

10. Robert Coles, *The Moral Life of Children*, Atlantic Monthly Press, 1986, pages 26,27

12. Radical Reformation in the Age of the Spirit

In the past, we had the so-called motive of saving souls. We were convinced that if not baptized, people in the masses would go to hell. Now, thanks be to God we believe that all people and all religions are already living in the grace and love of God and will be saved by God's mercy.

- Father Walbert Buhlman, Order of Friars Minor Capuchin. ¹

When mother church is dying, perverse energies are unleashed. Sadomasochism substitutes for morality, control for prayer, moralizing and condemnation for play and celebration, and a self-centeredness and preoccupation with human-made games and rules substitute for cosmic adventure, interest, wonder and living ritual.

- Matthew Fox ²

If the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle?

- St. Paul ³

The church is periodically under great pressure to change in response to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. If we translate that into the images of this study, we would say: The proliferation of stage 5 people, the increase of stage 6 persons and influences, and the incarnation of stage 5 and 6 principles into more of our institutions and causes renders current church structures and programs outmoded. Rather than pushing people to change, the churches tend to suspend growth at stages 3 and 4 or, in the case of the liberal churches, stage 5. I say "tend" because even the worst church reads the Sermon on the Mount with its stage 6 and 7 challenges, and every church includes a few people whose behavior transcends the congregation's average stage level.

The age of the Spirit calls for radical change and gives by implication some specific guidance on the directions it should take. This session suggests some principles and guidelines and gives examples of such change.

A new reformation should be already taking place. Frankly, I can't see much happening except in movements like the Sojourners, some small groups in churches and the organization of a few new congregations which are dedicated to making gay and lesbian people feel welcome.

The equation of salvation-as-godlikeness is this: One cannot get to stage 6 and be filled with its universal values and live by them without identification with the poor, the weak, the oppressed. Only by taking in the pain and suffering of the victims of the world can we be broken open to a universal value system and dominated by its all-inclusive caring. Otherwise, our protests of

universal love are just a head trip. Remember what Jesus said about people who intone, “Lord, Lord.”

Sadly, churches can’t very well help people move on to stage 7 without embodying stage 6 in their faith and life. This is not to say that we advance because of our works. We are advanced by our immersion in suffering and experience of vulnerability. An inevitable implication of this is that we have to join the struggle for equality, justice and dignity for all.

Another implication of stage 6 is living by God’s nonviolent love. At stage 6 all of us humans become brothers and sisters in one family. When Claire Gray, anti-nuclear activist, was challenged by the prosecutor as to why she didn’t “render to Caesar the things are Caesar’s,” she replied, laughing, “Why Mr. Pavone, God doesn’t tell us to kill our brothers and sisters.”

Two Questions

In relation to church renewal our two questions take on this form:

(1) What would be different about the churches if salvation is understood more as becoming like God than getting to a place called heaven?

(2) What would a stage 6-7 church look like?

The age of the Spirit also raises a third question in the matter of church renewal:

(3) How are people to be become like God or reach stages 6-7 unless there is a living, acting community incarnating those principles so that they may see them with some clarity? If the trumpet sounds no clear call, who will know where to march?

The Faltering of Church Renewal

Much has been said in the last 40 years about the necessity for renewal of the churches. In the last decade or so, much more has been said about the failure of all these efforts. This session describes and evaluates the various proposed strategies for recreating the church in God’s image.

Most of all we need living examples of the new to show the stalled churches of our day what a stage 6-7 family of faith would look like.

There are two ways to go about this and both are honorable and can have some effect: The first way is to vote with the feet, to come out of the existing churches and form new communities of faith which embody stage 6-7 principles. The other is for those who believe they are called to stay and try to change existing structures from within. This requires the formation of small communities dedicated to living a stage 6-7 style of life within existing church structures, with all the conflict this ignites.

Strategy for Church Renewal

Since World War II there have been hundreds of books and experiments focused on renewal of the churches. These tended to take one of more of the following ways: liturgical renewal; social action; denominational restructure and mergers; evangelistic outreach; and house churches, small group life and retreats.

As a denominational and ecumenical bureaucrat at the time, I witnessed and took part in all of these.

None of them worked; none can solve any of the major problems faced by the churches, at least not by themselves.

1. Liturgical Renewal

Liturgical renewal with its vernacular masses, guitars and pop music and greater participation of lay people has been interesting, fun, and mildly helpful. It is, in a sense, a stage 5 kind of worship, which breaks out of the artificial, superstitious, gothic-awesome forms with a breath of fresh air.

It fails because the vitality of worship depends on involvements and changes taking place in the lives of the people. When people are learning to give and receive love, to forgive and accept forgiveness and are working at justice issues and really serving the poor and oppressed then, it’s been my experience, any kind of worship is vital. When these are absent, no liturgical change really helps.

2. Social Action

During the sixties I was involved in the civil rights movement in Mississippi and in Indianapolis and in resistance to the Vietnam War. My colleagues on the national staff of the Disciples accused me of emphasizing social action to the virtual exclusion of the other aspects of the church’s life.

What was not clear to me at that time, is that they were liberal Christians and I was becoming a radical Christian; we had come to quite different theologies and worshipped different Gods. I believed as they did in evangelism, service to individuals, vital local congregational life, the world mission of the church, and all the rest. But I came at all of these from a different direction. I was willing to see the denomination’s giving and membership decline because of its involvements in standing up for the poor and against war, and believed that we would have experienced a corresponding vigor of spiritual life if we took that path.

This was not tested. The denominations all ended up muting their social action stands and starving those departments’ budgets in order to meet the objections of conservative and pietistic Christians.

The denominations also had a disconcerting practice of jumping each year to a different brief enthusiasm which was just as quickly abandoned as we moved on to some other crusade. During 1965 concentration on civil rights was ending and the Vietnam War came to the forefront. In 1966 emphasis shifted to the less controversial War on Poverty. Individuals and social action departments continued what they could on civil rights and the war, but the balance of the burden had to be carried by secular groups because of the churches’ unwillingness to sacrifice money and numbers in any cause whatsoever. Preservation of the institutional church structures came first.

One amusing and symbolically significant incident happened along about 1966, when I was editor of the Social Action Newsletter of the Disciples and had the portfolio of social welfare concerns. I was liaison to the National Council of Churches and its member denominations on the War on Poverty.

An organizational specialist from one of the most innovative large corporations in the country was invited to come and speak to our national staff, presumably to educate us on how our own bureaucracy might function more effectively in the service of God. He told how his corporation was experimenting with bringing in young people who were bright and nonconformist. Some of them, he said, had long hair and wore jeans and T-shirts. Some were loners. They were given tasks and the resources to carry them out and encouraged to do them in their own way. Gone were the emphasis on the gray flannel suit and the examination of an executive's wife and family for compatibility to the corporate style. In concluding, he challenged us to think that by means of innovative thinking and experiment we could become more efficient and solve our bureaucratic problems. At the conclusion of his talk, he asked for questions.

There was a long pause. Finally, I stood up and said something like this: "The common assumption here is that all our efforts should be directed toward increasing the number of members in the church and the amount of money coming in so that we may finance the work of God on earth." I paused to take a breath and he was nodding. This was an easy one for him because we had the same basic bottom line as his corporation. I continued: "But suppose that the task of the church is different.

Suppose that the mission of the church is to give its life, to die for the world as the Savior died on the cross for us all. Suppose that our job is to stand on the side of the poor and oppressed, at whatever cost, and in the process lose members and lose money, actually become smaller in the course of being obedient. Can you tell us how we would go about doing that?"

I still admire him for his answer. He smiled and he didn't even pause before answering. "It's up to you," he said, pointing his finger at us decisively, "to decide what the goals and objectives of the church are. You tell me what they are and I'll tell you how to do achieve them." And I've never doubted that he could have done it. There were a lot of dirty looks flung my way and an embarrassed pause. Then, someone got up and asked a question about internal functioning of a bureaucracy and we never got back to my question. I think the expert was frustrated because he really wanted to tell us how we could go about dying for the world efficiently.

It wasn't an option and it still isn't. The churches in their bureaucratic structures are dedicated to survival first and growth second. In effect, these are the only major objectives everyone can agree on.

There were some who agreed with me, in principle. But in sad fact, the mainline denominations have no clear theology. They are collections of people spread out over all six of Kohlberg's stages and with divergent theologies to match. They cannot take consistent directions and speak clearly because to do so would be to alienate and lose members. So the bureaucracies become places where vague inspiring language is the rule and bureaucrats are hired whose expertise is in double-talk and compromise.

The denominations continue to make a few brave statements on behalf of disarmament or social justice, which pastors are generally careful to see that their congregations don't hear about. the leadership has loved issues like Apartheid in South Africa which are far enough away not to upset anyone.

I joined the Quakers with the determination that I would keep one foot in the historic church while searching for a Christian community which could be an example such as we need. They seemed to me to be a less objectionable branch than the others. I love the equality of the sexes in leadership, the emphasis on all members as equally ministers, the pacifist tradition and active struggle against war, the openness to outcasts, and the theology of the Inner Light. However, the Quaker tendency to discuss endlessly how to act until the action has passed by, the devotion to old ways, awkwardness in dealing with the emotion of anger, and the bias against confrontation with evil systems in the name of gentleness all raise within me a very unquakerly fury at times.

As a minister in the Disciples I could not fully speak my mind. I could not preach what I believed without hedging. I could not say what was on my mind without offending others and endangering my job. I was schizoid, as I believe a great many ministers continue to be. Voting with the feet means to go find or found a community of faith in which we can say what we believe without muffling or mumbling, and that we can act on it without gross compromise with evil. It is to find a family of faith in which we can be whole and not split between a public image and a private convictions.

Radical social action is a necessary part at all ages, times and places of helping each other become like God. It is one way the god-self of agape naturally conducts itself in response to injustice and human suffering. But it does not accomplish church renewal by itself.

3. Restructure and Mergers

Denominational restructure and mergers almost never help reform or renew the churches.

When I was with the National Council of Churches in the 1970s the Council itself and most of its large member denominations went through a major reorganization. These restructures were supposed to be based on new theology which used all the latest jargon about mobilizing the laity, ministry of all the people, concern about the poor and the oppressed, and so on. So far as I can tell they did little for any of these causes. More women were brought on staffs or elected to high office. More minorities were brought in. Little has changed because the same crippling facts obtain.

The denominations continue to be giant collections of people of vastly different theologies, strung out all along Kohlberg's six stages. Consequently, every time they restructure or labor for a year to set up new criteria and procedures for allocating their money it comes down to making a place in the system for every pressure group in the church. What emerges looks like an ecclesiastical camel, an animal which reputedly was put together by a committee. The new structures are as theologically vague, ambivalent about how the church should live, and bureaucratically muscle-bound as the old. Sometimes more so.

The results of denominational mergers are worse, and this deserves a book in itself. When northern and southern

Presbyterians merged, most of the time in discussions had to be given over to how to accommodate all the institutions to one another and how to keep on most of the old bureaucrats. A huge amount of money was spent.

The denomination had to move more to the right, politically and biblically, to accommodate the southerners. The crippling effect of theological diversity became even greater. The merger postponed further the day when Presbyterians will be able to openly welcome practicing homosexuals into the ministry. It became an example of what Bishop Ivan Holt of the Methodist Church described back in 1947 in this way: "Uniting two icicles never produced any warmth."

Interestingly, the March, 1989 agreement for greater church cooperation and unity by the denominations participating in the Council on Christian Unity (COCU) seems to agree with me. Structural unity is not only not in the cards, but is increasingly seen as undesirable, I suspect for some of the reasons I've noted above.

Contributions of the Liberals

I have been too negative about liberal Christians. I've been one for most of my life and still continue to be in most respects. We tend to attack hardest those most like ourselves.

Do stage 5 liberal denominations have a role to play in God's economy? Yes, of course. They help move people from stages 3 and 4 over to stage 5. They generate liberals. This is a great contribution to church and society. But it still is my contention that those who find themselves split within by what they are required to do in service of those churches would better serve God, themselves and their families if they walked out and found or created communities where they could speak and act with full honesty. I respect my friends who have stayed with the leadership in these groups. I admire sometimes the grace and daring of their political high wire act without a net. But I do not think they best serve God, the church or themselves by being willing to "be damned for the glory of God." To die for others may indeed be blessed of God. But does God ever ask any of us to sicken ourselves morally and psychologically by stifling a part of our deep inner convictions just to stay in a position of leadership where we can effect small changes? Isn't there always a better alternative?

4. Small Group Life

The most effective renewal since the fifties has been done by house churches or small prayer, action or encounter groups within or alongside existing congregations. I have helped organize and been a part of a half dozen of these.

Some have been primarily social action coalitions which also engage in Bible study, worship and interpersonal sharing. All have helped break through to a certain extent the prevailing boredom of creative people within the sterility of local church life. By sterility I mean the deadness of worship and other inner church life due to the fact that most of the people have been church members for years and it has changed them hardly at all.

The customary defense is that people can change if they open themselves to the influence of the church, and those who don't change, by definition, haven't opened themselves.

In these small groups this argument is exposed as a cop-out. People have been drawn in and led to experience self-examination, sharing and social involvement which have broken them open and started a process of radical inner change. I've seen it happen repeatedly. This exposes the barrenness of the usual church organization and practice.

I am asking why anyone should want or need to stay within a stage 4 or 5 church when it is possible to go out and find or found a stage 6-7 congregation, based on a stage 6-7 theology and style of life. Such a congregation can be a more hospitable home for persons at all stages and can nurture people along faster and more effectively in their growth. Children and adults operating at lower stages can be compared to members of a family with mature parents. Mature adults nurture children along faster, more smoothly and effectively because the organizational principles of the family are dialogical rather than patriarchal and punitive.

Who, then, is going to keep the stage 3, 4, and 5 congregations going in order to serve their function of picking people up where they are and moving them along in their growth? The answer should be obvious. The people who believe in them honestly will participate in and run them honestly. Those who can no longer believe in them wholeheartedly might better get out and move on for the sake of the mission of the church on earth as well as their own psychological, spiritual and moral health rather than trying to change them from within.

5. Evangelism

There are those who list a fifth element in church renewal. The church is renewed and stays fresh, they claim, whenever it is an evangelistic, missionary church. The continual addition of new joyous, youthfully enthusiastic members is a constant renewing force.

Japanese theologian Masao Takenaka commented ruefully that evangelism is too often like pulling a fish from one dirty pond (the world) and putting it into another dirty pond (the church). We also remember Jesus' accusation against the Pharisees that they ranged the world making converts who became twice as much sons of hell.

Effective evangelism, which is also faithful to the God of transforming agape, is that based upon a powerful example of redemptive, loving community. Wherever missions has succeeded in the world, succeeded in producing god-like character, it has been through this kind of example of life and not through verbal pyrotechnics or vivid audiovisuals. Authentic life produces authentic life. Evangelism, outreach, should be done by those who are filled with joy and not those pushed by grim sense of duty or fear of hell.

Evangelism compatible with agape is inviting people to "come and see," to "taste and see that it is good." People will come and visit and look at the Christian community. If it is real many will stay and be changed. If it is not a community of agape, they will go away or they may stay but for the wrong reasons.

How will these faith communities be different?

Controversy, a Mark of the True Church

If we want to see where the church of tomorrow is emerging we will look beyond the above formally correct qualities. We will be on the watch for a kind of reckless daring in both witness and intimacy.

It will certainly involve a more passionate involvement in social justice causes and serving the poorest of the poor.

And – a big change – it will also involve deliberately tackling controversial issues and grappling with them in the congregation, rather than avoiding it as the churches do now. This is a part of the churches' vital function in preparing people for the 21st century and true maturity. If the churches cannot cope with controversy within, how can they be of help to people who will have to help decide the most difficult and complex political and economic and moral issues out in the world?

The Beacon Hill Friends Meeting, to which I belonged, is not yet a stage 6-7 community, by far. But some of its practices reflect aspects of such a faith community.

One example: A weekend retreat in the late Fall of 1987 was given over to the consideration of the explosive subject of same sex marriage. There were worship and prayer and play during the retreat. But most of the time was given to seeing if the group could come to a consensus on the subject of whether men can marry men and women wed women. There were deep differences, especially since the group was divided about equally between gay and lesbian members and those who are heterosexual.

It was reported to the Meeting the next Sunday that, while no final agreement was achieved, there was a deep feeling of oneness and love in the group and a sense that they had been in the presence of the Spirit in their deliberations.

The contrast should be clear. The congregations I've belonged to in the past would not have even sponsored such a discussion. Most of them could not even docket a discussion on the Vietnam War. One of the characteristics of a stage 6-7 community, at the very least, is that no topic on which even one member feels strongly is taboo, and there is an openness to listen, discuss and consider being changed. There is also a commitment to living in love and understanding with people whose opinions differ sharply from one's own.

There is no assertion that the people who belong to the Beacon Hill Friends Meeting are more moral, more intelligent, more spiritual, or in any other way superior, on the average, compared to the membership of any congregation anywhere.

The point is that the community has a theology and style of life which are different. It is a community established on principles and practices considerably nearer to a stage 6-7 theology and style of life.

An analogy – as to the strategic importance of structures – would be the US Constitution, a stage 5 document which has operated as a major change agent in the direction of political maturity in a nation the majority of whose adult citizens continue to function primarily at stages 3 and 4.

There is a reverse analogy in the world of politics. Compromise, some say, is the heart of politics and the churches are organizations in which compromise must be a part of the life. Not wholly untrue. But it must not be compromise with the evil of the institutions of the world outside the church. This is the way to continue and refuse to heal the disastrous poisoning of the life of the church which goes back to the time of Constantine when the church began to bless war and take part in it.

Beacon Hill Friends Meeting has members who are not pacifist and who disagree with some actions and statements of the community. No one demands that they conform or asks them to leave. They are welcomed and loved.

We must recognize that the church is not to be an institution in the same sense other organizations in society are. It is meant to be the people of God, representing God's Kingdom in the world. When it embraces violence or other evil means in order to try to influence the nation and its policies and their policies, it only confuses its message and leaves God's love without clear witness in the world.

This ideal of open, unfettered communication is the core of Jurgen Habermas' definition of how society must come to function. To him this is an essential condition for the development of ethical and moral maturity. Habermas characterizes his stage 7 as the place where "the principle of justification of norms is no longer the monologically applicable principle of generalizability but the communally followed procedure of redeeming normative validity claims discursively."⁴

Actually, we all have to have controversy, challenge and examples of advanced moral thinking and living to lead and push us beyond where we are, to give us the ability to transcend each stage and move on.

If we need controversy to grow, keeping the peace should be a third level objective within the churches.

Quality Rather than Quantity

This brings us again to our other basic question: the difference it makes in faith and life if one believes salvation is ultimately to become like God. It is more important for the churches to help a few people to grow decisively – those who are willing to – than it is for them to keep a lot of bodies within the four walls of the institution. In the long run, this will bring more people to godliness and will change society more rapidly and positively than will a spurious inclusiveness at a minimal level of commitment.

When we no longer believe in a hell of punishment, then we are free to live out this very different view of how the churches should be living.

Fortunately, the church is not limited only to its own resources. Communities spring up in the secular world which challenge the churches' apathy, as with the civil rights movement in Mississippi in the 1960s which, in its early years, showed a remarkable level of non-violence, participatory egalitarian leadership, and sacrificial love for the poor and for one another. This did not last beyond the sixties, but it exposed the serious sickness of the institutional churches by a clear vision of what they should be like.

Such examples also occur repeatedly at the fringes of the institutional church, from the life and order of St. Francis through

the contemporary base communities in Latin America.

Redemptive Small Groups

Understanding salvation to mean becoming like God and picturing a stage 6-7 organization alter decisively the terms of the discussion of church renewal. This calls for churches which are more open to discussion, discovery, experiment, conflict. If no one will be lost to God in the end, it is not important to hold on to those who do not accept change. Size and wealth are no longer as important as clarity and daring in living out of God's nonviolent, self-giving love on earth. The power to change individuals and move them forward in growth is more important than keeping those who do not accept the heady new wine of controversy or the threat of intimacy in small prayer-encounter groups.

People are changed and history is moved by small groups which incarnate and exhibit the power of the new being of agape. This wholistic style of life will attract people who are ready to change and it will repel those who are not.

A great historian wrote of how reforms and revolutions, significant innovative changes, take place in history:

*... the strongest organizational unit in the world's story would appear to be a thing which we call as "cell," for it is a remorseless self-multiplier; it is exceptionally difficult to destroy, it can preserve its intensity of local life while vast organizations quickly wither when they are weakened at the centre; it can defy the power of governments and it is the appropriate level for prising open any status quo. ... And the men who form cells are pursuing a higher strategy than those who seek immediately to capture governments; for those who make a direct bid to capture a government must bow before existing gods and existing tendencies in order to open a path to power; while those who form cells have no need to dilute their purposes or to purchase favor from the superiors of the status quo.*⁵

Liberal church people who seek stay in power in existing church governments and institutions should consider more deeply how God's strategy for advance in history seems to operate. Liberal churches are in several respects stage 5 churches. God's plan did advance a notch at the point they began to be. God's success involves advancing at least two more notches, so that the world may see and believe the full love of God in all its glory and joy.

Those living in the age of the Spirit have to sit looser to institutions and institutional loyalty. The churches must incarnate and live nonviolent, sacrificial love for the poor and for one another, rather than trying to return to or enforce outmoded morality and structures. They must be willing to trade some numbers and money for spiritual vitality and a style of life which changes people radically.

My criticisms of the institutional churches arise from no bad experiences or personal resentment. Churches and church people have treated me only with kindness, encouragement, forgiveness and much needed assistance of other kinds. If the above evaluation seems extreme I invite the reader to examine the similar charges made by M. Scott Peck in *The Different Drum: Community Making and Peace*:

The Maundy Thursday Revolution began to be aborted at the time of Constantine, when Christianity became a legal religion. A short while later the abortion was virtually complete when it became the official religion. It then became safe to be a Christian. The crisis was over. And when crisis ends, community generally tends to fade away. So, as if the time of martyrs largely passed, so did the life blood begin to flow out of Christianity and out of the Church.

We come here to the nub. Because Christ so clearly called us to peacemaking, the Church is the most important key to disarmament. But in order for the Church to get wholeheartedly behind the disarmament movement the issue of the arms race will have to be fought out within the body of the Church. And I do not mean simply fought out within the councils of Church leaders. It must be fought, parishioner struggling with parishioner, in each and every congregation across the land.

*In fact, the Church has failed in one dimension because it has attempted to be too inclusive. ... The plain reality is that by and large the Church has not been in the community game, it has been in the numbers game. The second thing to remember is that there are vast numbers of uncommitted religious who remain uncommitted because they have never seen a church worthy of their commitment. What they have seen instead are churches in the numbers game, churches that are wishy-washy social clubs, churches that lack community and the spirit of community ...*⁶

One way or another, in God's time, there is a stage 6-7 church to be born.

Questions for Thought

1. Does your congregation embody stage 6-7 principles and practices? List them. Does it have small groups? Does it have controversy over more than the color of the new carpet? Where would you place it on the Kohlberg scale? Is there a statement of mission? What does it say about justice or the poor and oppressed? About world peace?
2. What would like to change in your congregation after this study and how would you go about it?

Notes

1. *Time*, December 27, 1982, page 52
2. *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ*, Harpers, 1988, page 29
3. I Corinthians 14:8 (NIV)

4. Communication and the Evolution of Society, page 90. Habermas, on the grounding of ethics in truth, writes: "... in the final analysis the idea of truth requires recourse to an agreement that, if it is to be capable of holding as an index veri et falsi, has to be conceived as if it were achieved under the ideal conditions of an unrestricted discussion free from coercion." *Philosophical-Political Profiles*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, 1985, (Translated by Thomas McCarthy), page 1225.
5. *Herbert Butterfield: Writings on Christianity and History*, edited by Herbert Butterfield and C.T. McIntire, Oxford University Press, 1979, page 25
6. A Touchstone Book, Simon & Schuster Inc., New York, 1987, pages 295, 299-302

13. Religions in the Age of the Spirit

The God who was unending love and sustained creative power; who had made man in his image and bidden him to become holy like his creator is hypostacized and adored and ceases to be a challenge, a commandment and an imperative. The law is abrogated and supplanted by faith; and with the conception of hell, cruelty is projected into a mien that had never been cheerful, and the divine countenance is surrounded with an aura of magic, miracles and superstition. In the end, man lies in the dust before his own graven image.

- Walter Kaufmann ¹

The Coming of Christ into the world is the central fact of anthropogeny, the flowering time of humanity. But man's self-consciousness was not immediately revealed in Christianity and it had to pass through stages of development, nor is there any reason to suppose that this process is finished. ... Christianity has not been finally actualized and has immense potentialities. The conservative element in Christianity cannot tolerate even the idea of a potential creative energy because, as far as it is concerned, everything has been finally actualized. Thus the content of Christianity is impoverished and it almost looks as if men wanted to limit it for fear of its possibilities. Our task is certainly not to adapt Christianity to modern naturalistic evolutionism, as certain "modernists" do, but rather to discover in its depths a principle independent of development.

- Nicholas Berdyaev ²

A faith for the age of the Spirit should be able to show how the world religions can establish peace with one another and provide a basis for fruitful dialogue among themselves as a basis for contributing to peace and justice in the world at large. This end is implied in Teilhard de Chardin's Omega Point.

So much in comparative religion has been off course because it was are based on a least common denominator approach. This papers over differences. It tends also to reduce religion to ethics and then to search until teachings are found which appear to be similar.

What is required, rather, is dialogue based upon a frank acceptance of differences.

The most promising path is to center on a question of common concern to all religions: What is healthy, whole, strong joyous humanity, and how do we produce it?

The corollary is: What kind of society nurtures such people and how can we achieve it? This is the way suggested in this course.

This should be accompanied by joint projects in feeding the hungry and eliminating disease and poverty and strife. Only this can give urgency and realism to dialogue.

Crisis and Response

Religion, especially in its relationship to human personality and society is undergoing a basic crisis. The main crisis for all faiths is posed by what might be termed the acids of modernity. This is the challenge of science, secularization, modern technology, materialism, democracy, and other secular ideologies and trends.

Science, in its various manifestations, challenges the truth of many religious claims, while the other forces call into question the personal and social values of any religion except a religion of humanity.

The way in which each religion reacts to this multi-faceted crisis determines its relevance to the emergence of a new humanity of loving, joyous people.

It would be encouraging if we could simply conclude that those religions which don't move with the signs of the times will just fade away. Unfortunately, as we see from the maneuvers of fundamentalist rightists in the United States and Iran, there are demonic and destructive dimensions to the defensive writhings of religious communities which feel themselves undercut by modern trends.

Reactions to the crises in the religions often breeds fanatical extremes, theocratic dictatorships and genocidal violence.

Religions in History

Looking at religions and their role in history, this student concludes reluctantly that over 90% of the manifestations of religion in history have been reactionary rather than progressive so far as the encouragement of human freedom, justice and compassion are concerned. Most religions through most of history have bound humankind in taboos, self-torture, and self-denial.

In addition, as critics from Nietzsche through Walter Kaufmann and Ernest Becker have pointed out, religions have acted to leach the creative energy and initiative out of humanity by ascribing the glory and worth all to God.

Religions have also, in every generation, entered into collusion with ruthless rulers to maintain social control and supported use of torture, imprisonment and judicial murder.

This has been the story of Christianity from the time of Constantine and of Judaism in Israel since 1967. Christianity is, of course, the religion which is most guilty, because it claims to be based upon faith in a God who is self-sacrificing and all-inclusive love.

In this session we look at the signs of the times relating to religion in two respects: (1) The crises in religion and the kinds of reaction we see in them; and (2) an analysis of each major religion in terms of the specific crises and decisions it faces. I do not discuss secular ideologies which have performed the role of religion for many, such as Nazism and Communism.

Stage 6-7 Religion

To stand outside the religions and judge them requires criteria against which we can measure each one objectively. To attain such a perspective we'll look through the lenses of Kohlberg's stages and the god-self, by asking again our two basic questions:

1. What would a religion be like if it taught that salvation is more to become like God than to go to a place called heaven? In this course, godlike is defined as becoming the four-fold structure of agape with its wholistic power of being.
2. What would a stage 6-7 religion look like?

What kind of religion cherishes and produces all the dimensions of human wholeness, including individual freedom, compassion, universal content and concern, and internal integrity?

What kind of religion considers each individual to be as valuable and beloved as any other, regardless of age, education, possessions, level of moral maturity or kind of behavior?

What kind of religion refuses to hold meditation or celibacy or personal piety above the feeding and healing of children or the establishment of justice in societies?

In passing, let's note that a good rule of thumb for judging religions is the way they counsel their nations to treat the poor, the weak and helpless and the ideological outcast. Look at what a religion says about the right and wrong of who prosper economically and who do not, who get health care, education, housing, who have some control of their destiny and who do not, who are warm in winter and who are cold, who are abused and cannot find judicial relief and who are automatically defended within the system. Take into account also the nation's wealth, its comparative ability to care for the poor, children, the aged, the mentally ill, and culturally handicapped. Look at what the religion says about war and about the right of people to kill and for what reasons.

This is admittedly something of a western and Christian definition of religion and its goals. But I believe it opens up the questions of concern to all humankind, the immediate, important issues with which all the religions must wrestle.

Perhaps more important, they are questions which judge as deeply and critically the Christian churches as they do any other of the other religions.

Hans Kung's Criteria

Catholic theologian Hans Kung's book, *Theology for the Third Millennium: An Ecumenical View*, presents an important set of hypotheses on the basis of which denominations and religions may enter into dialogue toward an ecumenical theology, or, in the case of religions, a basis for cooperation and peace.

He suggests, as I do, that the basis for inter-religious dialogue is the question of true humanity. What preserves and enhances human life at its highest, individual and social?

Kung also attempts his own definition of human and humane and sets up criteria for true and untrue (good and bad) religion:

According to the basic norm of genuine humanity, good and evil, true and false, can be distinguished. We can also distinguish what is basically good and evil, what is true and what is false in any individual religion. This criterion might be formulated with regard to religion as follows:

a) Positive criterion: Insofar as a religion serves the virtue of humanity, insofar as its teachings on faith and morals, its rites and institutions support human beings in their human identity, and allows them to gain a meaningful and fruitful existence, it is a true and good religion.

In other words: Whatever manifestly protects, heals and fulfills human beings in their physical and psychic, individual and social humanness (life, integrity, justice, peace), what, in other words, is humane and truly human, can with reason invoke "the divine."

b) Negative criterion: Insofar as a religion spreads inhumanity, insofar as its teachings on faith and morals, its rites and institutions hinder human beings in their human identity, meaningfulness, and valuableness, insofar as it helps to

make them fail to achieve a meaningful and fruitful existence, it is a false and bad religion.

Whatever manifestly oppresses, injures, and destroys human beings in their physical and psychic, individual and social humanness (life, integrity, freedom, justice, peace), what, in other words is inhumane, not truly human, cannot with reason invoke, "the divine." ³

Kung is clear that his is a post-modern post-liberal form of Christian theology, and does not represent all forms of Christianity, certainly not the fundamentalist Protestant, the classical Reformation, the Neo-Scholastic Catholic, and so on.

