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**Inner Healing:  
A Contemporary and Personal Paraphrase of Augustine's  
Soul-Searching**

***Gabriëlle Kocken***

**A Thesis**

**in**

**The Department**

**of**

**Theological Studies**

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# ABSTRACT

## **Inner Healing: A Contemporary and Personal Paraphrase of Augustine's Soul-Searching**

*Gabriëlle Kocken*

The *Confessions* of Augustine was a dual conversation – on the one side, between Augustine and God; on the other between Augustine and his reader. This thesis seeks to make a connection to the inner-struggles openly exposed by St. Augustine in his writing *Confessions* and the inner-struggles we (and I in particular) face in today's search for inner peace.

In Chapter 1, I introduce Augustine's search for inner peace through his intellectual, emotional, spiritual and authentic analysis of a) his affiliation with different philosophies and b) his own conscious and unconscious behaviour in daily upheavals, challenges and struggles. In doing so Augustine challenged me to emulate his search since it has been, and still is, my life long passion to find answers to the questions life presents me with.

In Chapters 2 – 9 I challenge the reader and myself with topics that were relevant then and are relevant now. Chapter 2 explores the healing ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, the meaning of his preaching that the Kingdom is close at hand and his teachings on compassion. Chapter 3 explores the possibility that evil could be part of divine creation and how demonic forces can be fought. Chapter 4 challenges us to look at our own woundedness and to find ways to heal those pains through the journey of forgiveness. Chapter 5 explores the interconnection between sexuality and spirituality. Since we have a tendency to cope with life through finding ways of escapism Chapter 6 helps us to find ways to deal with reality through discipline. Discipline is not easy to be obtained therefore Chapter 7 deals with the notion of God communion through prayer. Chapter 8 opens up the discussion for our deepest fear: death and the importance of integrating death into our daily existence. The concluding chapter, Chapter 9, calls us to have faith in God taking care of us and to unite ourselves with life. Knowing that life is both demonic and divine, painful and pleasant, hideous and lovely, cruel and compassionate, destructive and creative; the conclusion of all the chapters combined.

The topics discussed are all open to personal interpretation, never the less intended to make the reader aware of the need for self reflection since ultimately we are all responsible for our own choices and actions (or non-actions). In order to become responsible choice-makers we need to learn to critically think which can be done by getting in touch with the sacred part of our being; there where God resides:

“ For it was there, there in the place where I had been angry with myself, inside,  
in my own room, there where I had been pierced . . . there it was that You began  
to grow sweet to me.” (*Confessions* IX: 4, p.190).

The thesis itself reflects the style and method of the *Confessions*. Like Augustine, I choose myself as object of reflection. “Thus, with myself as object of the experiment, I came to understand what I had read.” (*Confessions* VIII: 5, p.164).

*Dedicated to my son Raphael who has to find his own answers  
to all the questions that life will present.*

With gratitude to Lucy de Mooy, Susan Nagy and Jack Harris  
for endless patience in guiding me through editorial  
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# INTRODUCTION

This thesis is the product of a life-long search for Truth. I have been part of many movements, spiritual and non-spiritual, followed different ideologies, interpreted them and misinterpreted them and lived them out rightly or wrongly as a consequence. Truth-seeking is accompanied by a host of questions. My thesis puts forth some of the questions people ask when interested to walk the road of self-awareness and self-growth; the road towards Truth. On this road, one needs to get in touch with one's echo, but especially with one's own shadow (or dark side). Too often we push away our feelings of anger, frustration, pain, desire and sadness, thus maintaining a process of self-deceit. We need to learn to get in touch with our feelings, the good ones as well as those considered 'bad,' in order to find out whom and what we really are and want to be.

The personal recollections of St. Augustine in the Confessions are a prime example of self-analysis. Augustine asked questions of a life-enhancing nature; he wanted to know what his time here on earth was all about, he wanted to attain peace and happiness in a world where he saw himself surrounded by just the opposite. In that respect, nothing has changed for modern-day seekers. In his questioning, he searched for intelligent and academic answers using himself as object of observation, analyzing his own emotional, psychological, sexual, and intellectual state of being. Through his self-analysis he started the process of becoming whole.

Although Augustine wrote about his own subjective experience, he touched on common human experiences. I believe and my theses proposes to set out that God communes with us through thoughts and feelings, and that he uses the vehicle of experience as His great communicative device. For Augustine as for many modern believers, so much importance is placed on the Word of God, and so little on the experience. We have a strong tendency to discard the experience and own the words, when it should be just the other way around. Augustine's experience can be generalized

because today many of us have similar experiences. He dealt with issues in his life we can all, to some extent, relate to. Issues such as good and evil, death and dying, sexuality, addictive behaviour, forgiving, believing one religion versus another one and many more. By searching for clarity he searched for the meaning of his life.

For those who are interested in the process of self-awakening and self-growth, the questions Augustine asked do not come as a surprise; these are questions we ask ourselves. Going through the different ideologies, belief systems and churches, my experience taught me that the answers to my life questions, although influenced by words, thoughts, rules, regulations and dogmas, ultimately came out of my own God-communion. I believe that God communicates with everyone all the time, but who listens? Many people choose to believe that God communicates in special ways and only with special people. This way the majority avoids the responsibility of hearing God's message and having to interpret this. It seems far safer and certainly much easier to accept the interpreted version than the message we may very well be receiving in this very moment. Ultimately the answers are to be found in our own hearts. And so you will find me following Augustine's example, using the same methodology as explored by Augustine, using myself through the entire thesis as object of observation.

In the process of writing this thesis I felt I had to take off all the masks I have been wearing, either consciously, subconsciously through manipulations of life experiences, pressure of parents, society and other influences. At first I was scared to let go of these masks I used to identify myself with. What I found beyond the mask was bare nakedness and vulnerability, but ultimately that I am a child of God.

When Jesus proclaimed "The kingdom of heaven is close at hand" Matt. 4:17 he informed us that if we want to be set free of our fears, bad habits and self-deceit, we must be willing to undergo the process of radical transformation which can only be done in the present and therefore becomes a here-and-now experience. Very close indeed is this kingdom! Of course we cannot expect a quick fix for all our maladies. Many of us

however do hope so and visit healers, fortune tellers and other quick fixers (although these visits can be of some help). I maintain with Augustine that “It is in the process of dying and beginning anew” (Confessions XI: 7, p.266) that we will find our true being. We really, honestly, thoroughly have to find and walk that road of healing through self-discovery by ourselves. Starting in the sacred moment of NOW.

In Chapter 1, I will introduce Augustine as a soul-searching wanderer with whom we can identify ourselves to some extent. This man in psychological distress openly shares his upheavals in his diary of personal transformation called the Confessions. All the parts in the Confessions are united through Augustine’s expression of hope, asking God to love him and asking himself to love God, understanding full well that if he wants to find happiness it is ultimately he himself who has to do the changing, since God is eternal and never changing. This changing, as we will find out through reading the Confessions, is a painful process of becoming whole.

In Chapter 2, I will explore the meaning of healing in the Old Testament and the implications of Jesus’ approach to this subject. The Old Testament sees sickness and misfortune as punishment from God. The whole nation could be afflicted by the sin of one man in the community. Jesus, on the other hand, stresses conscious control over one’s life; to think and act individually, not collectively. He invites us to deal with our pain and obstacles in the present. Don’t wait till tomorrow if you can work on yourself today. He wants us to get in touch with ourselves through the process of inner confrontation: “the Kingdom of Heaven is near”.

In Chapter 3, I go into the theological view of the Devil (I have always been puzzled with Catholic teachings on the Devil). This brings us to the heart of spiritual warfare in this world. I ask of myself (and of the reader): If God is all-powerful isn’t he then also the creator of good and evil allowing us to commit all our evil deeds? Or are we saying that God created the world and beings but is not able to control it? Are bad and good both necessary ingredient for the evolution of man?

Chapter 4 touches one of the most difficult of human undertakings: forgiveness. People have a tendency to hurt each other. Parents hurt their children. Children hurt their parents. The worst kinds of wounds occur not on battlefields but in our very own homes. In this chapter, I will go step by step through the process of forgiveness with the last phase of forgiveness clearly guided by rational thinking.

Chapter 5 is about sexuality. There will be an exploration of the Christian view on sexuality as well as the view that sexuality is a basic element of our being, not determining, but surely permeating our thinking, feeling, and acting in the world. From this view follows the need to learn to love ourselves (which is for many the hardest thing to do). Loving ourselves requires that we honestly face up to and accept our own ego challenges and shadow sides. We are thus back to the point of self-analysis and the process of inner confrontation, as Jesus invited us to do.

Chapter 6 is dedicated to discipline. All over the world we have people feeling miserable because they cannot control their money, their craving for drugs, their spending, their own behaviour vis-à-vis their family members, their sexual impulses and more. To free ourselves from bad habits and addictions we need to take the necessary steps towards discipline and stop creating illusions for ourselves.

In Chapter 7, I discuss prayer. Prayer requires responsible thinking. When we pray, many of us ask for specific results, but are we prepared to accept the consequences of those results? I will also go into other ways of communing with God that are acceptable in their own right.

Chapter 8 is on coming to terms with death and dying. Since the expectation of death is somehow integrated into our understanding of life, why is it that we still do everything to avoid the topic of our own death as if we were immortal? We can comprehend the death of our neighbour but not our own. This is related to a host of fears that I will discuss. The Christian Church teaches hell, heaven and purgatory and that life and death are mutually-exclusive opposites; whereas, Eastern philosophy sees death and

life as complementary facets of an underlying process of rebirth, a pattern of constant arising and passing away. Whatever we want to believe, death is an integral part of life that gives meaning to human existence, so we should deal with it NOW, because tomorrow, when we get the final notice, we may not have the energy nor the time.

Chapter 9 brings us to the conclusion: happiness in God. Augustine inspired us to have faith that God will take care of us. Faith is the very key to freedom of the spirit, it asks us to trust life with all its tribulations. Profound happiness is to be found when we find our whole Selves, and to become our Selves we need to look at ourselves objectively and within ourselves subjectively; thereby exercising discipline and integrity, accepting our good as well as our darker parts. After such a “spring cleaning”, we therefore invite and let God’s Light shine in and through us, achieving a realization of peace and holiness.

It is time to change our minds about many things. This is what evolution is all about. Evolution of the soul which longs to be Divine-like. Augustine searched for the Divine within him, which is the reason why I am using him as a role model in this thesis. Augustine combines feelings, intellect and the Divine as well as the worldly to find the meaning of existence, questioning the same experiences as we do. He is therefore as contemporary today as he was in his own time. He listened to the voice within, which is the loudest voice with which God speaks because it is the closest to us. It is this voice that tells us what is true or false, right or wrong, good or bad when we define our own truth. I ask you not to take my thoughts and findings as Truth; the subjects addressed are chosen to inspire thought, to go within, and to come to one’s own truthful conclusions.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **ST. AUGUSTINE'S SOUL-SEARCHING**

#### **I) Conversing with Augustine Today.**

If people today could converse with Augustine would they find his views spiritually uplifting and fulfilling? My answer to that question is affirmative since I chose him as the role model for this thesis on inner healing. There is a passion about Augustine's *Confessions* which is relentlessly gripping, and I find myself wanting to retell the story in my own words; using vocabulary appropriate for the world on the threshold of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, to translate Augustine's *Confessions* in a way that makes it relevant for myself and others.

What has intrigued me most about Augustine is that, as a spiritual wanderer, he sought to understand what he believed. He searched for intelligent and academic answers and in doing so he was very sincere in analysing his own upheavals, asking himself questions, frankly interpreting his own behaviour, displaying a sometimes heartbreaking quest for peace of soul, for identity, for God, and in doing so trying to get closer to Eternal Truth: resting in God.

What makes the book so fascinating is that it is not merely history or autobiography; it is Augustine discovering the power of peace-giving grace. This is a grace I personally have been searching for, but it feels like an untamed power - and more than once, I have felt compelled to tame it, to possess it, by putting Augustine's story into my own words, thereby perhaps more deeply lodging it in my own experience. While reading Augustine's passionate total involvement I as the reader feel as if I am with a friend or close acquaintance, this gives his writings a sense of contemporaneity, and invites participation. It is a model and reminder of the power and fruitfulness of identifying oneself mentally with (and so fully comprehending) a person of

contemplation; thus it is the diary of a personal transformation and the changes one can expect to undergo if one wishes to emulate Augustine.

There are many differing responses to Augustine's *Confessions*, often written in well-defined academic disciplines; they do not fit neatly into any category of literature. It can be read as an autobiography, a case study, theology, a tabloid confession, a devotional guide, a political tract, a long sustained parable and more. We can compare it with other writings such as the autobiographical or reflective writings of Jung, Teresa of Avila, Gandhi, or Malcolm X, where we find important resemblance but ultimately it stands on its own (like every piece of writing and every individual). Most often *Confessions* is read as though it were an archive, a straightforward memoir, addressed to no one in particular, recounting events and reactions in a reasonably accurate fashion, regrettably "distorted" by the limits of Augustine's self-perception, but basically a set of data we can take at face value. I do not think however that Augustine intended to write "history" in this sense. It is important to understand to whom Augustine was addressing his testimony of faith. His audience probably consisted of mostly educated male colleagues who, like him, read books as an active process, questioning both their own lives in the text's light and the text's truth in light of their own experience. We should not forget that Augustine's conversion was intimately intertwined with listening and reading. He knew the great influence the printed word could have on its readers. What makes it clear that *Confessions* was not written to be read by women is the metaphor that dominates his construction of pleasure, namely male sexuality.

Reading *Confessions* can be quite disturbing. The text reveals a man possessed by or even neurotic about his relationships, especially with his mother. Due to 20th Century psychological developments such as Jungian thought, there is presently considerable controversy about Augustine's display of inner struggle. One can interpret and analyse his *Confessions* as the portrait of a man in psychological distress, extraordinarily beset and troubled in soul, but one can also read it as a cleansing which makes his vulnerable



disclosure of personal distress a sign of psychological health. If the latter is the case, the book is to be taken as a record of a process of becoming whole, as an account of resolution and redemption, rather than a continual life-crisis. Here is a man demonstrating ordinary possibilities (though sometimes painful) of finding one's soul and God's purpose for his existence. He integrates theology, philosophy and psychology to find his sense of vocational, sexual and personal identity. He is simply "trying to get his act together". *Confessions* narrates Augustine's own process from restlessness, frustration and irritation to contentment, equilibrium, and a sense of stability, rightness in the universe, orientation, and individuation. Interestingly, either way of reading is an accurate rendering of the text, and perhaps the most accurate is to combine the two.

What is more essential to focus on is the question how do we react, how comfortable are we with such a public display of personal distress and soul-searching, and the supposition that such display indicates pathology or health. Viewing Augustine as "sick" or as "healer" may depend on one's evaluation of Augustine's religious position. His posture of trust in God may seem to some unduly dependent and to others as a realistic basis for robust self-affirmation. The middle-aged Augustine writes about some intimate details of his youth, and these details are of his selected memories, not about the more reliable facts of his life (many dramatic events are missing). The distinctiveness of the book is on so many levels that it has appeared in different guises to different people, and quite different intentions can plausibly be attributed to Augustine. In this study the approach is to emphasise how Augustine's experience and account can be generalised, how it is valid to me and to others. In doing so I try to transcend particular historical and cultural boundaries.

Reading Augustine's *Confessions* we overhear a man in the midst of a religious experience, a man baring himself to his creator and redeemer, as if we were listening to hours of psychotherapy. And what are we overhearing? We are overhearing a prayer to God, a prayer it seems he wants us to imitate.

Another important element in his search for Eternal Truth is that he allowed himself to be influenced by philosophers of his own time, such as the Manichees.<sup>1</sup> Their promise of esoteric knowledge drew him to this group. I and many of my generation are seeking to understand and find the ultimate Truth and ultimate love going through a similar process like Augustine's, which gives his soul searching a surprising contemporaneity. I have listened, understood, misunderstood and lived different philosophies (born-again-Christians, Wicca, anarchists, fundamental evangelical Christians, theosophists) and over and over again I was not fully satisfied. So what is it that I (and the rest of my generation) are looking for? Like Augustine, I am looking for wisdom that surpasses all wisdom; I am looking for love that surpasses all loves; I am looking for truth that surpasses all truths only to find myself once again turning to a person who shook the world 2000 years ago and is still able to disturb me today. And by turning towards him I hope to find "rest in Thee" (*Confessions* I: 1, p.3). When St. Paul's Christ speaks of love he says: "love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails." (1Cor.13: 4-8).

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<sup>1</sup> The Manichees believed that in the beginning there were two Principles, one Good, one Evil, God and Satan. Each of these has his kingdom, the Kingdom of Light and the Kingdom of Darkness. The two Kingdoms have one border in common, but in every other direction they are infinite. Satan invaded the Kingdom of Light. God himself did not fight Satan, but emanated primal-Man (he is not to be confused with Adam) who in turn emanated Five Sons and these battled against Satan. A male and female devil in the Kingdom of Darkness bring forth Adam and Eve. Cain and Abel are sons of Satan and Eve. Adam's fall consisted in yielding to the seductions of sex. The Spirits of the Light took pity on men and sent Angels to help them. To deliver man; Jesus is sent – not the Jesus of Nazareth, who, according to Manichean philosophy, was an imposter, a devil, who interfered in the work of the real Jesus. He personifies the Light imprisoned in matter. As such all that happens in matter happens to him, so that he is always being born and suffering and dying. In particular he is eaten in all food. There is a continuing war for Men between the Angels of Light and Demons. The Angels try to deliver men by teaching them the truth about nature and the powers of nature, and calling men from sensuality. Men could co-operate with the Angels of Light or the Demons. In general the use of matter was a co-operation with the Demons: and the act of generation was the extreme point of this co-operation. There was a small number of Elect and a great body of Hearers. The Elect were bound to celibacy and were forbidden all flesh meat; they ate vegetables, and some vegetables were especially favored as containing a greater number of Light elements – of the cosmic Jesus in fact; and when the Elect ate them, these Light particles were set free. Almost all rulers – Christian and pagan – persecuted Manicheism as an enemy of morality.

And it is the desire to attain this love, this wisdom that makes Augustine proclaim: "And now behold I return to Thy fountain panting and with burning thirst. Let none bar my way: I shall drink of it and so I shall live. Let me not be my own life: of myself I lived evilly and to myself I was death. In Thee I live again. Do Thou speak to me, do Thou instruct me. I have trusted Thy books and their words are deep mysteries." (*Confessions* XII: 10, p.294)

I am in awe at Augustine's honest soul-searching, in awe at his testimony over God's grace, in awe of his painstakingly dissecting of his thoughts and behaviour and it is in this context that I present Augustine's *Confessions*.

## **II) Augustine's Soul-Searching: The Confessions**

We open the *Confessions* where we find an expression of hope; Augustine is entering into a dialogue with God, asking God to save him by enabling him to fulfil the great commandment to love Him. This dialogue unites all parts of the *Confessions*, making it a thirteen-book-long prayer!