This is the form of Christianity which is most open to dialogue with other religions on an equal basis. Perhaps Kung's way of defining human good is too Christian and western, but then presumably the other religions also come to the table with their own definitions and criteria. The results of such dialogue can only be good.

Four Dead-ends

Every major religion seeking to cope with the challenge of science and technology, secularism, pluralism and the other acids of modernity finds four contradictory movements struggling within itself. Each of these is a dead-end. By dead-end I mean that none of them results in genuine religious renewal.

They are strategies of survival, each of which tends to undercut any truly creative response to the crises. They are efforts to save religion rather than to allow it to follow the guideposts God has planted along the historical trail. Each of these strategies is an attempt to evade the hard, narrow path of agape.

Each is an attempt to pull in the walls of religion to confine the Spirit within the blinders of one of Kohlberg's lower stages of development. Religion then continues to operate to protect our laziness, fears and prejudices, not to mention our class economic self-interest.

Stage Level and Religion

When a society or individual remains trapped at a lower stage level the condition is not morally and psychologically neutral. As other people and societies are changing and opening out, the closed person or society is led by the outside threat to often severe defensive reactions.

We should note that people who remain at the pre-conventional levels (stages 1 & 2) basically want to be followers, to be taken care of, to trail after some leader on a white horse. They do not want to think or decide. They usually don't care much who gets killed or tortured in the process of securing a stable and supportive environment for themselves.

Those at the conventional levels (stages 3 & 4) tend to feel a compulsion to find an interpretation of life which is clear, firm and unchanging. They have a need for a strong supportive shell of faith around them. As we saw in session 6, when the boundaries are threatened by other faiths, those at stages 3 & 4 tend to circle the wagons and either isolate themselves or strike out against the threatening heretics. They see and picture themselves more and more as the good faith defending itself against evil.

Such a faith shell always defines itself by excluding others: We are Christians and capitalists; we distrust Moslems and hate communists. Because it is dogma, handed down by the leaders, such Christians find themselves simultaneously trying to outlaw abortion and at the same time advocating capital punishment and threatening to use nuclear weapons all without sensing any contradiction.

With this as background let's move on to look at the four dead-ends religions come up against as they attempt to neutralize the acids of modernity mentioned earlier.

The four dead-end movements are: modernism, fundamentalism, ethno-political religion, and new sects and syncretism.

1. Modernism

Modernism is the attempt to adapt traditional beliefs to modern science, technology and cultural-political trends.

Religions are eroded by the acids of modernity. Science explains many of the mysteries of nature and contradicts the pseudo-science of the scriptures. The ties of dogma are loosened. In an increasingly secularized and pluralistic world, religious communities cannot insulate their young people from other ways of life. So some reach for new interpretations of scripture and draw new lines of acceptable and unacceptable behavior which take in and baptize secular beliefs and styles of life.

First, Christian modernists said that Creation took six days, but the days were thousands of years long. Then, in the next stage, they say the whole story is just a myth anyway; the Bible is not a book of science but of faith. Demythologization explains away miracles. Jesus didn't really multiply the loaves and fishes; he just gave an example of love and the people all got out their lunches and shared them. That's a great sermon but it's not the point the gospel writer was making.

Modernism is appropriate to stage 5, the age of pluralism, democracy, individualism and a permissive view of life.

Modernism undercuts the controlling power of scripture, dogma and religious authorities.

Most forms of modernism are no antidote to the crisis of the acids of modernity because they go over to the enemy. Modernism concedes too much. It is essentially a negative process. It erodes authority but cannot replace it with a viable substitute. It tends to replace religious feeling with arid philosophy, the warm emotions of pietism with the cold atmosphere of a lecture hall. It is strong for social justice but is not at home with the end called death.

Modernism and the stage 5 churches tend to stop spiritual growth short at stage 5 and to keep people suspended there.

Modernism encourages a permissive society, but gives little clear guidance on what the new morality is and what it aims to produce. It pushes a vague stage 5 liberal permissive God.

The most frequent religious reaction to the vagueness and coldness of modernism is fundamentalism. Keep in mind that

while our examples largely come from Christianity, the same dynamics are at work in Hindu, Buddhist and Islamic communities and nations.

2. Fundamentalism

Fundamentalism is an attempt to return to the oldest, most primitive roots of the faith and to cling to them as an anchor in an age when everything seems to be loose and flapping in the wind. If you can return to the point where the spring emerges from the mountain you find the purest water. This core of irreducible and absolute truth is then supposed to be something everyone can agree upon.

Fundamentalism also cannot succeed. The origins of all religions are too obscure and pluralistic. No unassailable foundation can be found. Christian fundamentalists, for instance, are at war with one another and also with evangelicals who tend to believe that while the Bible is literally true it is not infallible in its every word and concept.

Fundamentalism's critical flaw, from the point of view of wholeness and the god-self, is that it is reductionist. In defining an official body of doctrine and limiting good behavior to a narrow list of permissible enjoyments, it truncates human development and limits divinely ordained creativity and enjoyment of the world the Creator declared good.

Fundamentalism tends to freeze human development at stages 3 and 4. It is sexist, so it tends to freeze female development in a dependent, home-bound, husband-dominated stage 3. (Even by the post-Gilligan grading criteria. See Appendix B.) Fundamentalist men get out into the world of business and politics, so may be stimulated to advance to a very narrow stage 4 perspective.

Every negative thing which I have said about fundamentalism, and will say about other religious movements, represents a major characteristic or trend in that faith community. However, it is important to point out that there are notable individual exceptions and significant reform minorities in every religious community. This qualification must be made in order to avoid distortion.

Fundamentalism is based on external authority, on scripture and dogma backed by the power of charismatic authority figures. You believe because you trust those who tell you it is true.

Dependence on authority figures blocks the advance to stages 5 & 6 where authority is of necessity centered in internalized, self-chosen standards formed in an dialogic atmosphere of creativity and an open future of many possibilities.

3. Ethno-political Religion

Because of the failure of both the modernist and fundamentalist alternatives, some turn to other solutions: ethno-national religion, new sects or syncretism.

Ethno-political religion is religion in the service of politics.

The authorities are ostensibly religious but are actually interested in social control, using religion to unite the people behind their policies and rule. Emperor worship in Rome was one example. The superficial capitalist God to which American politicians appeal is another.

Ethno-political religion is folk religion. Its rubrics are the "In God We Trust" on American coins and the "Gott mit uns" on German army belt buckles in World War I. "Gott mit uns" has the same happy ambiguity as America's cultural icons. It can mean either, "God is on our side!" or "We pray that God is with us!" The vast gulf between the two is conveniently papered over.

We see this operating to some extent in every country where one religion is represented by a political party consolidating its power.

In Uganda, Idi Amin sided with Islam and Christians were massacred. In Iran believers in Bahai and other minorities have been executed or imprisoned.

Islam is not the only religion which has factions that assume they should totally control the state and dictate the morality of the nation. In India Hindu fundamentalists seek laws restricting other religions and especially their evangelistic outreach. In Thailand and Burma, the Buddhist majorities assume their right to work their will on the Karens, Kachins and other hill tribes, many of whom are Christian. In Malaysia and Indonesia, Islamic majorities have substantial, organized factions which want to totally control public policy and to restrict the rights of Christians, Buddhists, Hindus and others.

Fundamentalists and other conservatives often give themselves to such alliances between religion and state power, as with the Christian Coalition in America.

This is the death of religion as religion. The religion loses its ability to speak to the modern world; it packs religion away in a box where it cannot change and cope realistically with the modern world and its devastating issues.

Ethno-political religion is dragged along at the tailgate of national policy. It forfeits the possibility of universal appeal.

Universality to these movements means to convert all peoples to their beliefs.

Ethno-political religion, as with fundamentalism, tends to freeze the development of individuals and society at stages 3 and

4.

4. New Sects and Syncretism

Modernism, fundamentalism and ethno-political religion fail. Many people prefer to try a new start through some sect offering a new revelation and/or a syncretism of the best and highest in all religions.

This happens in a variety of ways. Often it is a new prophet, who declares a fresh and certain word of God.

Nichiren, in the 13th century, came down from Mt. Heiei near Kyoto proclaiming all the other forms of Buddhism false. The only true scripture, he said, was the Lotus Sutra, and only as interpreted by him. So the most aggressive and powerful sects of

modern Buddhism in Japan were born, also the ones which claim they will become the religion of all humankind.

We know of the Book of Mormon and the distinctive beliefs of the Seventh Day Adventists, both based in the work of a new prophet. These are only three examples of many.

Some sects are syncretistic, claiming to take the basic truths from all religions. But usually each is based in one religion (Islam in the case of Bahai) while drawing on ethical teachings from others.

None of the new sects born in the last hundred years can succeed in becoming a major religion. Each runs against obstacles which cause it to become a small, embattled minority. None can attract a majority of the people in even one nation.

There are good psychological and historical reasons why this is true. Some sects draw tight boundaries of belief and practice which confine the human spirit and truncate its freedom and creativity. Other sects are broad and inclusive. Both ways leach out religious power ultimately.

The broad and inclusive sects lose all boundaries, the boundaries which produce in stage 3 and 4 people that narrow, intense passion required for aggressive evangelistic effort. They are weakened by their lack of specificity beyond vague appeals to universal love and brotherhood.

The new religions which have grown rapidly and developed political clout (as with the Nichiren sects in Japan which has the powerful Sokkagakkai as its lay arm) have been especially narrow, exclusive and proselytizing. In this they are like the fundamentalists of the major religions. This is their strength and also their ultimate weakness.

New religions and sects go through a period of rapid growth, reach a certain peak, and then start to fall off. As they decline they become more and more ingrown and less and less influential. The prophet dies and then they fragment. They are eventually pressed and hemmed in on all sides. They are resisted by those who represent established religions and sects and also by atheists, agnostics and those who want to use religion for political ends.

Syncretisms fail for the same reasons sects do; in fact, they become sects. A true religion, someone remarked, is a seamless garment, a internally united pattern of faith and action. The new sects and syncretisms tend to be quilts, made up of scraps and pieces which are roughly sewn together and lack an coherent pattern around which an appealing unity can be built. They tend to repel those many who find any one of the scraps unacceptable.

These, then, are the four dead-ends and the reasons why each fails to create vital religion or to become universal.

An Alternative

Each of the four dead-ends poisons religion, preventing its becoming a kind of faith and system which promotes growth into the godlikeness of freedom, integrity, cosmic expansion and nonviolent love.

None of them offers believers a workable way out of the crisis posed to religion by the corroding acids of modernity.

Those religions which claim a huge percentage of humanity as believers are actually collections of religions; they are not unified within themselves. Christianity is not only divided into denominations, but churches tend to be spread theologically and ethically across Kohlberg's stages.

There is no majority religion, and nothing approaching it. Moreover, none of the religions shows any promise of becoming a majority religion, much less a power which can unite all of humanity in a single faith.

Is there another alternative? Yes, that suggested in the first seven sessions of this study. I do not mean that it can unite humanity, certainly not in the foreseeable future. Rather, it can perform a necessary function in the process. It can bring into the mix witnessing communities dedicated to boundless human growth, creativity, justice and specifically effective love. These will offer an alternative for those who need the stimulus and example required to advance beyond stage 5 to stages 6 and 7. This in turn opens up for all humanity a possibility whose time has come, a communal example in a time of confusion and darkness of a form of faith which promises to advance us decisively toward total liberation.

This, understood properly, I think, is the way God has intended us to go from the beginning. In every level of individual life and at each stage in history, we are posed with decisions each of which is a specific turning toward life or toward death.

If humanity had taken the right turnings at each point in history we would have moved more quickly and with less destructiveness through the stages of development into godlikeness. Humanity usually chose the direction of spiritual death, of selfish domination, of violence and hate and greed, instead of the way of a creative life of mutual self-giving, nonviolent love. So religions are necessarily in disarray along with all other aspects of our lives. We did not follow the red thread of nonviolent love, so we got lost in smoky mazes of alienation and violence.

Let us look now at each major religion, raising only one or two key questions each with regard to that faith's central dilemma.

Christianity - Giving up Winning

Christians are the most guilty of all the believers of all religions, because we have done the poorest job of all of living to the highest we profess to believe.

We claim to believe in an all-powerful, compassionate and just God, who loves each person in the human family equally and who stands for a humble, self-giving love in opposition to all forms of violence, coercion, manipulation and deceit. Not only do we not conduct ourselves that way, but we have twisted our faith to conform to our deviation from the Gospel.

Christians, to represent our God, must give up what is called triumphalism. We must give up the hope of winning all people to Christ through evangelism, as most of us have, thank God, given up the notion that we should convert them by sword or cultural pressure.

Instead, individually and collectively, we must try to live the way of agape in and before the world, letting our words and

actions carry the message of the out-going, non-manipulative love of God. That is all the evangelism (proclamation of the Good News) which is needed. Anything which is not based upon this communal reality tends to make people, as Jesus said of the converts of the Pharisees, "twice as much sons of hell as themselves."

Since most of this course is a critique of Christianity and suggestions for change, there is no need to develop the subject further here.

Judaism - To fulfill II Isaiah's Vision

The crisis in Judaism is whether it will become a universal religion proclaiming of a God of justice and compassion as preached by II Isaiah, or will remain an narrow, exclusivist, ethnic sect dedicated to self-preservation.

This drama is played out in Israel in the specific decisions facing the Jews as to how they will treat the Palestinians. The political choice involves a theological decision of ultimate import for the religion. If they choose to establish a theocracy, a nation of Jews for Jews, they will have to give up the dream of Zionist founders of being a modern, pluralistic, democratic state. However humane their treatment of the Arabs within the country and around them may be, they will of necessity reduce those peoples to third class citizenship, as the South Africans did with the black people.

The Arabs in Palestine have fully as ancient and valid a claim to the land as the Jews. They are stateless and homeless people in their own land.

The Jews must choose. If they decide God gave them the land of Palestine forever and their main job is to survive as a people within these boundaries, this is spiritual suicide. It involves victimizing another people and defining God's purpose in narrow, sectarian, ethnic lines. God becomes again the tribal God of his chosen people.

If Judaism should decide, on the other hand, as II Isaiah called them to do, to become the suffering servant of Yahweh, witnessing to God's nonviolent love through the marks of their suffering, they have the scars to make themselves heard and believed. If they should open their hands and hearts and land to the Palestinians and welcome them as equal and beloved children of one God, then all the peoples of the world would rally to help the Arab and Jewish children of Abraham (Semites all!) establish a nation or nations in Palestine which can live in peace and prosperity and become a beacon of reconciliation and community for all peoples everywhere.

Hinduism and Buddhism - Self, No Self or Communal Self

Both Hinduism and Buddhism are collections of religions, from polytheism through monotheism to forms of atheism. Buddhism is a reformed Hinduism. Both have been subject in the past century to all four of the movements cited above: modernism, fundamentalism, ethno-political use of religion, and new sects and syncretism.

The concepts of the god-self and of stages of development are a new and potentially fruitful opening to the Eastern religions. In a sense, in this transformation of the faith we already meet them half way.

There are two questions Christians must raise for dialogue with Hindus and Buddhists. The first is: Do not both religions focus on the unreality (illusion in Hinduism) of this life and its character as suffering to be escaped (Buddhism), and so leach much of the optimism, sensuality, joy and play out of this world and its existence?

The second question is usually expressed somewhat as follows: When one emerges into oneness with the Absolute, achieving moksha (salvation) or enlightenment, does the individual self survive in awareness and fulfillment? Or is it, as a lot of the language of Hindu and Buddhist mysticism suggests, like a drop of water vanishing into the ocean or the flame of a candle losing itself in the infinite Flame of the Absolute?

Following certain lines of development within both clusters of religion would allow a closer rapprochement between the kind of Christian faith I am describing and these religions. Some of the following points which Christians might raise at the table would challenge but others would sound unusually compatible:

(1) Affirm that there is a personal loving God and not just an impersonal structure (Dharma) or undifferentiated Absolute at the end of the trail. It might be best to describe God as supra-personal, which would indicate that S/He is not less but more personal than we are.

(2) Affirm that reincarnation with forgetfulness between rebirths undercuts both the gracefulness of the Creator and the moral responsibility of the individual. Rather, we are perfected in future lives in other dimensions in full awareness of our previous lives through accepting specific responsibility for our sins and by continuing to give and receive grace in loving, redemptive relationship with other individuals.

(3) Affirm that the god-self within, our God-gestalt, is indeed the Atman and the Buddha nature which is one in structure with the supra-personal God.

Some forms of Hinduism and Buddhism already have a firm grasp upon the truth that godlikeness is something we must become rather than a place to which we go.

The Mahayana sects of China and Japan encourage people to believe that upon death they go to a sort of heaven, the great Eastern Paradise. In this sense, they are like medieval Catholicism which preached a crude popular form of the faith, peopled with demons, relics and saints, while allowing mystics and monastics and theologians to have a more mature faith. The theory is that you must manipulate people into heaven by preaching what you believe they can understand and once there they will learn the larger truth. This is condescension and paternalism.

(4) Affirm that, while there are many word pictures for salvation, in the end it means becoming like God and, as a result of that likeness, one with God in a communion of common enjoyment among personal centers, and not an extinguishing of the Atman or Buddha nature within an undifferentiated One. Enlightenment, beatitude, escape from maya (illusion) into moksha or release from

the suffering of fate into the bliss of Nirvana, all of these images can be complementary aspects of one reality if salvation is understood as the emergence and fulfillment of our God nature and its unity with God.

In Christian mysticism, as a rule, the ultimate relationship with God has been described as a communion in love and purpose and spirit rather than a union. The latter suggests a loss of individual identity.

In the light cast by Kohlberg's researches we can see a whole new aspect of the monistic/atheist forms of Hinduism and Buddhism, those which deal with God as Absolute in a way similar to Neoplatonism. They, it now appears, are trying to leap over all the intervening stages of development to stage 7n without going through them.

It is as though all the rungs of the ladder have been removed except the top one and people are expected to leap clear to the top in one jump. This is like trying to park the apex of a pyramid in the air with nothing underneath to hold it up. The passage through the early stages provide the substance which fills and provides form to the eventual cosmic expansion of the self. Otherwise, it is like a balloon full of hot air, and just as unstable. The practical result of such a projection of the ultimate is that people are not able to live by the ideal. They instead fall back into polytheism or other forms of religion which are stage-appropriate. Christians do the same thing in relation to the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount.

There is no particular reason to believe that the Hindu and Buddhist vision of the ultimate end of humanity is any more accurate than any other, since we are unable to envision clearly what stage 7 is like until we are approaching stage 6, assuming that Kohlberg is correct in contending that no one can see clearly more than one stage beyond where she is operating.

In the relation of the human self to the Absolute, both Hinduism and Buddhism have had some of the same problems Christians had in the early centuries in describing the relationship of Jesus Christ to God. A primitive, almost physical, notion of substance in both cases prevents the paradoxical relation of self to absolute from being properly defined to show how individual differences are preserved and enrich a complex whole.

If oneness is defined rather as sharing the same basic gestalt, the structure of agape, then it is clear how the ultimate unity preserves and treasures the particular, specific and concrete experiences of individual lives.

A Communal God

A possible meeting point on this issue involves recognizing that God or the Absolute is and will be a community. This powerfully challenges the western idea of autonomous individual selves. The fulfilled god-self is, in itself, a collective or communal personality in two senses: (1) So much grace will have been poured into each of us by other people that we will be intertwined with all of them in loving relationships in our memories. Parts of them are in us and parts of us are in them. We have no wish or need to pose as or to pretend to be a self-made person. (2) We will surely, in future existences, be in much closer communion mentally with one another, in something like what we call telepathic communication but perhaps within a network of greater intimacy than we can now imagine.

This assertion forms a solid meeting point between East and West halfway between the two extremes of individual autonomy and being extinguished in the One. It is indeed a union of sorts, a genuine oneness, but without losing the individual flavor and unique contribution of each personal center.

(6) Affirm that karma (the destiny or fate which arises from our past sins) binding us to the wheel of suffering or to illusion is one of the characteristics of the demonic self-systems. They are fragments and so do not have power of being sufficient to conquer anxiety, illusion, and the defensive measures which lead to struggles for power and security, violence and other evil.

The dynamics of the demonic self-systems can indeed be described as a kind of fate, since they are fixed in form and cannot be changed. They can only be put to death.

(7) Affirm that salvation does not come through austerity or denial of the sensuous enjoyment of body and world. The pleasures of the flesh are not incompatible with the highest life of the spirit. Celibacy is not superior to a life in which sexual communion plays a large part. Rather our salvation or enlightenment involves liberation from control by the world of things in terms of no longer worshipping them idolatrously. Or, to put it differently, we no longer need any of them but rather are freed to enjoy them all.

Islam - Going Beyond the Book

The crisis in the religious world of Islam also is a reaction to the acids of modernity. Many devout Muslims feel goaded to justify the absolute truth of their faith once and for all. Some conservatives are tempted to go back to the theology of jihad, holy war. That is the same dilemma as has had to be faced in Christianity: triumphalism.

If Islam is to take a peaceful place among the family of religions and nations, and engage in dialogue rather than shouting, it must transcend the belief that the Koran is verbally inspired. There is too much inhuman and cruel in the Koran, as there is also in the Bible. (Recall the story of God's sending the bears to eat the children who mocked the prophet.)

If this can be done, as the mystics of Sufism have, then a number of good results occur: Islam will be able to give up both the psychology and the practice of jihad, the belief that Allah wants the conversion of others at the point of a sword or by political pressure.

Islam must learn to walk upon the mountain peaks in the Koran, as Christians have to learn to do within the Bible. Then, both religions will find it possible to affirm that the highest attribute of God is love. This is to emphasize the images in the Koran which speak of Allah as merciful, forgiving, caring as a parent, and so on. By this route, too, Islam will be freed of the compulsive need to control all of society in accordance with the most narrow-minded and punitive Islamic version of natural law.

There is historical precedent in the history of Islam for such behavior. After Islam had established its first empire, from Turkey and Spain through northern India, it settled down into a period of liberalism, openness, scientific investigation and thirst for

education and knowledge in all fields of human endeavor. Muslims were often more tolerant of Christians and Jews in their midst than the nations of Christendom were of adherents to other faiths.

What ended this openness to creativity and change, in a real sense, was the behavior of Christendom. The poisoning of relationships began with the Crusades. Then, in the 17th and 18th centuries there were new invasions and pressures from the West which caused a defensiveness and stagnation in Islam.

This was followed by the conquest of the Islamic countries and their domination by the West. So, the current resurgence of fundamentalism throughout the Islamic world is a reaction to the militarism, domination and cruelty of the so-called Christian nations. It is also a crying out of the human spirit for meaning, some way to make sense of life and what may lie beyond it.

We of the West helped create the fundamentalist theocracies of Islamic countries as we did Hitler. This is a lesson we must learn from history and learn well.

Confucianism - The Humanistic Family Way

Confucianism, with only tiny exceptions, is not an organized religion. It is a philosophy of human relationships and social organization.

People tend to underestimate the enduring power of Confucianism in the modern world. Perhaps it will be clearer if we point out that the dramatic economic success of Japan, Korea, Taiwan and Singapore and the amazing changes in the Peoples Republic of China are a result more of the residual power of Confucianism than either the influence of Marxism or capitalism. None of these societies is significantly either Marxist or capitalist. But they all share a deeply ingrained devotion to the belief that society should be structured at every level on the model of the family, an essentially patriarchal, authoritarian family at that.

It is this deeply felt need for peace and order in society, for knowing one's place in the hierarchy of power and for societal enforcement of conformity, which make it possible to direct economic development from the top, without stifling the emotional support and contribution of individuals and groups within the community.

This is the genius of the Confucian system, that it has built in restraints on arbitrary power alongside the pressure on everyone to accept a responsible role and make a social contribution while bending to authority from above. This is why in these countries it is possible for the government to call in the leaders of banks, industry, science and universities and cause them to work together to engage in long-range planning and development of radically new products, to get them financed and to market them throughout the world. The Confucian countries do not really believe in the virtues of competition, except in a very limited sense of the word. They believe in and practice working together, submitting individuality to the collective.

Dr. T. Hsu, then a professor of anthropology at Northwestern University, wrote an article in 1973 which suggests that societies had better take the way of Confucius if they are to survive.⁴

It is a persuasive article. Dr. Hsu contends that societies can hold together, survive and have peace and harmony only by achieving what he calls Psychosocial Homeostasis, a system which balances authority and freedom. Hsu contends that people are bound together by social role and affect. The individualism and overemphasis on freedom in our western societies, he contends, have destroyed our homeostasis, our balance. We have lost our sense of social role within a whole and we have lost our emotional links to others which are found and expressed within the family.

As a result, Hsu says, the expanding individualist becomes diverted to trying to convert or change others to be like himself, to educate them, uplift and improve them, and in other ways to manipulate them. Mission and conquest become an effort to prove manhood (sic) and adequacy (to fill an inner vacuum of meaning and feeling). This encourages competition and conflict, staking out territories and defending them, trying to get an advantage over others rather than living together in peace and harmony.

Hsu accepts the fact that his way has negative consequences, a curtailing of individual freedom and creativity, but he still favors such reduction, considers it essential:

... my justification is that another name for creativity is deviation, and that uncontrolled development may lead not to social and cultural progress but to social and cultural destruction. When role relationships drive out affect relationships, all humans will treat each other as things (which) will lead to so much more mutual distrust, suspicion, and hatred that our society will find it hard to stay together. ... I feel strongly that our society has already gone too far, and that we need to retrace some of our steps.⁵

Hsu's analysis of the destructiveness of modern extreme individualism is as devastating as that of Nicholas Berdyaev. In contrast to Berdyaev, however, he counsels taking a step backward from freedom and creativity, at least temporarily. This sounds like good advice but is neither practical nor, I think, the right response:

1. It is too late to step back; the wine of infinity bubbles in our veins. We are set on a course, sails full spread, and we will ride it out either to destruction or fulfillment. The fires of creativity may be channeled to a greater degree, but not confined to the hearth.

2. It does not seem to me to be the will and purpose of God that we should turn back from expansion of the self and individual autonomy (freedom), only that these be accompanied by a full development of the other two aspects of wholistic power of being: compassion and inner integrity.

The answer is not to go backward to less freedom but on to control and liberation by the realizing the structure of agape.

If we truly believed that there is no God or expansive future beyond this life, then the way of the expanded family, Confucianism, might be our best choice for a religion, Confucianism melded with a kind of Stoic mysticism like that of Marcus Aurelius, a safer religion, that is, if safety is what we really seek.

Within such a social/ideological framework we could have the best of democracy and socialism and family love. There could be gradual extensions of individual freedom and political democracy within a stable framework of social control and responsibility.

Certainly we are headed for a massive and perhaps permanent crash if we neglect the development of small communities of love and loyalty within our emerging universal community. The church was always intended to be an extended family, but one where we learn to make intimacy work beyond the nuclear family. This it must become, or else.

Many Roads, One Peak

There is a lot of sentimental nonsense written by people who should know better about all religious roads leading by different routes to the top of the same peak of salvation.

All roads do not lead to the same peak. Some roads lead into torture chambers and genocidal wars, or to burning widows alive on funeral pyres. Others end up in swamps where people wander endlessly in a fog. Some religious movements cast up big landlords and generals to the top of an exploitative system within which the poor go hungry and die young.

We could say with more hope of accuracy that each religion takes us part way up the mountain, but none, including any existent form of Christianity, goes all the way, as yet. This is true whether we think of salvation as becoming godlike or primarily in terms of producing stage 6-7 people living in a stage 6-7 family of humans.

The religions will meet and come to fruitful harmony only as they begin to measure themselves by what enhances the health and wholeness of human beings and society, as Hans Kung suggests.

Most of them will be able to find this criterion somewhere in their scriptures and history.

They will meet and agree sooner if they join one another in projects of making peace, winning human rights, feeding the hungry, establishing justice and equality.

Questions for Thought

Consider or discuss: The key question here is whether the representatives of the religions can agree on some **criteria** for judging what is good religion and bad, what is true and false. Read again Hans King's argument. Compare this to Gordon Kaufman's views on theologizing in Appendix A. Does this really represent an imposition of Western democratic and Christian viewpoints on other religions?

Notes

1. *Critique of Religion and Philosophy*, Doubleday & Co., Inc., Garden City, NY, 1961, page 358
2. *Freedom and the Spirit*, London: Geoffrey Bles: The Centenary Press, 1935, pages 313,4
3. Hans Kung, *Theology for the Third Millennium: An Ecumenical View*, Doubleday, New York, 1988, pages 243-4
4. T. Hsu, *The Center Magazine*, November-December, 1973, pages 11-15
5. *ibid.*, pages 13, 14

14. Ethical Decisions in the Age of the Spirit

The Sabbath was made for people and not people for the Sabbath.

- Jesus

The most important thing for ethics is man's real nature, the spirit in which he acts, the presence or absence in him of inner light, of beneficent creative energy. Ethics must be based upon the conception of energy and not of the final end. It must therefore interpret freedom as the original source of action and inner creative energy and not as the power of fulfilling and realizing a set purpose. The moral good is not a goal but an inner force which lights up man's life from within.

- Nicholas Berdyaev ¹

The cold hard-set virtue devoid of creative fire is always dull and never saves. The heart must be set aglow if the dullness is to be dispelled. Dull virtue is a poor remedy against the boredom of emptiness. ... No rule or norm can save us from dullness and from evil lust engendered by it. Lust is a means of escape from boredom when goodness provides no such escape.

- Nicholas Berdyaev ²

... my self-actualizing subjects seem quite easily and decisively to "know right from wrong" for themselves.

- Abraham Maslow ³

This session provides a basis for personal ethical and moral reasoning, showing how the structure of agape provides the “transformed reason” necessary for reliable operation of some kind of situation ethics. The next session deals with the ethics, morality and decision-making in society.

Ethics in the age of the Spirit will move the question of behavior gradually over from the negatives of law and grim duty to the excitement and joy of doing justice and loving other people.

Christian ethics is also transformed through the answers to our two recurring questions:

1. What ethical actions follow if we believe that salvation is more a matter of becoming like God rather than to go to a place called heaven?

2. What would a stage 6-7 ethical response to God look like?

People in modern society know a great deal more about doing right and living with compassion than they put into practice. This may always have been true. But we live in a much more complex society than previous generations. We are pounded by conflicting value systems spread across the stages of ego development. We feel ourselves helpless to change society and its evil. This situation creates a new intensity of helplessness and frustration. The complexity tends to make us simply give in to the dominant powers in society, to accept uncritically their ethical posture, based as it is usually on stage 4 nationalistic values. This fixation has the further effect of tending to hold individual growth to stage 4.

What then would a revised Christian ethics have to say to us in our helplessness and frustration?

This session suggests two points: (1) that in the four-fold structure of agape we find a different kind of concrete ethical guidance which is perhaps more adequate for our time and conformed more closely to God’s purposes; and (2) we must have a new level of motivation. We have to somehow find an ecstatic joy in living ethically, so that it becomes more creative play than grim effort. In this Berdyaev is our prophet.

Creativity also suggests the kind of breakthrough which can save our world. It becomes the new means by which we can galvanize the general longing for peace and wholeness and focus its energy on viable solutions to ethical dilemmas.

The mobilizing of creativity constitutes, moreover, the one way of reaching those locked into the lower stages and attaching booster rockets to them, enabling them, not to leap over intervening stages of growth, but to scoot through them more rapidly and smoothly.

The Background and Context of Ethics

Christian ethics finds its initial motivation from thankfulness for the grace of God. Traditionally, this meant that once we experience forgiveness of our sins we are overwhelmed with joyous thanksgiving.

Ethical living is empowered by this thankful joy. This has, in fact, often happened. This motive appears at the center of the Hebrew Scriptures. In the prologue of the call Yahweh issues to Israel for obedience to the Torah, he reminds them that they were worthless slaves and he brought them out of bondage. The Torah, then, calls for them to behave in the same way toward others, including widows, orphans, the helpless, the poor, the weak, and even the foreigner who lives among them.⁴ The foundation of ethics, the model, if you will, is Yahweh’s graceful action of liberation.

For the Christian, the primary motivation for ethical and moral behavior has been thanksgiving for the liberating power of Jesus in our lives in and through the community of believers. Here, God is revealed as a loving Parent who seeks to replicate the divine love in every person and to bring about an on-going community of unselfish, over-flowing, redeeming love.

Christian ethics finds a powerful secondary motivation and its basic content from the actual living out of this love. Such living provides behavioral reinforcement. The deeper satisfaction and joy of building up rather than destroying, of helping people rather than hurting them are a kind of reward which encourage expansive growth and further acts of agape.

A New Start in the Third Age

This historic stance is correct, but too little and too late. Thanksgiving should start for us with the celebration of the unmerited gift of life itself, whether we are Christian or not. We should wake each morning ecstatic (unless we are sick or haven’t eaten for a couple of days, in which case all bets are off) with the prospect of another day we did nothing to deserve, a day open to all kinds of creative possibilities. If we all had this Garden of Eden joy in creation and life most of our ethical problems would be solved.

Sessions 5 and 6 spell out why we do not enjoy such a sensible playful and ecstatic approach to life. We are brain-washed by the social structures around us which have been twisted over centuries of hate, violence, greed and lust for power, and by the negative examples of those around us.

A Christian faith and community based upon stage 3 and 4 values cannot deliver most members from their inner demonic self-systems which worship the hateful and violent values of societies around us. Something more is needed.

Before we get to motivation, we must first look the way in which contextual ethics is different from the perspective of stage development and the god-self.

Ethical Guidance

Concrete guidance in ethical issues should come from what I call the structure of agape, its four-fold, wholistic pattern, which helps fill in and make specific what it means to become like God:

FREEDOM ——— RELATEDNESS
EXPANSION ——— INTEGRITY

Agape is the controlling sustained motive force of all that kind of personality which is like God; that is, that which is characterized by this sort of (1) internal coherence, unity and strength; (2) content and caring expanded to the universal/cosmic; (3) freedom from internal and external controls other than love itself, autonomy in the sense that one is dependent on no power except God; and (4) liberated compassion expressed as freedom to and joy within deep relationships of shared, selfless love with individual persons in community.

Life lived simultaneously at all the four corners of this square is as near to a workable, practical definition of a stage 6-7 life as we can come at this time, as well as what it means to be godlike.

Another way of putting it would be to say that we should always be guided in ethical decisions by the “highest” we know, and what produces this kind of life in people and society.

Love with a Cutting Edge

With this as a foundation, we arrive not at a system of ethics or norms and laws which always apply. Session 8, it was made clear why no system of natural law can be adequate in our time. Nor can such a system provide in any sense the fire of creative energy which Berdyaev says is necessary for the motive force behind right living.

What we can start from, however, is one approach to ethics, among several, called situation or contextual ethics. Such approaches appeal to love as the one basic norm of ethical action which is applied appropriately to ethical decisions according to the demands of the specific situation, and also guided in varying degrees by middle axioms which shift in nuance and hierarchy with shifts in stage level and power relationships.

An ethics controlled by the four-fold structure of agape should be, however, a kind of situation ethics with an especially sharp cutting edge. Seeing this approach in action should reassure many sensitive people who believe that any situation ethics is an open door to immorality and chaos.

One of the clearest definitions of situation ethics is that of Joseph Fletcher:

*Situation ethics goes part of the way with natural law by accepting reason as the instrument of moral judgment while rejecting the notion that the good is “given” in the nature of things, objectively. It goes part of the way with Scriptural law by accepting revelation as the source of the norm while rejecting all “revealed” norms or laws but the one command – to love God in the neighbor. The situationist follows a moral law or violates it according to love’s need. ... Only the commandment to love is categorically good.*⁵

The viability of a situation ethics depends, clearly, upon our ability to define love in such a way that it can operate effectively as norm to guide ethical action. Fletcher defines it in a way consistent with the New Testament:

*Love’s business is not to play favorites or find friends or fall for some one-and-only. It plays the field, universalizes its concerns, has a social interest, is no respecter of persons. ... Disinterested love can only mean impartial love, inclusive love, indiscriminate love, love for Tom, Dick and Harry. This is possible because such a disinterested love properly wills the neighbor’s good whether we like him or not.*⁶

My differences with Joseph Fletcher lie not so much in the formal definition of agape as in the way I understand agape to appear and become effective in history. This involves the four-fold gestalt of wholeness pictured above and the understandings derived from Kohlberg’s stages of development. Agape is an ontological reality, a kind of being, not just an application of reason to moral decisions on the basis of some vaguely defined, presumed good of the neighbor.

From the analysis of the origins of evil in sessions 5 and 6, we clearly see why reason is a corrupt and inadequate guide, a dirty lens. The god-self within is the only reliable and impartial guide to seeking our own and the neighbor’s highest good. The god-self is the one self-system within us capable of a healthy disinterested love. All the other self-systems arrive at ethical decisions through reasoning which includes some element of anxious self-interest. We have seen, in our analysis of Kohlberg’s stages, the various forms this immature and egocentric reasoning take, how the twisted immature and neurotic desires of the demonic self-systems inevitably cause us to warp our professed universal love into something which serves our needs and self-interest.

Disinterest

The term disinterest, to which Fletcher gives so much weight, needs a more precise definition, and this will clarify further the nature of agape as an impartial guide to clear ethical reasoning.

The disinterest which mature love requires is not a lack of caring. Quite the opposite. What it means is that egocentric desires, needs, wants, ambitions, and lusts (usually more for power than sex) are transcended and left behind. This is the floating free from attachments which characterizes stage 7. We no longer compulsively need anything and so are free to love generously, out of overflow, and thus to seek the real, long-range good of the other, that is, her growth into godlikeness.

Some of the best definitions of disinterest and its relation to our becoming godlike are found in the sermons of Meister Eckhardt. In his sermon “Justice, the Work of Compassion,” he taught:

A just person is one who is conformed and transformed into justice. The just person lives in God and God in him. Thus God will be born in this just person and the just person is born into God; and therefore God will be born through every virtue of the just person and will rejoice through every virtue of the just person.

*The just person does not seek anything with his work, for every single person who seeks anything or even something with his or her works is working for a why and is a servant and a mercenary. Therefore if you wish to be conformed and transformed into justice, do not intend anything in your work and strive for no why, either in time or in eternity. Do not aim at reward or blessedness, neither this nor that. For such works are truly fully dead. Indeed, I say that even if you take God as your goal, all such works which you do with this intention are dead and you will spoil good works. ... Therefore if you enter into your ground and work there and these works which you work there will all be living. ... For all works are surely dead if anything from the outside compels you to work. Even if God were to compel you to work from the outside, then such works would surely all be dead. If your works are to live then God must move you inwardly, in the innermost part of the soul, if they are really to live. There is your life and there alone you love.*⁷

As mentioned before, the innermost part of the soul and our inner ground in Eckhardt refer to what I call the god-self within. It is the one self-system which is wholly detached from the world in terms of compulsively wanting or needing nothing, so is the only one wholly free to form non-exploitative relationships to people and to act ethically and morally without the distortion of self-interest or concerns for self-preservation. Far from being passionless, agape allows keen joy and sorrow in empathy with others and seeks passionately their own arrival at godlikeness.

None of us has fully reached stages 6 and 7. None of us lives fully and always in the god-self. All of us are subject to the distortion factor of the needs and lusts of our demonic self-systems. So how may we, singly or together, act purely by agape?

The answer, of course, is that we cannot. We can come closer, however, if we understand two things:

(1) Our goal in life is to become like God and to make a society which produces such people. This gives a surprisingly different and still fairly concrete guidance to our moral and ethical deliberations, if we keep this to the forefront, Eckhardt suggests.

(2) We are only on sound ground if we submit our ethical and moral reasoning, at least in important matters, to the community of faith. A number of people reasoning together come much closer to a decision based on stage 6-7 morality and upon agape than one person alone. Different forms of self-interest tend to cancel one another out. We are able to come closer to what Kohlberg considered to constitute stage 6 reasoning – the arrival at decisions which looked at from the standpoint of anyone in the circle (musical chairs) will still seem the best and most just. It also illustrates Jurgen Habermas's point that ethics and morality must be based on decisions arrived at through the most free and unfettered communication.

An illustration of this in operation is the Quaker clearness committee. When a Friend faces a decision such as a change of job or marriage s/he may ask the meeting to assemble a clearness committee. S/he can meet with the committee as many times as necessary, until all feel they have delved the subject down to bed rock, considered all the possibilities and consequences. When this is done, the committee may reach a consensus and recommend one course of action, or only agree on several alternatives.

The person consulting the committee may in good conscience take the committee's advice or not, but in either event is enabled to act in the greater clarity arrived at through the group's analysis together of what agape calls for in this particular situation.

In the course of such discussions, the committee usually manages to touch base with all the four elements Joseph Fletcher considers to be involved in all moral and ethical decision-making: ends, means, motives, and consequences. The committee discusses what result the person seeks to achieve; whether the means to be employed are Christian or not (in keeping with agape); whether the person has examined the motives or not, and whether those motives are clear and clean or there are hidden agendas which may muddy the waters and cause problems later; and finally, they will ask questions with regard to whether the person has considered all the possible consequences of the action, for instance, whether those who may be hurt have been consulted, and so on.

We cannot consider ends alone. An action, we may feel, will serve our becoming godlike, but if it does serious harm to another, then it will not do so in the long run. We cannot decide solely on the basis of anticipated consequences alone, either. Sometimes an action seems demanded in principle. We may not know in advance whether it will help the situation or not. Considering all the possible negative consequences we may still decide to go ahead because a person must be defended, or a cause witnessed to.

Christians are likely to give careful attention to means than others since so much in the teaching of Jesus and our experience in Christian history show that the most noble intentions pursued through violence and deceit tend to be defeated in the long-run.

The Problem – Motivation

A major problem of ethics in public morality is that people know a great deal more about right and wrong, what helps people and what hurts them, than they enact. How we motivate each other to do the good we know we should do?

In session 8 we saw how in the modern age the prohibitions of law and the welcome reality of forgiveness of sins are not adequate to motivate growth into the higher stages, and to overcome the power of death in life. Nor do they provide motivation to do right and good adequate in our complex societies. The questions of people in our age of sophistication and cynicism are: Salvation to what? What is the content of life which gives it meaning? What could possibly be interesting enough to make eternity other than a hell of boredom?

Berdyaev is correct when he says that boredom is the source of a great deal of the evil we do.

The ability to transcend cynicism, to persist in personal moral action and struggle for social justice, against all discouragements, and to avoid the fatal disease of liberals, burnout, requires an inner power of being which enables the person to approach all aspects of life with an attitude of joy, peace, patience, and love.

Creativity is the new key addition to God's arsenal, the recognition that God now calls for the creative contribution of each one of us. This evocation of transcendent and joyous meaning is what lifts us up out of cynicism, conquers death in life, and

motivates an ethical stance transcending mere law-keeping.

This is the work of the Holy Spirit in and through the god-self. And it is only the god-self, because of its power of being, its wholistic gestalt, which makes this style of life possible.

A Universal Ethics

While such an ethical approach is centrally Christian for us, it contains within it a way to connect and dialogue with secular people and believers in other faiths, because it rests faith and ethics upon a definition of wholeness/maturity/love, the content of which overlaps to a large degree with such definitions in developmental psychology, so-called Third Force psychology, and other schools of social science.

The drive for something like natural law, the yearning for external authority, the reluctance in the church to let go of the wrath of God and hell – all of these spring from fear. There is fear of disorder in society, of its collapse.

This terror of loss of controls is understandable. We see such genocidal, sadistic evil in and around us, that we do not trust human law and police to confine and control it without the threat of divine justice and punishment in and beyond this life. We are afraid to give up the Boogie Man. We argue that some people only understand force, coercion, threat of punishment, so what else will restrain them?

This is in no way a suggestion that the enforcement of law and order in society be abandoned. The threat of consequences does often have a deterring effect. We might as well accept the fact, however, that the threat of divine punishment is effective only with a tiny minority of people in our day, as it tended also to be also in former generations. Someone remarked that the church turned the fires of hell as high as they would go in the Middle Ages and it did not cut down much on crime or sin.

Many argue that if God is justice in any meaningful sense, then S/He must punish sin and crime. Otherwise there is no moral order in the universe.

But these arguments straitjacket the debate within Kohlberg's stage 4 and its reasoning. We have only to shift to the stage 6 perspective in which we are all a family of brothers and sisters, equal in value, and then ask the question, "Would I send my son or daughter into eternal punishment regardless of how serious the crime?" The answer, of course, is no. This admission opens the way to begin to understand how and why God does not punish and comes to us only in forgiveness and love, though as mentioned before, every sin or crime does get punished in some way. This is fact that can be proved.

The meaning and purpose of life, for the Christian, is the redemption and liberation of all people. That is the work of grace, of out-going, self-less love. Punishment and threats of punishment represent the failure of grace; they accomplish little or nothing in moving people toward redemption and the inner activation of the god-self.

Conclusion

Stage 6-7 ethical perspective and motivation are becoming irregularly but cumulatively more powerful in history as more individuals arrive at stage 6 and our institutions are made over to embody this perspective.

Even while we all fall short of incarnating and living stage 6 and 7 agape, we can meditate on what we know about it and seek to live by it.

This is what Berdyaev terms "transformed reason". Uninformed human reason does not arrive at very good decisions in ethics and morality. We need a reason informed by agape. We can have this to a large extent even before we become one with such love.

Agape also can add the other essential part of this new ethics. It will arouse in us and others energizing human creativity and the joy of it empowering a passionate motivation to do justice and love in our time.

Questions for Thought

Consider and discuss: Both Christian and secular experts on ethics would read this chapter and say something like, "All this talk of creativity and fire and motivation and going deep inside for guidance is fine and good but it has no place in a system of ethics. Ethics is about giving people a foundation and criteria for making good moral and ethical decisions." Read again the opening quotes and first few paragraphs of the session.

Notes

1. *The Destiny of Man*, page 103
2. *The Realm of the Spirit and the Realm of Caesar*, pages 175,6
3. *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature*, page 315
4. Deuteronomy 5:6; 14:28-29; 24:10-18. The eighth century prophets and the II Isaiah of the sixth century continue the process of separating out from considerations of survival and special treatment for the Jews this ideal of including all persons within Yahweh's family and characterizing Yahweh more and more as a God with a passion for justice and love for all peoples because his (sic) inner nature is justice and love. This was inevitable as the implications of Yahweh as creator of all peoples came to be more fully understood and spelled out. The contrast between this ideal and the behavior of the nation of Israel toward the Palestinians is stunning.
5. *Situation Ethics, The New Morality*, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1966, page 26
6. *ibid.*, page 119
7. Matthew Fox, *op. cit.*, pages 464. 465

15. Social Justice in the Age of the Spirit

Mankind can finally place its trust not in a proletarian authoritarianism, not in a secularized humanism, both of which have betrayed the spiritual property right of history, but in a sacramental brotherhood and in the unity of knowledge. The new consciousness has created a widening of human horizons beyond every parochialism and a revolution in human thought comparable to the basic assumption, among the ancient Greeks, of the sovereignty of reason; corresponding to the great effulgence of the moral conscious articulated by the Hebrew prophets; analogous to the fundamental assumptions of Christianity, or to the beginning of the scientific era, the era of the science of dynamics, the experimental foundations of which were laid by Galileo in the Renaissance.

-Erich Fromm ¹

We are talking of a war, a struggle that is just beginning to heat up. Since the arms race is an institution that must be actively torn down, peace-making is a call to action. But remember that you are marching into battle to the beat of a different drum. It is a battle to change the rules of human communication. We cannot change the rules through playing by the old ones. When I speak of strategy I am also speaking of tactics that are revolutionary. Yes, the hawks, the merchants of death, the blasphemers, are all targets, but they are not our enemies, they are our beloved. It is not just a matter of wooing them. The keystone of the strategy to win this war is community, and the weapons can only be those of love.

- M. Scott Peck ²

In this session we address the interlinked questions of the social goals of the divine love in our time, and the strategy and tactics which are appropriate to these ends. The wholistic perspective of Kohlberg's stages 6-7 and the god-self give us an especially rich and effective view of ethics and morality and a basis for social action belonging to the age of the Spirit.

This is true, as we have seen, because the demands of the reign of God on earth – the holy, just and loving community – coincide with what is necessary for individual salvation, for our divinization. And both of these coincide with what is required to struggle lovingly and effectively for social justice for all.

There is also no necessary or natural contradiction between these and mystical contemplation, personal piety, ecstatic aesthetics, playful fun and sensual pleasures. This coming together of various conflicting aspects into a wholistic individual personality and the new society Erich Fromm called a "sacramental brotherhood," remind us again of Teilhard de Chardin's Omega Point. What supports health in society also makes for health in the individual. What serves the advancement in wholeness of one people of the globe serves the long-range well-being of us all.

There is a synergy which comes into operation as we transcend narrowly focused family, ethnic or national self-interest. Synergy means that divergent social forces are brought into a dynamic system of mutual reinforcement.

Such synergism takes on a changed character and new intensity in our time. As more persons reach higher stages of development, all peoples are drawn more and more powerfully upward. As the institutions of society come to reflect stage 6-7 values with their comprehensive synergistic vision, then individual growth is also accelerated.

A prime example of the institutional: The United Nations Declaration of Universal Human Rights. If our Constitution is a stage 5 document, this is clearly a stage 6 document which advocates treating all persons of whatever nationality and condition as equal before the law and deserving of just and humane treatment. This is true also of the UN covenants concerning women and children. The documents bring a new plumb-line into international conflicts and negotiations and apply a steady pressure on all nations to improve their structures and practices.

But above and beyond these long-term trends and more immediately relevant are specific political and social forces for change in our present situation.

Push and Pull

There are powerful forces, both positive and negative which can be made to work in rough mutual reinforcement of one another.

There is the positive, magnetic forward pull of the vision of a new world of peace. This vision seems nearer and more practicable because of the reconciling forces at work in international politics. This inspiring new hope is a powerful impulse for change. But, idealism alone is inadequate to produce the new.

There are also the negative pressures of dangerous national and international crises. These add their push for change, negative in the sense that they feed on fear of the consequences of not acting.

Threatening crises – outlined below – increasingly dominate the headlines and all our national agendas. They are pushing the nations to begin working together rather than competing with and fighting one another.

Crises propel us from behind while the vision of a peaceful world of plenty draws us from ahead in the right direction.

New frameworks of internationalism are helping. Liston Pope, my professor of Social Ethics, used to say that the way to overcome national sovereignty with its competition and wars was not by direct assault. He said this in his critique of the world federalist movement. It is impossible, he thought, to move soon to world government and have nations turn over sovereignty to such a body. What is possible, he said, is to erode national sovereignty from underneath until it crumbles away. This can be done, he believed, by getting the nations to working together in new organizations set up for the solution of specific common problems, so

that of gradually trust and the habit of cooperation are formed. Nations will then no longer fear to move closer together in other ways.

We can see this taking place today in United Nations agencies such as UNICEF and the World Health Organization. We also see it in negotiating instrumentalities such as the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT) and in the new economic community in Europe. These oblique and practical attacks on national sovereignty are the ones which are working and which must be encouraged and increased.

These already successful structures provide examples, paradigms for modeling other new organs of international cooperation and mutual security. Of course, there is evil in the working of these new institutions as well as good, particularly in the way in which GATT and other structuring of international trade, like NAFTA, work against the interests poorest of the poor and in some places even accelerate the environmental destruction.. It is the long-range trend of greater cooperation of which we are speaking here.

More Immediate Impetus

The collapse of the Soviet Empire and the end of the Cold War provide both a great opportunity and tremendous dangers.

The opportunity is to really achieve something in the abolition of weapons of mass destruction and the settling of regional disputes such as we see in the former Yugoslavia. These, plus new trade agreements can help create the trust and the habit of cooperation in international decision-making which could see us safely through the crises of the next two decades.

The great danger is that out of fear or hesitation we may miss this window of opportunity and inadvertently strengthen reactionary forces in Russia, Eastern Europe, the Balkans and China. We must read the signs of the times with great accuracy and act with appropriate boldness.

What is new and important right now is the extraordinary opportunity for break-through solutions. Its hope of success rests upon our ability to bring into a synergistic relationship both the negative push and the positive idealistic pull at the same time, to get them operating in the same direction.

If we can manage a real, long-range retreat from cold war mentality, a genuine reversal of the arms race and appropriately large reduction in weapons and troops, then humankind may be able for the first time to turn vast resources of money and brain-power to solving the other perilous problems relating to environment, local wars, dangerous disparities of wealth and poverty and human rights.

This double movement of resources out of war and into healing is probably the one set of actions which could get the nations of the world working together to the extent needed.

We are at a unique cusp of history; there is a good chance that we and our world can be saved after all.

What are the prospects and what must we do?

It is simple to project a utopia where equality joins hands with plenty to the fulfillment of harmony. It is easy to develop a checklist of things which need to be done. It is much harder to show where the consensus, discipline and passion to achieve such ends will be found, how we will overcome the enormous backlog of cynicism around the world.

Such cynicism is not without logic and good reasons. The problems are immense, far more complex and intractable than any of us fully can comprehend. Many feel that they cannot be solved. They have thrown up their hands and retreated into personal and family concerns.

Seven Crises

We can list at least seven serious and worsening crises in our national and international life. Any one of these, if not dealt with decisively, will lead to social disorder, loss of life, and the possible end of progress toward real quality of life and individual freedom for most people. These crises, listed in no particular order, are:

1. **Population explosion**, which, if unchecked, will make all the rest of the attempts to improve life like sweeping back the tides with a broom. When you hear otherwise, keep in mind what will happen as the people in developing countries get automobiles, refrigerators, TVs, washing machines and driers and so on and on.

2. **Ecological destruction**, the combined effect of pollution of air and water, greenhouse effect, the destruction of the rain forests, acid rain, depletion of the ozone layer, other trends. Within fifty years or less the combined effect of these trends threatens to put population growth in disastrous collision with diminishing food production, quite apart from other related disasters.

This crisis threatens to wreck cooperation between the have and have not nations. The intense longing for rapid development in the developing nations leads them to take the same disastrous ecological shortcuts the developed nations did. This reflects also:

3. The **rising expectations** of poor and oppressed people all over the world and the frustration of their hopes by international economic systems rigged by the rich nations for their profit and the enrichment of a tiny wealthy class in the poorer countries.

William Greider in his book, *One World, Ready or Not*, shows convincingly how giant international corporations and financial institutions range over the world without restraint by any power, national or international. They are, he points out, recreating some of the worst abuses against people of the first Industrial Revolution, and these little people have no governmental instrumentality to which they can appeal for help.

These tensions are in turn exacerbated by:

4. The **depletion of irreplaceable natural resources** and the growing competition for them.

5. The continuing **proliferation of arms** and the danger of increases in production and use of weapons of mass destruction.

These impede the development of trust and mutual cooperation and divert resources needed for food, environment and economic development, thus causing every other crisis to become worse.

6. The **continuing resort to war** rather than negotiation. The tragic inability of ethnic groups and nations to settle their disputes peacefully is also fueled by the cynicism with regard to solving any of the larger problems through trust and common negotiation.

7. The **deterioration of a sense of community and responsibility** to the larger societies around us, symbolized by increase of both violent and white collar crime, use of drugs, family breakup and the collapse of personal and public morality over the world. The lack of long-range hope helps create simultaneously cocaine-supported dictatorships in Latin America and a resurgence of fundamentalist extremism in Iran and elsewhere.

We should probably list **an eighth crisis**: the way in which these different dynamics interact with one another to make the solution of any one of the larger crises more complex and unlikely.

Given this enormous complexity of problems and the related cynicism, is it not hopelessly utopian to talk about growing into loving godlikeness and creating a community infused with that love?

It is not. The unrest which leads to evil arises in part from the deep yearning for a transcendent healthy being and society. The human spirit responds again and again to the least scent of this goodness.

Axioms of the Synergistic Society

We know what kind of society we want to see, one offering large doses of freedom, equality, justice, opportunity, plenty and adequate provision for the poor and weak.

This kind of society also best protects and advances the forces which make people godlike, which give them inner freedom, unity, cosmic expansion and empathy/compassion.

Clearly, such a society puts people and their welfare ahead of profit-making or production or superficially defined social order. The Sabbath is made for the person and not vice versa. So also are the factory, the market-place, the corporation, the government and all the more minor bureaucracies which step on and stifle individuals.

The following are several middle axiom principles which help guide us in political and economic objectives and strategies. They help us put things in order of importance.

1. The synergistic society of agape considers **every person entitled to protection of his or her full dignity as a human being** beloved to God and of not less importance than any other human being. This goes beyond assuring that every person has food, shelter, work, education and medical care. It is a society which works at eliciting creative participation of all and utilizing it.

2. This synergistic society provides that **all persons will have a voice** in the decisions which affect their lives, locally as well as nationally.

The problem to be solved is how to empower them in the face of corporate and governmental policies which favor the rich and increase the gap between rich and poor. William Greider suggests a number of practical steps we need to take:

*Restore national controls over global capital. Tax wealth more, labor less. Stimulate global growth by boosting consumer demand from the bottom up. Compel trading nations to accept more balanced trade relations and absorb more surplus production. Forgive the debtors, especially the hopeless cases among the very poorest nations. Reorganize monetary policy to confront the realities of a globalized money supply, both to achieve greater stability and open the way to greater growth. Defend labor rights in all markets, prohibit the ancient abuses renewed in the "dark Satanic mills." Withdraw from the old labor-capital battleground by universalizing access to capital ownership. Reformulate the idea of economic growth to escape the wasteful nature of consumption. And, in the meantime, defend work and wages and social protections against assaults by the marketplace.*³

These proposals smack of old-time liberalism. I have included them deliberately because these issues have been smothered, by-passed in the headlong rush to be at the baptismal service for the new international capitalism.

These steps are illustrative rather than definitive and would, in any event, be difficult to take. But they are the kind of measures which societies found it necessary to take to restrain early unbridled capitalism in the 18th and 19th centuries. Now that communism is really dead we can talk seriously about this once again.

These give people a stake in society and some power over all levels of their lives. They then feel they belong to the social order as valued members of a large family. They are much less likely to violate its laws or trash it.

Human need and human dignity should be the criteria which determine the directions of national policy rather than what is good for the rich, the powerful, or corporate profits.

One of the biggest snow jobs in history is the systematic brain-washing to which Americans have been subjected, to the effect that the rich and corporations must not be taxed very much because their profits are needed for developmental capital and, hence, the creation of jobs. This involves an economic analysis beyond our scope here, but I would only suggest that one analyze where development capital actually comes from in our society and what the super-rich and corporations are actually using that untaxed income for.

This principle of meeting human need systematically and justly is foundational for all progress. Recall how Maslow's study of personality development showed that if basic physical and security needs of the child are not first and adequately met then the whole psyche is twisted by the pressure of this unmet need for all of later life. The overwhelming amount of child abuse in our society is done by adults who were abused as children. A huge percentage of the criminals behind bars were such abused or

neglected children.

But this means that the need for being co-creators, full contributing members of society, must then be addressed also. Maslow's meta-needs must be appropriately met.

3. The synergistic society provides that **the weak and vulnerable are protected always and everywhere**. Just as national government needs checks and balances, so do all concentrations of power. This may be called the ombudsman principle.

There is great need for expansion in this field of intervention and protection of individuals, need for employment of many more workers, both professional and para-professional, and the creation of new categories of jobs.

Partly, for now, this is a matter of making up for past neglect, of transforming what are holding operations and ambulance services into genuine healing ministries.

In summary, these principles involve designing society so that it makes each individual a center of creative power and a beloved family member. It means shaping the institutions of such societies so they are hospitable to such strong people, create them and honor them.

It is a society which encourages growth in all the four dimensions of the wholistic personality:

freedom/autonomy
empathy/compassion
inner unification
universal scope and concern.

I used to like to put it this way: We must create a just society, which is to be followed by establishment of a compassionate society, and then a creative society.

After working with the implications of stage development theory and the sub-selves, I came to realize that, while justice has a kind of immediacy in priority because all the higher builds upon it, compassion and creativity must also be operating all the time, at every level and with every person. These have their own unique and necessary contribution to synergism.

Spending time in several prisons I have been privileged to see how a calm, compassionate and even humorous demeanor on the part of police, judges and guards help to lower the level of anger and heal all those involved. This is one example of compassion at work within a framework of justice. As we saw earlier, the eliciting of creativity also has its own kind of power to arrest the affects of abuse and overcome evil.

This is not an appeal for individual compassionate action though we need that badly. Those of us who went to jail were part of a community trained in nonviolence, schooled to make our every word and gesture gentle and loving. It is an appeal, rather, for new institutional examples. I have seen, for instance, what programs of training for the police and correctional officers can accomplish. While these train in specific skills they also involve teaching officials that every person is entitled to dignity and respect.

The just society, compassionate society and creative society intersect and reinforce one another, though it is ultimately creativity which rescues us from the boredom that could destroy all our efforts for justice and compassion in human relationships in the long perspective.

The Social Psychology of Change

At this point, we draw on the stages of development for insights into the strategy and timing of social action and social change.

Lawrence Kohlberg suggested that the United States Constitution is a stage 5 document, yet the American people operate mainly at stages 3 and 4. We do not know how to cope with the far-seeing prophetic paper on which our democracy is based. That is one reason why we tend to treat it like scripture rather than as a blueprint. Since people are stretched all across the six stages of moral development, consensus on direction of change is difficult to achieve, and we all fear what may happen if we start to tamper with it.

Any individual adult will tend to act out of different stages at different times, to be stretched out across several stage levels in uneven fashion. The levels which have not been fully transcended and integrated at each stage movement tend to become fixed in separate sub-selves which continue to be influential. When we say a person operates at one stage, we are saying that there appears to be a kind of center of gravity for each individual set in one stage level at a time. It is by this value system the person does most of her living and deciding.