In Book I, he is struggling with the God-notion. God is outside us but also within us (and therefore has masculine as well as feminine qualities). God is eternal, never changing so we will have to change to find God, the Ultimate Truth and all-encompassing Love. "For You change neither in form nor by motion, nor is Your will changed as the times change, for a will which is now one thing and now another is not eternal" (*Confessions* XII: 11, p.295). Augustine understood that ultimately it was he who had to do the changing, he was up for a painful process.

Book II - VI Augustine contemplates his younger years, when he was being severely disciplined by his parents; forced to study, no play time allowed. "But the idling of men is called business; the idling of boys (he refers to play time), though exactly like, is punished by those same men: and no one pities either boys or men." (*Confessions* I: 9,

p.13). He is resentful of these childhood memories: “no one does well against his will, even if the thing he does is a good thing to do” (*Confessions* I: 12, p.15) adding that a free will is of more value in learning than harsh discipline.

In his teenage years he was sent to Carthage to study rhetoric. He was ambitious, vain and prided himself in outdoing others, even if it required cheating. But he did realise that in the academic, legal or political arena a man is more contemptible when breaking a law of language than when cheating and hating, thus breaking a law of God. “It is strange that we should not realise that no enemy could be more dangerous to us than the hatred with which we hate him. and that by our efforts against him we do less damage to our enemy than is wrought in our own heart.” (*Confessions* I: 18, p.21).

In adolescence Augustine develops a passionate lust for love and sex, the delight of loving and to be loved. One should keep in mind that Augustine writes about his life after he has converted to Christianity. He subsequently decries his pleasures since now he sees them as not the “true” pleasure of knowing and loving God. “Augustine insists that sex, for him, was pleasureless because it was compulsive, and acting out compulsions never produces pleasure.”<sup>2</sup> Augustine wants his readers to accept his conclusions without the experience of a similar learning process. We find him accusing God: “And You left me to myself: and I was tossed about and wasted and poured out and boiling over in my fornications: and You were silent, o my late-won Joy. You were silent, and I, arrogant and depressed, weary and restless, wandered further and further from You into more and more sins which could bear no fruit save sorrows” (*Confessions* II: 2, p.27-28). He realizes that God had been with him all his life, although in his younger years he thought that God had abandoned him. Years later, as a middle-aged man looking back at his youth, he recognised God’s voice through the words of his own mother spoken to him a

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<sup>2</sup> Miles, Margaret R. *Desire and Delight: A New Reading of Augustine's Confessions*. New York: the Crossroad Publishing Company, 1992, p. 79.

thousand times. But the meaning of her words did not sink in at the time, a normal reaction, especially in adolescence when one tries to cut the umbilical cord in order to stand on one's own feet. In youth we do not know better than to run after our pleasures, a physical, emotional, psychological given. How is one to stop these urges that influence our thinking and acting? Some of us are very morally inclined but as a youth we search for love and believe it is in the physical that we can find it. Only through years of experience we learn to accept the reality of 'real' love in all its beauty and different dimensions.

In spite of feeling forced to study, in time, it did inspire free curiosity. Augustine was introduced to the story of Hortensius by Cicero and the one thing that delighted Augustine in Cicero's exhortation was that he was asked to love, to seek, to win, to hold, to embrace, not one or other philosophical school but wisdom itself, whatever that might be. It inspired him to study the sacred Scriptures. "But I had not the mind to penetrate into their depths. They were indeed of a nature to grow in Your little ones. But I could not bear to be a little one; I was swollen with pride, but to myself I seemed a very big man" (*Confessions* III: 11, p.55).

He fell in with a sect (the Manicheans) whom he afterwards criticised as talking high-sounding nonsense. He noticed some puzzling discrepancies between philosophical reasoning and what he came to call "the interminable Fables of the Manichees". The apparent inconsistencies were not satisfyingly explained and the Manicheans failed to convince the sceptical Augustine. Totally disillusioned Augustine states: "it would have been better to love the sun, which is at least true to the eyes, than those falsities which deceive the mind through the eyes." (*Confessions* III: 6, p.47). Today nothing is new under the sun, we still have plenty of old and new schools of thought about 'truth' confusing our vulnerable and eager minds. And if we were to accept one truth we would judge all others to be false. Last Christmas, I had the opportunity to travel to Sedona, Arizona, known for its positive energy vortexes. Plenty of psychics, healers, shamans and

other New Agers had put up shop in this gorgeous area surrounded by hills. Out of curiosity I requested a New Age healing ceremony. I was asked to hold a plastic wand for two minutes, which would help my addictions disappear. And did it? Of course not, but nevertheless, people flocked to these tellers of the story of the King and his new underwear. In the ceremony they channelled Angel Gabriel, who indicated to them that I was an ascended master. An ascended master of what? Of my addictions? I was amazed at the number of seekers that came in, 'for curiosity's sake', willing to pay hard currency for these life-changing sessions that were channelled from high dimensional frequencies, filled with 'truth'. "Thus many actions that to men seem blameworthy, are approved in Your sight; and many that are praised by men are condemned by You, O God - all because often the appearance of the act may be quite different from the mind of the doer or because there is some unrealised element in the situation." (*Confessions* III: 9, p.54).

It took Augustine nine years to commit himself fully to Christianity, although intellectual assent to Catholic Christianity was not a problem. He talks about these nine years as 'tossing in the mud, trying to rise only to fall even more heavily'. Without God he saw himself as a guide to his own destruction. In these years he found himself a well-paid job, took a mistress who mothered a son by him and lost a dear friend to death after which he fell into a severe depression. He hated all things, even the very light itself (sounds familiar). He remained in this state of unhappiness, where he could not abide, yet from which he could not depart. For where was his heart to flee for refuge from his heart? Where could he run to in order to flee from himself? "Where ever the soul of man turns, unless towards God, it cleaves to sorrow..." (*Confessions* IV: 10, p.70). So his "own self" became an unwanted element in his existence. In moments like these, when we do not feel able to handle our own presence, we escape in a variety of ways, such as over-eating, sex, drug abuse, alcoholism, workaholism, socialising in order to avoid our own loneliness, to avoid facing ourselves, our own personalities with all the flaws (that Jung

called our shadow side) but therefore also avoiding all its beauty (which I would call our own light).

This dramatic loss in Augustine's life made him question what he was searching for. He realised that although he was seeking happiness in life, he was seeking it in the land of death. How could he find happiness in life where there is no life? All his studying and intelligence became useless to him in this search for the spiritual truth. What use was it to him to know all things from books while he did not know God, the only truth he craved? We see him struggling with the Catholic faith. He questioned the Virgin birth, the mingling of godliness and defiled flesh, the origin of sin, the Old Testament's literal meaning, etc. He was suspended in uncertainty, which was more deadly for him than anything. "But as usually happens, the man who has tried a bad doctor is afraid to trust even a good one: so it was with the health of my soul, which could not be healed save by believing, and refused to be healed that way for fear of believing falsehood" (*Confessions* VI: 4, p.110).

Having gone through the same misery I recognise that too much thinking can be confusing. My mind constantly questions, constantly throws in rational thoughts, which seem to prevent me from fully giving myself to the Christ figure who radiates trust to me. a safe haven, a refuge from all my questioning. But the 'What if? What if not? But? And what about...? So and so said...' keeps haunting me. Will I find rest when I find Thee? I feel a fear of Christ not being the one he is proclaimed to be, I am afraid of not understanding the Sacred Writings. At the same time I know that I can only understand them if I am willing to give my heart first to the One who freely gave His life in order to bring light, thus answering to the darkness of this world. In astonishment I watch Augustine taking the plunge, determined to find what he was looking for. He went on as a catechumen in the Catholic Church and was determined to stay until some light would appear by which he could steer his course. Under the watchful eye of Ambrose, the bishop of Milan, he grew to prefer the Catholic doctrine above the Manichean; he felt that

believing in things that could not be proved, the Church acted more modestly and honestly than the Manichees. He did not whole-heartedly accept the Catholic doctrine though. It was only a step forward while saying: "to-morrow I shall find it: it will be all quite clear and I shall grasp it" (*Confessions* IV: 11, p.121). Two wills struggled for dominance within him; the earthly and the spiritual. He pondered over his worldly position with its own charm from which the mind is not easily cut off. Augustine was quite dramatic: it was an either-or position to him. Wealth, worldly status and a companion in his life were not part of the deal for him. Either he would give himself fully to Christ (which meant giving up a successful career as a teacher of rhetoric that had reached its peak, giving up his faithful life with his partner of thirteen years who bore him a son, and becoming a celibate), or he would stay in the world of the flesh enjoying all there was to be enjoyed 'being a slave of lust and greed'. He could not imagine a grey zone in this area. And so we see these things going through his mind, the wind was blowing one way and then another, tossing his heart this way and that. "From day to day I postponed life in You, but I did not postpone the death that daily I was dying in myself." "I was in love with the idea of happiness, yet I feared it where it was, and fled away from it in my search for it." (*Confessions* VI: 11, p.123). The truth of the matter is that Augustine could not see himself giving up the embraces and the warmth of a woman. He thought that he should have the strength in himself to be able to let go of that human desire and he knew he did not have that strength nor desired it: "for in my utter foolishness I did not know the word of Your Scripture that none can be continent unless You give it." (*Confessions* VI: 11, p.123). He feared to leave behind the demons that were playing tricks in his mind.

The end of his sexual torment was brought on by his mother Monica. She wanted a socially acceptable marriage for her son, which at that time meant to marry within one's cast or higher. In order to get ready for marriage Monica sent away Augustine's mistress. Augustine agreed to wait two years in order to marry a young girl not of marriageable age



yet. However, he was unable to contain his sexual urges and found himself another mistress. He wrote very little about this but did share: "She with whom I had lived so long was torn from my side as a hindrance to my forthcoming marriage. My heart which had held her very dear was broken and wounded and shed blood. She went back to Africa, swearing that she would never know another man, and left with me the natural son I had of her." (*Confessions* VI: 15, p. 126). Thus he stayed true to his time, to the ignorant and harsh reality in those days that women had no important role to play within a man's emotional well-being, let alone in finding his way to the truth.

We need to remember that Augustine did not want to stir the readers to seek similar sexual relationships. He presents sex as more trouble than it is worth by insisting on his own compulsive attachment to it. Pursuit of sex, he consistently writes, was a "slavery" that by definition could not give pleasure because: "a slave can't enjoy that to which he is enslaved" (*Confessions* VIII: 4, p.163). Book VII - IX describes the torment of not being able to make that final decision. "The enemy held my will; and of it he made a chain and bound me. Because my will was perverse it changed to lust, and lust yielded to become habit, and habit not resisted became necessity. My two wills, one old, one new, one carnal, one spiritual, were in conflict and in their conflict wasted my soul." (*Confessions* VIII: 4, p.163). We can all identify with a propensity toward addictive behaviour. Is it not over-eating, over-working, alcohol or other substance abuse we plague ourselves with? Compulsive and/or obsessive behaviour that can lead our habits into necessities in order to cope with or escape from stress, dilemmas and other problems we created ourselves. And the question once more arises, how loving are we to ourselves and others, knowing that love is kind, patient, not self-seeking, not rude, always sincere, always persevering and true. The hope that Augustine offers us is that we can be embraced by God even when leading our lives in conflict. "My desire now was not to be more sure of You but more steadfast in You" (*Confessions* VIII: 1, p.157). He had found a pearl of great value but he was hesitant to buy it. He found himself going mad on his

way to sanity, dying on his way to life, aware of his sinful state. Oh, the torment of irresolution. He sought refuge in the readings of St. Paul that became profoundly clear to him: "Thus, with myself as object of the experiment, I came to understand what I had read, how the flesh lusts against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh. I indeed was in both camps." (*Confessions* VIII: 5, p.164). He felt he had enough evidence that God's words were true, there was simply nothing he could answer save lazy words: "soon, quite soon, give me just a little while" (*Confessions* VIII: 5, p.165). But this little while went on for a long time. "For the law of sin is the fierce force of habit, by which the mind is drawn and held even against its will, and yet deservedly because it had fallen wilfully into the habit" (*Confessions* VIII: 5, p.166). We recognise in Augustine a man in emotional distress, like all of us have felt, one way or another, wanting to do things differently but not being able to commit totally to the change. And so we run to soothe the discomfort creating habits to comfortably cover up our weakness. It is a spiral we cannot easily get out of. "The mind gives the body an order, and is obeyed at once: the mind gives itself an order and is resisted" (*Confessions* VIII: 9, p.172). "The trouble is that it does not totally will: therefore it does not totally command." (*Confessions* VIII: 9, p.173). Thus Augustine continued the process of self-analysis to find why he could not totally commit to serving God, as he had long meant to do. "I did not wholly will, I was not wholly unwilling. Therefore I strove with myself and was distracted by myself. This distraction happened to me though I did not want it, and it showed me not the presence of some second mind, but the sin that dwells in me." (*Confessions* VIII: 9, p.173). "Why do you stand upon yourself and so not stand at all? Cast yourself upon Him and be not afraid; He will not draw away and let you fall" (*Confessions* VIII: 11, p.177).

Finally Augustine broke down in despair and it was at this dark moment that he heard a voice singing: 'take and read, take and read.' He took this as a command from God, stood up and opened the Bible and where it fell open he read: "Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and impurities, not in contention and envy, but ye on the

Lord Jesus Christ and make not provision for the flesh in its concupiscence Rom.13, 13.” (*Confessions* VIII: 12, p.179). The reading transformed him, and a light of confidence shone in his heart and the darkness of uncertainty vanished.

There are pleasures that addicts must deny themselves in order to maintain equilibrium in their lives. As an addict, it was not possible for Augustine to enjoy a sexual relationship in freedom, therefore his conversion revolved around the resolution of this problem area in his life. He sacrificed sexual activity in order to achieve the two “goods” he could not attain while being a slave of his compulsion: choice and control<sup>3</sup>. He brought order in his life and this order moved in the direction of rest, meaning equilibrium, stability, peace. This radically changed the way he saw the world. He found himself beginning to exercise a discerning, evaluating, choosing will, a free will. “How sweet it suddenly became to me to be without the sweetness of those empty toys! How glad I was to give up the things I had been so afraid to lose! For You cast them out from me, You true and supreme sweetness; You cast them out and You entered into me to take their place. sweeter than all pleasure . . . . brighter than all light, but more inward than all hidden depths.” (*Confessions* IX: 1, p.183).

His security was fragile: it relied on God’s gift: “no one can be continent unless you give it” (*Confessions* VI: 11, p. 123). Augustine relied on God because he lacked determination and will power of his own. Having an addictive nature myself, I empathise with Augustine’s need to hold on to the notion of God’s grace. To break one’s habits seems at times impossible, sheer hell, due to the needs they have created. The thought of quitting a habit on your own can be simply too much for a fragile ego to handle. There are several components that need to be faced. We are not only addicted to the mechanics of the habit but also to the stress relief, the stimulation and perhaps the image the habit

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<sup>3</sup> As we all know Augustine’s resolution did contribute to the subsequent glorification of the sexless life in Catholic Christianity. But we need to be aware that he presses that this was his own resolution and did not describe celibacy as the norm for Christians (Miles, p. 173).

provides us with. That is why to go on the journey (of quitting) one needs to realise that it will take time, careful planning and commitment (see chapter 6 on Discipline).

To quit a habit you need to know what you are up against and what it takes to quit successfully. Most of us, like Augustine, want to change but are prisoners of our habits and are terrified of the pain 'losing' them will lay upon us. 'Tomorrow, tomorrow, I will change ..'. Due to our lack of self-discipline, anger at ourselves becomes a companion that intensifies the habit. The habit becomes a necessity and then becomes destructive. Anger with one self follows, but the pain, the embarrassment, the terrified feeling of being captive of the 'beast' is stronger than the will. The repeating cycle is the reason for not being able to commit to the journey. Commitment requires a lot of discipline, heroic perseverance and, due to the destructiveness of addiction, often includes failure. Hence the need for God's grace. Life-saving grace is called-in when we ask for the help of God. One can argue that Augustine (and I) are holding on to a crutch, relying on God, in all humility, I answer that with a definite YES. Better hanging on to the love of God than hanging on to destructive vices, theories, habits that won't bring me to recovery, to a place of peace. Why 'stand alone and therefore not stand at all'? This also goes for people who wish to follow a spiritual path. Discipline is a means to freedom. After all, we do not just want to visit a different way of life, we wish to move there permanently. It is therefore of utmost importance to recognise when we are ready. Many of us are like Augustine, swimming upstream in a state of irresolution. Such a state of mind or soul is a torment. When we know we are ready we also know that we need help, we need guidance from someone who knows what we are going through. We need a support system, and one of the main supports is to know that we do not stand alone, that we have the Christ figure holding us up with the love that always perseveres and never fails.

When we look for God where do we find this Supreme Being? "You entered into me" writes Augustine at one point. "For it was there, there in the place where I had been angry with myself, inside, in my own room, there where I had been pierced . . . there it

was that you began to grow sweet to me.” (*Confessions* IX: 4, p.190). This shows God responding to his lament. (Our own tumult makes listening to this Voice often impossible). Notice that Augustine mentions the place of anger; he talks about the same anger I mentioned above, the anger that resides within us, in the struggle to overcome our own destructive behaviours. But in this same place, this place of inner depth, of upheavals and of light we also find God: “if only they could see the eternal light inside themselves.” (*Confessions* IX: 4, p.190). When we look for the eternal light, we look for happiness. The happy life, Augustine concludes, is to be discovered in memory: “we do not say that we have found what was lost unless we recognise it, nor can we recognise it unless we remember it.” (*Confessions* X: 18, p.229).

Augustine insists that happiness is recollected and reconstructed in the memory of the joys that occur in every person’s life. This concept is an important one for Augustine. The happy life cannot be experienced through another person, or through another person’s imagination, rather it must be collected from memories of individual, personal joy, vividly experienced. So happiness is individual, for everybody. “Is not the happy life the thing that all people desire, literally every single person without exception?” (*Confessions* X: 20, p.230).

There have been moments when it took all my strength to remember the joys I had experienced before in my life. It was an effort to even long for the happy life. Besides discipline to continue my effort I also needed the grace of God. “For there is still only a little light in people, and they must walk, yes, they must walk, that the darkness overtake them not” (*Confessions* X: 25, p.235). Depression may be one possible contemporary “translation” of what Augustine is referring to when he talks about darkness. Depression can be a dangerous thing: it immobilises, it takes away our zest for life, it cripples the memories of good times. Darkness so easily overshadows that little light that resides within us, we so easily blame God for all our misery and hardship. Even Augustine proclaims: “Is not man’s life upon earth trial without intermission?”

(*Confessions* X, 28, p.237). We must 'keep walking', keep searching for the truth and hold on to this little light, so that it will have the possibility to grow. It is in knowing that "it is in the process of dying and beginning anew." (*Confessions* XI: 7, p.266) that we realise the Truth.

What is this Truth that is discussed here? Why would Augustine's truth be my truth? He answers that truth is common property and that we have to watch our own opinions. "Your truth is not mine or this man's or that man's; it belongs to all of us because publicly, You call us to share it, warning us most terribly not to possess it as our private property, lest we be deprived of it" (*Confessions* XII: 25, p.309). In this search Augustine finds his peace, his peace being his acceptance of his need for God, a humble conclusion for a pride filled man: "The humble in heart are the house in which you dwell. For you raise up those who are bowed down; you are their height and from that height they do not fall" (*Confessions* XI: 43, p.256).

In the final book of *Confessions*, Augustine increases his use of scriptural phrases and speaking in a more authoritative voice to his audience. An audience that is no longer a male colleague but seems to be a congregation. Before he shared with us his past, describing the 'false' pleasures of his life and his conversion. In this last book he writes as a priest and bishop, a religious authority that reconstructs "true pleasure". He becomes more philosophical about his trustworthy source of peace, the pearl of true wisdom that he has found and which he wants to share with his audience. In this last book it is also noticeable that he is more conscious of his responsibility; he provides his readers with more assurance and conclusions. In philosophical terms he tries to communicate the reason for being restless. He sees people as being out-of-place, moving to find our proper place where we can be at rest, the place where we acknowledge to be embodied spiritual entities, sacred beings in the image of God: " Fire tends upwards, stone downwards. By their weight they are moved and seek their proper place. Oil poured over water is borne on the surface of the water, water poured over oil sinks below the oil: it is by their weight

that they are moved and seek their proper place and are at rest. My love is my weight: wherever I go my love is what brings me there. By your gift (the Holy Spirit) we are on fire and borne upwards: we flame and we ascend. In our heart we ascend and sing the song of degrees. It is by Your fire, your beneficent fire, that we burn and we rise, rise towards the peace of Jerusalem . . .”(Confessions XIII: 9, p.327).

### **III) A Contemporary and Personal Paraphrase of Augustine's Soul-Searching**

We are searching for happiness and for Augustine this happiness is peace, rest in God. Like Augustine I had to go through a time of tribulation, a time of being out-of-sync, but it is through this time that I finally recognised my own chaos and turned towards God, and by so turning exposed my soul to the light: “Being turned, by a change for the better” (Confessions XIII: 3, p.323). I found a new way of life, because: “over the dark and storm-tossed waters within us He moves in mercy” (Confessions XIII: 14, p.330). Gratefully I received this mercy. While before I was completely crippled due to my own compulsive behaviours, my addictions, my fears of failure and my low-self-esteem. I now was able to receive a new heart: “For the old things are passed away and behold all things are made new, and our salvation is nearer than when we believed: the night is passed, the day is at hand!”(Confessions XIII: 18, p.334). Even while writing this thesis I have had to face my own evils. Being dyslexic I was looking up at a colossal mountain, a stumbling block. I asked myself if I was capable of writing an academic research paper that will make sense not only to my professors but also to whoever else will have the desire to read it. The first draft, given to a friend for editing, made it dreadfully clear to me that indeed my spelling and grammar are obstacles to my goals, resulting in feelings of anxiety and nervousness. But it is in faith and hope, “For we are saved by hope” (Confessions XIII: 13, p.329) that I keep ploughing on. I asked for the

grace of God, to give me the strength, the perseverance, the hope of being able to bring this to a successful end. Where do I find this hope? Augustine explains to his readers that the wisdom and the love of God are to be found within ourselves. "It is no longer the voice of the apostle that speaks thus, it is Thine, who sent the Holy Spirit from above upon him." (*Confessions* XIII: 13, p.329).

And listening to this Voice within myself I am asked, just as Augustine is exhorting his readers to do, to not conform to this world but to be reformed in the newness of my mind. The newness of my mind allows me to overcome obstacles, allows me to make new, healthy and loving choices, choices I thought I could never make on my own. But I am not standing on my own, held in the love of God which inspires me to love myself and others. And by turning my face towards this light, allowing this light to fill my heart, the process of working on myself and of becoming whole has begun. I started to wash my soul as Augustine urged me to do: "be clean", "first wash yourselves", and "learn to do well" (*Confessions* XIII: 19, p.335). And by doing so I followed Augustine's advice: "be a doer of the law, not a judge" (*Confessions* XIII: 23, p. 341). It is so easy to see the speck in another person's eye while overlooking the beam in our own. It is so easy to blame everybody and everything, instead of looking within ourselves for possible solutions to the problems. What I had to learn was to take responsibility for my own actions. I understood that hiding behind habits that became necessities I was only in denial of what was really wrong with me. I understood that by blaming parents and other authority or non-authority figures I was still not in control of my own life. Our own free choices indicate to us who and what we really are. And by choosing to stand in the light I made a choice for the better: "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, to be content therewith" (*Confessions* XIII: 26, p. 346), "Now we have received not the spirit of this world, but the spirit that is of God" (*Confessions* XIII: 31, p.350). In this process of 'dying' to myself I begin anew, returning to the inner source of my being. "the good I now sought was not in things outside me" (*Confessions* IX: 4, p. 190). When the turning



point of my life (the literal turning of my soul towards the light) presented itself to me I understood that I first had to go through a purification process and I submitted myself to this cleansing procedure. While going through the transformation many new layers of 'inadequacies' presented themselves to me and had to be dealt with. For me healing is not an instantaneous occurrence, it is an everlasting ongoing process. The acceptance of the light was only the beginning of my growth towards a whole person. The following chapters explore a vision on inner-healing as a process of purification and renewal.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **THE HEALING MINISTRY OF JESUS**

#### **I) Sin and Suffering in the Old Testament**

When faced with an illness in today's modern technological times, we are accustomed to the idea of searching for a cure, but in the Old Testament days the opposite was true. Health and wealth were seen as the rewards of God, sickness and misfortune his punishments. From the beginning the Jewish law went into detail about the kind of disease Yahweh could send upon those who did not live by his covenant. In Leviticus for example consumption, fever, and pestilence were counted along with a variety of other penalties (26:16,25), and in Deuteronomy the list was greatly extended: "Yahweh will strike you down with Egyptian boils, with swellings in the groin, with scurvy and the itch for which you will find no cure. Yahweh will strike you down with madness, blindness, distraction of mind, until you grope your way at noontide like a blind man groping in the dark, and your steps will lead you nowhere." (28:27-29). In fact, there was really no end to the ailments Yahweh could produce to punish men for breaking the ritualistic or moral law. "This is how they got around the problem of evil, for it meant that the poor and suffering were only having divinely ordained punishment for their sin"<sup>4</sup>. Even those assigned to be priests were no longer worthy to approach holy things once illness or physical handicap had shown them to be profaned by sin. Again and again one is told that to follow wisdom and the law will bring health and long life, while to do otherwise will result in misery, misfortune, sickness, and death.

Real healing could only come from God and because of this point of view Hebrew ideas of medicine were quite different in some respects from those found among other

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<sup>4</sup> Sanford, John A. *The Kingdom Within: The Inner Meaning of Jesus' Sayings*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1987, p. 38.

peoples. While the secular practice of medicine was discussed in other ancient writings, it was barely mentioned in the Old Testament. Secular and religious practices of healing were very closely tied together but there was some ambivalence about healing rituals among the Hebrews. Those who practised medical healing were also versed in clairvoyance and magic and probably had relations with other gods, and so came in for condemnation. With sickness as a direct “gift” of Yahweh, it is hardly logical that such secular means would be considered effective, or that healing of any kind would be much encouraged.

In Jesus’ time there was healing among the Jews in spite of the fact that these incidents were looked upon with great suspicion by the rabbis. One can expect that men sought some relief from their sufferings, and so a form of ritual was used in which the healer whispered words adapted from Exodus 15:26: “If you listen carefully to the voice of Yahweh your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commandments and keep his statutes, I shall inflict on you none of the evils that I inflicted on the Egyptians, for it is I, Yahweh, who give you healing.”

The main schools of Judaism considered the practice involved here akin to sorcery and magic and forbade it, but the Talmud gave validity to its use. In several places there are references to the fact that those who employ such measures will have no share in the world to come. Since Jesus’ religious concern for the physical and mental welfare of men represented a turning away from his own religious upbringing, heritage and culture it is mentioned in the Talmud that he “was hanged on a tree on the Passover Eve because he practised sorcery”<sup>5</sup>.

Another belief about healing is preserved, it is the gigantic protest of the book of Job. Job simply challenges the theory described above. He was a righteous man, of this there was no doubt. He was firm and sincere in his religious profession. In his reaction to

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 41.

his suffering “Job is not a submissive, saintly sufferer, but a rebel against the injustice rampant in the affairs of the world, against the reign of evil, against a creator who refuses to answer the creature’s outraged address to Him.”<sup>6</sup> When Job ends up on the village dump former friends turn against him suggesting that he looks for sins of which he knows he is not guilty. His wife leaves him with the comforting recommendation that he curse God and die. Unquestionably the reactions of Job’s contemporaries represent the actual attitude of those days towards anyone struck down by misfortune and serious illness. These were signs that a man had lost God’s favour by his own fault and wickedness. But the peculiar attitude of Job is different: He is ready to face the One, asking for the seemingly impossible: to be heard and to be spoken to. Job wishes to face his enemy, to reason with him, to speak and to receive an answer. But there is no breakthrough to this estranged God. All Job can do is to affirm his integrity, express his cruel experience, and cry out for the seemingly impossible.

The whole book is a profound discussion of the problem of evil in human life. “In a broad sense, the issue is whether human individuals get what they merit or deserve in life”<sup>7</sup>. The problem of evil is beyond human solution; we do not see deeply enough to know how or why God deals as He does with the innocent, the upright, or the wicked. These things are beyond our reach and this is why Job becomes a voice crying in the wilderness. While Job criticises God and the horrible atrocities that befall him, the other characters in the book defend God’s governance of the world.<sup>8</sup> Spectators of suffering and of the grossest injustices tend to believe that the victims brought it on themselves. And the victims themselves suffer the further calamity of suspecting that they are indeed

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<sup>6</sup> Glatzer, Nahum N. *The Dimensions of Job*. New York: Schocken Books Inc. 1969, p. 2.

<sup>7</sup> Wilcox, John T. *The Bitterness of Job: a Philosophical Reading*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989, p. 9.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 9.

to blame. This view is always with us, "the theme of man's ignorance is relevant to the central problem"<sup>9</sup> and that is part of what gives the Book of Job its enduring relevance.

"But where shall wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding? Man does not know the way to it, And it is not found in the land of the living." (Job 28:12-13)

Even those men whose job it was to copy the text of Job disagreed with the presentation and its basic outlook. They disagreed so much that they even altered the text to bring it a little more in line with the orthodox Deuteronomic theory of the origin of suffering and sickness. "In the form in which it exists today, no one knows the meaning of many of its words and phrases; clearly, many lines have been altered or corrupted; sections seem transposed out of their original locations; passages may have been lost; additions seem to have been introduced."<sup>10</sup> Its influence is seen in other regions of Galilee where sickness was seen, at least partially, as the result of evil spirits rather than as coming solely from Yahweh. This, at any rate, was the strand of belief that Jesus brought forth. Looking at the ministry of Jesus, we see the contrast between his attitude and the official attitude both of Judaism and the Olympic gods. "We find that his life and acts, his teaching and practice, are rather akin to a shamanism based on an intimate relationship with a loving father God. The shaman is the mediator between the individual and spiritual reality, both good and evil, and because of this the healer of diseases of mind and body. In stepping into his healing role Jesus picks up the prophetic and shamanistic strand of the Old Testament tradition already mentioned."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p. 174.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, preface.

<sup>11</sup> Kelsey, Morton T., *Healing and Christianity: In Ancient Thought and Modern Times*. New York: Harper & Row, 1973, p. 51.

## **ID) The Healing Ministry of Jesus**

When reading the gospels one comes to understand that Jesus' main ministry was to bring relief from oppression: emotional, psychological, spiritual and physical. Sickness causes needless suffering, and in the midst of this suffering Jesus takes a stand: he suffers with the sufferer. He shows the root meaning of compassion: to know suffering together. From this point of view: "the healing ministry is the logical result of the incarnation: God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son; Jesus so loved that he healed."<sup>12</sup>

Another of Jesus' reasons for healing seems to have been that he was somehow hostile to what made people sick. He rebuked the forces that seemed to possess the mentally ill, and expressed the same antagonism towards physical illness. His underlying attitude was that the demon-possessed and physically ill were under the influence or control of an evil power. Some evil source seemed to have gained control or at least a partial influence over the sick person. Since Jesus by his very nature was opposed to this power, he wanted to bring it into subjection and in that way free men.

When we read the first chapter of the Gospel of Mark we can recognise a threefold ministry of Jesus— a ministry of preaching, teaching, and healing. Similar passages are found in Luke and Matthew. It is clear that this was the understanding of the writers and that the Gospels are a good summary of his total ministry. Jesus proclaimed the Good News, the present reality of the kingdom of heaven, now accessible to men. The kingdom, as Jesus proclaimed, may be viewed inwardly as well as eschatological (= doctrine of death and afterlife). Jesus and his followers undoubtedly looked for the immediate coming of the kingdom in history. However, the statements may also refer to the kingdom within, or the kingdom breaking through in history now. In other words, eschatology need not refer only to the future; the ideas of God acting at present and in

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p. 89.

final things are not mutually exclusive. This understanding of the dual meaning of Jesus' preaching will be carefully developed in a later stage.

Jesus' teachings showed people how the various aspects of their thinking, their devotional practice, and their behaviour related to God and also how God was coming into human life and history in a new way, through physical and mental healing. Wherever Jesus went he functioned as a religious healer. "Forty-one distinct instances of physical and mental healing are recorded in the four Gospels but this by no means represents the total. Many of these references summarise the healing of large numbers of persons. Those described in detail are simply the more dramatic instances of this activity of Jesus-according to the record and extensive ministry, to say the least."<sup>13</sup> Jesus sent his disciples out to continue that basic ministry (Mark 6:7-13, Matthew 10:5-10, Luke 9:1-6). The book of Acts records how well they carried out this commission. "There is even evidence outside the Gospel narrative for this aspect of the ministry of Jesus. In the Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 43a) we find the tradition that Jesus of Nazareth was hanged on a tree on the Passover Eve because he practised sorcery; he was destroyed because he healed by calling upon evil forces rather than upon God"<sup>14</sup>.

The ministry of healing of Jesus is certainly in line with the constant emphasis in His teachings on compassion and caring about one's neighbour. This stress on the importance of love is a most basic aspect of his teaching. One of the most concrete ways of expressing that love is through concern about another's physical and emotional well being, and the removal of torturing infirmities, physical hindrances, and mental or emotional illness. Through Jesus' healing ministry the people saw that God cared. By dealing with sickness and demon possession as the Messiah, Jesus laid the attitude of God toward sickness out on the counter where all could see it.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p. 54-55.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p. 57.

His teachings and his acts both reveal a point of view very different from the popular attitude presented to us by the rest of the ancient world. For the Jews in general, morality was a relatively simple matter of education and good will. Fear was used as an incentive to enforce the right way when good will was not present. Jesus, on the other hand, treated human beings as much more complex. He believed and taught that, up to a point, men do have conscious control of personality and that it should be exercised and developed. So much did he stress the importance of conscious control that it became one of the hallmarks of Christian society. In addition, however, "Jesus clearly believed that men could be influenced by 'spiritual powers' – i.e., by nonmaterial psychic realities."<sup>15</sup>. He was himself driven into the wilderness by the Spirit. He repeatedly referred to the Angels of God or the Son of man and his Angels. While Jesus understood that men could be helped or enlightened and directed by these positive spiritual powers, he also believed that they could be possessed by satanic forces. Demonic spirits made people sick physically, mentally, and morally. They could not be controlled by the conscious will of the individual, once it had been set aside by the alien power. The person's powers of knowing were not impaired; he knew that he was possessed but could do nothing about it. It was a matter of possessing the will, not of knowledge alone. The whole subject of Jesus' perception of man's relation to subtle underlying modes of psychic or spiritual reality has been ignored; it forms, however, such a basic part of his view of human personality that to ignore it is to do violence to his psychological point of view and his whole awareness of the nature of man and of healing.

One of the most challenging statements in the Gospels is Jesus' warning that one must lose one's life in order to save it; this implies that there are various levels of personality, and that to gain one of them another has to be sacrificed. One has to give up one's own will so that God's will, God's spirit, the Holy Spirit can become the centre of

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p. 113.



one's life. The human will or ego cannot stand against demonic infiltration and possession unless one is endowed with the Holy Spirit. This again shows clearly the complexity Jesus saw in human personality. "The only way to drive them out – to bring health of body, mind, and soul- was through the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit. This is characterised by love, by agape."<sup>16</sup>. Thus the injunction of Jesus that we love one another as he loved is not just an ethical maxim. It also has healing implications. Only a life characterised by love can give hospitality to the Spirit of God. As this Spirit resides in man, he builds up defences against alien forces so that they cannot attack and possess him, at the same time helping others to mobilise their own personalities and so become free of similar domination. This is the reason why Jesus had so much compassion for the sick. Men who were sick and in trouble morally needed understanding and compassion, not judgement and punishment. They were up against realities or forces that the human will could not handle on its own; they needed help, and Jesus responded to their need.

Jesus demonstrated his point of view in opposition to almost the entire Judaic and Greek culture of his time. At least six of his healings were done on the Sabbath to show his own people how important it was to set aside statutes of external observance when there was an opportunity to help a sick or disabled person. In doing so he was breaking the religious law; it was offending the Sabbath rule, supposedly the highest demand God made. "The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath; so the Son of Man is master even of the sabbath." (Mark 2:27-28/Matt. 12:8/Luke 6:5). In this way Jesus made it clear that people are more important to God than rules, that the best of religious rules and institutions exist for the benefit of human beings, not the other way around. Jesus' treatment was intended as a general way for men to treat one another. As such, it was (and still is) a radically new attitude towards men, with all sorts of implications beyond the healing ministry.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid. p. 64.

If Jesus had one mission, it was to bring the power and healing of God's creative, loving Spirit to the moral, mental, and physical illnesses of the people around him. Jesus demonstrated a new power, a ladder to bring man out of the pit of his brokenness and sin. Leaving man in his wretched condition in order to learn from it makes no sense in this psychological framework. Judgement and punishment only add to a burden already intolerable.

Healing, then, is one way of opening men's eyes to the wonderful nature and power of God, so that men who are healed or see healing performed begin to take God and the religious life more seriously. This has been my own experience. People who feel the power of God through physical or psychological healing often become more spiritually inclined. I also think that Jesus healed because he wanted to help man towards repentance. He was quite conscious of the relation between sin and sickness and of man's need for a spur towards wholeness. Whether God wants perfect health for all men at all times we cannot know, but it is certain that he wants wholeness and salvation for each individual.