Understanding how people think and react socially and politically at each stage level should help us in the difficult and complex task of responding to the positive and negative challenges of our present situation.

The following can only be an outline with a few relevant comments.

Stages 1 and 2

I worked with young men in a reformatory who seem mainly oriented to stage 1 and 2 morality. They had little sense of inner worth and an enormous suspicion and hostility toward the world beyond them. They were restless, self-centered, and sought instant gratification of their desires. Underneath, I found them to be terrified and hungry for attention and love.

It is inevitable that such people, emotional and social dropouts, unable to cope, will subsist through low level jobs and many will engage in crime.

Socially, they are a restless, seething force which can be recruited to any cause. They are fodder for gangs, and tend to

gravitate to a leader like Hitler and to be easily persuaded to do his torturing, terror and murder.

In passing, we should note that the United States seems to have a larger supply of such people than any other developed country because of the way political freedom without economic democracy has increased the suffering and abuse of the poor and minorities throughout our history. We have allowed the cost of economic development to be regularly taken out of the bodies and psyches of the poor.

Slavery destroyed families and so did the Great Depression. War has left thousands literally mentally ill and contributed to family breakup and child abuse. The abused and neglected children of hunger and war reproduce themselves and become a permanent underclass which threatens to tear our society apart. Abused children grow up to abuse their children.

Instead of meeting the needs of these people and assisting and healing them, we have instituted social policy in the last decade which has increased the gap between rich and poor. For instance, instead of adopting universal health insurance as every other developed country in the world has done, we still have forty million people who are without any health insurance at all. In other ways as well we are tearing more holes in our already tattered social net.

I am not suggesting that all the poor and oppressed people operate at stages 1 and 2, but rather that stage 1 and 2 people tend to be poor and oppressed and that involuntary and grinding poverty and abuse tend to retard psychological growth severely.

Stage 3

Stage 3 adults, who have outlived the age-appropriate expressions of this level, also tend to be leader-infatuated. They are dragged along in the wake of a Hitler or Ayatollah Khomeini. They fill the plazas as teenagers fill the concert halls. They have an spiritual orgasm as they lift their fists and chant responses to the liturgy of the power figure. They merge themselves into an ecstatic mystical union with his glory and achieve through him their temporary illusion of immortality and meaning, as Ernest Becker has so eloquently described.

Some years back, there was a vivid example of a stage 3 phenomenon. On the first anniversary of the death of Elvis Presley the White House was inundated by calls from adults who wanted the President to declare a national day of mourning for the star of rock and roll on the anniversary of his death.

Stage 4

Stage 4 "law and order" people are supposed to be the great center of gravity of a modern culture. They are the ones who believe in the morality, rationality and effectiveness of the total system. They really believe America is the greatest country on earth, on any and all counts. If they are forced to question the underlying morality or rationality of the system over a period of time then this either propels them upward toward stage 5 or throws them into enervating confusion. They may then join the many in stage 1 through 3 who do not vote because they believe all politicians are crooks.

Many who seem to have comfortably reached stage 4 prove, on careful testing, not to have really integrated fully and consistently at that stage. They attempt to fix parking tickets, cry unfair when touched by the law and in the next breath condemn the police for not shooting looters. They defend bribes and kickbacks on the grounds that if they did not do it, others would.

Whereas stage 1 and 2 people usually opt out of the larger system and look after themselves, stage 3 and 4 people in our time tend to be conservatives. They have a compulsion to over-simplify issues because they need to live within fairly narrow tightly controlled boundaries. They are frightened of rapid social change. It was such a disoriented middle and lower middle class in Germany which propelled Hitler to power and kept him there. They were also the ones who reverted to their stage 3 demonic self-systems participating orgiastically in the scapegoating and persecution of the Jews, projecting on them their own fear and anger.

In order for an individual to stay at stage 4 in our society the defenses of the self have to be strengthened, today more than in any previous generation. There are tremendous pressures on the walls from the in-rushing news of contradictory events and opinions.

People choose vapid entertainment and sports on TV over news and public affairs, not because there is such a need for constant entertainment, but because they are suffering complexity fatigue and need to avoid invasion by threatening alternative truth and morality systems. As a terrified child may roll up into a ball and suck her thumb, so an adult, under constant pressure, may choose to escape into the demonic self-systems embodying the memories and orientation of less threatening childhood days. The cost, however, to society and personal development is enormous.

The positive side of this phenomenon, as suggested earlier, is that the pressure of the complexity and the example of people at a higher stage of development demand and make possible change. If directed creatively, this shattering of the old can enable the birth of the genuinely new.

Stage 5

Because of the disorientation of stage 4 people, the defense of the American center and stability rest increasingly on the comparatively small percentage of stage 5 people. Most of these are what we like to call liberals. It is in this new role that liberals become, in effect, the true conservatives.

Stage 5 people also stretch across a spectrum, from neo-liberals like Bill Clinton and Al Gore and neo-conservatives such as Michael Novak all the way across to democratic socialists like a Michael Harrington.

The restlessness of stage 5 people is different from that of the others. It arises from the fact that they are cut adrift from the answers of the past and do not yet clearly see the shape of the future.

They are interim people.

In part, their uncertainty rests in what Daniel Bell called the death of ideology. Ideology came into disrepute because of the

failure of all the leading contenders for the faith of humankind. Communist societies failed to produce either freedom or plenty and the so-called capitalist countries built their wealth on the suffering of the poor and then refused to share power and wealth with them. No cause or ideology of like historical power to these two has emerged on the scene. The most promising socio-political alternative, the democratic socialist societies of Europe, are too much lukewarm variations of the welfare state to inspire passionate loyalty.

No modern society in a developed country has any longer a cohesive culture united by religion or ideology. They are all collections of minorities. This is increasingly true also of the less developed nations, as well.

Such confusion is dangerous, yet it also incorporates the hope of our salvation at this stage in history. It reflects a malleability, an openness to the genuinely, redemptively new.

Stage 5 people tend to gravitate into positions of leadership in all kinds of organizations and institutions. As mentioned earlier, they are not immobilized by complexity and social change. They tend to be more intelligent and better educated because our society pushes intelligent people into higher education and because families which produce stage 5 people tend to be educated, to value education and to teach a modern form of *noblesse oblige*.

Liberal and moderate stage 5 people tend to come into leadership also because they have been nurtured in liberal churches, colleges and other institutions. In a sense it is that "Catch 22" we call grace as it operates in the Kohlberg realm: One can't get to the next stage without experiencing an example of that higher stage.

Liberals are not a conspiratorial cabal about to, as some conservatives imagine, take over the country. They are far too divided and disorganized. They lack a cohesive vision, in somewhat the same way conservatives are divided and in conflict with one another.

Liberals continue their important maintenance function in society. They run the Boy Scouts, the PTA and the League of Women Voters and even the political parties to some extent. They are driven psychologically to run things and to keep them going.

Some say that the McGovern campaign of 1972 was the last good shot of the liberals politically. It is true that since then they have lacked a national candidate to group around so have scattered into support for a wide variety of causes from environmental to anti-nuclear.

A more important trend, other experts suggest, is the so-called conservatism of the younger generations, below middle age. They are, the theory goes, both more conservative politically and more self-centered. This is one sense in which the demonic institutions of a society tend to reinforce the retarded demonic self-systems within us and to hold back the advance of people to higher stages. There is no reason, however, to think that this is more than a temporary trend.

Many of these young people will, in later years, move on to stage 5 and a few to stage 6

Stage 6

There is not much point in trying to say a great deal about stage 6 people. There are too few of them for them to be a direct political force. There are more who will on testing, as I did, appear to be poised permanently on the cusp between stage 5 and stage 6, a sort of stage 5 ½. But for us, as in others, the lower stages are still powerful within.

Stage 6 people, the few I know, tend to be radicals, in the sense that they are dedicated to achieving longer range societal change and have a style of life which is more loving, open and creative. They are more distanced from existing causes because they dream beyond those limited goals. This is their great contribution to society, but it is also their weakness. They are unwilling to push their own leadership, even to defend themselves. They don't believe in charismatic leadership and won't be anyone's cat's paw. They will tend to walk away rather than fight to control.

Now, last, what does this listing of crises, visions of a new society and social psychological analysis of individual imitation and potential suggest for the strategy and tactics of those of us who seek to live out a stage 6-7 life style and yet also struggle passionately and effectively for the new society?

Strategy of the Community of Love

As with the reformation of the church, there are two possible postures for today's loving revolutionaries: We may choose to participate in the institutions of society to try to change them from the inside, or else, to work largely outside through the demonstration of alternative possibilities. In either case, however, we still have one foot inside and one outside. We are always living to some extent as an example of the new and to some extent trying to change the existing institutions.

A good example of an organization which tries to do both is the style of operation of the Quakers. They often engage in civil disobedience and are radically critical of the existing institutions. But at the same time they maintain an effective national lobbying organization, The Friends Washington Office, and try to throw their weight to one side on legislation. They attempt responsibly to effect small changes in the direction they seek to move society. At the same time, they try their best to keep before society by example a community which practices the highest and best in mutual love and justice.

A secular example is seen in the Democratic Socialists of America. They participate in practical electoral politics, supporting progressive candidates at all levels. They operate at the left wing of the Democratic Party ordinarily, although some DSA members regularly support third parties. At the same time they are engaging in such conventional politics they are attempting preach and live before the nation a vision of what life might be like in a more just, egalitarian and compassionate society, one not organized to encourage competition, greedy selfishness and violence.

As with Jesus, both the Quakers and the DSA refuse either to withdraw from the world of political action, on the one hand, or to engage in methods which would poison the long-range vision and example they seek to live, on the other. The ends, both would say, do not justify unworthy means.

I strongly suspect there is no such thing as a total outsider or utterly committed insider. Even the most cynical supporter of

our society must at times get sick at his stomach, for instance, if he knows any of the details of American CIA experts teaching right-wing military counterinsurgency specialists in Latin America how to torture scientifically, knowing these skills would be used not just on rebel soldiers but also to terrorize journalists, labor leaders and nuns. Almost all of us have some nausea potential. On the other hand, most of those of us who work mainly outside the institutions still feel compelled to vote, write letters to congress and pay taxes which support the system.

In Conclusion

In this session, I have attempted to describe the principles underlying a truly synergistic society. I've also sought to show how levels of personality development affect social change with the expectation this understanding may assist us in directing that change more effectively.

In *Pilgrim's Progress* John Bunyan taught that the road to the Heavenly City can be entered or left at any point along its length. We are separated from our holiness and goodness by the thinnest of membranes. The thundering beat of God's loving heart is a constant rhythm in the depths of each person challenging without respite all the arrhythms of evil, keeping us in turmoil until we choose to take the way of love. As we saw in session 6, this restlessness and constant threat from new and strange kinds of being explain both why we still plunge into the irrationalities of Hitlers, Stalins and Ayatollahs, and also why we recover from these forms of social madness and move on to again risk seeking greater complexity and a higher harmony.

Questions for Thought

Given that individuals are spread across all six stages and it is more difficult to reach a consensus today than ever before due to the complexity of both issues and communications, how can those dreaming of a world of peace, justice and plenty get it together and be effective? What would your strategy be?

Notes

1. *To Have or to Be*, Harper & Row, NY, 1976, page xv.
2. M. Scott Peck, *The Different Drum, Community Making and Peace*, A Touchstone Book, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1987, page 330
3. *One World, Ready or Not, The Manic Logic of Global Capitalism*, Simon and Schuster, NY 1997, page 472

16. The Bible in the Age of the Spirit

In both his first and second campaigns (in the Gospel of Mark), Jesus employs the tactics of what we would today call "civil disobedience." The very first public action of his disciples is to break the law (2:23ff.)! Jesus then debates the true intention of the law in the ensuing "trial" (3:3). The same pattern of legal violation and defense occurs again in 7:1ff. The climax to Jesus' practice of symbolic direct action, however, is the parade from the Mount of Olives and the ensuing temple action. ... Thus Mark legitimates not only "classic" civil disobedience – in which the law is broken because it is unjust, as in the case of the Sabbath – but militant direct action as well.

The powerful practice of exorcism/direct action must not be exploited by the disciples in order to build their own power base (9:38ff.). Indeed the power is linked to "faith" which means the ability not only to "name" the demons within and without, but to envision a new personhood and a new world free of the structures and patterns of domination... Mark stuck by his belief that true subversive politics was to be found in neither reform nor rebellion.

- Ched Myers ¹

Of the older scriptural authority we had learned something in universities and seminaries, it proved alas, of little help in the world we must walk, the fires underfoot. ... Too abstract, too specialized, chary of the times and their questions, a game of artful dodgers and academic isolationists. The method worried the text, held it up like a dead specimen, turned it this way and that in one hand, in the other a dissecting tool. Words, words, words. ... Myers took chances, dared to be passionate or indignant or ironic or loving. He renewed the sap of the text, the zest, the risky start, the hope of finishing. His method makes the Gospel of Mark a veritable tract for the times. ... Iniquitous authority, lawless and spurious, must be cast from its illegitimate throne, justice must be enthroned. This is the work of Jesus. It proceeds in the community of Jesus.

- Daniel Berrigan ²

To understand the Bible we have to try to put ourselves into the cultures of the times in order to see through the eyes and experience of the people to whom the writings were directed. There is the barrier of world-views vastly different from our own.

There is also another, modern kind of barrier. This is the obstacle created by our being rich and powerful, of our unconscious tendency to read the scriptures through the garish lenses we have inherited as members of the world's ruling elite. These illusions distorting the reality of our own real world block our access to the scriptures as well.

The "principalities and powers" of our time, seeking to preserve their wealth, privilege and control, have brain-washed us much as the scribes, lawyers, Pharisees, Herodians and occupying Romans intertwined religion and state mechanisms of control to manipulate and pacify the hungry and helpless Galilean peasants in Jesus' day.

This control was not only ideological. It was institutionalized in rituals of cleansing and rules and regulations governing everyday life, in taxes and in law enforcement agencies.

To read the Bible in the cultural language in which it was written, we have to unlearn a great deal. We have to have our eyes opened, just as Jesus sought to open the eyes of the blind, so we can see his world as it really was, and our own as it is, without filters or blinders.

For us in the modern world, the ability to stand critically outside and to transcend the false pictures we carry within our heads begins with Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud.

Marx demonstrated how we are blinded by the ideologies of the ruling classes, the rich and powerful, the principalities and powers to use the New Testament term. Actually, we should probably say it began with the prophet Amos. Read the book.

We are born into cultures dominated by built-in prejudices which serve the maintenance of unjust structures. These always protect the rich and powerful and make victims to some degree of the poor and weak. We drink in these power-protecting distortions along with mother's milk. Like colored contact lenses, they tint everything we see.

They are semantic filters through which we automatically hear and accept slanted interpretations of the world around us.

Freud, in turn, described how our seeing is distorted by inner needs and compulsions which cause us to live by crippling illusions.

These illusions and distortions prevent our making ourselves present in Mark's time. We can identify neither with the exploiters or exploited.

But there are new ways of reading the Bible which make it possible for us to see much more clearly what was going on then and its relevance to our own situation.

When we pull the scriptures free from the encrusted layers of distorting interpretations and ourselves free from ideologies it again takes on power to liberate us from external and internal oppression.

In this session we will examine one of the most striking and helpful of the current efforts to liberate the real good news of the Bible, Ched Myers' *Binding the Strong Man, A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*. After that we will look further at the stages of development and the god-self to see how these mesh with Myers' methodology and conclusions. We will also examine the way they throw additional uniquely useful light on the scriptures.

I read the first third of Myers' book, in manuscript, while in prison. Looking up from the underside of our society, as I was, the Gospel of Mark was opened up with startling freshness and relevance. When the rosy-tinted glasses of our privileged status as ruling class people are shattered, we find it possible to look up from the underworld perspective of the biblical authors. The Gospel of Mark is now seen to expose the deep injustices and structural evils of our day just as Jesus' direct action and civil disobedience did in his.

A main point of contact between Ched Myers' work and the argument of this course is the belief we share that God works only through nonviolent, nonmanipulative love.

Ched Myers does not use nonviolent love as an outside principle which he brings to the Bible and then makes the scriptures fit the presuppositions. Quite the contrary. Myers shows in a marvelously clear way how such a reading reveals Mark's reason for writing and what his message really was.

Similarly, I do not start from the principle of nonviolent love but rather find it dictated by the very nature of the god-self and stage 6-7 personality and society.

It is this kind of liberation theology which I see being naturally knit to the other elements of a wholistic faith; that is, the new mysticism, the new piety, the priority given to social justice, and the view of individual growth and social transformation by stages described earlier.

A warning: Watch out! This faith, lived consistently, precipitates us into just as radical a discipleship as Mark's Jesus pressed upon his followers.

The Socio-literary Method

Speaking of his methodology, Myers writes:

*The reading strategy I propose skirts between the twin errors of contemporary biblical criticism. To port lies the Scylla of historical criticism's dismantling of narrative texts; to the starboard the Charybdis of the new literary criticism which divorces narrative signification from the historical world. ... I insist upon both the literary and the socio-historical integrity of the whole text. I call my approach "socio-literary" in order to distinguish it from three current schools of criticism, each of which I draw from in part but none of which I fully endorse: sociological exegesis, narratology, and materialist criticism...*³

Myers drives like a bulldozer through dense thickets of interpretations and methodologies. He steers accurately between the old individualistic, spiritualized distortions, on the one hand, and the Marxist, materialist interpretations of some forms of liberation theology, on the other. The latter tend to limit salvation/liberation largely to this world and this life. They unnecessarily sacrifice the transcendent and eternal.

Myers reads Mark as a unified work, one which from beginning to end was designed to tell the story of Jesus in a way which would speak decisively to the crises and temptations Mark's own brother and sister Christians in Galilee some thirty-five years after Jesus' death.

It is not the story of Jesus; no such story exists. It is a story with a purpose, on the basis of which Mark makes his selection of events and sayings from the life of Jesus, and determines the order in which he presents them and the interpretations he gives to them. It is precisely because the book has these urgent contemporary goals that it speaks also so powerfully to us.

This is true in part because we face the same enemies, in slightly different cultural garb, as Jesus did in his day and Mark's house churches in Galilee a generation later.

Or, too often, I fear – to paraphrase cartoon philosopher Pogo – when we meet the contemporary enemies of God and humanity we will find that they are also “us.”

The next section summarizes some of the points Myers makes which are most relevant to this course. We must necessarily omit the vast amount of supporting data he includes.

Mark's Jesus

According to Myers, Mark apparently lived in Galilee and wrote to the Christian community in that area. He wrote around 69 CE. This was when the Jewish rebellion against Rome (66-70 CE) was rushing toward its disastrous conclusion but before the destruction of the Temple.

Myers' interpretations do not depend on this precise date and place, but as one reads the book with this in mind these parameters come to feel more and more correct.

The small Christian community in Galilee was caught between two millstones. On the one hand was the imperial power of Rome and its Hellenistic and Jewish supporters. On the other side, there were the Jewish rebels who were engaged in the desperate attempt to free Israel from Roman control by force.

The Christians were not supporters of either side. We can imagine how they found themselves persecuted by both the Romans trying to ferret out rebel sympathizers and the Jewish forces who were recruiting freedom fighters in the villages.

We can compare them, perhaps, to a peasant village in El Salvador or Nicaragua trying to survive as government forces sweep over them one week and the opposition soldiers the next.

Or we could remember the Quakers of Boston and New York who refused to support either the British or the colonists in the Revolutionary War. Minutes of one Meeting record the poignant tale of a Friend whose home, business and possessions were confiscated because he refused to pay the war tax.

These two examples help us put ourselves inside the Marcan house churches in Galilee struggling with the same principalities and powers which Jesus had confronted. Their lives and possessions were no doubt often on the line.

This embattled minority had good reason to ask themselves where this kingdom Jesus had promised was? And what was the good news he had promised? When would it materialize and their torment be ended? Such questions, pressed by current suffering, presented a crisis of critical seriousness to the young Christian movement. At issue were the very nature of God, the divine purpose, strategy, and especially for the Christians, the question of who Jesus had been and the way in which he was savior of the world.

If the forces of evil were on the defensive and being defeated, there was little evidence of it around them. If the tiny minority of Christians were not to support either side in this struggle and to remain outsiders what was their socio-political strategy?

Mark sets out to answer those questions the way he understood Jesus had answered them a generation earlier using Jesus' own words and the actions and events of his life.

The pietistic answer many of us learned at mother's knee said that heaven is the reward of faith and justifies all our waiting and suffering. The pietist tends to put Christians in alliance with the ideologies of the rich and powerful. This view has led to quietism in the face of great injustice.

On the other hand, some liberation theologians, who see liberation as primarily political and this-worldly, paint Jesus as a revolutionary who would sympathize today with those who seek the violent overthrow of oppressive governments. The political liberation theologies encourage Christians to support armed revolution involving us in the descending spiral of violence, hate and war breeding war.

Mark was quite clear, according to Myers, that Jesus hadn't favored either of these extremes. Jesus had an agenda which was more political than other-worldly, but it was not that of any of the groups around him. He directly and continuously confronted the religious and political powers which oppressed the poor of his day. His kingdom was not of this world, but in the sense that it is a kingdom of nonviolent love and not because it can be realized only beyond this earth and its people. His kingdom is in no way “of” this alienated, violent world.

Alternative Community

At the same time he was challenging the top leadership of all the power structures around him, Jesus was building with his disciples an alternative community or society, one based upon equality of all persons before God, the shattering of all artificial barriers between human beings, ethnic, racial, sexual, class. It was to be a society based on God's own inner nature of nonviolent, non-manipulative love expressed through servanthood.

Confrontations with Illegitimate Power

The first time Jesus healed a leper, touching him and declaring him whole, he challenged the power and revenues the Temple system derived from purification rites and priestly prerogative.

The first time Jesus forgave sins, he took to himself a power and authority which directly challenged that of the High Priest and the whole lucrative Temple system.

When Jesus and his disciples threshed out grain on the Sabbath they dared to challenge Scribal and Pharisaic domination of biblical interpretation. In speaking with authority Jesus undercut the main control this class of official experts exercised.

He also challenged the system of honor, by which a man's gender and his education or social status placed him above others and defined who he would or would not eat with. Jesus deliberately ate with outcasts.

Each of these acts of resistance attacked directly the Temple system's control of channels of grace. This threatened the system's ability to control its people and to draw from them tax revenues and fees for religious services. It was a system which perpetuated injustice, hunger and the denial of dignity to the ritually unclean, the sick, to women, the poor, the gentile outsider.

This reminds us of the medieval Roman Catholic Church with its control of the channels of grace and through them its leverage on the obedience of the whole populace. Both religious systems were able, when spiritual sanctions failed, to call in the sword of the State.

The Last Are First

Jesus' direct challenge to the system appears in every chapter of Mark. When this becomes clear then all the seemingly insignificant little incidents take on dramatic detailed meaning. Note the following examples.

Myers points out that when Jesus is on his way to heal the daughter of the powerful synagogue official, Jairus, he breaks the journey to heal a woman. It is not just any woman; it is a woman at absolutely the bottom of the heap. She has four strikes against her. She is a widow, has no man to represent her, is poor and is ritually unclean because of her continual bleeding.

Jesus rejects the priority of Jairus' power and wealth by stopping to heal her. He touches her, denying her ritual uncleanness. He calls her daughter, bringing her into his intimate family.

Those last in power, wealth and prestige are being set in first place and the first are made last. This reversal of the values of society occurs in almost every chapter of the book.

This is followed by a pair of healings of gentiles in chapters 7 and 8. Jesus debates with the Syro-Phoenician woman, concedes her point and heals her daughter. Jesus accepts the aggressive approach of a woman. Here and in the healing of the deaf man of Decapolis Jesus symbolically brings all the rest of the people of the world into full membership in God's kingdom on a basis equal to that of the Jews.

Mark has a fine touch of irony in this latter story. Jesus uses ritually unclean spit as a medium in opening the ears of the deaf gentile.

Myers sums up:

These two pairs of healings demonstrate Mark's mastery in using narrative action to illustrate the ideology of inclusion, which is the cornerstone to the new social order being constructed by Jesus. The social dynamics of status and honor, fundamental in the life of antiquity, have been turned upside down to make way for the outcast Jew and the alien gentile. ⁴

Jesus did not challenge the powers in order to get individuals into heaven. He did it to set the record straight on God's nature and purposes and to launch a new and pure communal expression of God's rule on earth.

These powers oppressed and starved the people. They did it in the name of God. Abusing people in the name of religion is true blasphemy. Jesus acted in accord with his convictions as to the inner nature of God and God's purposes and strategy. He refused to withdraw from political struggle, and he refused to fight using the world's methods of violence, deception and manipulation. He confronted the religio-political powers relentlessly, day after day, until he was silenced on the cross – for a time.

Through Jesus' example and the servant discipleship he demanded of his followers, he began the construction of an alternative to the principalities and powers, a new community which would live by the nonviolent love of God within the world.

Modern Relevance of Mark

Over the years after Constantine, as the churches became more and more enmeshed in power politics and war, the scriptures were spiritualized, the political relevance washed out, and salvation became a matter of individuals getting to heaven.

Jesus' agenda is also the church's agenda, Mark was saying. The church's job is to live out God's nonviolent, all-inclusive love and the justice for all implied by it. This sets the churches in every age against the principalities and powers who are always to some degree denying God's beloved poor the dignity belonging to their humanity.

It is the great service of liberation theology interpretations of the Bible, and especially Myers, that they enable us to again stand in the shoes of the Galilean peasant as Jesus passes through the throng confronting and defying the oppressors.

These few examples of Myers' methodology and interpretation are inadequate. Space does not permit more. I hope these few tidbits will send the reader scurrying to find the book.

Kohlberg and the God-self

How, then, does Ched Myers' socio-literary understanding of the Bible relate to what we've been saying about Kohlberg's stages of development and the god-self? To put it most briefly and directly:

1. The god-self incarnates the most universal and the most compassionate. It always lives and interprets reality in terms of nonviolent love and the equality and ultimate value of all persons. It does not ever live in peace with injustice but it will battle evil only nonviolently.

2. The stages of development help show how it is that the external principalities and powers are able to shape and control each generation to their own self-preservative ends through the sub-selves within us.

The truncated values of the lower stages of development shape the boundaries of the sub-selves which worship and live by the corresponding values of the Beast (to borrow the imagery of the book of Revelation), the social institutions which preserve and protect the oppressive status quo in each time and place.

The sub-selves which are confined to narrow defensive boundaries necessarily color and distort our view of the scriptures.

If we think at stage 4, for instance, parts of the Bible with lower values repel us. We will tend to read the Bible in a way which validates the society our stage 4 self supports and celebrates and which allows us to condemn the enemies of that system.

We will be likely to reject or ignore the story of Elisha's cursing the children so that two bears came running to savage them. Too totally gross!

But at the same time stage 4 has just as much difficulty accepting and living the Sermon on the Mount or Jesus' command to love our enemies. Neither extreme fits the specific boundaries of stage 4.

Yet, interestingly, as we saw in session 5, there are those levels still within even the stage 4 person which are capable of accepting the bears' working "God's punishment" on the children, just as "Christians" sit in the theater and cheer Rambo as he mows down dozens of the enemy.

There is also within each of us a level which understands and resonates with love for the enemy.

Knowing Kohlberg's stages, in short, helps us read our internal workings. They enable us to see and define the different levels of oppressor and violence which still live and are powerful within us when we activate and live within the demonic self-systems organized around those earlier, immature values and the angry rebellious inner children who lived by them.

When we stride through the Bible in the seven league boots of stages 6-7 and study scripture through the spectacles of the god-self, we find an amazingly fresh kind of sorting taking place almost automatically. We somehow are enabled to distinguish the low from the high and the childish from the childlike with amazing accuracy.

When we look at the Gospel of Mark through these spectacles, we will tend to read it much the way Ched Myers does. We will no longer be wearing the tinted spectacles of the individualistic pietist who weeds out or unconsciously passes over the political and confrontational aspects of the Good News. We will be liberated to see why Jesus confronted the authorities relentlessly and why we must also do so in our time.

Kohlberg and the god-self add a special and useful dimension to biblical interpretation. And it is no way contradicts Ched Myers' methodology. Let's look at several examples starting with:

Abraham and Sodom

In the 18th and 19th chapters of Genesis we have the marvelous little tale of Abraham, Lot and the destruction of the wicked city of Sodom.

Like so many of the stories told around the campfires this one grew and was elaborated for generations before it was written down. The original tales very likely took shape in the minds of creative story-tellers who were perhaps inspired by accounts of the destruction of some town by volcanic eruption. We can envision the story-teller, as evening camp was set up in the Dead Sea area, pointing to an oddly shaped hill and adding to the tradition, "See, there is Lot's wife who was disobedient to the Holy One."

Along the way the account picked up more embroidery, becoming for one thing a celebration of Hebrew superiority. It portrays the Moabites and Ammonites as springing from the incestuous union of Lot's daughters with their father. We can almost hear the laughter and jeers of the audience sitting around the fire as their traditional enemies are put down and ridiculed.

In the heart of the story, Abraham negotiates with God to try to save the city of Sodom, in which his nephew Lot and his family live. Lot and Abraham had split up in a dispute over the grazing grounds. In order to make peace, Abraham allowed Lot first choice. He took the best territory, down in the valley. Abraham was left with the poorer hills.

In passing, note that this is one of the moral peaks of the Bible, an instance of unselfish willingness to sacrifice one's own immediate interest for a long-range harmonious relationship. It is also an example of the positive function of a stage 3 (family oriented) morality. Abraham seeks a peaceful settlement because Lot is family. It is a teaching of age-appropriate unselfishness. It is a parable of the way in which the whole world of nations could settle their problems. It is an enduring model of peacemaking, which the Jews of modern Israel have chosen to ignore in relation to the Palestinians.

Abraham negotiates with God to try to get him not to destroy the righteous with the wicked in Sodom. If there are fifty righteous will you spare the city? He works his way gradually down to ten, and persuades a reluctant God that ten would justify sparing the city. Then the messengers of God experience the violent inhospitality of the people of the city. God then concludes that only Lot and his family deserve to be spared and as they flee into the hills he destroys the city. Lot is obedient to the fine print of the agreement, but his wife can't resist looking back and ends up a pillar of salt.

The narrator, besides sinking some barbs into other people of the land, was making an important point. He was saying that evil behavior will be punished and warning his hearers that they should be righteous. This word in Hebrew has broader and deeper connotations than our English cognate. It meant being upright and honest, obedient to the whole Law, including compassion toward the weak, needy and alien among the people. Righteous, in later Judaism, became a term for the saint who is most advanced in faith and all the virtues.

It is worth noting that the sin of the Sodomites was not homosexuality but a betrayal of hospitality; they abused the guests

of a citizen.