The evidence of the early church affirms that the ministry carried on by Jesus was continued among his followers. On the basis of Acts and the epistles, taken together, we can come to no other conclusion than that the early Christians seemed to have a power and Spirit greater than their own, which worked through them and gave them unusual resources to deal with the physical and mental illnesses of men. There are different theories of how the Holy Spirit was received but, regardless how, we find the apostles using the same basic sacramental approach as Jesus. Some words or touch were important as an outward and visible sign of an inner grace, a spiritual energy. It was not magic. If the same Spirit would be in church today as it was in that time, then the same things could happen again. Unless one disputes the entire record as fact, or restricts it by some framework like dispensationalism, there is no other conclusion possible.

### **III) Jesus and the Inner Kingdom**

One of the greatest needs of our age is for a way through life that will lead to a conscious awareness of ourselves which can be established through a creative personal relationship with God. This stands in complete contrast to the merging of our individual identity with a collective organisation. Many of us find our sense of identity only in membership, be it of a church, a nation, a political party, or the gang on the street corner. This need is especially apparent to psychologists, therapists, spiritual counsellors and healers alike. If we ignore the needs of the inner person, a vacuum has been created that must be filled. In order to fill the vacuum we try to find different possibilities such as becoming members of a (strict) movement or in desperation turn to drugs, alcohol, even war, as a means of escape from this inner isolation and as a compulsive expression of the sickness within us. The less structure we have within ourselves, the more we will try to find it outside ourselves.

The whole self exists in each of us as a potentiality and seeks to be realised in the life process. We need to learn individually to recognise our own potential and with it our sacredness. We need to learn to think individually and not so much collectively. Our dreams for example express the urge for realisation of the whole person within us and give us insight into this inner unconscious world.<sup>17</sup> To realise the whole, however, the conscious ego must come into a creative relationship with the inner mind and be constantly expanding in order to give greater and greater expression to the full scope of the personality. But our collective nature makes us fear individuality with its demands for freedom and consciousness. We suppress our inner world, so that we don't destroy that identification with the group.

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<sup>17</sup> As an example Sandford uses the dream of King Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 2: 29-30) observed by David clarifying that the meaning of dreams represent the "thoughts" of our inner mind which is our unconscious. Whereas our conscious minds think conceptually, the unconscious expresses itself in the symbolic language of dreams. Sandford, p. 12.

Our dreams and Jesus' teachings are images in which we may see our selves reflected. The sayings of Jesus however are not to be 'psychologized'. It would be dangerous to reduce what Jesus has said and to equate his images with the jargon of some particular psychological creed. The beauty of the teachings of Jesus is that they do not depend on any system of thought. Jesus did not express himself by means of jargon but by means of living images, figures, and parables. In this way he succeeded in freeing his message from history and making it timeless and applicable to all ages. His teachings are drawn from the well of life itself.

Very often in the history of Christianity theologians and teachers have dwelt on the unworthiness of human beings in contrast to God's supreme goodness; they even had man responsible for evil (the story of Adam and Eve). There is none of this in the teachings of Jesus. He believes human beings are potentially of the highest value, the inheritors of God's very own kingdom. Jesus wants us to harbour the kingdom within our own soul and by the use of images or figures Jesus is trying to open the door to this mysterious reality for us. In chapter I, Augustine finds a pearl of great value and although Augustine was hesitating still to buy it, through reading St. Paul the parable became clear to him: "The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field which someone has found: he hides it again, goes off happy, sells everything he owns and buys the field." (Matt. 13:44).

There is an inner reality within each of us that is like a great treasure lying hidden in the field of our soul waiting to be discovered. Augustine was dying to discover this treasure within his own soul. When someone finds this inner treasure and recognises its value, he/she hopefully will happily give up all other ambitions in order to make it real in his or her life. There is a second parable to compare the first one with: "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls, when he finds one of great value he goes and sells everything he owns and buys it." (Matt. 13:45-46).

In the first parable the kingdom is a treasure that *we* search for and find; in the second parable the kingdom is likened to a merchant who is searching for things of value. In this case *we* are the pearls, the treasure found by the kingdom of God. So the wonderful thing is that the kingdom is both that which we find within ourselves as an inner treasure and also that which is searching to find us. *We* are the fine pearls if the kingdom can take root within us, and to us God gives a place of supreme value in his creation.

The importance of the kingdom of God has not gone unnoticed by scholars and theologians, many volumes have been written on the subject. They have tried to relate Jesus' ideas of the kingdom of God to ideas already prevailing before his time. These scholars often related this kingdom to a materialistic world instead of the possibility that this kingdom could have been a kingdom of the inner spiritual reality. They neglected the inner experience, the experience of growing to wholeness, to an increasing sense of the meaning of our individual personality, a realisation of new and creative energies, and of the growth of our consciousness. How can inner reality be recognised? My own experience is that it came through a sudden insight into my own being, either through my lived experiences or through reading material that all of a sudden started to make sense. Augustine himself mentions the importance of studying and reading and the impact it had on his life. The mystery of the kingdom and the knowledge thereof can only be grasped through one's individual insight and experience (Jesus knew the difficulties involved and used parables to help people in this process). How can one understand love, pure love of the highest level if one has not experienced it? How can one understand the meaning of suffering if one has not been exposed to it? How can we comfort a person who experienced rape for example or the death of one's child through a long painful illness or accident? One only understands the deep life sucking pain if one has indeed experienced the reality of it. Sometimes there are no answers, just pain. The same goes for happy experiences. Augustine is very aware of this point; he shares with us that the happy life

cannot be experienced through another person, or through another person's imagination, rather it must be collected from memories of individual personal joy, vividly experienced (*Confessions* X: 11, p.222).

We need to recognise that every personal experience is so unique that each one of us will have our own inner conception of the inner teaching. There is a natural tendency to want an instantaneous, complete experience. But since we are only beginners we could never handle such a load of information and training at the same time. Growing towards the kingdom and therefore the 'Light', is a process in a person's life that begins seemingly small and insignificant but through a process of *growth* becomes a mighty power.

The kingdom of heaven is the reality of growth in a person's life that causes the whole person to achieve completeness. There needs to be a constant seeking to bring about wholeness and fulfilment. This inner growth potential is regarded by most people as small, insignificant, and valueless, and the important things are said to be outside of ourselves. Yet it is through the acceptance of the inner power for growth that our lives rise and become fulfilled. When we go on this journey we shed all kinds of bondage in order to come to the place that we call inner freedom. And this journey is a here-and-now experience. "...the kingdom of heaven is close at hand ..." (Matt. 4:17 10:7, and many parallels).

It is in the present that we need to deal with our pain and the obstacles to finding our way to freedom and the search for a radical transformation of character that is rebirth. When we decide to go on this spiritual journey we have to face the fact that part of our old 'us' has to die in order to give birth to a new 'us'. "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). The reason I think so many people stay away from a possible journey is because it does require a certain amount of sacrifice on our part. We need to let our "ego" go; we need to comprehend that certain parts of our behaviour are destructive and that at times we even deny our deeply rooted need for inner

peace. Jesus never promised us an easy ride, on the contrary:“...n arrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.” (Matt. 7:14).

What many of us do not comprehend is that the pain of shedding our ego may be deeply intensified, in the long run it is the road to freedom creating space for intensified joy, happiness and love. This freedom is worth all that we own, all that we desire. And we need to be daring enough to be willing to take this road. My own experience was such that I craved to find the ‘Light’. I did not know where to start but to simply pray “God, Cosmic power, whatever you are, lead me towards the Light”. I did not know that my desire for light was deeper and stronger than the bondage I was in. This simple prayer became a daily repetition. It took more than half a year before I finally decided to actually ask for help and those six months seemed like an eternity, because inside I was dying. I can say with sadness that I have seen, tasted and lived death to the depths of my being, it tore me apart, the will to live was barely there and it was in this moment of my deepest darkness, of “ the darkest night of my soul...” (Teresa of Avila)<sup>18</sup> that I cried out for God to have mercy, to lead me towards the Light. We are not alone on this road to recovery. All great Saints and many unknown Saints have gone through these moments of deep darkness. Augustine pours his heart out in his deepest, darkest hour of the night, weeping most bitterly, feeling trapped. But it is in this deep painful dark moment that he hears a voice singing to him. It was in this deep dark painful moment that I felt a presence, a comforting sense of not being truly alone. And at that moment of sheer despair it became a choice of either death or life. Life is the dawn of a new morning, the sun that rises once again. “Why do you stand upon yourself and so not stand at all? Cast

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<sup>18</sup> Teresa of Avila wrote a book called ‘Interior Castle’ in which she parallels the soul as if it were a castle made of a single diamond, in which there are many rooms, just as she sees many rooms in Heaven. These mansions are arranged variously and in the center and midst of them all is the chiefest mansion, where the most secret things pass between God and the soul. She uses this figure to describe the whole course of the mystical life- the transformation of the soul having to go first from the outer mansions towards the inner sanctity of the King (there are seven mansions in all). When one wants to enter the castle one needs to enter through prayer and meditation. Once inside one must also cultivate self-knowledge and humility. She uses maxims such as self-knowledge, humility, detachment and suffering.

yourself upon Him and be not afraid; He will not draw away and let you fall" (*Confessions* VIII: 11, p.177). By a sheer act of will, I forced myself to a church, where I prayed for deliverance from this darkness, and it is here where my experience of 'shedding my old self' started to make sense. A new Gabrielle was given the opportunity to rise and to flourish. But this process was only possible when I was also willing to allow the death of my former self. Parts of me had to die, the parts of addiction, of chaotic reasoning and being in need of love. Why is it that we always look for love in those places where it cannot be found? What I have learned from my experience is that when I feel disrespectful towards myself, unbalanced and messed up, I attract unbalanced, disrespectful people. When I do not respect myself how can I expect someone else to respect me? When I do not know my own boundaries how can I expect someone else to know them for me? When I was trying to get out of my dark 'life-style' my 'friends' could no longer understand or connect with me. During this process I kept on praying. What I understood from sporadic reading in the Bible was that Jesus was inviting me to relate to God. He was inviting me to an individual participation in the kingdom, which I could achieve through the process of inner growth into wholeness and creativity. And from this point of view the kingdom became for me a personal reality. "The kingdom of God is within you." (Luke 17:21). I was dumbfounded by my own ability to comprehend this teaching because when I looked within myself I could only see darkness and therefore I protested at first with all my strength against this concept. If what is within me is supposed to be the kingdom, I am in trouble, I am lost, I will never make it. I was in panic. "For it was there, there in the place where I had been angry with myself, inside, in my own room, there where I had been pierced . . . there it was that you began to grow sweet to me." (*Confessions* IX: 4, p.190). My darkness was so in contrast with the Light (the reason why we cannot expect a quick fix to spiritual enlightenment) that it blinded me. I understood that entrance into the kingdom required a more moral life



from me, not the morality of socially imposed and implemented rules and regulations, but a morality that is founded on self-knowledge:

“ For I tell you, if your virtue goes no deeper than that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never get into the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:20).

How can one find this self-knowledge? The answer is: through inner confrontation. As a society we have created a law system because of the darkness that exists within our psyche. It would not be necessary to have laws against murder, adultery, stealing, coveting, and slander if there was not a part of our personality that might do exactly these things. Our law system is built to prevent the dangers caused by our inner ‘shadows’. But the higher morality requires confronting the shadow within us. By confronting we achieve a new and stronger moral attitude towards ourselves and life. The need for self-confrontation for those who wish to belong to the kingdom is of paramount importance to Jesus. We find it in his first utterance: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is close at hand” (Matt. 3:2). And in such shocking statements as this one to the Pharisees, “I tell you solemnly, tax collectors and prostitutes are making their way into the kingdom of God before you.” (Matt. 21:31).

The Pharisees were the most meticulous of the entire community in keeping the Law. But precisely because of their success in this, they were convinced of their own righteousness and therefore failed to see their inner “shadow” side. As a result there was no moral self-confrontation. “But for the tax collector and prostitute, who were all too aware of their shadow side, there was always the possibility for self-confrontation and so for a truly moral consciousness”<sup>19</sup>.

It is this self-confrontation that leads to commitment to the inner way of the kingdom and to the realisation that the kingdom of God is a process, a journey, a life’s work. There are moments we yearn for the less conscious life which we enjoyed before

because due to its demanding nature this inner journey can be painful and difficult. When I desperately wanted to forget about this path I had started on, I had to ask myself: could I stop this inner work if I wanted to? The answer was no, I have no choice but to continue this way. If I indeed want to find freedom within, I need to go through this process of change. My old self had to die, in order to give space to the birth of a higher moral and psychological consciousness. “. . . it is in the process of dying and beginning anew.” (*Confessions* XI: 7, p.266). Death of oneself is painful no matter how one looks at it, but the prize to be won is worth so much that I plough forward. “I tell you solemnly, unless you change and become like little children you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. And so, the one who makes himself as little as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” (Matt. 18:3-4/Mark 9:35-37/Luke 9:47-48).

For this reason Jesus was going about the countryside teaching that wholeness is the essence of the kingdom. The essence of wholeness brings meaning and creativity. I started to belong to Life thanks to the fact that I gave a meaning to my own death. And my death joined me to the fabric of eternal life, God's ultimate promise of his kingdom firmly established within me.

#### **IV) The Way to Enter the Kingdom**

The only way to enter the Kingdom is as conscious individuals. This requires independence of the group and the collective thinking mechanism. As long as we are identifying ourselves with a group consciousness, we are taking the road of instincts, attitudes and mass movements that are easy to follow. Being submerged in a group, I found a certain security, it gave me a sense of belonging while the separation process brought forth anxiety due to individual differentiation from the group. The responsibility

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<sup>19</sup> Sanford, p. 36.

of choice became apparent. Jesus himself states in the Sermon on the Mount: "Enter by the narrow gate, since the road that leads to perdition is wide and spacious, and many take it; but it is a narrow gate and a hard road that leads to life, and only a few find it" (Matt. 7:13-14/Luke 13:24). The narrow road towards the kingdom requires consciousness, close attention, lest we wander off the path. Only few take it because of its individual character and because it entails the hardship of becoming conscious. Jesus also declares in Matt. 10:34 that it is not peace that he comes to bring, but a sword. A sword is the symbol of division, of separation; separating what was once merged together in order that my individual differentiation may take place.

My recognition of having been injured and hurt in some way in life made me most apt to come into the kingdom. There is no virtue in my weakness or injury as such, especially if my road leads to self-pity, which completely defeats my creative purposes of the kingdom. When I recognised my own need, even my despair, I became ready for the kingdom. If I were to feel self-sufficient, if I were to uphold my one-sided orientation, I would remain caught in my egocentricity. This is, I think, why Jesus so often associated with sinners and tax collectors, and why he was generally unable to have a relationship with the Pharisees, for the latter, as a rule, were upheld in their egocentricity by their privileged position in society and by their conviction of their own righteousness. But the moment I accepted my own sinfulness and confronted my sins is the moment that I became receptive to the kingdom. "The humble in heart are the house in which you dwell. For you raise up those who are bowed down; you are their height and from that height they do not fall." (*Confessions* XI: 43, p.256). The ones who seem the least fit for the kingdom are those who come to enter into it. "The wedding is ready; but as those who were invited proved to be unworthy, go to the crossroads in the town and invite everyone you can find." (Matt. 22:8-9). In Luke's version it is stated even more forcibly: "Then the householder, in a rage, said to his servant, "Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in here the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame ...Go to the open

roads and the hedgerows and make people to come in so that my house will be full.” (Luke 14:21,23).

I felt I was personally invited to come to the banquet knowing very well that life forced me to concede to myself that I was a sinner, poor, psychologically crippled, maimed, even blind. But thanks to this realisation I was irresistibly aroused to enter into a great feast. I was invited to come and celebrate. How could I pass this invitation?

I would like to prevent a possible misunderstanding; the passage mentioned above can give us an impression that the entrance into the kingdom is not demanding. The opposite is true. The Gospel of Matthew says: “But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. ‘Friend’ he asked, ‘how did you get in here without wedding clothes?’ The man was speechless. Then the king told the attendants, ‘Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ For many are invited, but few are chosen.” (Mat. 22:11-14).

Sanford gives us a historical background for such harsh behaviour. He explains that it was the custom in the ancient Orient for a nobleman who invited someone to his house for a special occasion to send with his messenger a special garment to be worn by the guest. To wear this garment was both an honour and a badge of protection to the person as he travelled on the way to the court. To arrive without the garment was the height of carelessness and rudeness. From this explanation we understand that there is a demanding aspect to the kingdom, and that our attempts to enter frequently create a crisis. As we have seen, all of the old person and all the old attitudes are challenged by the kingdom. Our response to this challenge is crucial and determines whether we will go the way of creativity or the way of unconsciousness. This is the ‘ego crisis’, a time of judgement but also of opportunity. God is challenging us to an inner attitude, not an intellectual faith that consists in giving assent to creedal doctrines. It is a commitment to an inner way regardless of what comes, determination to know the One who is at the

centre of the conflict. It is in this sense that the story of the calming of the storm is to be understood. In this story Jesus falls asleep in a boat while crossing over to the other side of the lake. A storm comes and the little boat of the disciples, their tiny ego standpoint, is tossed to and fro on turbulent seas. Terrified they rouse the Master: "Then he woke up and rebuked the wind and the rough water; and they subsided and it was calm again. He said to them, 'Where is your faith?'" (Luke 8:22-25).

Many times I had (and still have) to endure high storms, my ego being so fragile. But the inner world as well as the outer world are trying to remain obedient to God. With faith in this power of God, I was (and am) able to endure those storms. Ultimately the power to withstand the storm of exposure to the inner world is the rock of consciousness of the Love of God. And so I found myself called to seek fulfilment not through absorption or fulfilment in and through another person as I was so quickly apt to do, but through a relationship first with myself and therefore with God. I am not talking about egotism. It is not a matter of living only for myself but of being able to come into real relationships with people, since now for the first time I am a real person. And because of that my circle of relationships now grows. I no longer confine my relatedness to those of my own circle, to my own group, but I am more inclined to respond to all kinds and types of persons. Now I can leave my narrow-mindedness and can understand what it means to be part of the human family under a common heavenly Cosmic Consciousness and build genuine person-to-person relationships. We all suffer, we all struggle, we all feel pain, we all have insecurities and idiosyncrasies and, with these, we also enjoy the beauty of life and moments of sheer happiness, regardless of our colour, our creed, our belief, our prejudices, our nationality or our personal histories and the masks that we wear. Becoming myself means to face my own nakedness which lies behind all the masks I have used to identify myself with. And beyond my masks I find myself to be a child of God. We are all children of God and as such we are challenged to go on the painful road of individuation which in the long run brings great treasure. "Shoulder my yoke and

learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. Yes, my yoke is easy and my burden light.”(Matt.11:29-30). The yoke of Christ is the yoke of becoming conscious. This yoke is a burden, as we have seen, requiring our total commitment. But it is our road to inner freedom, where we can expect many issues and questions to come our way. It is therefore that I now will turn to a series of issues and questions one probably will find oneself faced with after the initial step is taken, wanting to shoulder the yoke that has been offered to us by divine providence.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **THE HOPE FOR HEALING HUMAN EVIL**

#### **D) Theological View of the Devil**

The Christian Church teaches us that when we are not whole, we are susceptible to the power of darkness. This can lead to confusion in our choice making. Jesus was aware of a spiritual 'warfare' within and without our psyche. He therefore not only cured the sick he also cast out devils and these powers he passed on to his followers. Since we are speaking of the devil and demons it is inevitable we look at the theological view of the Devil.

According to Rodewyk in his book *Possessed by Satan* a devil is a fallen angel: "Devils are angels, which means that they are totally bodiless spirits. Being spirits, devils have minds and free will, just like angels; like them, too, they are gifted with sharp and penetrating minds and tremendous will power. Their minds are only weakened because their sinful rebellion against God was followed by loss of their supernatural illumination and supernatural powers. The remaining, merely natural powers are nevertheless so great that one is justified in calling devils 'superspirits'."<sup>20</sup>

Michael Scanlan in his book *Deliverance from evil Spirits* calls Satan the deceiver of the whole world.<sup>21</sup> While Martin Israel in his book *Exorcism, the removal of evil influences*, gives a specific essence to the devil, the essence of "the desire to seduce another person and then to feed parasitically on them. In the end the victim is discarded barely alive or even dead while the predator enjoys their fill."<sup>22</sup> Scott Peck, a famous

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<sup>20</sup> Rodewyk, Adolf. *Possessed by Satan: the Church's Teaching on the Devil, Possession, and Exorcism*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1975, p. 22.

<sup>21</sup> Scanlan, Michael. *Deliverance from Evil Spirits: A Weapon for Spiritual Warfare*. Michigan: Servant Books, 1980, p. 16.

<sup>22</sup> Israel, Martin. *Exorcism: the removal of Evil Influences*. London: SPCK, 1997, p. 46.

Christian psychologist, on the other hand defines evil as “the use of power to destroy the spiritual growth of others for the purpose of defending and preserving the integrity of our own sick selves.”<sup>23</sup> From these different descriptions we can conclude that Evil has to do with harming and ultimately tries to kill the spirit within us.

There is a sound basis in Scripture, theology and Christian tradition for the existence of evil in this world. Scripture clearly talks about two kingdoms; we have the kingdom of God which is to be found within us, as explained in chapter II, and the kingdom of Satan which is antagonistic toward God’s kingdom (Mt. 12:25-28). According to Scanlan’s line of argumentation: “Satan’s kingdom is the kingdom of this world” (Lk 4:5-6). “In his enmity toward God, the ruler of this kingdom wants to stifle the life of the kingdom of God growing within men. Satan does so through his own personal activity in the hearts of men” (Mt 13:19), “and also through the people, ideas, and events which make up the kingdom of all ages” (Mt. 13:22). “The two kingdoms – God’s and Satan’s – exist side by side in this world” (Mt 13:38), “and yet the two can be clearly distinguished because of their deeds”(Jn 3:19-21). “The sons and daughters of the kingdom can be known quite easily because their actions are different from those of the sons and daughters of the world” (Mt. 5:18). “It is this kingdom of Satan which the Son of God has come to destroy” (Jn 12:31).

This view of Satan explains a major part of Jesus’ public ministry which was oriented towards casting out demons (Mk 1:34) and in so doing, according to Scanlan, he announced the downfall of Satan’s kingdom. Jesus clearly says that his power to exorcise evil spirits heralds the arrival of a greater and stronger kingdom – the kingdom of God (Mt 12:28). But while we await the full realization of the kingdom of God, we are confronted by the stark reality that evil still abounds in the world. Scanlan sees it as a fact that we live between the initial coming of the kingdom of God and its full and final

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<sup>23</sup> Peck, Scott M. *People of the Lie: the Hope for Healing Human Evil*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1983, p. 119.



establishment, which therefore brings us to the heart of a spiritual warfare! In his opinion there is only struggle and opposition. For the light and truth and righteousness of the kingdom of God can have nothing to do with the lies and darkness and sin of the kingdom of Satan. We live in an interim period between the mortal blow dealt to Satan by the cross and the final destruction of his kingdom when the Lord comes again. And in this warfare "God desires that men and women come to him; receive his love, forgiveness and abundant life and share in the very life of God by becoming a member of his family" while "Satan desires that men and women be in complete bondage to Satan himself through bondage to the world and sin."<sup>24</sup> The conclusion I make from Scanlan is that God is actually fighting a divine war and man is born into the midst of this struggle. Scanlan declares that by its very nature men must fight in it. No one can escape from it. Every man and woman must choose whom they will serve.

The questions I am left behind with is: If God is all powerful, as we believe Him to be, is He not allowing us to commit all our evil deeds? Or are we saying that God created the world and beings but is not able to control it?

## **II) Evil, Part of Divine Creation?**

Strachan points out in his book *Casting out the Devils* that from birth on we are very strongly conditioned by duality. The eternal battle between good and evil, or the animal self and the divine has been retold throughout the ages in many ways. "We are taught from the cradle that male and female relationships can create perfect love, and that day balances night, that black is the opposite of white. But people do not like to admit that good balances evil, and that this, like the others, is a perfect balance. Bad, like good,

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<sup>24</sup> Scanlan, p. 11.

is a very necessary ingredient for the evolution of man.”<sup>25</sup> Christianity on the other hand denies that the principle of evil is as necessary and eternal as God. In Christianity the Devil sinned by trying to be equal to God. But what would have happened to Christianity if there had not been a Judas, would Christ never have been crucified?

Israel states that what we call ‘evil’ is part of the divine creation, almost the divine will, for without the constant challenge to grow in spiritual awareness and stature we would remain stuck in a state of ignorance.

### **IID) Possession**

Before going into the subject of Possession it needs to be clarified that we are not completely powerless in the face of evil, we as humans have a say in the matter. The power of the Devil is held subject to the limitation that he cannot affect the free will or spiritual being of man, so the Devil or evil can only approach through the gate of moral weakness. The Church teaches that if one does not recognise evil as such it will get in and satisfy what are really artificial needs. An artificial need is based on the desire for comfort e.g. to not feel the pain of an unhappy life, to not have to tire yourself out with self-interrogation and confronting your own responsibilities. Thus the need for escape is created. An occasional joint for example can then easily become a ‘must’ every evening, a habit, an (artificial) need (see also Chapter I, Augustine). Israel believes that these parasites ‘eat’ their way into the person’s body, mind and spirit, distorting the view and knowledge of life. If a person continues to give in to his weakness, gradually it becomes a necessity and the necessity unchallenged will become so strong that finally the ‘Devil’ completely takes over, and the person becomes what is known as possessed. A possessed person has lost his free will and choice in the particular matter, which usually carries over

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<sup>25</sup> Strachan, p. 25.

to other areas of life e.g. the need to be stoned affects social contacts. How can a person become possessed in the first place? "In every case without exception, it starts with an inherent weakness in the make-up of the individual which either the person is unaware of, or has not bothered to rectify."<sup>26</sup> The conclusion I therefore make is that possession itself is no accident, it appears to be a gradual process in which the possessed person repeatedly gives in for one reason or another.

Micheal Scanlan is far more aggressive in explaining evil in our daily life: "Many of the problems blamed on physical, hormonal, psychological and environmental factors are actually the work of evil spirits."<sup>27</sup> He warns his readers that evil is able to camouflage itself. "They carry out their work in such a way that people think the havoc they cause is merely the natural working of human life."<sup>28</sup> He continues the argument that demonic temptation can take place at various levels. And at its most profound level, satanic temptation can result in domination over a person which seems impossible to overcome. Demonic temptation ranges from simple everyday occurrences to bizarre thoughts and expressions. It encompasses everything from "little white lies" to adultery and murder. The main purpose in demonic temptation is to trap people in sin and keep them off-guard. They look for opportunities to use men's weaknesses to their own advantage. They look for spiritual, physical, emotional, and mental weakness. Keeping close watch on these areas, they look for occasions to strike and inflict whatever damage they can do. They will maintain their hold on an area as long as they remain unchallenged. When the person does not resist the temptation but gives in to it, it can lead to serious sin. As characteristics of evil activity Scanlan mentions its insistent, overwhelming quality and its compulsive nature.

There are many temptations that the Christian authors call the work of evil spirits. In their opinion, if it is the work of evil spirits, the problem will not get resolved until the

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p. 39.

<sup>27</sup> Scanlan, p. 37.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p. 37.

demonic force behind it is unmasked and directly resisted. We as people will never be completely free of temptations. Some freedom from them can be gained by living a wholesome and stable life, but even a sinless life wouldn't prevent demonic temptation. Jesus lived a perfectly sinless life, though he was tempted many times by the Devil. However, being vulnerable to demonic temptation is not the same as being helpless. Some of us will try to live this 'holy' life in order to escape temptation by the Devil, but this is impossible. One cannot isolate oneself from evil because evil is part of being human (there is a little bit of Judas (or Hitler) in all of us). "If a complete spiritual quarantine is imposed between the devil and his courtiers and ordinary people, there will be no meeting of minds and therefore no growth in knowledge or sympathy."<sup>29</sup> Any form of rigidity can become a form of possession, it distorts clarity of mind and view, it limits thinking and with it knowledge so wisdom cannot be acquired. For example politicians and power-seekers use this to their own ends therefore we as individuals in society, should be aware of that. It is important for us to allow different philosophies to 'touch' our minds; it broadens our perspectives. If we were to mix only with those whom we liked and admired, we would become increasingly static in our sympathies and attitudes. The Devil and his entourage bring us aspects of reality, including especially those characteristics of ourselves that lie hidden from our own sight, though clear to see for those around us. "But the dividing line where the Devil can be a positive purifier or a negative hindrance is extremely fine, and prayer for guidance can be a very powerful aid in these circumstances. It is a razor-edged path and one should know one's own limitations for the Devil can be extremely subtle."<sup>30</sup>

Israel describes two main ways of preventing demonic attack: the first one is like immunization against infectious disease and the second one is developing spiritual power

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<sup>29</sup> Israel, Martin. *Exorcism: the removal of Evil Influences*. London: SPCK, 1997, p. 110.

<sup>30</sup> Strachan, p. 118.

to combat evil directly by confrontation. The first way mentioned can have only a limited effect, for no scheme of personal isolation has any hope of permanence. In the second option we need to develop our own spiritual resources from inside ourselves, by doing so there arises a focus of spiritual power that can drive out all psychic evil and eventually become a zone of intense spiritual light, which is the way we recognize the Divine Presence.

What we can conclude from Israel and Strachan is that good and evil cannot be eliminated, in the same way that day and night or masculine and feminine cannot be eliminated. All one can do is to balance the black and white forces within one self through knowledge and understanding of God, and right-judgement of the concepts of good and evil. "Christianity especially fights shy of evil and the Devil, instead of realizing its intrinsic value – that the demonic force is the essential purifier. 'God judged it better to bring good out of evil than to suffer no evil to exist.' (St. Augustine, *Enchirid*, XXVII)." <sup>31</sup>

As good and evil are the basis of most orthodox religious beliefs, so the ego and the shadow are the terms generally used in analytical psychology; the shadow containing the hidden, repressed, and sometimes offensive aspects of the personality. But the positive side of the shadow incorporates the instincts and creative impulses. "Like good and evil, ego and shadow, although separate, are inextricably linked together, in the same way that thought and feeling are related." <sup>32</sup>

Until we get rid of all conditioned conceptions concerning good and evil we will not be capable of understanding intuitively the true nature of God. But conditioning is

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p. 28.

<sup>32</sup> Strachan, p. 117. Strachan further more explains that Dr. C. Jung once called the constant conflict between the ego, or conscious mind, and the shadow or unconscious 'the battle for deliverance. Dr. Jung's philosophy is that an individual needs to realize that his shadow exists, when he recognizes it he then can draw strength from it and is able to expand his consciousness to unlimited depths. But it is essential that he also comes to terms with its destructive powers which basically means that before the ego can triumph it must master and assimilate the shadow.

not an easy thing to eradicate, for we fearfully accept evil rather than confront and try to understand it.

#### **IV) Possession: A Mental Illness?**

There are numerous references to possessed people in the Gospels. Jesus clearly differentiated between possession and disease. He told his disciples, when he first sent them into the world, "Cure the sick ...cast out devils" (Matt. 10:8). Later, when he gave them his power to drive out devils, he said, "In my name they will cast out devils ...they will lay their hands on the sick" (Mark 16:17-18). Does this mean that possession is not an illness but a psychological phenomenon? Rodewyk's point of view is that possession is not an illness: "It is, therefore, not a medical problem but a religious and consequently a theological problem."<sup>33</sup> Scott Peck argues against this line of thinking; he takes the position that evil should be regarded as a mental illness. His final argument of not labelling evil as an illness is the belief that evil is a seemingly untreatable condition. He questions whether a cure is possible or whether we can just sigh and say: 'It's beyond us', even if it is the greatest problem of mankind. He believes that it is fear that drives the evil-possessed. "They are terrified that the pretense will break down and they will be exposed to the world and to themselves."<sup>34</sup> Of all emotions, fear is the most painful, the most crippling and for that reason Peck sees that these people are to be pitied- not hated- because they live their lives in terror. "So chronic, so interwoven into the fabric of their being, that they may not even feel it as such".<sup>35</sup> Peck labels evil as a mental illness because he believes that illness and disease should be defined as any defect in the

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<sup>33</sup> Rodewyk, Adolf. *Possessed by Satan: the Church's Teaching on the Devil, Possession, and Exorcism*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1975, p. 21.

<sup>34</sup> Peck, Scott M. *People of the Lie: the Hope for Healing Human Evil*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1983, p. 124.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, p. 125.

structure of our bodies or our personalities that prevents us from fulfilling our potential as human beings. Fear inhibits any spiritual and emotional growth potential and possible transformation. According to Peck, the fact that we do not know how to treat evil in the human individual is to him the best reason to consider it a disease. The label of disease implies that the disorder is not inevitable, that healing should be possible, that it should be studied scientifically and methods of treatment should be sought. "The designation of evil as a disease also obligates us to approach the evil with compassion. By their nature the evil inspire in us a desire to destroy than to heal, to hate than to pity. While these natural reactions serve to protect the uninitiated, they otherwise prevent any possible solution."<sup>36</sup>

## **V) Freeing the Possessed: Exorcism**

There are varying degrees of possession and regardless of the degree, all people possessed are in need of healing. Authority over the power of evil does not come easily; it is gained by faith and persistence in addition to knowledge. Such endeavor can be born only of love. Genuine love is ultimately sacrificial. We need to understand that evil possession, as far as we know, is very rare. Human evil, on the other hand, is common. Peck explains as a traditional psychotherapist that in his profession there is no use of power. Psychotherapy is conducted in an atmosphere of total freedom. The therapist has no weapons with which to push for change beyond the persuasiveness of his knowledge, understanding and love. Exorcism is a different matter. Here the healer calls upon every power that is legitimately, lovingly available in the battle against the patient's illness. Exorcism should always be conducted by a team of three or more "as mishaps can and do

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid, p. 127.

occur”<sup>37</sup> (either by the possessed person becoming aggressive and in that way becoming a physical danger for all involved or the evil spirit will try to enter one of the team members). The length of an exorcism session is not preset but is at the discretion of the team leader. A psychotherapy session is usually no more than an hour and the patient knows this, while exorcism can take hours, perhaps days in a row. The exorcism team, through prayer and ritual, invokes the power of God in the healing process. For the non-believer this may seem like an ineffective measure, or else its effectiveness would be explained in terms of the power of suggestion. As far as the Christian exorcist is concerned, it is not he or she who successfully completes the process; it is God who does the healing! So exorcism is seen by its practitioners in terms of spiritual warfare. It is a dangerous procedure; power is always subject to misuse. One safeguard against this is informed consent. Because patients forfeit a great deal of their freedom during the procedure of exorcism Peck strongly recommends that, before starting an exorcism, patients should sign elaborate authorization forms and they should know exactly what they are letting themselves in for. “Only with love can practitioners be sure to keep the patient’s best interests in mind at all times and be certain of resisting the omnipresent human tendency to become unscrupulous and enamoured with power. Exorcism is not a magical procedure – unless one considers love to be magical. As in psychotherapy, it makes use of analysis, of careful discernment, of interpretation, of encouragement, and of loving confrontation. It differs from traditional psychotherapy only as open-heart surgery differs from a tonsillectomy. Exorcism is psychotherapy by massive assault.”<sup>38</sup> Peck strongly believes that radical surgery can be not only healing but lifesaving and might be the only way to heal in certain cases unresponsive to more conservative therapy.

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<sup>37</sup> Strachan, p. 38.

<sup>38</sup> Peck, p. 188.



## **VI) A Change of Heart**

In order to set ourselves free from evil tendencies we need to be courageous enough for honest self-examination and criticism. Yes we have been hurt, yes failure wounds our pride, but it is the wounded animal that is the most vicious, and I was vicious especially in blaming God and everybody else to that matter for my misery. In the struggle between good and evil, in the hope that goodness can succeed, life has meaning. This hope is my idealistic answer: Evil can be defeated by goodness. It is always within our power to change aspects of our nature. It has been in my power to change my nature. I have been called an idealist. Well I am. Idealists are people who believe in the potential of human nature for transformation. I believe that people are capable of building a society that is able to transform its evils. Evil can be conquered by love. An important element of love is purity, which implies that self-purification is essential. The whole course of human history could depend on a change of heart in one solitary individual. This is why the individual is sacred. For it is in the solitary mind and soul of the individual that the battle between good and evil is waged and ultimately won or lost.

“Do not store up for yourselves treasure on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and thieves break in and steal, but store up treasure in heaven, where neither moth nor rust will destroy, not thieves break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matt. 6:19-21).

## CHAPTER FOUR

### FORGIVENESS: A LIBERATING POWER

#### **D) Happy to Forgive**

In our hearts we all want to be happy. We are all longing for a sense of inner freedom. These are difficult times for most, and tragic times for many, so we tend to harbour faint hopelessness about the future. “Is not man’s life upon earth trial without intermission?” (*Confessions* X: 28, p.237). St. Augustine himself was preoccupied with the *beata vita*, the “happy life” (the title of his first treatise as a Christian). The theme weaves throughout his long career as author and preacher. He once said in a sermon:

“Everyone, whatever his condition, desires to be happy. There is no one who does not desire this, and each one desires it with such earnestness that it is preferred to all other things; whoever, in fact, desires other things, desires them for this end alone. . . in whatever life one chooses . . .there is no one who does not wish to be happy.” (Augustine Sermons 306.3.)