How do we draw wisdom and guidance for ourselves from this cautionary tale? First, we establish as best we can the intended purpose of the story in its time. Then, we use insights given us by other tools and methodologies. In this case, from Kohlberg's stages, we can see that the tale of Abraham's negotiations with God represents a transition point in faith. It is a departure from a stage 2-3 quid pro quo relationship between humanity and God. It does not yet mark an advance to a stage 4 perspective, but represents a wrestling on the cusp, so to speak. It is a realization by the people that God's way of dealing with humanity is not, as the child put it, "You treat God right and He'll treat you right." God is beginning here to be seen as one who has standards he maintains which are not affected by chosen people status, prayers, sacrifices, or bribes. There are consequences in evil-doing, punishments, which may not come immediately but will come.

What we see here – and this makes a marvelous sermon – is Abraham wrestling within himself with two different gods, representing two different stages of morality. Yahweh's voice represents the lower morality: the old demonic deity who becomes angry and acts on his anger and has to be talked out of rash actions. The voice of Abraham represents the higher level god, who at least is interested in sorting out those who deserve punishment from the fairly innocent.

Over the course of the Bible and human history, there are several levels of sophistication in sorting out good and evil. At first, there are evil cities and nations which, if they become bad enough, are punished. The good people and the children suffer right along with the evil-doers.

At the next level, there are good and evil people within nations and cities. While the good may suffer along with the evil theirs is not a personal punishment. The nation is still seen as a kind of corporate personality in which all must suffer together or be blessed together. A partial truth, but demonic in separation from the other side: the equal value and personal responsibility of each individual.

The next level is the realization that there are good and evil in every individual. There are no such things as absolutely evil empires or absolutely evil individuals. Paul makes this point firmly in the opening paragraphs of his letter to the church in Rome. He says categorically that all of us are corrupt and if God dealt with us as he probably should we'd all go down the drain. Judgment is coming, he says, but there is time to repent.

However, and this is the point, each one must repent for his or her own sins. This eventually produces several vital changes in our view of how God works and makes the divine will effective in history, in our theology of providence. This is dealt with in sessions 17 and 18.

The Children's Teeth on Edge

In the 18th chapter of Ezekiel, a prophet of the time of the exile, we see another example of this inner wrestling between views of God and providence.

Ezekiel is struggling with what appears inescapably to be God's rejection and punishment of his chosen people. In the process, Ezekiel declares a sort of new covenant. Yahweh has been misunderstood:

The Word of the Lord came to me again: "What do you mean by repeating this proverb concerning the land of Israel, 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge'"? As I live, says the Lord God, this proverb shall no more be used by you in Israel. Behold, all souls are mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sins shall die. (18:1-4 RSV)

From now on, Ezekiel says, every individual will be judged for his or her own acts and no one will be punished for the sins of parents or children. This is a radical reinterpretation of God's providence from older theologies which treat Israel as one individual, child of God, so that punishment for the sins of the nation fall on innocent and guilty alike.

In other biblical theologies, of course, this problem is solved by noting that while punishment does fall on whole nations, it comes from the natural consequences of their arrogance or aggressiveness and not as a special act of God.

Or else, as in Habakkuk, the prospering of the evil and suffering of the righteous are portrayed as a temporary situation, a time of testing and growth, to come to an end when God comes with full justice and judgment.

Stages and History

The examples given here illustrate an important additional point with regard to Kohlberg's stages. Societies do not move through stages of moral development clearly and neatly anymore than do individuals.

The most retarded we-they moral values continue to exist within modern societies, just as they live within our own sub-selves. The inner demonic self-systems and the external demonic principalities and powers complement and reinforce each other.

The most morally retarded elements generally tend to gradually pass into folk sayings and practices of individuals ("The only good Indian is a dead Indian.") while increasingly the more advanced morality is that which is embodied into law and the normative practices of institutions. This applies, that is, except when a whole society goes through an abrupt moral regression, as in Nazi Germany, Khomeini's Iran, or the Southern Baptist Church under fundamentalist control.

For instance, note the way that the principle of equality before the law and the right of individuals to be considered innocent until proved guilty, continues to gain ground in law, with occasional setbacks.

With Russia, Eastern European nations and South Africa abandoning the death penalty for any crime, the US, England and Japan stand virtually alone among developed nations as allowing executions.

Note how the Rambo mentality still controls the thinking of large numbers of the population, who believe that whole

groups of people are guilty enough of crimes that it is moral to kill them. The religious formulation of this vindictive theology is often expressed thus, "Send them off, and let God sort them out." In other words, "We have a right to kill them whether they are individually guilty or not, and God will send them to heaven or hell, as He (sic) pleases."

Being of the priestly class, Ezekiel had a widely varied catalogue of behavior he thought God considered sinful. It is a mixture of some of the most primitive and some of the most advanced of moral principles:

If a man is righteous and does what is lawful and right – if he does not eat upon the mountains or lift up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, does not defile his neighbor's wife or approach a woman in her time of impurity, does not oppress anyone, but restores to the debtor his pledge, commits no robbery, gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked with a garment, does not lend at interest or take any increase, withholds his hand from iniquity, executes true justice between man and man, walks in my statutes and is careful to observe my ordinances – he is righteous, he shall surely live, says the Lord God. (18:5-9 RSV)

Ezekiel the priest mixes rank superstition with regard to the "uncleanness" of a woman during menstruation with the exalted principle of the duty to defend the oppressed and feed the hungry.

This is a good example of how societies tend to be spread across Kohlberg's stages and is why progress is rather to be measured in the actual impact of the higher stages, the long-range trends and the changes in institutions.

Ironically, it is Ezekiel the priest who also transposes the Genesis tale of the destruction of Sodom into a higher moral key:

Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, surfeit of food and prosperous ease but did not aid the poor and needy. They were haughty, and did abominable things before me, therefore I removed them, when I saw it. (16:49-50 RSV)

The Conversion of Paul

The book of Acts tells of Saul's persecution of the early Christians. As the story begins we see him holding the cloaks of those who stoned Stephen. He went on from there to make a career of imprisoning and killing Christians.

Here, again, we see a struggle between gods taking place within one individual. The narrow stage 3-4 god of a Jewish national faith gives way to a god who sees all persons as equally beloved children.

Saul struggles fanatically to hold the crumbling walls of his personality boundaries. When they suddenly collapse he is inundated and immobilized entirely. Then, he is astounded to find another, new persona, wider and deeper and higher than the old, already formed and waiting for him. Saul became Paul, an almost entirely different (read "reborn") person.

In a sense we could say that primitive Christianity jumps two stages above the highest cultures around it. This was more than people could assimilate, including Paul. Two thousand years later we are still attempting to live up to this call to universal, caring love. Preachers are still saying that Jesus' command to love one's enemies is ethics of the ultimate kingdom but are really impractical in this present world.

The Golden Rule

Stages of development also illumine the teaching and wisdom sections of the scriptures. Take as just one example Jesus' teaching we call the Golden Rule: Do to others as you would have them do to you.

This commandment is highly ambiguous. This ambiguity pops right up when we lay it alongside Kohlberg's six stages.

At each stage the Golden Rule turns out to mean something quite different.

I remember asking a class of Kansas 10-year-olds in a summer Bible school to tell me what the Golden Rule means. One boy eagerly volunteered and said, "Do it to others before they get a chance to do it to you." That was indeed his family's belief and practice.

Even where people don't distort the teaching in this way, they still twist it around to fit into the ethics of their clique or culture.

Psychologists would say that to the extent people do not value themselves, have low self-esteem, they will not treat others any better than they do themselves. It does not help to teach the Golden Rule to a sociopath who has been abused out of normal feelings either. He doesn't care how he is treated, doesn't expect good treatment, and won't treat others with kindness or respect. A loner who wants only to be left alone will ignore other people, and in so doing treat them just as he wishes to be treated.

Each of these lives in and acts out of sick, narrow and exclusive sub-selves rather than from the wholeness of the god-self.

Conclusion

Kohlberg taught that we cannot envision clearly a god more than one stage above our operative level. It is certainly just as true that we cannot comprehend a level of faith and morality in the Bible which is higher. And we will be repelled by the morality and values in scripture which are below the highest we seek to live.

Actually, we can envision in our minds a higher god and morality, but we then ignore such a god as irrelevant or rationalize away the higher values, twisting them to fit without friction the mores of those around us we have to live with. We are not likely, then, to read the Bible in the Spirit if we are reading it with a stage 3 sentimentalism or a stage 4 chauvinism.

One has only to recall how the South African whites used the Genesis note on the descendants of Ham, "hewers of wood and drawers of water," to justify keeping blacks in subordination.

But this was also pretty much the way enlightened, law-abiding Romans looked upon the barbarians of subject nations, and tended to be the attitude of the Jewish Hellenistic nobility and the Temple authorities toward the hungry, disease-ridden, uneducated poor of Galilee. Superior to inferior. God-blessed to sin-cursed.

The same kind of we-they division was invoked to make it possible for decent American young men to slaughter Vietnamese. Instead of being fellow human beings they had to be portrayed as commies, gooks, slants, or slopes.

Questions for Thought

Consider or discuss: Look again at Myers' interpretation of Mark. How does this conflict with your image of Jesus? What difference would it make in your behavior as a Christian if you agree with Myers? What would you do differently? What would be different about a church which was founded on this interpretation of Jesus?

Notes

1. Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man, A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY, 1988, pages 436,7.
2. *ibid.*, from the Introduction by Daniel Berrigan, pages xxi-xxiii.
3. *ibid.*, page xxviii.
4. *ibid.*, page 205

17. Providence in the Age of the Spirit

*Know this: though love is weak and hate is strong,
Yet hate is short and love is very long.*

- Kenneth Boulding ¹

God is not in the world, that is, not in its given factuality and its necessity, but in its setting of a task and in its freedom. ...God is present and God only acts in freedom. He is not present, nor does he act in necessity. God is to be found in Truth, in Goodness, Beauty and Love, but not in the world order. God shows himself in the world in truth and right, but he does not dominate over it in virtue of his power. God is Spirit and he can operate only in Spirit and through Spirit. Our ideas about power, about authority and causality are entirely inapplicable to God. The mystery of God's operation in the world and in man usually finds expression in the doctrine of grace, and grace bears no resemblance to what we understand by necessity, power, authority, and causality, our conception of these is derived from the world. For this reason alone grace cannot be set in antithesis to freedom – it is combined with freedom.

- Nicholas Berdyaev ²

A theology of history for the age of the Spirit recognizes the importance of the quiet dynamics in individuals and society which operate underneath the lusts, ambitions and violence of the events which dominate written history.

Moreover, there are events and structures in personality and society which interact to produce constant challenge to the demonic self-systems within us and the external principalities and powers which sustain those inner demons.

While good does not always triumph in banner headlines, neither does evil ever come out unscathed from the conflict.

Also, the demonic systems work against each other and often cancel each other out, both in individuals and in society.

Progress or Regress?

Are we progressing in world history or regressing? Is good winning against evil? How would we measure and how would we decide?

It is hard to beat Reinhold Niebuhr's answer. He pointed out how our efforts to change things for the better are hampered by our inaccurate word pictures with regard to meaning in history. History is not a circle, as in Platonism or certain Asian views; it is not a matter of cycles eternally recurring. There are real advances and real regressions, real change.

On the other hand, history is not to be understood either as an upwardly inclined plane, things getting better and better, social salvation awaiting around the corner after the application of more effective technology and education. This view, common around the turn of the century, was a fantasy, Niebuhr said, destroyed by two world wars and a major depression. ³

The pessimism arising from global catastrophes and unmanageable problems has helped fuel the popularity especially with American fundamentalists of still another image, that of the descending inclined plane. The world will get worse and worse until the Second Coming of Christ. Then, God will bring history to a resounding end, sending some to heaven and most (evidently) to hell. One frightening thing about this particular image is that some of its adherents often also believe that nuclear war is an inevitable part of God's plan, so they have no interest in arms control.

The best image, Niebuhr believed, is that of an on-going struggle between good and evil which will continue to the end of time, with no victory within history by either side. As advances are made in science, in techniques of education, even in embodying greater moral sensitivity in law and institutions, more power also becomes available to evil forces within each of us and to those institutionalized in society. More power for good means more power for evil. The conflict intensifies and continually broadens its scope. The supersonic aircraft which drops bombs can also bring food and medicine. Accurate knowledge of the central nervous system and brain has brought amazing relief from pain; it has also made possible new kinds of torture able to break any will.

A powerful example of this struggle is in the rise of Nazism in Germany and tradition-based militaristic oligarchy in Japan, which led to World War II. While worldwide depression was the precipitating cause, these ideologies found fertile soil of support in the anxiety of middle and lower middle class people shaken by political and cultural liberalism. This abrupt shattering of old mores had brought greater freedom and a frightening rebellion among the young. Many saw this as immoral and a threat to public order. The very forces working for liberation of the human spirit helped to produce dictatorship and world war.

This picture of on-going and escalating struggle is certainly a much more accurate image than a circle or an ascending or descending line. There is a final victory in God's hands, Niebuhr believed, but it lies beyond history and is ours here only in faith and in energizing hope.

This image of on-going struggle is only a picture, a bare outline. We can say much more about what God's strategy for victory is, and we must if we are to see clearly the part each of us is to play.

God's On-going Action in the World

Here again, Nicholas Berdyaev shows us the way. Berdyaev believed that God acts in the world only through human freedom, only through a delicate but vital communication with the free, creative core at the center of the individual human personality. This core existing at the deepest part of the self he called the God-man. I refer to it as the god-self. He wrote:

*In history we have the conflict of freedom with necessity, but God may exist only in freedom. He is not present in necessity. This leads us to a complete change in the doctrine about Providence. Grace is not a power acting from without, grace is the revelation of the divine in man. There is no conflict between grace and freedom; grace transfigures freedom.*⁴

God does not operate as a mover and shaker in world history. In this I agree fully with Berdyaev. God does not cause earthquakes and typhoons and famines, and God does not prevent them. God does not move nations or kings around like pawns. God does not speak in words to prophets, nor to kings, nor to ordinary people. God does not punish people to keep them from sinning, nor does S/He reward them with health or prosperity when they are righteous and loving. A righteous life may lead to health and prosperity because it is lived in peace and justice with others, but it may also end in failure in business or a painful death by cancer. God can do all these things, but chooses not to.

God's direct operation in history is not in the whirlwind or the storm, but rather in the quiet small voice speaking in nudges of approval or disapproval to the god-self within, in feelings rather than in words.

It is this one kind of personal entrance upon our consciousness, this small aperture for influence, which makes it possible to say the Deists were wrong. God did not set the universe running and go away. God is as close to human beings and as active in history as it is possible to be given the demands of nonviolent, nonmanipulative love which can work only through freedom.

What I have referred to as nudges could be interpreted as intervention. But we must remember that the god-self within is also the god-structure. It is the string within us which is tuned to God's frequency – that of wholistic agape – therefore it naturally resonates to God's presence always.

The problem is not God's attempt to communicate; S/He always is communicating. The problem is that the weight of the demonic self-systems dampens the vibration we should be experiencing. When some Quakers speak of attempting to "center down" they mean sinking all the way through the clutter of idolatrous distraction of the other self-systems to where the god-self sings a duet with God. Or, as sometimes seems to happen, for a whole Quaker or other gathering reaches a level of sensitivity which becomes a shared revelatory experience of oneness and peace and joy.

This group experience is the one occasion when God's direct influence reaches beyond the individual, as at Pentecost, when a community's togetherness in love and common purpose brings about a bonding with one another at the level of the god-self. This creates a larger aperture for God's entrance and influence. Then we have an orchestra rather than a single string.

Apparently, this produces, temporarily, a focusing of truth within each of us, as well as a release of power, the nature of which we do not yet understand well because we experience it so infrequently. It is infrequent because we do not seek it, and in many cases do not believe in it.

This is not the same ecstasy we see among charismatic Christians when they work themselves into a kind of trance state. There are demonic forms of ecstasy as well as spirit-releasing forms. A trance state isolates each of us from the neighbor; it is a turning inward, a kind of emotional masturbation.

This is my hypothesis to be examined. This touch by God in and through the god-self is the only direct way God's self-revelation can take place, and it is the only way God influences individuals and, through individuals and small groups, brings about significant changes in society.

There are many events which show evidence of God's influence and we call them God's action. But they are indirect, through people, and not direct.

When the early Christians said "Jesus is Lord!" it was also another way of saying (whether they realized it or not) that God's providence operates directly only through freedom and through nonviolent love. Therefore, the only entrance God has into the

world is into the god-self within each individual, and into the life of a gathering only as they experience a spiritual oneness, a momentary and fragmentary uniting of their god-selves.

Does this not limit God? Only to the extent God has purposely limited the use of divine power. God is free and may have other channels through which to work. My hypothesis is, however, that God communicates almost always in this world as described above.

Does our prayer and meditation in groups activate the nudges of God? No. The divine pressure is always there, uniformly, pressing from all around and from inside. We only are able, helping one another, to open a channel through touching our own god-selves.

It is not so much a work we do as a lack of work, a letting go and sinking down to the center (as Eckhardt liked to put it) and a sharing of grace with one another.

If the divine pressure is always there, how do we account for what the mystics call the “dark night of the soul?” These are the occasions when prayers seem to rise no higher than the ceiling and God appears to be utterly absent from the universe. It is perhaps easier to think of these as resulting from two other phenomena: (1) They may represent plateaus where we rest between stage movements, for a time in chaotic darkness, or (2) they perhaps express our trying to reach God by striving, by our own activity. Centering down more a matter of emptying oneself of idolatrous distractions than a matter of crying, “Lord, Lord!”

Unless we keep this matter of God’s constant nearness straight, we are not likely to understand anything correctly about providence in history and about real progress.

Critique

Berdyaev’s view of providence in history has been called subjectivist and Gnostic. We have to consider these criticisms here before we can go further.

Milton Friedman lumps Berdyaev together with three others and calls them all modern Gnostics: philosopher Simone Weil, psychoanalyst Jung, and the novelist Hesse. Like the original Gnostics, Simone Weil, Friedman believes, puts God so far above humanity that there can hardly be any relationship. At the opposite extreme is another kind, he says, speaking primarily of Jung:

*The second type of Modern Gnostic replaces Weil’s transcendent God by an emphasis on the divinity of the self. This type is not found as such in ancient Gnosticism, but two of its most important elements are. One of these is the focus on the knowledge of the divinity at the inner self. ... Another element already present in ancient Gnosticism is the antinomianism of this latter type of Modern Gnostic. The Gnostic hostility toward the world led to two seemingly opposed forms of Gnostic morality, the ascetic and the libertine.*⁵

And he adds:

*“Only an immature or enslaved mind,” writes Nicholas Berdyaev, “would deduce from the doctrine of the importance of evil that one should choose to follow the path of wickedness ‘in order to enrich our consciousness and profit from a new experience.’” But this is exactly what the second, and perhaps most widespread type of Modern Gnostic does – the one who contrasts the evil of the social world with the good within. In doing so, of course, he no longer thinks of “evil” as really evil. The old moral conceptions of good and evil are relativised in favor of a new conception of good as the integration, or individuation, of the person and real evil as anything which stands in the way.*⁶

Before answering this criticism, which might be true to some extent of Jung, let’s go a step further and see how the argument cuts with regard to Berdyaev’s view of history. In this case, the critic is Langdon Gilkey:

*Suffice it to take a few notable examples which illustrate a new sense of dualism between history and God’s activity, and the sole locus of that activity in the incarnation, and in personal “existential” individual life of men and women. Perhaps the most extreme case is that of Nicholas Berdyaev. Here, apparently, God’s activity has no relation to the general course of history, and so there is no doctrine of providence. ... “This world into which we are thrown is not God’s world, and in it divine order and divine harmony cannot hold sway. God’s world only breaks through into this world, the light of it shines through in that which really exists, in living beings and in their existence. ... There is nothing of God in the dull and prosaic normality of the objective world.” N. Berdyaev, *The Beginning and the end*, pages 152-7.*⁷

Berdyaev’s dualism, which is the concern of both Friedman and Gilkey, arises from his rejection of the other possible alternative solutions to the problem of good and evil. He felt strongly the need for combating a kind of monism which laid the responsibility for evil upon God. He had been deeply influenced by the writings of Dostoevsky and in particular the parable of the Grand Inquisitor. In the contrast between Christ and the socially brain-washed Inquisitor the distinction between good and evil seemed absolutely clear. If monism was to be rejected so also was any pluralism of powers. There is no Platonic Demiurgos to blame evil upon. While there may be a plurality of forms of evil, they are all aspects of one evil.

It seemed inevitable to Berdyaev, that until all is caught up in unity within the Godhead at the end, there is an inescapable dualism between good and evil. The evil arises out of human freedom in the our alienated state. It takes place as the perversion of God-given capacities of human freedom, of creative power. It is a corruption of something good and parasitic upon that deeper good

within the human personality. In this respect Berdyaev is certainly in structural harmony with many from Augustine through Karl Barth who saw evil as non-being.

Berdyaev certainly never reached Jung's extreme, that of seeing evil merely as a shadow side of the larger personality which needed to be integrated.

Contrary to both Friedman and Gilkey, Berdyaev was quite clear that there were good and evil in both society and individuals. Perhaps the concept of sub-selves and how they operate is paradigm easier for us to understand. It puts the distinction more sharply between the wholistic gestalt of the god-self on the one hand and the demonic self-systems on the other. It puts the dualism between good and evil where it belongs, and should be an interpretation more hospitable to the modern mind than the one Berdyaev used.

Berdyaev didn't have access to the recent studies of developmental psychology and biology. He reached back into an obscure idea from the 14th century mystic, Tauler, to find a paradigm for his intuition about the fountainhead of human evil, what Tauler called the *Ungrund*. This Abyss, according to Tauler and Berdyaev, appeared prior to and somehow separate from God the Creator. It seems to have some kinship to the primordial matter (hyle) of Plato. Or perhaps it has more in common with Whitehead's "primordial nature of God" which is the reservoir of all possible choices and all possible futures. These, in a sense, preexist before specific choices actualize some possible futures thus cutting off others.

We can see the relevance of this to the way in which the fall into evil takes place. Children move from "dreaming innocence" (Paul Tillich) into the making of moral choices from among a bewildering variety of alternatives, without prior experience and in a state of anxiety. This combination of anxiety and multiple possibility plus the presence of evil all around them is what causes, psychologically, the inner fragmentation we call a fall.

Evil assumes different shapes in the demonic self-systems. These reflect the forms the "principalities and powers" take in society. The inner sub-selves reinforce and/or are reinforced by the social ideologies and values of the age. The inner demons arise from and also worship the external social powers. These are thus continued generation after generation. The content may change but the structures remain the same. The Byzantine Christian Emperor Justinian said it was okay to kill German barbarians in the name of God. And the Christian President Johnson sends the troops off to Vietnam to murder Asian communist, atheist barbarians. Today as then the external structures of prejudice and violence reinforce the inner sub-selves organized around a narrow stage 3-4, we-they world view.

How Does God Act Directly?

One may, as most theologians have, insist that the divine providence is a mystery; we do not know and cannot pin down the various ways God acts. As admirable as is the humility of this position, we have to say that if we are cannot be more specific we are hard put to figure out what to do to fit effectively into God's strategy for incarnating agape in individuals and society.

I have asserted, going beyond Berdyaev, that the paradigms of the god-self and of stage development make it possible to say a lot more about the way God acts and does act in history. This view helps enormously, I believe, to clarify for us both the nature of revelation and our own responsibility.

Mine is clearly a left-wing Protestant view. It falls roughly within the "Christ against Culture" category of H. Richard Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture*.⁸ This position, I believe, expresses best of all the alternatives what the position of the Christian and the churches should be vis-a-vis the world. Here, Berdyaev and I are with the letters of John and the other parts of the New Testament which see society as the kingdom of the Beast, held fast in the grip of evil. All our social institutions are corrupt and even the best of them tend to freeze human beings at one or another of the Kohlberg stages, stunting our growth. So, it is hard to improve on Berdyaev's paradigm of objectification through socialization (call it brain-washing) which we all experience. This creates depersonalized, herd people. Only the spirit, the god-self within, has the wholistic power to free itself from this control.

The battle between good and evil continues within the depths of each individual. God works directly only there. Social structures may incarnate to greater or lesser degree freedom, justice and love, and the struggle to change these structures in the direction of the kingdom of God is vitally important. But God doesn't work directly with social structures because God works only with freedom and through nonviolent love. God works in history only through people, institutions and ideas which incarnate to some extent the way of agape, indirectly, that is. Read again the quote from Berdyaev at the opening of this session.

At any rate, neither Berdyaev's viewpoint on providence and history, nor my own, is Gnostic.

Nor are we individualistic in our view of salvation. It is especially important to point out that whatever Berdyaev says about the God-man within being the locus of God's revelation and of full freedom, creativity and truth, he puts a parallel emphasis on community, *sobornost* to use the Russian word. This sets Berdyaev sharply apart from the so-called gnosticism of Simone Weil, Jung and Hesse, a point Friedman seems to have missed.

Salvation is not first and mainly individual because it involves becoming like God. Becoming godlike is a communal process requiring countless transactions of grace. For another thing, the individual's struggle for social justice in society is essential to the crossing from stage 5 to stage 6 and the integration at that level.

Stages in History

Now we must look at how stages of development in individuals relate to stages of development in history.

The fragmentation of wholistic love in history parallels the fragmentation within the individual. Any one of the four movements necessary for spiritual development, when it is taken off into isolation and to extreme, becomes demonic, out of control, and immensely destructive. Two examples:

Expansion

The first example is the way in which expansion itself, while good and necessary, becomes demonic. Expansion has been one of the most consistent movements in history, from tribe/clan to city to nation state to empire. The retreat to the primacy of the nation state in modern history is an exception, but only a temporary one. Modern communications and transportation and international economic interdependence assure that our future is internationalization, though the forms it threatens to take may be more demonic and destructive than we now imagine.

Expansion of human consciousness to encompass the whole of humanity is a part of the divine plan for making us over into the image of God. Yet, as expansion has taken place, it has usually been through brutal violence rather than by treaty, compromise and cooperation.

Psychological adjustment in every age to institutionalized violence, often blessed by religion, has helped cause internal fragmentation in every individual. Caring, rooting in the family, has had to be set elsewhere in the self, in a separate gestalt in the brain, apart from the rationalizations making possible the murder of fellow human beings.

In session 6 I traced Ernest Becker's analysis of how the dynamics of the development of empires derived from the inner drive of anxiety with regard to death and finitude.

This is, he thought, the psychological root of evil in individuals and society. I carry his analysis a step further and relate it to the development of the god-self and the demonic self-systems within each of us. Without this, it becomes next to impossible to explain the survival of compassion and caring among peoples in the world at all.

Autonomy

The second example is that of individual autonomy. Like expansion, this is one of the poles of the wholistic self as well as the healthy society. The tearing free of the psyche from the cultural umbilical cord has been a long process with many set-backs.

We trace modern individualism to the Renaissance, Reformation and Enlightenment. In the battles associated with these movements some of the power of the collective to determine the shape of the psyche was broken. The freedom won is incomplete, but significant.

This movement is an essential part of God's plan. But, as with expansion, movement toward autonomy brought a different but equally deadly kind of inner fragmentation. The "autonomous" individual of America is haunted by loneliness, feels cut off from human warmth and companionship. The social consequences of an undervaluing of communal interdependence are seen daily around us in the unemployed, people on welfare, the neglected children and homeless families, hunger and illness untended, and greater and greater holes being torn in our already inadequate safety net.

Berdyaev wrote that the movement to individual autonomy is necessary in God's purpose but the extreme form it takes in the modern world is terribly destructive. To autonomy, he opposed the principle of *sobornost*, the Russian word for community in the Spirit. He also set *sobornost* in contrast to all forms of oppressive collectivism such as Nazism and Communism. He contrasted it also to the economic oppression and spiritual bondage he saw in modern capitalism. He wrote:

*Community is a spiritual quality of persons, a being-together; a brotherhood of men, and it never means some sort of reality which is above men, or which can order them about. Community leaves judgment and conscience in the depths of man's heart. ...Religious community is also called sobornost, something directly opposed to any authoritarian concept of the Church.*⁹

Sobornost is community to the max together with freedom to the max, a higher synthesis of both extremes united in the person only within the god-gestalt.

To expansion there must be the counterweight of the opposite pole of internal unity and harmony. This is true of social units as well as individuals. And to individual autonomy there must be added the loving community wherein people are related to one another internally through real compassion and justice and not just by external sanctions of custom and law.

The god-self does not live by a balance of these opposites, nor any Aristotelian mean. The god-self is by its very nature a fusion of all four of the poles of wholeness into a new and higher unity. It is a seamless garment. In any particular decision of the individual, we may opt for greater freedom or greater relationship but the god-self empowers us to do so quite free of any necessity to move one way or another. This is true freedom.

God will succeed, eventually, because evil is self-destructive and short-lived in its particular expressions. When the god-self is realized, the demonic self-systems must shrink away and perish. Evil also provokes a reaction, in the form of a longing for health and wholeness. This is one of the booby-traps God has placed in us and history. As Kenneth Boulding wrote, truly love is weak and hate is strong, but hate is short and love is very long.

Questions for Thought

What does it mean to say "God will succeed?" An assertion of faith, of course, but is there any support in history for such optimism? What would victory mean? What is your own view of providence? Does God cause anything directly in history? If so, what? What are the consequences of each of the various view of providence in everyday life?

Notes

1. "Nor to Avenge Any Wrong," There is a Spirit, *The Naylor Sonnets*, Fellowship Publications, Nyack, NY, 1945, 1979, page 3
2. *The Beginning and the End*, page 152

3. *Faith and History*, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949, page 14ff.
4. *The Realm of Spirit and the Realm of Caesar*, Harper & Brothers, Publishers, NY, 1952, page 44
5. *To Deny Our Nothingness*, Contemporary Images of Man, page 146
6. *ibid.*, page 147
7. *Reaping the Whirlwind*, The Seabury Press, NY, 1976, pages 492, 403
8. Harper & Row, NY, 1951. H. Richard Niebuhr never intended that his five categories of relationship of Christ and culture should be rigidly understood or applied. Subsequent writers have helped clarify this by noting that while one kind of relationship may be the predominant paradigm by which a person or group thinks and operates (Christ against culture, Christ above culture, Christ transforming culture, and so on) it is nevertheless true that in other parts of the life of the group or person, or in relation to a particular issue he or they may operate for a time on a quite different paradigm. All of us, at different times, embody each of the Christ-Culture relationships, as appropriate. The operational primacy of "Christ against Culture" in my system is the corollary of the New Testament assertion that the kingdoms of this world are the kingdoms of the Beast.
9. *The Realm of Spirit and the Realm of Caesar*, *op cit.*, page 123

18. Tracing God's Trajectory in the Age of the Spirit

If it is the individual who matters most in the sense that he is the maker of history, the next important force and the strongest organizational unit in the world's story would appear to be the thing which we call a "cell"; for it is a remorseless self-multiplier; it is exceptionally difficult to destroy; it can preserve its intensity of local life while vast organizations quickly wither when they are weakened at the centre; it can defy the power of governments and it is the appropriate level for prising open any status quo.