We tend to look for happiness in the wrong places, especially when we have been hurt and would like to ‘kill’ the feeling of restlessness that comes along with the hurt. The truth is: people hurt people. Parents hurt their children. Children hurt their parents. The ones that can upset us are those we are close to – parents, primary authority figures, pastors, teachers, employers, friends and those of whom we have high expectations. The worst kind of wounds occur not on battlefields but in our homes. “Wherever love has been part of relationships, the shrapnel of human destruction is strewn in our living rooms and bedrooms in the form of aborted dreams and wounded hopes.”<sup>39</sup> In the midst of it we hurt ourselves.

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<sup>39</sup> Flanigan, Beverly. *Forgiving the Unforgivable*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1992.. p. 5.

These wounds and devastation in our hearts saps much of our energy and resources, taking away our possibilities for a happy life. Looking at my own life, there have been times that I expended so much energy simply trying to make it through another day, that there was little left over to give away to others. I could not even love myself, being too occupied with whatever kept me down.

Mark Virkler who wrote the book *"Pure in Heart"* made an outrageous statement that every negative thing and thought is always of the enemy (the Devil), and every positive, life-giving, up-lifting thought is always of the Holy Spirit. He calls the enemy the accuser who always accuses, and the Holy Spirit the comforter who always comforts. Virkler discovered that approximately 80 percent of our thinking is negative, critical and accusatory, and only 20 percent is positive. He was able to prove this through statistics by conducting a test of a set of questions for participants to fill out. If we accept his findings, we are in a predicament where 80 percent of the time our thoughts yield to negative and judgmental thinking which according to Virkler are really of the enemy. So I find myself examining myself: what do I talk about? What do other people talk about? Many times I discuss my grievances. Listening to other people I recognise that they also talk about their injustices (especially in church settings). We rehearse what other people have done to us and we go on about how we have been hurt. We instinctively judge much of the time, and when we judge, we are usually negative, biased and unfair, accusing others of our own fault. In my prayers I noticed a continual cry for justice. But then I remembered the saying, "it is better to light one little candle than to curse the darkness." Contemplating those words of Mark Virkler; I would like to get free of the holds of this accusing, destroying enemy in my life. "Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you." (Luke 6:37-38). Translated, do onto others as you want others to do onto you. Simple and

clear. My X-ray vision that is able to see the shortcomings of others blinds me to see my own. Understanding this is a major key to freedom.

The heart of God is to forgive and to heal. But in our hearts we often find emotional baggage of years and judgmental attitudes that we (for the most part) are not in touch with. We wonder why recurring patterns of pain and rejection occur in our lives. But the source of happiness lies within ourselves. Only within us can we find God and all the help we desire. Many dogmatic Christians believe that it is by going to church every Sunday that one will find God. If it is of benefit to enter a church to pray and meditate, then by all means do so. But in my opinion places, words, beads, and churches are not the issue; it is the ability to commune with the One God that is of utmost importance. We can only reach this communion with our own heart. If we break the spiral of self-interest and self-destruction, we become objective about ourselves and engage in spiritual rewarding activities. In becoming objective we learn to establish a balanced relationship with ourselves, others and with existence. When we turn away from our self-concern, our fears, our melancholy, our resentments and our regrets, replacing them with such healthy sentiments as love, hope, zest of life and a sincere interest in persons and incidents we are giving meaning to our lives. We get out of life not what we take from it, but what we put into it. Above all we need to feel that we count. And for that we need to go to that place deep within ourselves where we have been hurt and where we have not been able to forgive the perpetrators of our pain.

Some of us will have difficulties in this matter. They may wonder why people who are abused by their parents do not reject their own mothers and fathers? What are they to do with their rage, can they express their rage toward others? For how long? What is enough? My oldest brother has chosen to reject my parents. He feels that he has tried to talk to them about his pain inflicted by my parents treating him a certain way. But he was not able to get through. I tried to do the same with the same result. I was even more upset than before I started my account of how they had misunderstood, mistreated

and abandoned me. Their response was: "What were we supposed to do? You were such a difficult child with such a stubborn character that we were not able to break you, so we had no choice but to send you away". Why the need of breaking my spirit? Why the need to send me away as a solution to the problem? Why not admitting that they were not capable of loving me the way I was and am? Why the need to demonstrate their power and authority in such a demeaning manner? For years I struggled to come to grips with this attitude. My brother, being emotionally broken, simply decided to walk away from them forever. In the process of trying to find my own happiness I needed to forgive them, a very difficult task because blaming them enabled me to hide from my daily responsibilities. Accusing them allowed me to hold on to a destructive life style. I decided to take the hard, at times seemingly impossible road of learning how to forgive. This period, like the injury itself, can be terrifying; it is an extremely critical time in the life of the wounded person, but we need to forgive for the sake of our own wellbeing. Forgiving is among the most difficult of human undertakings. To forgive, one must remember the past, put it into perspective, and move beyond it. Without remembrance, no wound can be transcended. This is one of the many reasons many of us do not know how and where to start, if we want to start at all. The pain seems too much to bear, the confusion too deep to handle, the loneliness too overwhelming. Competing emotions are heaped on one another: grief with rage; sorrow with love; and hope with a kind of desperate, final fear. But for the deeply wounded these are the options: we either change and thereby learn how to forgive or we face the likelihood of slowly drowning in a deep pool of hatred.

"An unforgivable injury that has festered and grown is like a worm crawling into an apple. It can take hold of your core and damage the heart permanently. Unforgivable injuries break dreams and assault beliefs; but if they are allowed to damage your core, you have let someone else not only destroy your dreams but destroy you. That is too high a price to pay for anything. It is one thing to have your heart broken; it is quite another to

have it poisoned. Broken hearts repair. Poisoned hearts shrivel and die. If a worm is poisoning your heart, have it removed. If non-forgiveness is poisoning your heart, then choose to eliminate it.”<sup>40</sup>

## **II) The Journey of Forgiving**

Over twenty-five years ago Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross discovered that her dying patients typically passed through five stages of grief: denial (I am not really sick), anger (it is the doctors' fault), bargaining (God, I'll stop smoking if you let me live), depression (why didn't I get a check up sooner) and acceptance (I really am going to die and I can accept it). Dennis, Sheila and Matthew Linn discovered that, since any hurt is a loss that is like a small death, we pass through the same five stages in forgiving a hurt. In their book *Don't Forgive too Soon* they compare Dr. Kübler-Ross' findings and their five stages to the process of moving through any hurt: denial (it didn't really bother me), anger (it is their fault), bargaining (I will forgive if they apologise), depression (it is my fault) and acceptance (I am not glad for what happened but I am glad for the gifts that came out of it). Kübler-Ross says that dying persons will automatically move through the five stages of dying if they have a significant other with whom they can share their feelings. The Linn family has found that the same is true of the five stages of forgiveness.

Beverly Flanigan in her book *Forgiving the Unforgivable* also talks about 5 stages but gives them different names and sees them in different phases. Phase one is the Naming of the Injury. Phase two: Claiming the injury. Phase three: Blaming the Injurer. Phase four: Balancing the Scales and Phase five: Choosing to forgive. I will go through the five stages and combine both authors to come to a better understanding of the process.

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid. p. 144.

### **III) The Phases of Forgiveness**

#### **PHASE ONE: DENIAL & NAMING THE INJURY**

In the stage of denial we like to pretend that we have not been hurt at all, or we ignore the real hurt and focus on less painful aspects of it. There is something positive about denial; it keeps from getting overwhelmed by too much pain at once. It also gives time to set things aside until one is ready to deal with them. It allows time to go to a safe place where one can feel loved by God (and perhaps others). Then comes the phase that Flanigan calls Naming the Injury, which helps to interpret the meaning of the injury, isolating what one is going to forgive. Naming requires going beyond the raw emotions of the aftermath period. "The aftermath period is as filled with futility as the terrorist victim's attempts to sew on a severed limb; and it can be just as painful. Shock, confusion, disbelief, rage, helplessness, and a kind of terrible impotence characterise it. In addition, many wounded people experience physical illnesses or symptoms."<sup>41</sup> We should not be surprised by these symptoms nor should we think that we are becoming crazy or a pest to ourselves, our friends or society, the aftermath is completely normal. We need to find an outlet for our pain and we start doing that through these symptoms.

As we begin the process of forgiving, we will have to think about the injury as much as feel it, and to keep in mind that we have no control over the injury. The analysing of the wound reveals what must be done to actually forgive. What I will share next goes for all of us; growing up is one long exploration journey of falling and getting up again, of being hurt and finding ways to heal. I now understand that during my own childhood my belief system had been damaged repeatedly. My parents assaulted my ideas and values while still in the making. Children need food, water, and a proper environment for healthy growth. A proper environment is not one of luxury but one of love and

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p. 55.

acceptance. The child should be corrected with love, not constantly criticised. As the child grows, he needs guidance in the use of his body and mind. The child learns by example, watching how people relate to others (much was to be desired in this regard when it came to my upbringing). Parents shape the child in us and thus partly the adult who evolves from that child. So when I finally found myself 'alone' in this world I was confused about what was right and what was wrong. And I wandered through my young life testing one set of personal standards after another to see what, if anything, would fit. Another issue I had to deal with was the fact that I was literally locked into the house, not allowed to be part of any fun-filled teenage activities such as sports (because the games were always on Sundays and Sunday is the day of the Lord and I was expected to be in church) dance lessons or parties (God forbid what would happen if the child would fall in love?). This treatment made me feel that I was the object of my parents' will. I lost all sense of personal power and control over events that were taking place. Did I have any control over this abuse? No, none! But today I do have a choice in what to do and in managing my emotions. In other words, what is important in this first stage of forgiveness, when naming the injury, is that we do not lose control over our lives. What is lost is any likelihood of resurrecting the dreams and hopes about the future as I had imagined it. I imagined having parents I could come home to with all my pains, fears, hopes and sorrows, with whom I could share all my emotions. This will never happen. And this is my conclusion from this naming phase of forgiving. The question is: can I accept it? The time for talking has arrived. Many people believe that discussing problems is helpful (I strongly recommend therapy for all of us, including those who think they have no problems); others believe that talking does no good at all. Even if talking about problems does not make you feel better immediately, it does accomplish a critical function: "Talking to someone other than the injurer accomplishes some of the same



functions as talking to the injurer. Talking to any other person helps you interpret the events in your life and give them meaning.”<sup>42</sup> The most important aspect of talking is that it allows expression of our feelings while formulating beliefs about the injury’s cause, duration, consequences, and controllability.

#### **PHASE TWO: ANGER & CLAIMING THE INJURY.**

The Linn authors explain that in the anger stage the most common traps are either to act out our anger through vengeful behaviour or to bury it and swallow the abuse, rather than listen to what the anger most needs. Most anger translates into feelings of resentment, common to everyone. There is no individual so mature and well balanced that he has never experienced this emotion. The modern pressures under which we live and the anxiety and strain which steal our peace of mind tend to set our nerves on edge. Resentment grows easily in such emotional climate. Unless we learn to master these feelings, they can disrupt our homes and our friendships, lower our efficiency, antagonise our associates, ruin our serenity and wreck our health. How do we generally deal with these emotions? It seems to be human nature to relieve vengeful feelings by directing them at who ever is available, often an innocent victim, a loved one or a subordinate. While writing this thesis I know that I have surpassed my limits of stress. I am writing in a frame of anger due to the fact that I have a time limit. But life around me needs my attention, especially my eight-year-old son Raphael. There is resentment that I don’t have the freedom to write when I feel inspired to write, of being a single mother doing it all alone, having an ex-husband who sees his child only once every two months, builds up. And who gets the brunt of all this? Indeed, my innocent eight-year-old, the one whom I love the most. I am very aware of this problem and try my utmost to not let it happen. All the more because I know that taking out my resentment on someone else relieves my

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid, p. 89.

wounded feelings only momentarily, but does not solve the actual problem. But resentment does not want to be buried, it somehow struggles for release. It disrupts one's sense of well-being, reduces efficiency and blocks happiness. We often remain inarticulate about our anxieties, resentments and fears that we carry within us. These feelings become poisonous if not somehow expressed. And again it is time to talk! Expressing the emotion to another person often serves to reduce its power. If the tea kettle cosily simmering above the flame had no outlet, the confined steam would build up to a powerful explosion. Similarly, it is dangerous to let the flame of our anger keep our resentment boiling inside. For our emotional safety, 'talking it out' is a sensible way for discharge and relief. It is once again advisable to seek an understanding friend or counsellor with whom we can 'talk out' our resentments without any restraint.

Another way the Linn family suggests for 'us angry people' to discharge the emotion of resentment is to put our muscles to work. As adults, we cannot kick cans along the street or join in a sandlot game, but there are legitimate physical outlets for our emotions. We can dig in the garden, go for a hike in the woods, clean the house with vigour (my favourite one) or join a sports club in order to 'work it off'. At the end of the day we are exhausted physically, but 'my' house is more attractive and our resentment troubles us less, or not at all. The more tired our muscles become, the weaker our resentment will get. Although physical activity does not deal with the problem yet, it does deal with excess emotion.

Kenneth Hildebrand in his book *"Achieving Real Happiness"* gives us some more suggestions in the mastery of resentment and that is the use of understanding and imagination. This includes the ability to put oneself in the other person's place and to understand why he acts as he does. "When one acquires the ability to see through another's eyes, resentments do not burn with as hot a flame."<sup>43</sup> In addition Hildebrand

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<sup>43</sup> Hildebrand, Kenneth. *Achieving Real Happiness*. New York:Harper & Brothers, 1955, p. 153.

suggests that we take an objective look at ourselves. He gives us the question: is there something in us which irritates others? Do we wield a sharp tongue? Are we quick to assert ourselves, even at the cost of hurting the feelings of others? Do we insist on having things our way? An effort to look at ourselves objectively may not give us a completely accurate picture, but it can serve to uncover personality traits that cause others to react to us unfavourably. Another method he brings forward, is to banish resentment by an act of will, deliberately to shut the door of the mind against the things which irritate and to refuse to let them in. He claims that each of us has this power, if we exercise it. And if this does not work he suggests freeing ourselves by an act of faith. In his opinion religious conviction can give power to the will.

Now let's take ownership of our anger by claiming the injury. This really means accepting it, to stop fighting or running away from the injury. You accept the scars that result from the offence. You stop rationalising the behaviour of the offender. All of your defences – denial, repression, rationalisation, or projection – begin to give way to an honest confrontation with the fact that you are processing the effects. You must forgive your injurer, and others must forgive their own. You must make the wound part of your future being. One cannot expect this to happen over night. It takes time, but it must be done, whether it occurs right after the injury or many years later. Flanigan prepares the reader by asking them to think carefully about the differences between what happened to you and what happened to someone else. She wants us to claim what is rightfully ours, to focus on our own pain and not on someone else's. By focusing on someone else's pain, she explains, one is not required to experience one's own. "You can't run from your shadow, and you can't run from your injuries. We are each of us part of our accomplishments, our training, the rewards we have received, and the sheer luck that has befallen us. We are also products of the love, hate, encouragement, and misfortune we

have encountered.’<sup>44</sup> It is relatively easy for us to incorporate the good things we have enjoyed and make them into working parts of our daily selves, but it is more difficult to make the damage work for us. Making pain work, Flanigan invites us to find something – anything – positive about it. This seems almost impossible when you are in agony, but Flanigan insists that it can be done. What could be good about pain? Flanigan claims that much love emerges when people are in pain, but that the wounded have to learn to notice it and treasure it. Loving supporters, even those gained from misfortune, are gifts. Another result of pain that she describes is that it can bring freedom for new experiences. From pain people can also learn that they have skills they had never recognised before. Pain can help to clarify values. I conclude from her statements that, ultimately, a person succeeds in forgiving through strength. A grown self will emerge through empowerment from bad experiences and be able to start forgiving.

According to the Linns lingering anger usually is an indication that we move too quickly through the forgiveness process. They see that anger helps us to locate our wound and to defend ourselves. They believe that in an abusive situation we have no right to forgive until we have honoured our anger. Anger at abuse and injustice is an expression of our integrity and our dignity as human beings. Authentic forgiveness comes from integrity within us. We can honour anger by listening to it and using it for the process of claiming the injury.

### **PHASE THREE: BARGAINING & BLAMING THE INJURER.**

Many people are uncomfortable with the idea of blaming (although we do it all the time). This discomfort comes from the fact that we have been taught that blaming is not nice. Flanigan states that blaming helps us to answer the questions ‘who hurt me and

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<sup>44</sup> Flanigan, p. 100.

why did this person do it?'. Without an answer to these questions, you can be psychologically paralysed, unable to move forward in life and certainly unable to forgive anyone. But what is wrong by holding someone accountable for an injury? Someone is simply wrong. So this someone should be identified and can then be forgiven. There is nothing bad or good about blaming. Blaming holds someone morally accountable. "Blaming does not necessarily mean that fury is unleashed. Nor does it always involve vicious recrimination. Blaming accomplishes two objectives: (1) it separates you from the injurer, clarifying those roles; and (2) it brings into focus your intentions and those of the injurer where the injury is concerned."<sup>45</sup> In other words blaming is part of getting on with life. In fact, it is good and necessary as long as it is an aspect of forgiving and not an end in itself.

After we have been able to identify our source of pain we feel a need for our injurer to apologise to us, but this does not necessarily happen. Then we feel paralysed and can not move on in the forgiveness process until the person who hurt us first changes. But if we fall into this pit of having to wait for our perpetrator to apologise, our happiness becomes dependent on that person and we remain a victim. However, it is highly probable that this person is not free enough to change, due to his own injuries. So the Linn family suggests that we need to separate ourselves from the other, whether they meet our bargains or not. Forgiveness does not mean tolerating abuse from the person that hurts us, but rather finding a healthy way to love ourselves and that person as well. Setting healthy boundaries is therefore very important. "Boundaries are ways in which we protect our dignity by setting limits on how other people may deal with us. We do others a favour when we clearly communicate to them our boundaries. One of our boundaries is that we are not willing to be mistreated."<sup>46</sup> If we do not know our own

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid, p. 108.

<sup>46</sup> Linn, p. 55.

boundaries how can we expect other people to know them? That is why it is important for us to be clear about our relationships with people. If we are clear to ourselves we therefore will be clear to all involved.

#### **PHASE FOUR: DEPRESSION & BALANCING THE SCALES.**

Flanigan believes that the events that cause unforgivable injuries deprive people of choice. "Since choice, in addition to love and trust, is a critical resource in any voluntary relationship, when one person restricts the other's options while he maximises his own, the relationship becomes imbalanced."<sup>47</sup> The Linns discuss the state of depression that sets in when we have lost these choices. We often ask ourselves, "What could I have done better before, during or after the hurt?"<sup>48</sup> There is value in the depression stage; it can help us acknowledge our mistakes and discover our power to make changes (choices) and amends if needed. The Linn family warns against false guilt or toxic shame, which indeed will bring us in the stage of depression. This is because our shame makes us feel unworthy of the very thing we most need: love and forgiveness. The key to health in the depression stage is to honestly admit our mistakes, make them our own and in the process not be too harsh to ourselves. I come from a strict conservative religious upbringing (Roman Catholic). When I did not comply to my mother's way I was coldly told that I had the devil in me. Since I did not know the 'meaning' of life (as if I understand it now) I was confused and saw myself indeed as the one playing with evil. This false guilt festered in me for years culminating in a deep depression in my early twenties and another one in my early thirties. I could not understand what I had done so 'wrong' in my mother's eyes. (In my early thirties my religious beliefs were being

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<sup>47</sup> Flanigan, p. 128.

<sup>48</sup> Linn, p. 62.

shaken). In order for her to make her point she would literally withhold her love from me or go 'on strike' locking herself in her bedroom for days, to fast and pray for her children's sins. It is only now that I see that she was manipulating us. But at age fifteen I wondered if the taking away of love was my own doing. Blame and shame were part of my existence, although I did not know why. The feeling of unworthiness crippled me for years.

Flanigan gives us four possibilities to balance the scales, each of which has the effect of increasing our personal choices:

***Possibility One:*** Consider the injury over and done. This is possible if we realise that both the injured and the injurer are responsible, that both are flawed and faulty humans, each capable of doing harm. "You actually forgive humanness rather than a particular harmer."<sup>49</sup> To accept equal blame, then, you must acknowledge that you were partly responsible for the injury.

***Possibility Two:*** Punish the Injurer. Punishment, like blaming, should not be confused with revenge or recrimination. Revenge comes from deep rage that is released through punitive action. A person seeking to punish, on the other hand, is searching for a way to teach a lesson. Punishment is a method of taking away choices from people. Sending a child to his room for example, will hopefully make the child think twice about repeating his offence. People are punished so that they can feel what it is like to be the object of someone else's will. They become subject to someone else's choice. Since everyone has been punished some time or other, most people can empathise with a person robbed of his free will. Once the punishment is finished, we can let go. But punishment does not work unless the punished person is told the reasons for being punished. If reasons are not understood, punishment is more like revenge, and the punished person is not sure what he must do to make things right.

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<sup>49</sup> Flanigan, p. 130.

**Possibility Three: Loading the Scales.** Loading the scales is explained in resources that are taken away from you and you need to reload them. This is accomplished through taking purposeful action to regain advantage. It is important in the balancing phase to increase your own resources and choices on purpose so that it is your own accomplishments that give you a sense of personal power. "If you create a gift for yourself out of your own tragedy, you might create one of the most powerful psychological paradoxes of all."<sup>50</sup> To take action means to move beyond self-absorption or self-pity and to look at others who may need you. In this stage you are no longer at the mercy of someone else's will, but instead you create your own opportunities. For example, people who have their child dying of cancer become part of a support group for people in grief.

**Possibility Four: Mirroring the Injury, or Mock Punishment.** In this stage Flanigan warns us about the very destructiveness of this method of coming to grips with our injury. In this case the harmed person repeats his own injury; only this time he becomes the harmer. In doing this we may learn to understand the injurer and his motives better and even identify with him. Once people have engaged in behaviour similar to the behaviour that hurt them, they can finally understand that anyone can do harm, even themselves. "In a way, mirroring is an unconscious effort to equalise blame so that compassion for the injurer overtakes hatred for him."<sup>51</sup> If a wounded person retaliates, which is often done unconsciously, he should understand that no one wins; everyone loses in the process. We, being wounded, often turn around and wound others.

Coming back to the depression phase, I would like to emphasise that we should not and cannot take the responsibility for the mistakes of others. When growing up we do not know better, we take the adults' punishments and reactions as signs that we do

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid, p. 136.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, p. 138.



something wrong. Later in life we may be able to understand that they did not know another way, being influenced by their own history and hurts. In the end each person is responsible for his/her own actions. Balancing the scales, I accept that injuries occurred and that it changed my life. The blame has been placed. It is time to move ahead. The goal is to gain strength from the injury, knowing that forgiveness restores our choices!

#### **PHASE FIVE: ACCEPTANCE & CHOOSING TO FORGIVE.**

Choosing to forgive is a turning point in a person's life! Although some phases in the process towards forgiving are more emotional, Flanigan argues that the final phases are rational. "Choosing to forgive is guided by, and generated from, clearheaded thinking. It springs, really, from self-preservation."<sup>52</sup> Living itself is a rational process; it is a choice, a definite responsibility. If the rational mind is suppressed, e.g. through alcohol or any other mood-altering substance, it is impossible to choose rationally. Once the choice is made, a new life can unfold. This can also make the choice to forgive scary. Nothing will stay the same, at least for the forgiver.

Flanigan states that choosing to forgive is like any other choice. Anytime you choose one thing you lose another, but it also brings a new set of responsibilities. I think that she is trying to say that, when we are able to forgive we are really saying to ourselves: 'the person who has hurt me is no longer responsible for the way my life will go, I am responsible now'. This is not an easy accomplishment. Speaking for myself, I lost the luxury of having my injurer around to blame for my attitudes or my pain. I had to let go of my resentment and anger, which had always given me an excuse for not having to meet my obligations. It meant that I had to take risks again, and taking risks makes vulnerable. I also have to watch that I do not go back to being a victim since my misery was my way of looking at life. It was the only thing I knew. But by forgiving I closed a

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid. p. 144.

door, I was released, I could start again. It means that I am in the process of finding a new identity, regardless of other people's approval. I can no longer hide behind the label of victim. It means that I have to let go of feeling special because of my injury. A large part of this process is being in mourning. The mourning of past dreams and "could have beens" and the loss of whom I was but am not.

There is one thing I feel I have to add to these writers. Both the Linn family and Flanigan state that forgiveness is a choice. In a way they are right but on the other hand there are times that forgiving is such an impossible task that one needs the Grace of God to receive supernatural forgiveness. From our human behaviour it is obvious that forgiveness is not natural. We have a tendency to retaliate when hurt – 'an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth'. There is an element of justice in retaliation and justice is good. If someone robs you, you demand justice through punishment; an equalisation of the wrongs done. Grace is the other side of the coin. If every time we have been wronged we demand punishment, we are not in a state of forgiveness. Therefore, Grace helps us to forgive super naturally. This brings me to the conclusion that we need God's power in our life in order to be able to receive this supernatural forgiveness. And in the process of trying to find ways to forgive we also learn to love. Love heals not only broken bones, but also broken homes and broken spirits. Often love is conditional which is not true love but possessiveness. We need to learn to return it with unconditional love, which is open, not closed. It is given freely without any thought of return. It sees the defects in the other but loves in spite of it. In order to love in this way, I need God's help to give me Grace, to give me Divine Love, Divine Wisdom and knowledge so that I indeed can grow into a state of liberation.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **WHOLISTIC VISION OF SEXUALITY**

#### **I) The Body as a Gift of God**

In chapter 1 it is already mentioned that we are embodied spiritual beings. This means that we have not only our spirit to take care of, but also our bodies, the wrapping of our internal being. In non-theological 'popular' Catholicism the body is often regarded as a source for worldly pleasure, distracting from the path to higher spirituality and God, and therefore sinful. Especially women are taught to repress their sexuality and not to like their body. Denial of this part of our feminine being often leads to a deformed self-image. To be whole, I think, we have to include the body in our selves. After all, isn't the body also a gift of God?

#### **II) Christian Sexual Teaching**

Christian sexual teaching has been articulated in a culture deeply marked by patriarchy, property, purity and the demand for procreation. All too frequently, in its attempt to control the fires of sex, well-meaning preachers have tried to extinguish them altogether by viewing sex as dirty and evil. Since theology is a human enterprise we need to keep in mind that there are no final human answers to our fundamental questions, of which sexuality is surely one.

Throughout history most religions have given enormous attention to the dynamic of human sexuality. Human sexuality carries the dynamic of both good and evil and is a strong power, because of a host of fears churches have been trying to control it.

There are several dualisms in the Christian religion. "Any dualism is the radical breaking apart of two elements that essentially belong together, a rupture which sees the

two coexisting in uneasy truce or in open warfare".<sup>53</sup> The early Christian church grounded their spiritualistic dualism in Hellenistic Greco-Roman culture. It sees life composed of two antagonistic elements: spirit, which is good and eternal, and flesh or matter, which is temporal, corruptible, and locus of sin. The sexual aspects of the body are the particular locus of sin.<sup>54</sup> Up to today the Catholic Church has inherited a "language" that depicts body and soul as two distinct entities. These entities are parted at death to be reunited at the resurrection. Mastery of unruly, dangerous passions is still depicted as an essential task: "Either man governs his passions and finds peace, or he lets himself be dominated by them and becomes unhappy".<sup>55</sup> Because of this spiritual dualism we now have to face sexist (or patriarchal) dualism. Men have typically defined themselves as essentially spirit or mind, and they have defined women as essentially body and emotion. Sexuality is a 'lower power' in men, thus it follows that the 'higher power', the reason and the will, must dominate and control the lower. And so men felt justified in the systematic subordination of women. Patriarchy argued even further, their classic understanding of the crucifixion and the atonement gave suffering a sense of necessity on the path to salvation. Since Christian theology denigrated sensual pleasure, the suggestion was made that deprivation and pain are mandatory if eternal joy is to be found. Women's suffering has been particularly encouraged, for in patriarchy it is woman who made the man fall in the Garden of Eden. It is woman that represents the evil and therefore is most

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<sup>53</sup> Nelson, James B. *Body Theology*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992, p. 30.

<sup>54</sup> This is due to Christianity's ongoing association with various forms of the heresy of Gnosticism. Gnosticism is a form of dualistic thought that arose at about the same time and in about the same part of the world as the Judeo-Christian tradition. In many respects, the two thought systems of Christianity and Gnosticism have been fellow travelers ever since. "The main problem with gnosticism is that it is a dualism holding that the world as it now exists it's the result of a warlike conflict between two coequal principles (or Gods), a good principle that made the spiritual realities, including the human soul, and an evil principle that made the material realities, including the human body." (Philip S. Keane, p. 5) Thus for Gnosticism, the body and realities associated with it such as sexuality are basically evil. At times, Gnosticism rejected the material principle the bearing of children because children continue human involvement in materiality. Roman Catholicism has never espoused Gnosticism. Nevertheless, at times the Church and even its greatest leaders have lived in a world so influenced by Gnosticism that the Church has tended to perpetuate Gnostic fears of sex among its people.

<sup>55</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994), pp. 362-368.

in need of redemption. One thing I would like to mention here is that patriarchy is not only the oppressor of women; men have been and are victims too.

Christian moral doctrine insisted that sexual activity should be limited to married and fertile heterosexuals. There was no toleration for sexual activity outside of marriage or sexual acts within the marriage that were seen as “unnatural” (any activity that was non-reproductive in purpose). The pleasure involved was seen as sinful. Sex had only one purpose: to generate. James H. Schulte, in his article *Roman Catholic Views of Sexuality* illustrates an old concept of how the church dealt with sexuality. He explains to us that the early church fathers turned to the example of animal generation for guidance as to what was natural to both animals and man. In that view, based on an early and inadequate biology, the key to propagate the family lineage was the male semen, which was considered to be the sole source of human procreation. The female was considered to be only the receptacle for that semen. The woman was the garden in which the seed could grow. Since procreation requires coitus, then masturbation, bestiality, homosexuality, sodomy and birth control were forbidden and considered unnatural. Fornication and adultery on the other hand, along with incest and rape, do not violate the natural purpose of semen, but rather err, by denying the second purpose of semen: education of offspring. They are therefore not considered unnatural, but unjust, as they deny that purpose. Deviation from any one of these arguments, would in the church fathers’ view, lead to a breakdown of the entire system. Another reason the church fathers held on to this system for so long is that it gave a sense of order and is easy to apply. Since most of the acts are unnatural, they are always wrong, regardless of circumstances. It is disturbing to notice that few emphasised the purpose of love within marriage, that marriage was ‘act oriented’ rather than person oriented. As a result, many Catholics today still experience strong guilt feelings and anxiety if they depart from this doctrine. Most of our parents are products of this line of thinking. But a less narrow view is being explored today, paying more tribute to the human being (a less biological and more rational point of view). Love rather than

procreation is seen as the motive for sexual activity. Moral goodness and human love, expressed in conjugal relations, provide the new base for sexual morality. Marriage is not always mentioned in this liberal view.

Following the conservative view we could only express conjugal relations in marriage. But what about the single people in past times? A solution was created, the elevation of chastity to a supreme spiritual position, even higher than marriage. This is all due to the socio-cultural climate of fear and suspicion regarding sexuality, reinforced by ignorance. This fear is still present today. Today the churches are still not sure what to do with the growing group of singles. Do we have to deny and repress our sexuality? What about our feelings? Do we have to repress these too? Denial and repression become a source of frustration and often anger. Sexuality is a basic element of our being, not determining, but surely permeating our thinking, feeling, and acting in the world. The human condition is dynamic and constantly evolving. Growth in the area of sexuality and the moral convictions pertaining to it is a necessary part in the dynamics of (my) life. The old 'believers' however will scrutinize me and see my frustration and human desires as weakness and a source of moral decline. My mother and I will never see eye to eye on this subject, she has no interest in a dialogue with anyone about this subject: it is immoral, that's it, that's all! My mother is one of a still large group of people who can not open themselves to innovative moral teaching. My question to them is: "what are you afraid of?"

As a spiritually inclined person I am at a loss for what to do with my sexuality. My religious upbringing has given me hang-ups about sexuality and has even lead to occurrences of sexual dysfunction. What if I was to go with the more liberal view? The liberal view gives me the greatest degree of autonomy and personal freedom. I can do what ever pleases me. Guess what, I have done that and did it bring me happiness? It brought me a temporary and perhaps deceptive feeling of belonging. When one is in a dysfunctional state, (e.g. the state of not loving oneself) sexual encounters have a high

price. The state one found oneself in before the sex act is only intensified. In my case an intense, deep emptiness, profound crippling sadness of a stark reality engulfed me, almost to the point that death would be a refreshing consolation. And why is that? Because the majority of us is searching for true, committed love (including those who do not want to admit it). We all want to feel worth to be loved. But we can only receive and return this love if we first learn to love ourselves in a healthy and wholistic way. This is one of the major stumbling blocks: to love oneself is one of the hardest things to do since it requires an in-depth, honest facing up to and accepting of one's own ego and shadow side, going through the excavation of the true whole self, a labour that comes with pain, fears and disappointments but also the sacred and the loving side of our being. A reminder: Life in its affirming way is both divine and demonic, light and dark, creative and destructive. We need to learn to stand up, with loving pride, in the rubble of our corruptible soul. With regards to the sexual body we can find our self for example by looking at our sexual fantasies; what kind of person am I in fantasies, as compared to my everyday self? It is wiser to look at and deal with the dark side in ourselves before making decisions, especially sexual ones.

### **III) The Drawback of the Liberal View**

"Do to others, as you wish them to do to you" Math.7: 2 : The liberal view leaves us with almost no guidelines and the danger exists of abuse and the destruction of human interpersonal relationships. Due to the immediate pleasure that is being pursued, we open the gateway for human sinfulness – to destroy self or others, to do real harm. This view does not bring strength for making well thought-out and consistent ethical decisions. We have enough sexually dysfunctional people walking around, which to me is a symptom of a lack of wholeness. In conservative groups I have met too many people who cannot relate to others in a natural way because they are burdened with religiously

inspired fears of their sexuality. In liberal groups I have met too many persons who cannot relate to others due to selfish behaviour and self-interest, with no consideration for the feelings of others, interpreting sexuality as making physical pleasure their focus. Most people I meet are in the sex-only-for-pleasure camp, although when I take time and have a deep discussion most people admit that what they are really looking for is the 'real' thing, meaning true, lasting committed love. But unfortunately we bought into the consumer philosophy: If you are tired of the old, you throw it out and buy new. We would need to correct both approaches and find a wholistic vision of sexuality that will value the bodily as well as the spiritual aspects of our being.

#### **IV) Healthy Human Sexuality**

"Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness."

"God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him;  
Male and female he created them." (Genesis 1: 26-27)

"God saw all that he had made, and it was very good." (Genesis 1: 31)

In light of clinical and empirical evidence, both men and women are considered to be androgynous: within every man there is a woman, and within every woman there is a man. There are many modes of sexuality. Although genital sexuality is part of being a sexual person, genitality does not define sexuality. The more basic type of sexuality is that of being a sexual person, male or female, an wholistic theory of personhood. Our experience of sexuality and the meaning we give it depend on our understanding of the structure and dynamics of personhood. We all have an image of humanity constructed on the basis of our experiences, inheritance, child rearing, mass media, culture, education, and so on, which determine the way we look at, judge, and deal with ourselves and others. For example, an approach to sexuality that excludes the spiritual dimension will give sexual experiences a meaning radically different from one that includes the spiritual. William F. Kraft in his book *Whole and Holy Sexuality* takes the viewpoint that



premarital and extramarital genital sex is easily justified when the spiritual is excluded; including the spiritual makes the experience and meaning of such sexual behaviour significantly different. Likewise, if the physical and/or psychosocial dimensions are excluded or minimized, the meaning of sexuality is fragmented. He does not address the issues of singles, young, old, disabled and homosexuals. It is an inevitable reality that sex always has been and always will be practiced regardless of any doctrine. And what is so disturbingly wrong with that?

We have a tendency to satisfy our needs, preferably instantly. When we experience pain or a physical need such as hunger or thirst, we don't want to wait and aim for immediate relief or satisfaction which often makes us act impulsively. Many examples can be given but I would like to focus on the physical mode of sexuality. When we feel intense sexual urges or needs we will invest our energy in instant gratification. We are willing to go along with a total stranger whom we have picked up either at a party, in a bar or who knows where. When engaging in such physical sex, we can easily lose respect for self and others. If we maximize the physical dimension of sex, we see people as sex objects. Most of the liberal thinkers, religious or non-religious, have had sexual encounters as mentioned above. Is pleasure the only reward? (That in itself does not have to be bad). Even in these fleeting moments of escapism we can find moments of caring, of intimacy. But what is intimacy – the experience of self-disclosure and sharing. The day after these moments have passed we wonder how much did we really share of ourselves if we shared at all.

We make the big mistake of confusing affection for genital sexuality. When affection is seen as necessarily leading to genital sex, frustration, confusion and fruitless guilt are among the possible consequences. To avoid these pains both partners should know their own and the other's intentions. Problems emerge when the partners have different motivations. I, as a woman, like to embrace and to be physically intimate as a way of expressing affection. I know that such intimacy is highly sexual though not

explicitly genital; but too often men misinterpret my affection as a desire for genital encounters. The key point I want to make here is that physical affection does not have to lead to genitality. After discussing this subject with many people I realize that most, if not all of us are searching for care, respect, kindness and, most importantly, love. What is the essence of love? Is not a definite part of it spirituality? We are embodied spiritual entities. And what is the essence of spirituality? Definitely love! If love is indeed our deepest desire we have no other choice but to look towards the spiritual side of sexuality. Discipline can help us to sift the do's from the don'ts and to examine our motives, conscious as well as unconscious.