- Herbert Butterfield ¹

A 21st century theology for the age of the Spirit should be able to see the method in God's action in history more clearly. It peers down from a higher point on the mountain.

God does not act differently in the age of the Spirit from the way S/He does in any other age. It is our growing maturity which helps us see through the lenses of other paradigms how and why God acts. This new perspective demands that we trace anew God's redemptive pathway through history, seeing both scripture and historical events in a radically new way.

We draw a line from the beginning, following the trajectory of agape, and then project it into the future as far as we can.

This is a story, mainly, of God's failures, which are also humanity's failures, but they are failures which reveal little by little the innermost nature of God's love.

Revelation

Revelation – God's direct and indirect influence in history – has to start somewhere, in some individual, in some specific time and place, or it does not start at all.

Revelatory events usually start with the dissatisfaction of an individual, often within the context of the unrest of some minority "internal proletariat" (to use Toynbee's phrase) of which she is a member.

This reminds us of the dynamics within the individual psyche described by Piaget, wherein the move to a higher stage of cognitive development begins from the abrasive rub of discontent with the way the present operative skills no longer can solve the problems being met. But in this case the main conflict is between the god-self within, and its desires, and the demonic self-systems. Nature (the awe-inspiring "starry heavens above" of Kant) introduces a conflict between the universal concern for all persons and the particular self-interest in self-preservation and self-enhancement. This is a dimension of the god-self, as at the other extreme, is the mother's caring for her baby and the extension of that into empathy for others.

The content of the new revelation arises from an innovative new paradigm or word picture which alters significantly an element of the existing faith of the larger community. In the analysis of II Isaiah below we see how the prophet's situation, emotions and experience in an alien land and his vision for the future produce a new and revolutionary paradigm. As with other visions in other ages, this was fortified within him by an inner assurance of rightness provided by the Holy Spirit in rapport with his god-self.

Israel presents a prime example of how changing circumstances can repeatedly make a nation's view of God outmoded. The concept of Israel as a special chosen people changes from the Exodus and entry into the land, where God is the war god of the invading tribes. This view evolves all the way to the understanding of II Isaiah who saw God as an all-forgiving, passionately loving Parent who takes Israel's suffering on herself as a mother suffers bearing a child, and who calls Israel to be suffering servant, evangelist to the nations for God's justice and compassion. There were intermediate stages. These stages can be roughly summarized as follows: war god, king, patriarchal father, all-forgiving parent, suffering servant God. The images often coexisted; there are not

clear stages where one replaces another.

This apparent expansion of God's compassion takes place alongside expansion of the conscience of Israel, and in the midst of the violent expansionism of empire-building. It is the universalization of the conscience of Israel.

Unfortunately, this revolution of conscience takes place only in only a few individuals and small groups scattered across centuries. In this, Israel was not so different from us. In so many of our pitifully eclectic, pack-rat theologies the reactionary images of God as war god, king, and patriarchal father continue to exist alongside those centering in self-giving, nonviolent love, the kind we see in the cross. With us, as in Amos' Israel, if one wants to go to war or to cheat a neighbor, he dips in and finds a rationale in some element of this conveniently multi-faceted, potpourri deity.

In the process of new revelation the new paradigm (which may or may not be a better one) is declared to be a new Word of God. To the extent that it reaches toward an increase of compassion and universality, it is indeed such a word. It becomes then, in effect, a seed of revolutionary change.

Such revelation usually has come first to an individual. It is then planted in a small community of faith, as for instance, a school of prophets or the followers of a particular prophet.

The inhospitable environment of violence and greed has usually buried these new seeds of revelation so deep they could not flourish in the first generation. It sometimes instead prospers a false word of false prophets, such as happened with those who melded Yahweh with the Baal fertility deities.

The substantial harvest from the true seeds of the Spirit did not come until decades or even centuries later, though the seeds continued to flourish within history in a few individuals or small communities and thus remained an irritant to the principalities and powers in each generation.

Jesus pointed to the people around and said to his disciples that the fields were ripe for the harvest. We have, in our individualistic post-Enlightenment way, distorted that into a call for plucking individual souls off the brink of hell. This was far from what Jesus had in mind. He was saying that the time had come to challenge Israel to put up or shut up, to either fulfill II Isaiah's call to be a suffering servant to all the peoples of the world or get out of the way and let somebody else do it. If they were not going to be wheat, they would be weeds and somebody else would be the wheat.

Remember, as said earlier, the truth of a revelation is not established through formal philosophic or theological analysis nor its immediate pragmatic results. In this respect we continue, in every generation, to live by faith, hope and love, not by the security of certainty that we are right.

However, we can say now, in the light of the trajectory we see in the past, that the criteria for the test is whether or not the new revelation serves human liberation. And here liberation is a summarizing symbol for the release of all human creative powers within the god-self and the institutionalization of the liberating rule of God within history. This happens, as we have seen, by successive stages, although the former stages remain with us in the demonic self-systems of individuals and the institutional principalities and powers which they worship.

Let us look for clues at several points in history as to how the beliefs and actions of individuals and small groups affected history decisively, that is, planted in history the seeds of a future qualitative change, equivalent to the movement from one stage in ego development to another in the individual. We are also looking for clues as to how God works through the god-self to remake humanity into her own image, that of the divine love, and to restructure social orders into that reality of the future which we call the rule of God.

This ends up being a session on failures in history, aborted revolutions, like the Sermon on the Mount. I could have chosen other examples to develop; there are many. I chose these because each of them seems to me to be pivotal, an axial change, the planting of a seed crucial to God's strategy for victory.

1. The Mother Who Failed

A study of nuclei of human cells taken from all over the world reports that all people everywhere share one most primordial genetic bit; it is identical in all of us. This suggests strongly that every one of us springs from the same mother who lived in East Africa or China. If these scientists are correct, then all other strains of humanity who were not descendants of her daughters and their daughters, before and after, simply died out. This mother of ours did not spring from Adam's rib; she came into being as culmination of a process of evolution.²

What, then, can we say about the nature of the Fall into evil? Let's extrapolate from our own experience and do some creative guessing, more in the spirit of poetry than science.

The survival of this tribe and Eve's children suggests that she may have been a product of mutation. Perhaps her brain was one of the first which had both right and left brain function as well as superior reasoning power. Perhaps, as some suggest, the brain had not yet completely separated these powers of linear thinking and gestalt-formation. Perhaps the brain was much more of a unity, with the unconscious and its visions and dreams closer to the surface of consciousness, more subject to control. Perhaps there were ESP powers as well as the trances, visions and prophecies attributed to women in later generations. Perhaps fellow tribespeople were in awe of her because her children always lived. Perhaps she was considered a sorceress.

If some early tribes such as this were matriarchal, why did the tenderness and empathy of a mother in her relations to a child not prevail? Why did anxiety harden into distrust and lead to make violence into public policy?

A harsh life produces harsh, cruel people, out of the requirements for survival. Family/mother love evidently was not strong enough.

The mother-child relationship is constant and recurring. The human infant, whose beauty and helplessness evoke empathy and compassion, was there in all the generations of humankind to say, "There is a better way than hate and violence. Take it!"

Perhaps it is at this point we see the beginning of the human schizoid personality. I am referring to the splitting within between the wholistic god-self and the fragmented demonic self-systems. The love of a mother for her child with its implications of empathy for all people, could not survive alongside the violence and cruelty the tribe saw around it and felt obligated to practice in order to survive. Yet, neither could it disappear or the race would have committed both spiritual and physical suicide.

Brutality and compassion had to be put into different compartments. The gestalt-forming functions of the brain created a separate compartments for incompatible beliefs. To bring these together day by day required declaring outsiders heretics and enemies, Becker's scapegoating mechanism was at work. "We love our children but we won't hesitate to kill yours!"

If a higher level of morality is possible for us than our mother Eve's tribe, it is due only to the institutionalization of higher stages of morality which are the gifts to us of the dedication and sacrifice of a few men and women in each generation.

2. The King Who Failed

King David is the first person in history about whom we have a somewhat reliable biography. Granted that parts of it are dressed up a bit, still the outline and most of the events are accurate. Partly this is because it was recorded during his lifetime by some able court historians. But more important, it was the nature of the kingship in Israel itself which made this innovative bit of historical accuracy possible.

The king operated under Yahweh's authority and not by his own descent, ability or charisma. Therefore, it was possible that the story of his weaknesses, sins and failures be chronicled along with his virtues and successes. And this was done. This was in significant contrast to the kings all around Israel.

The critical event which became one of the hinges of history occurred at a routine hearing in his courtroom one day.

David had been caught up in a passion for a beautiful woman and had gotten her pregnant. To make the situation worse, he had engineered her husband's death, and then had taken her into his harem.

David was safe in doing this. He was so popular that he could not have been unseated, not even by the prophets of Yahweh. The people loved him. He was a great warrior, who had beaten back the enemies of his country and made a secure space for the people for the first time in their history. He was a great poet and religious leader, known for his piety.

Also, around David was an officer's corps of military men who had been with him through the long years of exile and guerrilla warfare, while Saul was king. They idolized him. They would kill for him. They would and could be counted on to cover up any scandal. They might be worshipers of Yahweh but they loved David more than life itself.

So, when the prophet Nathan stood before David, he took his life in his hands. He told the story of a poor man whose one lamb was taken by a rich man. David became angry. He promised justice would be done. Nathan pointed his finger at David and intoned, "You are the man!"

David didn't have to repent, not even to admit any wrong. He could have gestured to his guard and Nathan would have been taken in hand, his head cut off, and his body dumped into some conveniently distant ravine. David had the power, he had the means, he could not be unseated. By all precedent of any monarch of his time or before, this was what kings did. A cover-up was in order. The kingship itself, its dignity, its perpetuation, were beyond question to be held more important than an injustice against one citizen.

What David did was not due to fear of losing his kingship. The memory of Saul's madness which was credited to Yahweh's Spirit may have been a factor, but certainly not the deciding one.

Nathan had on his side some formidable power.

There were the sheep. David had been a shepherd, had guarded and protected his sheep against wolves and lions. He had thought of himself as a shepherd king. Was he now to join the wolves and become a devourer of the sheep rather than their savior? The sheep gathered around Nathan's legs.

Nathan also had Jonathan, Saul's son, and David's dear friend, who had given up his crown and his life in the belief David was more worthy. Jonathan stood at Nathan's shoulder.

And there was another face looking over Nathan's shoulder, that of David's friend, a mercenary warrior but one who fought out of belief in the king, Bathsheba's husband, Uriah. was one of the sheep David had sworn to protect.

It was not just David against Nathan, or even David against Nathan and God. Nathan brought an army David could not fight, an array of witnesses which marshaled David's own conscience, his own god-self, against him. If David put Nathan to death, he went against everything he had believed in. He would become a hollow king, no longer the one psalmists called son of God.

David repented. He abased himself. The story of his great sin became part of his biography and an enduring influence in history.

One measure of David's failure and his sin was in the mess he made of his children's lives. Absalom rebelled and Bathsheba's son Solomon engaged in foolish ostentation and fathered the splitting of the kingdom.

His successors' failure was that they did not become shepherd kings, but instead took the same murderous glory trail of the other monarchs around Israel.

The measure of David's success is that the notion of a kingdom under God's rule and dedicated to justice and mercy toward its subjects, all of whom were seen to be equally beloved of God, passed into the underground stream of grace which continued to feed the god-selves of all of us and remained a possible choice for every ruler from then on.

The "Camelot" dream of David undoubtedly fueled the writings of the mysterious prophet we know as II Isaiah.

3. The People Who Failed

We do not even know the name of the most profound prophet of the Hebrew scriptures, who is also one of the greatest poets

of any nation and author of an exalted picture of God perhaps unrivaled in any scripture. This view of infinite power and unlimited compassion comes as close as anything else in the Bible to articulating a stage 6-7 view of God.

We call him Deutero-Isaiah or II Isaiah. There is fairly wide-spread agreement on these educated guesses about him:

- He wrote chapters 40 through 55 of the book we call Isaiah.
- He lived and wrote a couple of hundred years after Isaiah.
- He lived part of his life as one of the Jewish exile community, the people who had been taken away to Babylon after the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BCE.
- He foresaw the fall of Babylon and the return of the exiles under Cyrus before these events happened and preached urging the return of the Jews to Palestine.
- II Isaiah is also the author of four magnificent poems which are embedded like jewels in the larger writing: 42:1-9; 49:1-7; 50:1-11; 52:13-53:12. These are called the Servant Songs, and from them we get the term suffering servant.
- Chapters 56 to the end are the work of a third prophet (or perhaps group of prophets), III Isaiah, who may have been a disciple of II Isaiah, but whose writing had a less profound and somewhat different message.

II Isaiah is, for me, the linchpin which binds together the highest in the Hebrew scriptures and the highest in the Christian.

II Isaiah drew on the Pentateuch (Torah), the 8th century prophets and the Psalms. But the pieces he took from them, he put together in a way which was revolutionary.

He laid the foundation for Jesus' understanding of his own mission.

The heart of II Isaiah's Reformation is in these four points:

1. God is seen as a servant God of forgiving, parental love. This is not wholly new. Hosea had presented God as a doting parent, spooning cereal into the mouth of a rebellious toddler and unable in his love to punish him too harshly. See Hosea 11:3-9. But for Hosea wrath and love struggle within Yahweh as they did within the prophet himself. II Isaiah, 200 years later, presents a God who comes almost entirely in forgiveness, welcoming love, and salvation

2. God is the Creator of the whole universe, is Sovereign of nature and all peoples and nations. This is also not wholly new. Yet, II Isaiah's vision of God's infinite scope and power is unrivaled.

It is the mysterious and sudden rise of Cyrus, ruler of the ascendent Medes and Persians, to world power, II Isaiah says, which makes this clear and will prove to the Jews, as well as to all nations, that there is but one God, universal and all-powerful.

II Isaiah goes on and draws a conclusion from this which is truly revolutionary. Not only is God Creator and all-powerful, not only is God sovereign of history, but God cares about all peoples. Everyone is his subject. Although this is suggested in the a few other places in the Hebrew scriptures, it is II Isaiah who puts it at the center of his theology. God is no longer, ever again, to be seen merely as the tribal God of Israel.

3. The New Israel is to have a new mission; it is to be the servant of God to make known Yahweh's justice and love to all peoples.

If Yahweh is parent of all and all people are one family, what is special about the Jews? Why go back to the land? Why rebuild? II Isaiah is aware that he is answering these questions for a people who have seen all their faith and meaning collapse around their ears. It is a crisis unrivaled in history for them until the 70CE destruction of the second temple and the scattering of the people.

II Isaiah's answer to this crisis of faith is that God has a mission so much more glorious than mere nation-building that it will rejuvenate the people and set them on a higher pinnacle of importance than ever dreamed before. It will not be the pinnacle of a conqueror, but of those who are lifted up by others as worthy of respect because of their example of love and justice.

Of his own calling II Isaiah writes little, and those few lines indicate that he saw the call to mission as coming first to himself and then being extended to the whole nation:

(The Lord) says: "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth." (49:6)

It was no light call, to try to convince the exhausted, discouraged nation that not only would they never again be Number 1 or Number 2, but that they were deliberately to go to the bottom of the heap, to become servants of all. One is reminded of Jesus' words to his disciples as he washed their feet.

4. The suffering of the servant. What will convince the world of the caring of God is the willingness of the servant nation to suffer in the cause of justice.

The mission is to be carried out by the living of the message. *"It must go forth in gentleness and in love and not on the point of a sword: He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break ..."*

As usual, God is revealing truth through the prophet's own life and experience. No doubt, living in Babylon, he had met worthy people of many lands. Were not these too God's children, brothers and sisters? Perhaps he found, too, that some of them were far more willing to listen to words concerning Yahweh and his law from one who was unarmed and came bearing stripes rather

than a sword. This is the way we should understand the mysterious words of the fourth Servant Song:

*Yet it was the will of the Lord to bruise him;
he has put him to grief
when he makes him an offering for sin
he shall see his offspring,
he shall prolong his days;
the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand;
he shall see the fruit of the travail of his soul
and be satisfied.
By his knowledge shall the righteous one,
my servant, make many to be accounted righteous;
and he shall bear their iniquities ...
he poured out his soul to death
and was numbered among the transgressors;
yet he bore the sin of many,
and made intercessions for the transgressors. (53:10-12)*

Those Jews who had been faithful to Yahweh and yet were suffering the exile are bearing the sins of all those of their nation who went before. Now, having paid the price, they are forgiven and are to be returned to the land. But now their suffering can, by their wisdom and example, also bear the sins of those yet unborn, also those of other nations.

Well, who can preach to the imprisoned better than an ex-convict? Can you preach a servant God if you're a lord? Who can convict of sin like a sinner? Whose words for peace carry such weight as an ex-soldier's with scars that testify to the suffering and futility of war? In their suffering, they have borne the sins of many and by their stripes we can be healed, if we hear what they have learned through their suffering.

The Jews of Jesus' day thought Isaiah had prophesied that a single Messiah would appear. It was unthinkable to them, though, that suffering would be integral to his mission. Both the Jews and the later Christians were wrong. II Isaiah was not prophesying the coming of an individual. He spoke of himself as servant, but also included all the righteous who had suffered for sins they did not commit. And he included the whole of the New Israel as the servant of Yahweh, the one whose sufferings in exile would prepare them in understanding and reputation to make a witness to all nations.

The returned exiles were not able to lift their eyes high enough to catch and hold this vision. They were exhausted and in shock. They were afraid. Instead of opening up to the people around them, they withdrew into themselves even more tightly. They rebuilt their walls, crouched within them, and clung to the belief that holiness means separation from others for the sake of purity. They even believed they were superior to their half brothers and sisters, the Samaritans.

Jesus seems to have seen his mission through the eyes of II Isaiah.

4. The Failure of Jesus

By the time Jesus appeared, the Zealots, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Herodians and the Essenes were setting the agendas of the Jews. While they disagreed with one another, they all understood God's purpose and Israel's destiny in ways II Isaiah would have hated.

There were individual Jews, like Nicodemus, who were dissatisfied with all the interpretations and proposed agendas, who longed for a greater hope and a better answer.

It fell to Jesus, then, to try to recapture what II Isaiah had preached and to live it. It is interesting to note that within a few weeks he had thoroughly antagonized all the above-mentioned groups, except perhaps the Zealots who did not know what to think of him, and the Essenes who paid little attention to anyone outside their closed community.

It is important to note that those who followed him were the ones farthest away from the Temple of Jerusalem and its power, wealth and enforcement of the official channels of biblical interpretation. Those who responded were, for the most part, the poor and uneducated, the ritually unclean like tax collectors and prostitutes, the humble. They were the economic or culturally marginalized, the outcasts.

Jesus was, then, actually, the last remnant of the II Isaiah's New Israel, at least the one whom the poet-prophet would have endorsed. Whatever others believed and hoped for, Jesus was the one who chose to act out the witness II Isaiah had tried to lay on Israel.

It is not strange, then, that the writers of the New Testament simply assumed that Jesus had been the suffering servant II Isaiah spoke about.

Perhaps the name Son of Man which Jesus used of himself meant that he knew he had learned from the god-selves of all those who had gone before, including II Isaiah.

5. The Church That Failed

It was not mainly the weakness of the people which caused the fall of the early church. It was the drift of their theology away from nonviolent love.

When Constantine declared Christianity the religion of the Empire, legions of soldiers were baptized. Priests standing

above showered them with water as they marched by. This is symbolic of the prostitution of all that was best in the church to the Beast-State of the book of Revelation.

6. The Reformation That Failed

Rufus Jones, the great Quaker philosopher, in *The Spiritual Reformers in the 16th and 17th Centuries*, (MacMillan, 1911, 1928) describes a fourth reformation which took place alongside the Lutheran, Reformed and Anabaptist movements. It was a reformation which failed. Its way was too gentle, too tolerant, to succeed in a violent and bigoted world. It defined Christianity too much in terms of love and too little as dogma to have succeeded in the times and places where it was born.

Perhaps these were the truest heirs of II Isaiah and Jesus. Let's look at what they believed. Numbers in parenthesis in this section indicate the pages in Jones' book for each reference.

The leaders of the reformation that failed began to appear in the early 16th century in Germany (Hans Denck, Sebastian Franck); Silesia (Caspar Schwenkfeld) and Austria (Johann Bunderlein). In the latter part of the 16th century and beginning of the 17th, there were Sebastian Castellio (France); Dirck V. Coornhert (Netherlands); and Jacob Boehme (Silesia). Still later, according to Jones, there were Francis Rous, Durant Hotham, John Sparrow, Sir Harry Vane, Thomas Traherne, Benjamin Whitecote and others in England.

These people were never a unified movement. There were isolated individuals and a few small groups. They sprang up largely independently of one another over a century and a half.

The similarities in their views is striking. There are a half-dozen beliefs of importance that all of these men (and undoubtedly many able but unsung women) held in common. It is fascinating and significant that these basic beliefs they came to, largely independent of one another, now are almost routinely held by most progressive and radical Christians, not only Quakers but by significant minorities within every denomination and the Catholic Church.

The Setting

When Luther nailed his theses to the church door in Wittenburg, he broke open the shell which was barely containing powerful spiritual discontent throughout the Holy Roman Empire. The forces which had been gathering underneath burst out in all directions.

The influences on which the leaders of the reformation that failed drew, according to Jones, were: 14th century German and other mystics such as Eckhardt, Tauler, Nicholas of Cusa and *The Imitation of Christ*; the new humanism of Erasmus and others based on reason; and the pietistic side of Lutheranism which emphasized a warm personal individual faith.

Jones should have emphasized more a fourth basic element, the influence of a Bible liberated from church control. When the Catholic control of Bible and dogma was successfully challenged, the spiritual reformers, along with many others, rushed back to the scriptures and looked at them afresh. Each set out to restore the apostolic purity of the early church, along with its enthusiasm, starting with the attempt to understand the written accounts of that first fresh energy and certitude.

Religious Freedom and Tolerance

The spiritual reformers watched with deep personal hurt as Luther, Calvin and the Anabaptists seemed to repeat all the mistakes of the early history of the church. They promptly began to codify new rigid dogma and church forms and, most serious of all, to condemn and actively persecute those who disagreed. Most of the spiritual reformers, at one time or another, were hounded out of their jobs and homes, arrested, imprisoned, and in some cases put to death. The first conflicts were followed by the terribly destructive religious wars which devastated Europe. It is not strange that the spiritual reformers came to think of this as a "second fall" of the church.

The brilliant scholar, Sebastian Castellio, went to Geneva and became a protégé of Calvin's. But soon Calvin was unable to tolerate the free-ranging mind of the young Sebastian who had to flee to Basle.

The difference between Calvin and Castellio is dramatically illustrated by their separate appeals sent to King Edward VI of England. In 1548 Calvin wrote, "*Under the cover of the Gospel, foolish people would throw everything into confusion. Others cling to the superstitions of the Antichrist at Rome. They all deserve to be repressed by the sword which is committed to you.*" (93)

Three years later, Castellio wrote to the same king, in the dedication to his translation of the Bible into Latin, "*I address you, O King, not as a prophet sent from God, but as a man of the people who abhors quarrels and hatred, and who wishes to see religion spread by love rather than by fierce controversy, by purity of heart rather than by external methods.*" (Page 93)

Two years after this, Calvin burned "unitarian" Servetus at the stake in Geneva for heresy.

The spiritual reformers lived and wrote over a century and a half. With all their differences, shared a core group of basic beliefs to a remarkable degree, in addition to and related to their passion for peace, toleration and a nondogmatic approach to the scriptures.

Six Core Beliefs

1. **Religion as Inward and Spiritual Religion** is seen as an inward transformation rather than an external transaction based on an exactly right faith or an objective Atonement.

These views moved them strongly in the direction of free will as against predestination, and to a belief in an abiding and untarnished core of good in every human being in contradiction to the then popular notion of "total depravity."

2. The Inner Light or Seed. Connected with the above, was the belief that there is something of God found in every human being. They often spoke of it as Quakers do, as an Inner Light, a Seed of the Divine or Word within, and so on. Yet there is no evidence of direct influence on Fox by any of them with the possible exception of Jacob Boehme.

Salvation was not to them a matter of infusion of Grace as with the Catholics. Nor was it restoration of an almost totally lost Image of God through faith and God's declaring one righteous as the Protestants believed. Rather, salvation was seen by the spiritual reformers as a reawakening and growth of the Seed of Christ which had always been present within and could not be put to death.

Sebastian Franck, influenced by the 14th century German mystics, wrote, "*No man can see or know himself unless he sees and knows by the Light and Life in him, God the eternally true Light and Life; wherefore nobody can ever know God outside of himself, outside that region where he knows himself in the ground of himself.*" (53-4)

Valentine Weigel wrote, "*He who hath the inward Schoolmaster loseth nothing of his Salvation though all preachers should be dead and all books burned.*" (147)

The priority is given to inward spiritual experience, to actual inner change rather than the outward new formal relationship of justification and forgiveness.

"*Thou thyself,*" Jacob Boehme wrote, "*must go through Christ's whole journey, and enter wholly into his process. ... We become children of God in Christ, not by an outward adventitious how of appropriating Grace, not through some merit of Grace appropriated from without, or received in an historical apprehension of being justified by another, but through an inner, resident Grace, which regenerates us into childlikeness, so that Christ the Conqueror of death arises in us and becomes a dominating operation in us.*" (195)

3. Heaven and Hell. One of the reasons these gentle people could sit loose to the Bible and dogma and be more tolerant was that they tended to believe that Heaven and Hell are not places a person goes, but are conditions of the self. They are not reward and punishment but reflect the ability or inability to become heaven and to get hell out of the self.

This belief is of vital importance, evidently, in freeing Christians from fanaticism, defensiveness, conflict over territory and doctrinal detail, as well as manipulative forms of evangelism.

Valentine Weigel held that when Christ is in our hearts then there is heaven. (147-8) This was paralleled by his belief that God "*is nearer to us than we are to ourselves.*" (149) If we literally swim in a sea of God then our only distance from the Divine Being and heaven is our own alienation and resistance to agape.

Several of the spiritual reformers held that the notion of a God of Wrath who punishes arises from the alienation and wrath within our own hearts. This is what psychologists today call projection.

Englishman John Everard wrote, "*Beloved, were you once to come to a true sight of God, you would see Him glorious and amiable, full of love and mercy and tenderness – all wrath and frowns blown clean away. We should see in Him not so much as any shadow of anger.*" (292)

Benjamin Whichcote, of the 17th Century Cambridge Platonists, preached, "*All misery arises out of ourselves. It is a most gross mistake, and men are of dull and stupid spirits who think that the state which we call Hell is an incommodious place only; and that God by his Sovereignty throws men therein. Hell ariseth out of a man's self.*" (302)

The spiritual reformers, then, tended to see God as wholly benevolent; people as having an irreducible good core of godlikeness which needs to be uncovered and brought to life; and of salvation and heaven to mean becoming like God, partaking of the Divine Being, rather than being objectively justified and declared righteous because Christ has retired the debt of sin on behalf of those who have a right objective belief.

4. The Bible. Obviously, to hold these views, the spiritual reformers had to break free both from a literal interpretation of the Bible and the straitjacket of Catholic hierarchy and dogma.

They did this through two beliefs: (1) that the Bible is the greatest source of truth and guidance but not the literal or infallible word of God. Truth is in the Bible but is found and authenticated by the authority of personal experience and the Spirit within. (2) And the other is that there are stages in God's revelation, that this is necessary because ignorant and sinful humanity had to be brought along step by step and educated stage by stage.

Hans Denck said, "*The Holy Scriptures I consider above every human treasure, but not so high as the Word of God which is living, powerful and eternal, for it is God Himself, Spirit and no letter; written without pen or paper; so that it can never be destroyed. For that reason, salvation is not bound up with the Scriptures, however necessary and good they may be for their purpose, because it is impossible for the Scriptures to make good a bad heart, even though it may be a learned one. A good heart, however, with a Divine Spark in it, is improved by everything, and to such the Scriptures will bring blessedness and goodness.*" (28-9)

When Jacob Boehme attacked the notion that some are predestined to salvation and others to damnation, he concluded, "*Should Peter or Paul seem to have written otherwise, then look to the essence, look to the heart. If you lay hold on God you have ground enough.*" (164)

The spiritual reformers were pleading the authority of love and the new being – its actuality – over anything which contradicts them. They felt they were in harmony with Jesus, who declared that love of God and neighbor sum up the Law and the Prophets, and that the Spirit would lead us into all truth.

5. Progressive Revelation. The spiritual reformers speak of religion as being revealed in stages, of a progressive revelation

by God of the Divine nature and purpose. They diverge on the way they describe these stages.

Johann Bunderlein, inspired by Denck, was also a scholar of Hebrew, Latin and Greek. He saw revelation as moving from the external pictures and ceremonies a wise Teacher-God uses in the infancy and adolescence of the race to the inward and spiritual appropriation of truth so that external aids are no longer needed. (37) He says, “*When the Kingdom of God with its joy and love has come in we do not much care for those things which can happen only outside us.*” (39)

Coomhant in the Netherlands thought of all previous forms of religion as preparatory, as “*outward and external religions. They are all temporary, pointing and leading toward the true religion of the inward Spirit characterized by love.*” (111)

6, Church and Sacraments. A corollary of this understanding of the Bible of the unfolding self-revelation of God, especially for the movement from external form and ceremony to internal reality, was the way in which these reformers downplayed the external visible church and its sacraments. To some, they were useful but optional. A minority (as later with Fox and the early Quakers) saw them as apostasy and to be avoided.

As he lay dying, Hans Denck wrote, “*Ceremonies themselves are not sin, but whoever thinks that he can attain to life either by baptism or by partaking of bread, is still in superstition.*” (Page 27) And he insisted, “*All externals must yield to love, for they are for the sake of love and not love for their sake.*” (28)

A recurring theme of these gentle folk is the invisible church as the true church. For a number of them, the new church includes not only all true Christians, but also those of other religions and races who have the Spirit of Christ whether or not they know his name.

The Spiritual Reformers in Perspective

These people lived lives remarkably consistent with their beliefs. They were gentle, compassionate, held firm under persecution. But they appeared before the world was ready to put peace above formal correctness or love above ecclesiastical uniformity and authority. So this reformation failed and most of the communities of these leaders were persecuted out of existence or faded away.

How different the world might have been if this reformation had prevailed rather than the others. As with the earlier failures of God, these gentle souls planted seeds and watered them with their blood. Today, we are seeing the core beliefs of these people of peace begin to prevail to a remarkable degree in the existing churches.

Maybe the time has come for the Fourth Reformation. When I think of Hans Denck, Sebastian Castellio and Jacob Boehme, as well as that courageous 14th century forerunner of theirs, Meister Eckhardt, I am always reminded of the words of the author of Hebrews: “*And all these, though well attested by their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had foreseen something better for us, that apart from us, they should not be made perfect.*” (Hebrews 11:39,40 RSV)

7. The Constitution which Fails

As Kohlberg and others have noted, the United States Constitution and Bill of Rights are essentially stage 5 documents, setting up what amounts to a stage 5, democratic institutions.

Unfortunately, tests have shown that the overwhelming majority of the American people, even today, are able to reason and function most of the time at only a stage 3 or 4 level. The American people aren't up to sustaining and realizing their own constitution.

A good argument can be made for the fact that the Constitution came into existence as what appeared to the framing assembly as the only viable way to avoid much worse alternatives. They were determined to avoid another king; there were to be no more monarchs. Power would have to rise from the people; not all the people, of course, from educated people, property owners, white people.

So the separation of powers was to protect not just democracy but property as well, and the conflicting interests of various interest groups who agreed it would be better, at least no more risky, to settle their conflicting claims for a larger share of the pie of power and privilege within a congress rather than competing for the favor of a king.

Similarly, the separation of sectarian religion from the State, which came later by amendment, sprang not from a lessening of bigotry, not in the least. It came from the conviction of the framers – who fortunately were more secular minded or Deist in their thinking than the religious leaders – that if such pluralism were not embodied in law then there would be no enduring union and there would probably be a repetition on the new continent of the religious wars which had devastated Europe less than two centuries before.

Thus, fear of any of the several alternatives to the Constitution became, alongside the power of new currents of thought, the impetus to a major step forward in history – the first national government based upon stage 5 concepts.

A seed of universalism planted by II Isaiah and others, lived by Jesus, pushed by the spiritual reformers, had at last flowered in an imperfect but practical institutional embodiment, new in history and powerful in its impact.

8. The Failing World Community

The example of a stage 6 document is also with us: *The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. And has been for half a century. We stand now upon a cusp of history, deciding whether we will embody its demands for equal, humane treatment for every human being everywhere into institutional form or will continue sectarian or nationalistic battles.

The United States has too often been an obstacle rather than an advocate of this ideal. Other important covenants of the UN await approval by the US Senate. John Howard Yoder gives us, in passing, a list of a few of the failures and losers in American

history who, though they refused to grasp for power, yet had great transforming influence on American history:

There were William Lloyd Garrison and Alexander Campbell holding together abolitionism and nonviolence. There were William Jennings Bryan and Norman Thomas and Harold Stassen, perennial near winners, seeing their victors soon defeated and some of their causes winning. There was Judge James E. Horton, who in 1933 sacrificed a judicial career in the attempt to give a fair trial to a black man. There was Martin Luther King, Jr., utterly Baptist when almost despite himself he became the most important churchly instrument of cultural change in our century. Most of them Baptist, most of them pacifist, most of them who would rather be right than president; they were the heralds of the agents of creative cultural change on a national scale precisely because they did not conceive of national power as their goal, but kept their eyes on the higher loyalty of the Kingdom citizenship.⁴

Conclusion

When will the stage 6-7 social institutions and churches come to be? The task waits upon our vision and courage. The seeds of the next advance are already in the ground, though the effort to make them grow will again be watered by the blood of a few heralded and many uncelebrated suffering servants.

Questions for Thought

Consider or discuss: Is it better to strive purely for an ideal and lose, or to work within the system for small incremental changes? What is your own strategy? What is the strategy of your congregation? Over the long haul which is more effective? Reflect on one successful revolution in American history: the civil right struggle of the mid-sixties in the South? Who played the key roles and why was this struggle a success when so many have failed?

Notes

1. Herbert Butterfield and C.T. McIntire, editors, *Herbert Butterfield: Writings on Christianity and History*, Oxford University Press, 1979, page 25

This quotation continues as follows: “*Whether we take early Christianity or sixteenth century Calvinism or the French revolutionary period or modern communism, this seems the appointed way by which a mere handful of people may open a new chapter in the history of civilization. And the men who form cells are pursuing a higher strategy than those who seek immediately to capture governments; for those who make a direct bid to capture a government must bow before existing gods and existing tendencies in order to open a path to power; while those who form cells have no need to dilute their purposes or to purchase favor from the superiors of the status quo.*”

2. See the lead story in *Newsweek*, January 11, 1988

3. *The Spiritual Reformers in the 16th and 17th Centuries*, Macmillan & Co., NY, 1911, 1928

4. *The Priestly Kingdom, Social Ethics as Gospel*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, IN, 46556, page 181

19. Theology in the Age of the Spirit

As far as the futures goes only one thing is certain. At the end both of human life and the course of the world Buddhism and Hinduism will no longer be there, nor will Islam nor Judaism. Indeed, in the end Christianity will not be there either. In the end no religion will be left standing, but the one Inexpressible, to whom all religions are oriented, whom Christians will only then completely realize – when the imperfect gives way before the perfect – even as they themselves are recognized: the truth face to face.

Hans Kung¹

This peroration from Hans Kung’s book on ecumenical theology suggests a culmination in history like Teilhard de Chardin’s Omega Point, a coming together of all things into harmony without the elimination of beautiful variety.

Kung also suggests a methodology to match. He recommends an open and dialogic approach to theology which lies along the way to this unification. This is in essence a stage 6-7 kind of theologizing. It is method which trusts that what is important in Christianity, what belongs to the inner nature of God, is not risked at all by a complete openness or frank dialogue centering on what constitutes true humanity, how to define healthy, whole, loving, creative individuals and a kind of society which will produce and sustain them.

Such dialogue requires a sharp look at the Christian faith and its historic beliefs. I contend that the perspective of stages 6-7

and the god-self transforms our approach to all the traditional hotly contested issues of theology and philosophy. When we apply these new paradigms and follow out their implications, we find new doors of enlightenment opening. We will, I believe, be empowered and our thinking clarified so that we can do more mature theologizing. This will be true if we are, as the hypothesis puts forward, becoming more and more like God, more and more able to live in and appropriate the viewpoint of our god-selves.

This session offers answers to several of the most perplexing problems of Christian theology. These are answers which I see arising out of or fully compatible with the system outlined in the first seven sessions. They move us in the direction of a kind of faith which discovers truth around us outside and beyond the traditional channels. These answers are also hopefully more fruitful for dialogue with representatives of other religions and no religion.

True and False Mystery

When theologians feel unable to explain something so it appeals to human reason, they declare it a mystery or a paradox. This forwards the problem to the next thinker. They are unwilling to abandon the problem or declare it unimportant because (1) it is a historical link to the roots of our faith, and/or (2) it is seen as still important to salvation.

In the first case if we rule out such dilemmas we partially sever links to our historic roots in the Bible and early Christian community. In the second case, we may be unclear as to what it is we do to be saved. At the very least, any theology must state a position on these issues and justify it.

One kind of answer is that matters such as the two natures of Christ or the Trinity are not central to faith and life. This may be true, but it may also suggest that we are trying to take the easy way out by down-grading theological struggle and reducing religion to ethics. We may throw up our hands and just give up trying to understand God's nature and purpose. This leads to a truncated life with a minimum of transcendence and ecstasy. And it certainly makes Christianity less interesting.

Electrons have to be described as acting sometimes like particles and sometimes like waves. This is a genuine paradox and a mystery because we don't know why. But presumably someday we will. And we will express that more inclusive truth through some other word picture which will sum up and unify the characteristics we now see as resembling either particles or waves.

When theologians say that the oneness of the two natures of Christ is a mystery, they are saying something like the second example. They are saying that all the solutions which have been tried so far lead only to answers with contradictions which reason cannot resolve. But this does not mean that with more adequate paradigms and a deeper penetration into the actual methodology of divine/human action in the world, we might not be able to reach more correct and intelligible answers. By that I mean answers which are confirmed by our mature reasoning and our experience, answers which simplify and unite our lives instead of complicating and dividing them. See Appendix A for the discussion of truth and verification in theology.

Jesus Christ as Center

We are talking about a theology which is Christian and yet which is open outward to all those who are not Christian. It is, moreover, a theology which insists that the logic of a God of love demands that ultimately all people will become godlike, that all will be saved.

This means that we have to deal directly and at first with the issue of christocentrism. This theology centers in Jesus the Christ. It is necessary from the beginning to be clear as to both what this does and does not mean.

For some christocentric has meant that a theology is not Trinitarian and so neglects God's activities as creator and governor. That is not how I am using the word. For me to be christocentric means that we are able to see the inner nature and purposes of God clearly only in the nonviolent, out-going, sacrificial life and death of Jesus. This becomes the one place in history where the inner nature of God is most purely revealed, where it appears so vividly that we who are Christians return to this life continually as the central reality in terms of which we interpret everything God has done from the beginning, is doing now, and intends to accomplish in the future.

To look at faith and all reality through Jesus' nonviolent, non-coercive love offers us a special and important view of God: (1) God is Creator, but creation is seen to be the work of God's non-coercive love. God refuses to run things, rather letting us be. (2) God is Governor of the world and Lord of history, but refuses to exercise this sovereignty by force, coercion, manipulation or seduction. God's influence is subtle and indirect, as we saw in the previous two sessions. (3) God is Savior and Redeemer, but only through the wholistic love we see embodied in Jesus and its continual re-creation in the loving community of faith.

God will save us through such love however long it takes and however much suffering lies along the way for her and for us. And God is Spirit, comforter and sanctifier and empowerer, but in a special way described later in this session.

This is the way Jesus' life and death for the pattern of God's inner nature. The implications of this view imply stage 6-7 understandings of God's action in history.

One Way, One Truth, One Life

Now it remains to interpret those two seemingly most narrow and exclusive passages of scripture about christocentrism: Jesus: "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."² Peter: "There is no salvation in anyone else, and no other name under heaven given among men by which we have to be saved."³

I understand these to mean that if we are to be saved, to become godlike, then we must take the same road of nonviolent, sacrificial love which Jesus took. We must become that love in order to end up godlike. And presumably, if a Buddhist or Muslim or atheist takes that road and becomes that love, whether she knows of or believes in Jesus or not, then she will also become godlike. This way has been open to all persons from the beginning of our existence as human beings.

The Nature of Jesus Christ

The creeds have Jesus wholly divine and wholly human with no discernible seams between the two. The effort to resolve this paradox without skimping either the divine or the human has led to incredible convolutions of logical sounding illogic.

If Jesus is divine with human overtones, then we have a sort of Gnosticism, where Jesus only appears to be one with us in our ignorance, temptations and suffering. He is only an actor on a stage, not living a real life.

If Jesus is human with divine overtones, then God has not come fully among us in him and Jesus' power to represent fully within himself the unification of God and humanity and to lift us up to participation in the divine being falls into question.

Most often, within the churches, Jesus' humanity is sacrificed to his divinity because (1) perfection is considered essential to the efficacy of the Atonement: only a spotless lamb's blood can wash out all the sin; and (2) it is his unity with the Godhead which empowers his role as Savior.

Once we have redefined salvation to mean becoming like God then the paradox can be unriddled. Jesus is human and divine in the complete unity of one personality in the same sense that we potentially are, through the divine-human god-self within. It is "begotten not made" by the supra-natural process of grace I have described previously. Jesus, the elder brother, is not the first to have a god-self but the first to enable it to become the whole of his thought and life.

Irenaeus taught that Jesus "recapitulated" the faith which went before him. Jesus summed up all the goodness of his ancestors, by a process of distillation and concentration. This was not all of Irenaeus' christology, but it gives us a clue which takes on greater importance as a paradigm today.

The historical process through which the god-self is "begotten" from generation to generation by the underground stream of grace in history was uniquely effective in Jesus' case because of the mediating power of Mary and perhaps an unsung village rabbi in Nazareth.

History came to focus in Jesus in a unique way. He embodied the faith of Abraham, the devotion and penitence of David, the willingness to sacrifice for love of Jonathan and Esther, the sense of justice of an Amos, the personalizing of God's parental love in Hosea, and, in a particularly important way, the understanding of sacrificial love and servanthood from II Isaiah.

All this divine-human action through history came together in Jesus and was fused into one unified self by the fire of his calling and vocation. His unified divine-human god-self may be said to have been born of the Holy Spirit and Mary. Thus, whether Jesus said the words or not, they were true: "Before Abraham was, I am." Jesus preexisted in the unity of human and divine both in the imagings of the divine love in the Godhead and as incarnation of fragmentary meldings of the divine and human which had taken place in previous history.

The god-self of Jesus is not different from ours. What is different is the way, in him, the demonic self-systems were vacated and put to death, in the process summed up by his response to the three temptations at the beginning of his ministry and confirmed in the kenotic leadership he exercises during Holy Week climaxing with the washing of the Disciple's feet. Here God's inner nature of nonviolent, creative, down-reaching love is dramatized convincingly. God and humanity are fused.

The Work of Jesus: Atonement

The doctrine of the atonement is the point at which the most furious battle must be joined between the forces of rigid tradition and our stage 6-7 theology. In what sense did Jesus die for each of us? In what sense did his death atone for our sins, pay a debt, or otherwise accomplish the righting of our relationship with God, our cleansing, or our redemption?

In seminary, my generation at Yale was fortunately to be able to study systematic theology under Albert C. Outler. When dealing with the atonement he gave us a very liberating idea right out of the New Testament. He pointed out that in the Gospels and Epistles there are several recurring word pictures by which the meaning of the sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross is interpreted. The atonement, he taught, is a whole which is more than the sum of its parts. It is a truth so grand and complex that no one of the images is sufficient to describe it adequately. These images arise from everyday life and religious practice of the time.

There is the picture of a slave being bought free or a debtor whose debt is paid by someone else (from bondage to redemption). There is the picture of a leper being healed and a ritually unclean person being cleansed (from filth to acceptable cleanness). There is the image of one in bondage to powers beyond her control, inside and outside the self, who suddenly finds those powers defeated (salvation as deliverance, in the sense of the Old Testament word). There is the picture of the blind person who is made to see (from ignorance to the deeper wisdom of the Spirit, from the blindness of hate and alienation to the clear sight involved in love). There is the image of the dead person being restored to life (as one who has no meaning and lives as dead to one whose life is vibrant with meaning and joy). There is the picture of the one alienated from family and community being forgiven and accepted again (reconciliation). There is the picture of one who is disobedient to God's law having someone else take upon himself the burden of punishment (atonement). This is illustrated by analogy to the liturgical practice of animal sacrifice and the sending of the scapegoat into the wilderness bearing the sins of the people. There is a picture of a final victory over cosmic powers of darkness, salvation for the individual being transferred from the kingdom of darkness over into the victorious kingdom of light.

Each of these presents one facet of the whole. It is as though a great diamond were suspended on a thread and spun in the light, so that first one facet and then another is exhibited, while the beauty of the whole can never be seen at one time. It is like the elephant and the blind men, where the strange animal is experienced by one as like a snake, by another like a wall, and by another like a tree trunk.

It is no accident as history and theology have moved through stages of development certain images have emerged as more able than others to sum up what is involved.

Reconciliation and liberation, especially, have come in our time to be the dominant word pictures. There is good reason for this to be so.

Stage Development and Atonement

As pointed out in the introduction, there are at least seven stages through which our understanding of the nature of God passes as we mature. And the stages of our understanding of atonement also correspond to those stages in our understanding of God. For instance:

Stage 1: God is seen as mystery, magic, unpredictable and dangerous. Atonement at this level is understood mainly as magical or ritualistic cleansing or the diverting in other ways of God's anger at our disobedience or transgressing of taboos.

Stage 2: God is seen as one who cuts deals. I sacrifice this or give that to gain points. If my good deeds outweigh my bad deeds, I may make it to heaven. If Jesus pays it all, then that is even better.

Stage 3: This teenage and young adult picture of God resonates with Abelard's theory which sees Jesus primarily as example from which we learn of God. But at heart the stage 3 person can't accept this without anxiety. There is no depth to the conviction. Moreover, there is not yet a concern for or understanding of the social consequences of sin and its communal nature. The stage 3 person loves the story of the Prodigal Son and Jesus' forgiveness of the thief on the cross, but has not yet set this in the context of a universal love reflecting a mature power of being.

Stage 4: This view of God on the part of adults taking their place in the larger world of responsibility and serious consequences, finds meaningful the Hugo Grotius governmental theory of the atonement. This suggests that God, as just, cannot overlook sin, must punish it, as otherwise no one would take justice or law seriously.

The whole fabric of morality would collapse if those who break God's laws are let go Scot free. Therefore, God takes on himself the burden, sacrifices his own son, and so gains the moral leverage to forgive the sins of those who repent, but only if they really repent.

Stage 5: This is the stage of confusion and skepticism, which finds each theory inadequate. This liberal stage finds comfort in Outler's theory of a reality larger than any of the particular word pictures used. However, stage 5 has great difficulty being more specific than that. It is not yet broad enough to be comfortable with the universal/cosmic perspective of a God who has no interest in punishment at all. Stage 4 and 5 people are still deeply afraid of social anarchy and believe that somehow a dangerous God who punishes is necessary to keep people in line, to prevent society from disintegrating.

Stages 6 and 7: I lump these together because stage 7 is still pretty much beyond all of us. We can see it only in wavering outline. The stage 6-7 person is aware, from experience rather than rumination, in gut intuition when not in reasoned form, that every sin, every wrong-doing, every hurt to self or another is inevitably punished, always and without exception. She sees that God does not punish; God does not have to punish. There is no place called hell because we bear hell and suffering within. Every hurt we give to others, every cruelty and deception, fragments us further and alienates us further from God and others, which is to say it buries our own wholistic god-self deeper within us.

The stage 6-7 person understands instinctively that what Jesus did, in his life, death and resurrection, was to live in his own god-self and show us not only what that means but how to do it. Jesus didn't do it to change God's mind.

The stage 6-7 person also understands clearly and deeply the interpersonal and graceful nature of human community, how Atonement rests upon the exchange of grace (including sacrificial love) in the community of faith, without which the one-time sacrificial death of Jesus would be without substantial power.

Salvation - Our Work or God's Work?

One of the oldest hot battles in theology has been the question of whether God does it all in salvation or human beings make a contribution through their works. This is the question of the so-called heresy of Pelagianism.

This would not have been so crucial a question if the stakes were not so high: heaven or hell. The question of whether the fires of hell are literally painful or not is unimportant here. It is the finality of the acceptance or rejection which counts. The believer had to get right the answer to the question in Acts: "What must we do?"

If salvation is redefined as in this course, if it means "to become like God" rather than to go to heaven or hell forever, then the question of Pelagianism is still important but not so immediately vital.

Be that as it may, this course offers, I believe, a more adequate answer to the question as to how much of the work of salvation is God's and how much is ours.

The answer is this: Indeed, salvation is God's work beginning and end. Every advance in our lives toward wholeness, health, strength, love, autonomy, ability to give and receive love is opened to us initially by a gift of grace from some other person or group of people. And, to carry the argument to completion, their ability to give this gift traces in an unbroken chain back to God.

We are powerless to move toward God at all except as others open gates for us and nudge us through. We can build on the insights we have received, and have the joy and responsibility of doing so. But we know that even our ability to use words and relate to people at all we owe to relatives, teachers and friends at the beginning of our lives.

The studies relating to the Kohlberg stages of moral development reveal yet another dimension of how it is true that we grow by grace or not at all. Our ability to move from one stage to another can come to us only, if it comes, from the example of others who have already arrived at least, at the one stage beyond where we are.

So, the only power to initiate new advance we have is to thrust ourselves into a new environment where grace may be found and allow ourselves to be acted upon by it.

Once the novelty which breaks us open to new growth is assimilated and made our own, then we may then by ourselves practice the new level of freedom, love, cosmic awareness and inner unification, and help others along.

The Holy Spirit and the New Communal Being

Jews and Muslims have pointed out repeatedly that a Trinitarian God makes nonsense of monotheism. There is another interpretation of the Trinity.

As we have seen, the godlikeness represented by the god-self within is “begotten not made” in the process of God’s action with us in history. This is true of Jesus as well as ourselves. Jesus is child of God, our elder brother; we are destined to be children of God in the same sense, divine in the same way.

When God is thought of as infinite, omniscient, perfectly good, then we are left with an absolute gulf between God and humanity, symbolized by Barth’s term “Wholly Other.” It is then inevitable that the Incarnation – any fusion of the divine and human – is an insoluble mystery. However, if we understand the god-self within to have a shape, a form, a gestalt of wholeness in the image of God’s freedom, inner unity, expanded content and ability to love specifically and intimately, then the possibility is no longer impossible. The problem becomes manageable.

This still leaves us with the seemingly insoluble problem of the Holy Spirit. In the Hebrew Bible the Spirit of God comes and goes infrequently and with unpredictable results. The Spirit drives King Saul mad, for instance. In the New Testament, on the other hand, the Holy Spirit is a permanent gift to the Christian community through the crucified and resurrected Christ. It comes of, by and for the love called agape. The New Covenant is a new relationship of greater intimacy between God and humanity.

But the problem remains: How are we to think of the Holy Spirit as different from any other manifestation of God’s personal presence and power?

A workable answer may lie in the relationship between God and the god-self within and the relationship of both to Christian community.

The Holy Spirit is not a different aspect of God under the New Covenant but rather a new reality which appears in the midst of that greater intimacy between God and the community made possible by the uncovering of the god-self and its energizing in the communal life of out-poured mutual love. This intense oneness is a relationship in theory possible everywhere and from the beginning, but only realized where the god-self emerges from under the crushing weight of the demonic self-systems to a greater degree. This takes place first in the community at worship because the worshipers at Pentecost are caught up together in an ecstasy, a standing apart from self-consciousness and in oneness of love to one another. In the united power of their god-selves in communion with God directly the Holy Spirit appears. This is, at this time and place, the first fruits of the new Reality of God-plus-humanity. That is, it is first except for the incarnation in Jesus, as symbolized by the descent of the Spirit at his baptism.

If we understand this God plus humanity to be supra-personal, a communal personality, analogous to the way in which each of us as we mature becomes increasingly a community, then this is not so hard to understand. The Holy Spirit is the momentary appearance of the communal God who will yet be.

The manifestation of the Holy Spirit is at the flash point where there is a fusing, a foretaste, of the ecstasy of Beatitude between the god-self and God, between human spirit and Holy Spirit. At this point a third reality is created, that of God-enhanced-by-human-lover. This enrichment of the Godhead is the aim of the Creation from the beginning. The Holy Spirit is, then, the unity of Parent, Child and Holy Community, a new reality in history.

The Trinitarian God, then, is summarized thus: God going forth in creation (Parent), God incarnate in Jesus (Child) and God returning to God (Holy Spirit) bearing all humanity within the holy community of agape into the divine Being, into the eternal Honeymoon.

We need to continually remind ourselves that we swim in the sea of God. With the divine Being pressing in continually, there need be only a momentary parting of the cloud cover of the demonic self-systems for the Light to strike fire with our inner light.

Meister Eckhardt speaks of the one-fold unity of love which appears when we emerge from that which conceals God from us and God meets us emerging from the Godhead:

*In this unity the Father generates his Son in his most spiritual source. The Holy Spirit comes to flower there, and a will that belongs to the soul originates there in God. As long as this will remains undisturbed by all creatures and all creation, it is free.*⁴

Theologians have had difficulty dealing with the statements by Eckhardt and other mystics to the effect that God does not exist without us, or that we, in some sense, create God. Perhaps we can now understand what they meant.

There is “that of God in each of us.” When that love and that piece of being are added to God’s being then God also becomes a new being, a new and evermore new and greater God. Our participation is required to make God more fully what God wishes to be.

In the above quotation, Eckhardt speaks of the will as becoming free only when it is liberated from the power of idolatry of created being and is lost in God. This perfect freedom is that of the god-self which is unburdened of the futile distracting desires of the demonic self-systems. It is also the freedom Berdyaev speaks of as arising from the depths of the self. It is this creative loving freedom of the god-self which, joined to God, creates the new reality “God plus perfected humanity.” This then is the fulfilled but eternally growing and changing Trinity.

This session has touched only a few of the contested theological dilemmas of history. They are presented as illustrations of theological reasoning opened up by stage development and the god-self. If our theology is indeed more true and more mature today it will be due, in part, to the progression of a larger number of people and institutions (including the churches) to higher stages of development.

This emergence to a more mature view of God enables us to express theological truth which is (1) humane (and so not insulting to God); (2) truly comprehensive and inclusive; and (3) intellectually more respectable, insofar as the madness of agape can ever seem respectable to the people of the world we live in.

Questions for Thought

1. Read again the seven views of God in the Introduction and compare them to the views of the Atonement above. Do they fit together? If so, why?
2. What are the consequences in personal life if one holds one of these views as literal truth? In politics? Look at stage 4 and the Hugo Grotius governmental theory? Consider this and the issue of capital punishment.

1. Hans Kung, *Theology for the Third Millennium: An Ecumenical View*, Doubleday, New York, 1988, page 255
2. John 14:6. My translation.
3. Acts 4:12. My translation.
4. *Breakthrough*, op. cit., page 202

20. Summing Up

The passion that drove the early Christians to evangelistic zeal was not fueled just by the desire to increase church membership or to usher people safely into a compensatory heaven after death. Their passion was fired above all by relief at being liberated from the delusions being spun over them by the powers. Being thus freed determined them to set others free. In the final analysis, the gospel is not a message of escape to another world, but of rescue from the enticements of "this world" (the Domination System) and its ultimate transformation, when "all nations shall come and worship" God (Rev. 15.4). Eternal life is not something reserved for the future in another reality, but begins now, the moment we become alive to God and God's revealer (John 17:3)

- Walter Wink ¹

Instead of providing more new material, this session asks you to reflect back over the whole course.

Read again the Preface and Introduction in the first session. Consider or discuss:

1. Did the author provide validation for his two main paradigms: (1) growth by stages in individuals and society, and (2) the existence of sub-selves including the one called the God-self? Salvation as becoming like God? Definition of the "highest" (session 7)? Read Appendix A on the task of theologizing? Is it appropriate to speak of "scientific proof" in this connection? Would it be more accurate to speak of scientific support or undergirding?
2. How has your thinking changed as a result of this study? Your faith?
3. What do you plan to do differently? In your personal religious practice? In your faith congregation? As a citizen of the country and the world?

Notes

1. *The Powers that Be, Theology for a New Millennium*, Doubleday, 1998, page 200

Appendix A: Revelation, Reason and Experience

... where it is the world-itself we are trying to conceive, the whole within which everything else falls – including not only all facts but also all our symbols – there is nothing outside our conception against which we can place it to see whether it “corresponds”; just as every thing is within the world, so also everything must be conceived as included within the concept of the world. With this conception, then, criteria of correspondence cannot be applied; only criteria of coherence and pragmatic usefulness to human life are relevant and applicable. If these considerations hold for the concept of the world, how much more must they apply to the concept of God, built up as it is through even more elaborate imaginative constructive moves.

-Gordon D. Kaufman ¹

Following my teacher, H. Richard Niebuhr, this theology is confessional. In the tradition of Anselm, it is “belief seeking reason.” It begins within the circle of faith, confessing belief in a Creator God who chose not to enforce the divine will but to use omnipotence only to create beings who are intended to be companions, lovers and co-creators through eternity.

I confess that my faith has had many confirming experiences of mature, unselfish love in many persons who also confess that this love comes from God who is love, and that this is where they got it, though through human mediation. I confess that I have been cradled, nurtured, forgiven and taught the most important lessons of life by and within the Christian community of believers.

I confess that I believe there are lives beyond this one, that there is no end to the growth in grace, love and creativity for which we are destined. I confess that I believe God works directly and indirectly within each person and that God will fulfill all personhood eventually and do it without coercion, deception, manipulation, or supernatural act.

I do not claim that all this can be proved in the way most scientists define proof. In what sense can we say that it is established as true, or disproved?

Gordon D. Kaufman writes:

When we are dealing with metaphysical or theological conceptions, then – with the “world” or “reality” or “God” – the ordinary truth-criterion of correspondence simply cannot be directly applied. Instead, appeal must be made to the intuitive or self-evident plausibility of the “root metaphors” on the basis of which the principal metaphysical or theological concepts have been constructed.

This appeal can be buttressed, however, by recourse to two other criteria of truth: coherence, and pragmatic usefulness to human life. ²

These are the criteria I have sought to use in this course. If the root metaphors which underlie the overall system of interrelated meanings presented here are confirmed (become self-evident) through both intuition and reason; if the parts of it hold together and hold experienced reality in unity (coherence); and if its pragmatic results give strength and freedom through a clearer understanding of reality, a greater ability to attack social evil productively and for people to relate to one another lovingly, then perhaps it fulfills Kaufman’s criteria.

But are Kaufman’s definitions of coherence and pragmatic usefulness the same as mine? He writes:

Although because of the metaphorical and analogical notions that these disciplines necessarily employ, precise definitions and strict deductions are often difficult or impossible to produce, and significant inconsistencies are thus often hard to detect, it remains clear that the principle objective of both metaphysics and theology is to give an ultimate coherence to human life and experience through providing overarching, all-inclusive concepts and images which can bring the fragments and pieces of experience into a meaningful unified conception or pictures. The imaginative constructive activities in which these disciplines are engaged are the widest and most comprehensive attempts of humans to draw all life and experience into a unified whole. ... ³

By coherence, then, Kaufman means not just whether the system itself holds together. He is talking about whether it is unifying to the individual and the community, whether it presents an overarching unity explaining and interrelating reality and experience into what he calls a “meaningful picture.” But of course, neither of us is talking about just any kind of meaning.

Here it is necessary to look also at what he means by pragmatic usefulness. Kaufman points out that the world-view which “good” theology and metaphysics bring helps to bring human experience and life to greater self-consciousness, thus making it possible for men and women to take fuller responsibility for their own life and action.

In this respect metaphysics makes its own significant contribution toward fuller human liberation from determination by the powers and forces of that nature from which humanity has gradually emerged. ⁴

I found it necessary to quote at such length to make clear that in Kaufman’s definitions as well as my own application of coherence and pragmatic usefulness, there are presuppositions that operate. Because they may not be apparent to everyone at first glance it is necessary to confess them and make them clear in order to be intellectually honest. Kaufman assumes (and I would agree) that there is value in bringing coherence to human life in terms of unified meaning and freedom from internal and external coercion.

In this course I also assume that some styles of life are superior to others in terms of what they produce: greater freedom, love, internal unification, expanded boundaries and fuller content. There are various words to use and ways to express this “higher” way of life and its fruits. However, this is a faith assumption. In the end Kaufman operates within the circle of faith and the Christian community just as I do, and he admits it. His theological assumptions and life experiences do not lead him to a Max Stirner kind of solipsism, a Marxian submergence of individual into communal good, a Freudian pessimistic resignation to irreconcilable conflict between inner needs and societal demands, or a Nietzschean glorification of will to power.

To believe that there are higher values, that they are to be sought, that they involve enhanced freedom, love, mutual self-giving and the like, that they can be found and lived, and finally (the greatest leap of all) that these are characteristic of the inner being of a loving Parent God who is in the process of sharing with us that loving Being – all of these are leaps of faith and to believe them is a choice which always flies in the face of some contrary evidence.

I’m sure Gordon Kaufman will disagree with some parts of my belief system. However, I think we would agree that after all the evidence and arguments have been presented, after all the questions of coherence and pragmatic usefulness have been examined, in the end we still have to say faith is a choice we make on the basis of the best evidence we have. The faith which I was given as a child has been corrected and confirmed in life as much by my failures as by my successes in following its light. I have also found that as I proceed along the way, falteringly, my assurance of the existence and love of God grows ever stronger. But to believe this and seek to live by it is a choice, and will remain so.

This returns us to the first session. If we could somehow prove God’s existence and love, then we would inevitably be less free. We would take on some of the robot characteristics of beings whose thoughts and actions are coerced from outside themselves.

Science and Theology

When I mentioned this writing project to Dr. Michael Commons at a symposium on post-formal stages in developmental psychology at Harvard, he cringed. He complained that when theologians write about developmental psychology stage theory they tend to twist it around so that it becomes religion rather than science. It is distorted by being assimilated.

At least this is the point I understood him to be making. I have tried hard in this course to let the research and the researchers speak for themselves and have made their points as they would have made them. I believe I have kept the lines clean between social science and religious faith.

To use an analogy, I have found developmental stage theory a help somewhat as Aquinas drew upon Aristotle or process theologians use Whitehead’s philosophy. Where it has been done correctly, the writer has stated what the philosopher says clearly and fully, drawn from the philosopher’s images and concepts to establish hypotheses to test or to illuminate aspects of religious faith, and then made clear where the philosopher had a different faith or point of view.

When this is done then physical and social science and philosophy are not confused with theology. Science is not reduced to theology nor distorted by it. Nor are secular thinkers coopted to give testimony to faith statements they would not themselves make.

The danger on the other side is that theology will be reduced to science or philosophy and lose its own distinctiveness. I believe I have guarded against that, too. Readers will have to make their own judgment on that.

It is also a faith assumption that truth is somehow one, though scientists assume something like it in order to search for a unified field theoretical system in physics. I have assumed that truth is one for the purpose of hypothesizing, and searching for that oneness. No final unity has been found, because our human capacity to experience and collate infinite variety is inadequate to the job. This is in addition to our sinful resistance to seeing painful truths. But, the effort is necessary, is worth it, and we have faith the truth we find will test out to some degree and lead us on to fuller truth.

Thus, the correspondences and mutual support which I find in my system among theologians, mystics, psychologists and others, may to some degree be forced and it may prove in some respects incorrect. But I have a provisional confidence that the system as an integrated set of hypotheses offers a scaffolding more adequate than most, one which people in the future may rebuild in some parts with the increase of knowledge and continue to find useful.

In my mind I compare the paradigms of the developmental stages and the god-self and their integral inter-relationship through the sub-selves within us to Freud’s concept of the unconscious. The unconscious has been redefined many times and there is still debate over what it is and does, yet it has been an extremely valuable paradigm in psychology and healing.

The paradigms of the god-self and stage development may be eligible for comparison with this and other rough models in history which have charted new ground but proved subject to revision for greater accuracy later. Michael Green gives such an illustration:

The basic “construct-paradigm” or “artifact” operates as an analogy to induce a “new way of seeing.” What is surprising about these paradigms is the fact that they may not even be fully accurate in the light of subsequent developments. An example from the history of science is Copernicus’s model of the solar system, which assumed circular planetary orbits. Not until Kepler worked out the mathematics of elliptical orbits did a satisfactory theory of planetary motion become possible. And yet the revolution is rightly called Copernican, for it was the crude and overly simple original model that performed the decisive paradigmatic function by providing an accessible model exemplifying the essential pattern of the planets. ⁶

Naturalism and Supernaturalism

It is necessary to avoid both the extremes of supernaturalism and naturalism. The one implies God’s intervention in the world in a way which inhibits our freedom. The other suggests that God set the world going and now is no longer involved personally.

Theologians have struggled mightily to find a clear path between the two. If you give up God's intervention then it appears you render large parts of the Bible incomprehensible and undercut the practice of intercessory prayer.

On the other hand, if you admit God speaks and acts directly to change people and events it makes a mockery of human freedom and of consistency in God's nature and action. An interventionary theology also makes painful the problem of what happens to people who died before Christ or never had a chance to consider faith in him.

I have suggested a solution starting with St. Thomas Aquinas' belief that God does not speak with specific content, not even within peoples' minds. Rather, God reinforces right decisions by feelings of rightness and deconfirms wrong decisions by a sense or intuition of wrongness. God nudges rather than directs, hints rather than speaks.

I differ from Thomas at two points: (1) I believe God has always acted this way, and (2) God's communication in terms of "feeling tone" is only with the god-self within. It is with this self-system, begotten not made in God's image, with which God can resonate and to which S/He can communicate feelings without disrupting free choice.

This is a mode of divine-human co-operation which is neither supernatural intervention nor naturalistic negligence. Call it supra-naturalism.

It also allows us to turn the tables practically on both supernaturalists and naturalists by suggesting that God performs all the miracles S/He can given respect for human freedom. God speaks as directly and clearly in all historical periods and all the times of our lives as possible given the way in which love can be communicated without robotizing the lover.

Brain Function

This brings us to a sensitive point: the relation between theological and biological hypotheses, especially the relevance of brain function to theology.

The distinction of right and left brain function is an hypothesis and the issues are far from settled. Can the functions be located in clearly distinct sections of the brain? Is left brain function really so different from right brain operations? Or do different functions happen simultaneously in many parts of the physical brain as some evidence seems to show? I have ignored this debate and made use of the evident gestalt-perceiving and gestalt-forming functions of the brain as a paradigm and heuristic help in theological hypothesizing. At any rate, the conclusions I draw theologically do not depend on a particular current definition of these phenomena.

It is clear that the brain has the power to form gestalts out of sensory input and to cluster into interpretive meaningful relationships both materials which register consciously and those which don't come clearly into consciousness. Some of these gestalts are more complete and organized systems; others are only fragmentary bondings of a few experiences, existing against a background noise of disconnected and vague impressions. All of these are raw material for intuitions and creative thought. The strongest gestalts are also available operationally to our conscious minds. They function as personality sub-systems. I believe future research will verify these assumptions.

Evidently, the selection of what is remembered, how memories are grouped, and the intensity with which they are retained and influence us are all determined by emotions related to intentionality, such emotions deriving their power to form and to evoke the sub-systems from strongly emotion-laden events and people in the past.

Israel Rosenfield writes of the relationship of emotion and memory:

(Memories) occur only when there is activity in the limbic system. In order to have the sensation of a "memory," an emotional link (limbic activity of some kind) appears to be important for establishing a coherence, an order, to memories. ⁵

The most difficult assertion in this course to accept is that a wholistic self-gestalt, whether we call it the god-self or the core self or the true self, begins its formation in the brain from the earliest days of our lives, and so is a force of some intensity from the very beginning.

I believe this is true. I have found in discussing the idea of the sub-selves with professionals a strange resistance to the idea itself. At the risk of sounding self-serving, I believe that there is a deep-seated and sometimes anxious resistance to believing that we are so fragmented within as this course suggests, in spite of all the evidence in even our everyday experience.

Liberation Theology

I am profoundly in agreement with most of the conclusions of liberation theology. I was arrested in Mississippi in pursuit of justice for black citizens and have spent a couple of years in prison due to anti-nuclear actions. While not a Marxist, I believe that we have indeed been brainwashed into a ruling class mentality and automatically rally to defense of our privileged status as wealthy first world people.

Black theology, feminist theology, third world liberation theology are all thematic systems. They contribute essential perspectives and no theology unbaptized in their fire has a right to claim authenticity in our time. However, I believe a primary calling of theology is to show how we unite the parts of existence and relate them to the nature and largest purpose of God, in spite of the cynicism in our time with regard to the possibility of developing convincing comprehensive systems of thought.

The weaknesses in some liberation theologies are: (1) a tendency to twist biblical material out of shape to political liberation ends; (2) a tendency to inject a Marxian political and economic definition of class struggle which distorts its broader reality and significance; and (3) in some cases a tendency to justify killing in the name of liberation.

The connections to liberation theology in my own system are:

1. The hypothesis that no one may reach stage 6 and integrate at that level without taking all human beings into one's perspective as equals before God and entitled to the same consideration we give members of our own families. If one is not converted in the guts to this perspective (and not just as an ideology), then one cannot grow further in godlikeness until this barrier is crossed.

2. The priority of sacrificial, non-violent love as the central reality of God's nature. This is a corollary of a stage 6 perspective, as I have argued elsewhere.

3. The stage 7 perspective cannot be entered and one cannot be integrated at that level without overcoming, psychologically and spiritually the power of death and developing the ability to live within eternity and infinity, at least to live without hiding from this expanded perspective. This represents an inner liberation from the anxieties and fears which underlie our hates, prejudices and oppressions.

Total liberation, then, not only from one's own prejudices but also liberation to the courage to give one's life gladly for other people, requires development at the higher stages. This doesn't mean people don't sacrifice their lives at all stages. A stage 3 mother may throw herself into the mouth of a tiger to save her child. People trapped in stages 1 and 2 may throw life away out of nihilistic despair.

I am not implying either, that tackling and eliminating particular injustices must wait until we all reach the higher stages. That is the same heresy as suggesting that if only all people were converted to Christianity the world would be at peace. We know it is not true.

Liberation theology remains and will remain an essential element in any wholistic theology. Any theology which bases itself on God's inner nature of sacrificial love for all has to make room at the top of its action agendas for defense of the rights to full justice of the suffering people at the bottom of the heap. It cannot trail behind preservation of the church structures, or worship, or evangelism or anything else.

For all the above reasons, I find Ched Myers' book, *Binding the Strong Man, A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus* (Orbis Books, 1988) embodies to an large degree the kind of liberation theology I believe in. Calling his book a political reading may mislead some. In the sense that all religion is involved in politics it is a political reading. In the sense that any view of God's purposes has positive or negative political implications for every society, it is a political reading. But it does not reduce religion to a this-worldly political struggle. Nor, I believe, does it twist scripture to political ends. Quite the opposite. By seeing Mark's times, purposes and audience with new clarity we feel able through this book to read its message for the first time washed clean of layers and layers of cultural scum. And especially, lifted free from its smothering featherbed of individualistic, quietistic modern interpretations which have served the preservation of unjust systems for generations.

Incidentally and along the way, Myers does a splendid job of putting semiotics, deconstructionism, narratology, structuralism and other literary interpretations in their proper place. It is hard to praise his achievement in this respect too highly.

Ecumenical Theology

What shall we say of Hans Kung's book, *Theology for the Third Millennium: An Ecumenical View?* Is it possible in our time to produce an ecumenical theology, one which will unite the splinters of Christianity and also other world religions?

Kung recognizes that it is not. This book is not a theology, but articles on how theology should be conducted in order to institute a process of dialectic dialogue among the Christian denominations and with other religions – in the direction of unifying all of us. This is a unity not based upon compromise or a least common denominator. It has to be based upon objective truth, but a kind of truth which has to be found along the way and through dialogue.

Kung reasons in somewhat the same way I do, that the search for and struggle for whole, healthy, loving people in a just and compassionate society will take us toward a center where we will find truth and God and unity with one another; and that the struggle enable such people and such society is more productive than arid discussions of theology in a conference room.

This assumption, for me, was summed up at the beginning by reference to Teilhard de Chardin's concept of the Omega Point. This postulates as an hypothesis that all reality moves toward a unity which does not submerge all the wondrous complexity of individual achievements and social productions, a harmony of fecund complexity.

This is basically an appeal for a stage 5-6 approach to theology as illustrated by Kung's definitions of the task:

Only this sort of theology is a truly ecumenical theology, which has laid aside the still widespread denominational ghetto mentality and can combine the greatest possible toleration toward extra-ecclesiastical and generally religious phenomena, toward the simply human with the task of elaborating what is specifically Christian. ⁷

There is here, of course, an assumption that God is revealed through many channels of human interaction and not just religious people or the churches.

Truth in the Christian faith, then, is to be discovered in the pursuit of the truly human and is not to be found as any dogma which can become fixed in any historical era and certainly not by the mentality which thinks of the faith as something to be defended by an arbitrary hierarchical authority.

God evidently intends us to go about the task of understanding her by actively loving one another and respecting one another. How else does a compassionate, all-forgiving God become revealed in individuals and society? Not by arguments over Arianism and Pelagianism. Such truth is self-confirming. As we become the agape of God, as it controls our lives with its liberating fullness, then we find we need no further proof.

Notes

1. *An Essay on Theological Method*, AAR Studies in Religion 11, Scholars Press, Missoula, MT, 1975, 1979, page 75
2. *The Theological Imagination, Constructing the Concept of God*, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1981, page 255
3. *ibid.*, page 255
4. *ibid.*, page 256
5. Israel Rosenfield, *The Invention of Memory, A New View of the Brain*, Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, NY, 1988, pages 6-7
6. *Imagining God*, *op. cit.*, pages 67-8
7. Hans Kung, *Theology for the Third Millennium, An Ecumenical View*, Doubleday, New York, 1988, page 166. Translated by Peter Heinegg

Appendix B: The Pros and Cons of Stage Development

I have used Kohlberg's stages of moral development as a kind of complex root metaphor. While I note at points Kohlberg's own comments on the higher stages or the philosophic significance of his research, these are not central to this course

I have been interested primarily in one aspect of stage development: the way the research supports the hypothesis that all of us go through a succession of expansions of the boundaries of the personality to take in each time a larger environment so that at each stage the personality must be reorganized to fit the larger demands of the new environment.

I could have used Robert Kegan's five stages of ego development, or James Fowler's stages of faith. Their work builds on Piaget and uses Kohlberg. I decided to use Kohlberg because his seven stages seem to give a better trajectory for projecting our imagination toward the ultimate expansion of the personality to the cosmic/transcendent/ecstatic dimension. As I've suggested, the further we extrapolate the more wrong we probably get, yet the exercise is fruitful.

Also, I selected Kohlberg's stages because initially I wanted to step back from stages of religious faith. I wanted to start with what has been discovered by scientific research and then draw out its implications for faith.

It should be noted in passing that the numbers six or seven are not magic or inevitable. Some list ten stages; others consider that there are only four or five. By postulating intermediate stages, such as 3/4 and 4/5 as stopping places for some people, it is not hard to expand the number. And there is no reason why we should be rigidly welded to any particular number. However, for now, I am still persuaded that the seven stages Kohlberg describes give the most normative (usual) path which people actually do follow, and for the reasons given. There are crises precipitated by, for instance, starting school, entering high school, entering college or taking full-time employment, middle age, etc. These enlarge the environment and so press on the boundaries of the personality.

Criticisms

It is important at this point, to note some of the criticisms of Kohlberg and of stage theory in general. Partly this is because we tend to get captured by systems which seem to explain so much and enter into an idolatrous relationship with them, where we cut or stretch everything to fit the system and so distort reality itself.

Another purpose of the critique is to point out to the critics that there is so much truth in stage development that they should direct attention to improving the research methodology and defining what it can and cannot do, rather than just knocking it and declaring it dangerous on the basis of what it has been in the past. Many modifications have been made and they will continue to be made. What has been a useful instrument in understanding human development will become more accurate and helpful.

Dykstra's Critique

Some of the most telling criticisms of Kohlberg from the religious perspective are those of Craig Dykstra, a Presbyterian minister and professor of Christian education, in *Vision and Character, A Christian Educator's Alternative to Kohlberg*.¹

Dykstra is correct in believing that a system of morality cannot be built on justice alone, that, in this respect, Kohlberg's test dilemmas and the narrowness of his Kantian focus do not yield an adequate system of ethics nor a well-rounded approach to moral education. The Kantian objectivity of Kohlberg's stage 6 seem to us too calculating and formal. We want to see people develop also in empathy, feeling, ability to give and receive love. We want to see them, as Berdyaev insists we should, also employ imaginative creativity in ethical decisions.

This is why I have pressed the point that "expansion" is only one pole of growing godward. One may balloon out like a Darth Vader to a comprehensive viewpoint and yet remain callused toward individuals. I have tried carefully to indicate that there must be growth in both basic polarities of life or one is experiencing only pseudo-growth and is actually living in one or more stunted and twisted demonic self-systems.

These are the polarities of (1) expansion (inclusiveness) vs. inner unification and (2) the objectivity involved in autonomy vs. commitment involved in loving and being loved. So obviously the strategy of growth must include more than basing one's life only on the implications of taking in a continually larger perspective of time, space and people.

Objectivity is essential, to look at moral issues from the standpoint of all the people involved to see how it affects them as well as oneself in moral reasoning in the public sphere. There are no solutions to racial prejudice or the economics of poverty unless objectivity plays a role. To lift one's head above immediate feelings to see clearly and calculate carefully becomes one foundational exercise in public policy-making. It is only one of the aspects of personal decision-making but it is an essential one.

Dykstra is wrong, I think, to complain that the moral dilemmas by which Kohlberg tests moral reasoning also lead one to deal with morality as problem-solving which turns people into objects and eliminates the depth of mystery in people and relationships. Having been tested myself, I can testify to the fact that the dilemmas actually become a gateway into deep reflection on the inexhaustible depth of any moral problem. In fact, the moral dilemmas snag the person's emotions, some more than others, and drag us into confrontation with unexamined presuppositions and consequences. They make us think, they make us feel, and Dykstra to the contrary notwithstanding, they make us exercise imagination.

Just one example: the lifeboat dilemma. There are three men in a lifeboat with a bad storm coming. One is the captain who is the only one who can navigate and who is expected by his social role to make the decisions relating to survival. One is a young, strong seaman who can row. The third is an old man with a badly injured shoulder. The story is crafted to convince the test subject that two can survive the storm but only two. The question: What should the captain do?

The subject is asked to put herself in the place of the captain, to face the alternatives and make a decision.

In a conference on post-formal stages in 1987, I compared memories with an Indian woman on our responses to this dilemma when we were tested. She had made a report to the conference on how, in the testing of people in India, the structure of stage development is found to be the same as in other countries, but the content has some differences.

Especially, she noted, Indians tend to put a higher value on reverence for life itself, because of the importance of "ahimsa" (non-harm) in Indian religion and philosophy.

We found that both of us had given the same answer to the lifeboat dilemma. Both of us contended that the captain should not order anyone overboard, that the three should enter into dialogue about what to do (while rowing, I suggested), and that they should attempt all to survive together even at risk to the lives of all. Both of us, essentially I think because of our religious faith, went a step further. We said that it is possible that even if all three died in the attempt, one or more of them in the final hours might achieve a such a state of spiritual development that these few hours would be of more value than all the years of a longer life.

This dilemma has been criticized as being badly crafted. If there had been twelve in the lifeboat the answer we gave would have been less applicable. It would be impossible for twelve people to reach a consensus on staying together. But then, it would also be much harder to argue that with one fewer person survival would be substantially more certain.

More important, however, I am arguing with Dykstra the point that the dilemmas however badly crafted engage the imagination and become moral education as well as testing. We are forced to enter into the dilemma not only objectively but to a certain extent as one who is morally responsible and involved as a participant.

The notion that there are values to be considered beyond the greatest good for the greatest number comes into consideration from Kohlberg's stage 6 on. Actually, our answer to this particular dilemma was, I would guess, a stage 7 answer for which no scoring manual exists. This does not mean either of us has reached stage 7.

This brings us to two other important points which I have suggested are true of the stages: (1) That each of the stages, from the lowest to the highest is already present as an influence in our lives to some degree from our earliest years, and (2) that the lower stages continue to exert influence upon us throughout lives, however high we reach..

I think the latter is easier to establish than the former. I have indicated it is possible through the brain's ability to form structures out of undigested input from the environment. The more difficult question is how the higher stages might exist among primitive tribal people who have no universal perspective embodied in individuals or societies near them. How do they even imagine beyond stage 3? The structures of stages 6 and 7 are sometimes more powerful among people for whom those values have been embodied in religious teaching and in the examples of a few Mother Teresas. But it is possible to argue that for primitive peoples the poles of both universalism and self-offering love were there to have been chosen. They were at times lived by individual prophets and seers and, more importantly by a number of unsung individuals, those who, for instance, risked their lives to save a member of another tribe from abuse or execution.

The two sources of high morality available to all are those which Kant considered the basis of moral reasoning common to humanity: (1) the starry heavens above and the (2) moral law within. That is, the awesomeness of nature which constantly suggests that our gods are too small and our moral boundaries too narrow, and the depth morality based on instinctive empathy with others arising from our experience as children, parents and mates.

The instinctive depth morality of stages six and seven within arise from our penetration through imagination to a cosmic perspective and through empathy to compassion. These paths have been open to all people everywhere from the beginning and, this must have been behind Paul's reasoning in Romans 1, where he insists that we are all aware of being sinners and of responsibility for our sins because God has revealed the divine nature in and through all creation.

Another point Dykstra makes is that Kohlberg seems to consider moral growth natural and inevitable, as with cognitive development in Piaget's system. Exposed to enough stimulus everyone will progress from stage to stage. Of course, Kohlberg had tested prisoners in penitentiaries and found grown men who were functioning at stages 1 and 2. He knew that growth could become arrested. Perhaps if he had lived longer he would have tackled this question. He was always open to criticisms and to changes in his methodology.

In this course, I have attempted to explain how moral development can be arrested and the poisoning effect this has through the demonic self-systems. My hypotheses suggest two conclusions related to Dykstra's criticism: (1) Our passage through the stages often is conflicted, so that the lower value systems stay with us as influences in the form of sub-selves oriented around those values.

And (2) growth may be arrested so an adult can continue to function at, say, a stage 2 or 3 level. But in that case, the higher stages are a continual disturbance in his life. Examples of a more open and loving style of life from the outside environment often lead to a fanatic tightening of the boundaries around the narrow orientation and a violent rejection of alternative styles because of what seems a death threat to the self.

To the extent Kohlberg suggested a natural unfolding of growth, this I reject. My understanding of human development is, as with Dykstra, a more dynamic and varied one.

Ladders and Stages

Gabriel Moran, in *No Ladders to the Sky: Education and Morality* (Harper & Row, San Francisco, 1987) focuses his attack on the paradigm of stages, which developmentalists sometimes portray as like a ladder one must ascend to get to a predetermined end. Moran is concerned that using this one paradigm tends to wash out other equally important concerns such as living emotionally and morally in the present, the depth dimension in moral and emotional life, the element of conversion in religion, and so on. He writes:

*I am not totally opposed to the image of ladder, rope, chair, or staircase; it is too prevalent in human history to be eliminated. Christian thinkers starting with St. Paul and St. John, make a fruitful use of the image within a metaphor of divine descent. However, even at its best the image of ladder is very limited in the who, what, where, and how it can encompass. A ladder downward all too easily shifts into invariant, sequential, hierarchical steps up a ladder, then proclamations of divine descent simply conflict with the established way of moral thinking and are preemptorily dismissed. We need breathing space, diversity of visual images; we need divine revelation from every direction and through every sense.*²

I agree with most of what Moran writes. It is a beautiful and helpful book. My answers are:

1. I have avoided using the word ladder for the very reasons he suggests, plus an additional one. Ladders are climbed. We do not climb upward to God. If one uses the image, then it is more correct to say that we are pushed up the ladder, from stage to stage, by the graceful help of other people. Growth is through grace and not our own self-effort, except as such effort uses the power of being already put in our lives by God through others.

I have, rather, portrayed stages as a process of expansion of the boundaries of the self, more like concentric circles or spheres than a ladder.

2. Even more important, I have contended that the process of expansion by stages (actually more akin to learning plateaus) is only one movement in the process of growth Godward. Unless it is paralleled by increase in autonomy, intimacy and compassion and internal coherence, expansion itself is pseudo-growth and dangerous.

3. I do not see our being pointed toward an end (godlikeness) as a disability, a process which takes us away from real life immersed creatively and lovingly in the present, which Moran thinks is a danger arising from an exclusive focus on developmentalism. He writes:

*... the people most successful at taking down the ladder to the sky have been the great religious mystics ... Their lives demonstrated the conditions for living without an escape upward: love for creation, the experience of communion and immersion in the present. ... A favorite metaphor of many mystics is that of a woman giving birth. There are objective aspects of pregnancy and birth, but the process that leads to birth cannot be reduced to a visible acquirable object. So also the metaphors of rushing waters, healing touch, dark abyss, attentive listening, and metal throwing sparks. A moral life conceived within such language has a set of possibilities richer than a moral life imagined to be the acquisition of an object and the protection of my rights.*³

Exactly! If ladder or stage means self-centered striving for some kind of being or arriving at a goal on one's own, then this is a distortion of Christian growth and ethics. It is a needed correction for secular developmental psychology to recognize that stage movement depends not on our striving but on the graceful giving of others. This is scientific fact and not solely a religious intuition.

I contend that growth is only possible as we immerse ourselves (thoughtfully and not mindlessly) in the people and activities around us. It is only this way we put ourselves in the path of the acts of grace which open us up to movement to the next stage and to becoming capable of real compassion and intimacy.

Sexism

One of the most serious charges against Kohlberg's system is that of sexism. Unfortunately, his first longitudinal study of stages, stretching over more than twenty years, involved a group of fifty boys, no girls.

Carol Gilligan, in her seminal study, *In a Different Voice*, raises the question of whether, in fact, the moral reasoning of girls is not quite different from that of boys, women's from that of men.⁴

This questioning began with an unease about that fact that girls tended to be scored about a stage lower than boys of the same age, simply on the basis of their answers to the dilemmas which Kohlberg had devised and was using with his boys. Was it,

Carol Gilligan asked, that women's approach to ethical and moral dilemmas is different, so that their answers, while just as valid, do not fit the scoring criteria set up for boys. Gilligan found that boys tend to think in either-or terms, and have more interest in problem-solving on a basis of abstract justice. Girls, on the other hand, were always seeking for a way that expressed cooperation

rather than competition, a winning situation for everyone involved in stead of justice for one or two. The answers of the girls seemed more vague and rambling, more searching, less clean-cut. As a result they appeared often to belong to a lower stage of moral development than those of the boys.

Gilligan's study and conclusions have become widely accepted, and were incorporated to some degree by Kohlberg and his associates into revisions of the scoring manuals as well as in other respects. Continued work is being done on differences in the moral reasoning of the two genders and the seemingly complementary values of both kinds.

Madonna Kolbenschlag in her germinal book, *Kiss Sleeping Beauty Good-bye*, suggests that girls and women are becoming more and more able in the justice kind of reasoning without losing their previously existing strengths. As women break out of the home and kitchen ghetto they become doubly versatile, as indeed men should also. She writes:

As women grow more practiced in decision making and problem-solving, their capacity for ethical choice will increase. In Kohlberg's paradigm, we will see many more women developing beyond "Stage Four" (moral good is equated with faithful conformity to and performance of social norms, irrespective of the effect on the self) to "Stage Five" (fidelity to autonomous personal commitments and capacity to critique-received values, norms) or "Stage Six" (conscience is able to act in opposition to an authoritative or social consensus concerning correct conduct, moral judgments are "reversible, consistent and universalizable"). Some women will progress to a seventh stage in which the ethical imperative of "doing harm to no one" will be extended by a willingness to "suffer persecution for justice's sake" – the ethical standard of heroism, faith and sanctity.⁵

Women add to Kohlberg's objective, cold Kantian universalism of scale a unique compassion and sensitivity to interpersonal relationships and nuances which belong to the wholistic personality. A whole person, a divinized person, surely will have mastered the strengths of both genders and their modes of reasoning and feeling.

Elitism

There is one last criticism which I suspect is more often felt than articulated. It is a kind of instinctive populist rebellion against the whole idea of stages because this subtly suggests that some people are better than others, more mature, because they reason at stage 5 rather than stage 3. It seems to open up a sort of Gnostic hierarchy so that people can be categorized and then put down: "Oh, you're only a stage 3?!!?"

More important from the standpoint of liberals and liberation theologians is the suggestion that people in third world countries, particularly those who still live in tribal cultures or small rural villages, are somehow inferior to educated, "cultured," technologically advanced peoples. As suggested earlier, studies have shown that rural village and tribal people tend to move more slowly through the stages and often stages 5 and 6 are not present.

One illustration from experience:.. When I was a college student I preached weekends in a small Kansas town and stayed with a farm couple in their fifties. Frances, the wife, had only finished junior high school and had not traveled out of the state. She would have scored on the Kohlberg scale at a solid stage 3, no higher, no lower. She was totally family and church oriented. In fact the church was for her an extended family.

But morally and ethically, she was perhaps the finest person I have ever met, in terms of empathy and compassion. She had a serious heart condition and suffered frequent heart attacks from which she barely recovered. She was in almost constant pain and had accepted freely and joyously the fact that she was always only a minute away from the next world. Yet she took a warm personal interest in everyone around her.

She was beloved by all who knew her. People came from all around bringing her their problems. She listened to them, advised them and doted on them. She knit up broken marriages and rescued rebellious teenagers reconciling them with their families. Within the narrow circuit of her concerns she was Christlike to the nth degree, compassionate, caring, unstintingly giving of her tiny energies, reckless of her life for the sake of others.

I remember some years later telling the story of Frances to a liberal, militant young woman and mentioned in passing that she was conservative Republican and strongly opposed to labor unions. My young friend scoffed at my naivete;. For all her virtue, she pointed out, politically Francis was reactionary and served by neglect to keep the poor of the world oppressed.

If anyone were acceptable to God as faithful within the confines of the world as she knew it, Frances was. She served and loved and healed with all her might. More to be praised and honored was she than multitudes of stage 5 social activists who give only a fraction of themselves to causes and even less to those in their immediate vicinity.

Let us praise faithful men and women who at stage 3 work more compassion and healing than many of us who are more expanded in our concerns will ever manage, and who contribute a grace of growth in compassion to all who come in contact with them.

And yet at the same time, let us recognize that wholistic maturity is more than this. If it were just a matter of qualifying for heaven, there's no question Frances would beat us there by light years. But if it is a question of becoming like God, then Francis has still some growing to do in future lives, particularly in the areas of autonomy and expansion.

Any stage 5 person who feels himself superior to a stage 3 person, has a lot more growing to do, in understanding what agape is all about. He has some heavy wilderness wandering and foot-washing to do.

Notes

1. Paulist Press, Ramsey, NJ, 1981
2. Harper & Row Publishers, San Francisco, 1987, page 7
3. *ibid.*, pages 5,6
4. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1982
5. Madonna Kolbenschlag, *Kiss Sleeping Beauty Good-bye*, Doubleday and Company, Inc., NY, 1979, Bantam edition, 1981, page 179

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Questions and Comments

This will be a growing and changing resource, including questions with answers by the author and suggestions, criticisms and comments added by readers, somewhat like the question and discussion period following a lecture.

May 12, 1998

I read your chapter 16 this evening with great interest, since I draw on Wink and Myers as the main sources for the faith and society class which I teach at Messiah College. Your/Kohlberg's stages of development/god images will help me relate better to where students are in their pilgrimage if I can learn to use this information creatively.

On Paul's conversion, I have been struck by how central the issue of violence was in his conversion. He was converted from thinking that God's community had to be secured/defended and preserved by violence to believing that love is the fulfilling of the law. And his conversion happened when Ananias, a member of the community which Saul was threatening, approached Saul with the words, "Brother Saul." An astonishing greeting, given the situation! But it does appear that it spoke to Saul's heart.

John K. Stoner