Healthy spiritual sex incorporates all the qualities we are looking for. "Spirit deepens sex, and sex embodies spirit. Sexuality gives spirituality concrete humanness; spirituality gives sexuality lasting vitality".<sup>56</sup> Kraft explains that healthy spirituality can never be sexless because spirituality is always in some way embodied. Likewise he explains that sexuality is always more or less spiritual because it is inclined towards transcendence –a going beyond individuality towards communion with others and God. As we know, too often spirituality and sexuality are separated and Kraft reminds us to integrate these two into our lives. "To repress sexuality while promoting spirituality is similar to repressing spirituality while promoting sexuality".<sup>57</sup> In his opinion both are unchaste. A human person is a unity of physicality, functionality, and spirituality. We are invited to seek beautiful and transcendent sex: to experience the union of self and others, to go out of ourselves to and for each other, to experience the presence of God. I am wondering if this can be done without marriage? Marriage is no guarantee for healthy spiritual sex.

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<sup>56</sup> Kraft, William F. *Whole & Holy Sexuality: How to Find Human and Spiritual Integrity as a Sexual Person*. St. Meinrad, Indiana: Abbey Press, 1989.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.* p. 21.

## **V) Chastity: A Means to an End**

Chastity is abstention from physical sexuality. Chastity can help promote and nourish healthy behaviour; it has helped me in my search for a deeper meaning of sexuality. It helped me to see how much I needed affection and how easily I gave in to genital sexuality. In my desperate need for love I mistook genital sex for affection and this separated my sexuality from my spirituality. This need of mine only invited and encouraged exploitation. Today I want to experience and to respect not only myself but also the 'other' as a whole person.

Kraft states that chastity is the virtue by which sexuality and spirituality are dynamically interrelated. "Chastity demands that we transcend such impurities as lust, manipulation, exploitation, arrogance, selfishness, and pride."<sup>58</sup> This does not mean that we have to behave as sexless beings, on the contrary. Chastity gives a sense of freedom; we meet with others in their personhood, as embodied spiritual beings. The discipline involved I see as creative control of one's life. It makes us aware, it affirms feelings and sexual desires without impulsively acting on them. It helps self-affirmation and free choice, which stimulates a healthy attitude in life. I can now appreciate sexual tension as part of experiencing somebody and am able to put it into perspective. I can make a choice based on free will. The choice is not always easy; there are strong emotions and many thoughts involved but it gives time and space to think of the possible consequences of an action one perhaps could regret. Time will help me to ask myself if an encounter will help me to mature, become more loving, or more committed. Or will it make me bitter, frustrated, hurt and eventually numb? The choice is entirely mine and I know I am not in perfect control of my feelings and behaviours and cannot orchestrate those of others.

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid, p. 56.

There have been times that I honestly believed that recreational sex was better than nothing. I now understand the need for 'togetherness', for caring and romantic moments. Sex is normal, human, can be meaningful but it is not always healthy or good. It is so easy to hide behind rationalization, general statements, repression, projection<sup>59</sup>, sympathism<sup>60</sup>, undoing<sup>61</sup>, overcompensation<sup>62</sup>, denial and any other kind of dysfunction we can come up with. All these are a sign of us not being completely honest with ourselves and it prevents us from personal growth. In conclusion I would like to stress that a period of celibacy can help us to hear the whisper of spiritual longings within our genitality. Thereby dating can be so romantic and in the long run sexually stimulating only because we took the time to get to know the real person before we jumped into the sack.

In his *Confessions*, Augustine details the agonised, sexual "enslavement", and the desire to be set free from habit itself, or as we say the addiction to sexual gratification. The oft-quoted passage where he prays for chastity in Book VIII – "Soon, quite soon – but not yet" (*Confessions* VIII: 5), brings him close to us in our own struggles today to find an equilibrium in the expression of our sexuality – an equilibrium, which may find a different mode from the one chosen by Augustine – dedication to celibacy – but one that expresses a balanced state of mind, body and soul.

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<sup>59</sup> Projection is a defense mechanism, which maintains self-esteem and adequacy by placing on others our own unacceptable feelings and impulses.

<sup>60</sup> Sympathism is the practice of trying to get others to feel sorry for us and to support us. As example one can run from sexual awareness by complaining constantly of problems.

<sup>61</sup> In undoing a person assumes that feeling sexual is the same as behaving sexually. Since such a person has sexual feelings, guilt is intense and frequent. A scrupulous person can waste enormous amounts of time and energy trying to undo guilt evoked by natural feelings through confession and penance.

<sup>62</sup> In overcompensation some people engage frequently in genital behavior to make up for feelings of sexual inferiority.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **DISCIPLINE: A MEANS TO AN END**

#### **I) Inner Discipline**

Life in this century, especially in western society, has become very complex; people have to deal with a multitude of structures, function in a variety of roles and seem to have problems finding their own place in this hectic world with all its demands. There are so many distractions from the search for the Truth, the eternal Light, so many temptations that seem to make habits into necessities: one is being controlled rather than to control oneself, one is caught in the web of demands on the worldly, material level. All over the world we have people feeling miserable because they cannot control their money, their weight, their emotions, their drinking, their hostility, their craving for drugs, their spending, their own behaviour vis-à-vis their family members, their sexual impulses, and more. Some of these problems are large, while others seem small to all but those who suffer from them; but they share an acutely disturbed awareness of failure at self-regulation or self-discipline.

If we want to become free and follow a spiritual path we need to practice discipline, rigorous self-search and deep awareness of our inner beings. The road to heaven is said to be narrow and steep; we can choose to walk it, to start on the way that leads to that so much desired state of happiness. These days more and more people are looking for that road. They ask fortune-tellers, faith healers and so on to guide them, they want a quick fix through 'awareness workshops' and such, but that, I found, is not the way. We really, honestly, thoroughly, have to find and walk that road by ourselves, we can use the help of others to walk with us but ultimately each person individually must take the necessary steps, freeing ourselves from our habits, necessities, addictions. To start (and continue) this process we need discipline, self-regulation.

## **II) The Phases of "Self-Regulation"**

### **A) THE HIERARCHY OF SELF-REGULATION.**

Baumeister, Heatherton and Tice have done a thorough research to find out how and why people fail at self-regulation. In their book *"Losing Control"* they use the terms higher and lower processes. If the higher process overrides the lower, one succeeds in self-regulation. For example, I may be torn between the desire for a cigarette and the resolution to quit. If the latter is higher on the hierarchy and I smoke that cigarette I fail in my self-regulation. If I manage to avoid smoking it, I am successful in self-regulation, because I was able to override the lower desire to smoke. "Understanding self-regulation as an override process portrays the problem as one of competition between responses, and indeed in many instances of self-regulatory challenge people feel as if there is an inner conflict going on, in which they are pulled in opposite directions."<sup>63</sup> Successful self-regulation therefore requires that the responses high in the hierarchy carry enough strength to override the lower tendencies. This concept of strength we can also call willpower. In order for me to quit smoking I need to use my willpower to overcome temptation. But that requires a painful process of being aware of what is going on within me. "And in some cases people want to escape from self-awareness, such as when it is unpleasant to think about the self (e.g., after a distressing failure experience), and the flight from self-awareness will often be accompanied by a reduction or cessation of monitoring and, consequently, by patterns of unusual and disinhibited behaviour".<sup>64</sup> The research conducted by Baumeister, Heatherton and Tice comes to the conclusion that to override an impulse, a habit, or some other tendency one often has to exert oneself both mentally and physically. They suggest that one has the most effective self-regulation when it will require the least strength and that is

when it overrides a response as early as possible. "The longer one allows an objectionable response to go on, the harder it will be to stop it, just as a bad habit will be harder to break as it becomes more and more ingrained."<sup>65</sup>. They therefore suggest prevention. Prevention will be easier and more effective than interruption. It is easier and more effective to avoid giving in to temptation than to resist it.

#### B) TRANSCENDENCE

A second key to successful self-regulation they suggest is transcendence. This requires us to think beyond the immediate situation and interpret events with reference to long-range meaning and implication. This is done by refusing to respond to the immediate stimulus which they call the here and now and focus instead on long-range, more abstract distant goals and standards. As an example they use the history of Christian martyrdom which records many examples of individuals accepting their own certain death while singing hymns, often making a deep impression on their executioners and onlookers. The martyrs were able to transcend the death-dealing stimuli in their immediate environment and focus instead on their anticipated rebirth and salvation in heaven.

We have many ways to cope with life, many ways to comfort and pleasure. All are based on the same thing: the fear of encountering any kind of unpleasantness. And so we create illusions and regard those as true. We fill our time with all possible distractions: chasing pleasure, comfort, social acceptance. We can become blissfully mindless through heavy duty meditation, charismatic praise rallies, Hare Krishna mantra, Zen Buddhist meditation, repetitious praying of a rosary, etc. or simply through mind altering components. Because we are so busy

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<sup>63</sup> Baumeister, Roy & Heatherton, Todd & Tice, Dianne. *Losing Control: How and Why people Fail at Self-Regulation*. New York: Academic Press, 1994, p. 9.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, p. 17.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, p. 21.

with this we 'honestly' don't have time to look at our inner selves. Of course we do know, somewhere inside, that it is not all rosy and we are not true to ourselves, but the more we know that the more we want to get away from it so we distract ourselves more. What we need to understand is that life can never really be brought under control. We cannot control the uncontrollable and fleeing from the reality we call life only increases the pain. And this knowledge remains, nagging, disturbing, asking us to find a way to live with it, not to repress it into the dungeons of our souls. If we would let some light shine in these dungeons they would not be so dark and frightening. Both a discipline and faith in ourselves and our light are what we need.

### **III) The Daily Renewal of Discipline**

One of the reasons why we shrink from discipline is because it is usually considered to be restricting. But what about the freedom we gain through hard work. Hard work endows us with material rewards such as a home or automobile. In spiritual life, we win freedoms of greater worth. We win the freedom of a joyful and peaceful life. Above all, we win God's grace, which alleviates our suffering and grants us the opportunity to continue to advance on our way to God.

Discipline can indeed be painful but pain can be our teacher. Spiritual discipline eventually will help us to become willing to sit for a while with that portion of our pain. In our God-communion we have to perfectly be willing to be there, to accept life as it is, embracing both life and death, pleasure and pain, good and bad. To learn to be comfortable with these dual aspects we need, once again, self-discipline. With time we will learn to recognize that this discipline will become a source of joy. Self-discipline gives birth to confidence and satisfaction. "An individual without self-discipline finds no lasting happiness. As a world with no laws would



disintegrate into chaos, an individual without self-discipline becomes mired in confusion and despair.”<sup>66</sup>

Even material freedom yields little satisfaction if we are held captive by the demons of fear, anger, and worry. Without the benefit of spiritual discipline, material discipline is a shallow consolation. All through the ages there have been spiritually endowed men and women – the mystics of the world – who have known conscious union with God, and who have brought the presence and power of God into their actual experience. They taught the principle of love and co-operation. When we digest the messages of these spiritual masters who have already trodden the path, we can assimilate their wisdom and experience. If we read their stories, we will find that we have many things in common. These spiritually elevated people have gone through the same struggles as the ones we face in life. These ‘saints’ started out as people like us, why couldn’t we become ‘saints’?

Other sources of wisdom, such as the holy texts of the world’s major living religions, also provide traditional knowledge for adopting a course of spiritual discipline. We can use this wisdom to guide our conscience. Much of the ancient wisdom we already carry within us, we just need to tap into it. Again, this requires discipline.

Particularly at the start of the spiritual path the obstacles seem formidable, the need for many changes in our lifestyle and attitudes becomes quickly apparent. This can be very discouraging. Discipline is an ongoing process, requiring strength for each and every obstacle, each temptation that we find on our way. Overcoming one obstacle makes us stronger for the next. “The day a man wills he is set on the path to freedom”.<sup>67</sup> The wise person will not put off

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<sup>66</sup> Roof, Jonathan L. *Pathways to God: a Study Guide to the Teachings of Sathya Sai Baba*. Faber, Virginia: Leela Press Inc., 1991, p. 41.

<sup>67</sup> Paramahansa Yogananda, *Autobiography of a Yogi*. Los Angeles, California: Self-Realisation Fellowship, 1946, p. 497.

the opportunity to surmount an obstacle. "The trouble is that it (the mind) does not totally will: therefore it does not totally command"<sup>68</sup>.

If there is anything I have learned by trying to overcome my 'short-comings' it is the fact that I am totally unreliable. I wish to quit smoking, I do so for perhaps a week or two, telling my friends "I finally kicked the habit" only to find myself smoking again. In this process of quitting I am not helpless (as some of us may think) rather in a sense I simply have to choose and be committed to my choice. I also need to choose to anchor my conduct in the Divine if I ever want to overcome and conquer this weak will of mine. "Daily renewed sense yearnings sap your inner peace: they are like openings in a reservoir that permit vital waters to be wasted in the desert soil of materialism. The forceful, activating impulse of wrong desire is the greatest enemy to the happiness of man. Roam in the world as a lion of self-control; don't let the frogs of sense weakness kick you around."<sup>69</sup>.

In fact, one of the puzzles of the structure of the *Confessions* is the presence of the last four books – after the narrative of the conversion. It is in these last four books, that Augustine explores the daily integration of the on-going process of conversion in our lives. The last book, Book XIII discusses the six days of creation – certainly an on-going journey of re-formation until, the final Sabbath. Thus Augustine emphasises the daily discipline as a means to the "end" – the Seventh Day.

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<sup>68</sup> St. Augustine. *The Confessions of St. Augustine VIII*. Translated by F. J. Sheed. New York: Sheed & Ward, 1943, p. 177.

<sup>69</sup> Paramahansa Yogananda. *Autobiography of a Yogi*. Los Angeles, California: Self-Realisation Fellowship, 1946, p. 149.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **PRAYER: LET'S TALK**

In the Introductory chapter – Augustine's Soul Searching, I commented on the literary genre of the *Confessions*. Is it autobiography, a case study, theology, a tabloid confession, etc. I suggested that it is overhearing prayer. Prayer is at the heart of the *Confessions*. It is at the heart of soul-searching.

#### **I) Prayer: A Mere Calculation?**

People often ask me if prayer really works? My answer is: YES! But not always in the way we expect. Thank God for that. Can you imagine if all our prayers would be instantly answered? Chaos would be the result, because people tend to wish for their own good, their own profit. "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" Mathew 16:25. It seems that we are never satisfied with what we have, we always want more. We had better think twice before we pray for things because we might get what we wish for and not be able to deal with the consequences of our desires. So prayer requires responsible thinking, essential to our human fulfilment.

When I talk about prayer I start from the notion that there is an initial belief in the power of prayer. One must believe in the possibility of what is prayed for. Prayer is a demand of the soul. I have seen and heard people literally begging to God. God did not make us beggars; he created us in his image! A beggar who goes to a rich home and asks for alms receives a beggar's share; but a child can have anything he asks from his wealthy father. "The secret of effective prayer is to change your status from beggar to child of God; when you appeal to him from that consciousness, your prayer will have both power and wisdom." <sup>70</sup>.

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<sup>70</sup> Yogananda, Paramahansa. *Man's Eternal Quest*. New Delhi, India: Baba Barkha Nath Printers, 1975, p. 34.

## **II) Prayer: A Line of Communication**

Paramahansa Yogananda in his book *Man's Eternal Quest* insists that we cannot expect that we will receive every benefit that we seek, stating that we should not behave like little sulking children that then give up prayer. Yogananda argues that the importance of prayer is that it draws us closer to God. It establishes a line of communication and builds God's presence in our minds. Whether we are giving thanks or seeking help for others or ourselves we are working to understand our relationship with God. Prayer is one of the most basic and most ancient elements of ritual and religion.

## **III) Same Time, Same Place**

When we begin our spiritual life, our desires tend to go way over our heads. We want everything at the same time. Spiritual wisdom, knowledge, healing, love, forgiveness, and the list goes on. We want to know everything and understand everything at once. But we cannot pass our exams without studying first. We need to direct our aspirations to God. God knows what is best for us: he will guide our spiritual desires along the right lines, at the proper timing. Sathya Sai Baba<sup>71</sup> in his teachings maintains that it is necessary to practice the habit of regular prayer. Here we see the importance of discipline again. A regular time and place for prayer helps us to quickly concentrate and reach a state of calm. It is not always easy to sit in silence, to meditate, pray, to connect to God. Sai Baba gently reminds the seeker of truth to understand that God is as close to us as we are to Him and to persevere in mature prayer which "will give us a clearer vision of the

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<sup>71</sup> Sathya Sai Baba is a 'Holy man' presently living in India and who is revered throughout the world for his miracles, love and service. He helps 'seekers of Truth' to find for themselves God-realization through prayer and moral living. He is a teacher of Indian Spirituality.

tasks that have to be done and helps us to strengthen and deepen our responsibilities, which in turn promotes growth in wholeness.”<sup>72</sup>.

#### **IV) A Conscious Choice**

Although God knows what we seek, we still need to ask. We ask for specific results and thereby accept the consequences of those results. By asking we make a conscious choice of what path we wish to follow, thus our actions should not contradict our words. If we pray for spiritual wisdom we cannot live foolishly, if we pray for greater love, we cannot continue to hate. If we wish for humility, we cannot continue to strut about in pride. We cannot just pray and wait for results, we must do our own part to fulfil the request. We cannot receive grace before we have made our own best effort to reach our objective. Our thoughts, words, and deeds must all support our prayer. “Prayer must be united with practice. You should not pray for one thing and practice another. Such prayer is only a means of deception. The words you utter, the deeds you do, the prayers you make must all be directed along the same path.”<sup>73</sup>.

#### **V) Prayer: A Thinking Process**

Prayer is not only responsible but also passionate thinking. “If there is a thinking that is content to analyse and measure and compare that phenomena of the world, there is also a thinking that enters feelingly into the world and knows itself deeply involved in all that goes on there. Such a thinking is not content to learn what is, but considers what ought to be” <sup>74</sup>. So

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<sup>72</sup> Roof, Jonathan L. *Pathways to God: a Study Guide to the Teachings of Sathya Sai Baba*. Faber, Virginia: Leela Press Inc., 1991, p. 84.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, p. 78.

<sup>74</sup> Macquarrie, John. *Paths in Spirituality*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1972. p. 26.

prayer has a compassionate quality as well. When I pray for my family members or friends, I decide to stand at that moment by the other, sharing in their feelings and aspirations. In Christian tradition we call this intercessory prayer. When I pray I know that I think and this thinking has a reality of its own. And my faith's name for my reality is God. To have faith is to meet the world with the conviction that in spite of all its ambiguities and its downright evils, we can discern a reality of love and grounds for hope. Prayer helps to put my life into perspective.

## **VI) Speak to God in Your Own Way**

What has always dumbfounded me is that certain church authority figures seem to have all the answers and advice to give without considering that we all have different needs and attitudes. It is not possible for us to evaluate the worth of another person's prayer, for all speak to God in their own ways. What is appropriate at one time may not be at another time. The values and languages of different cultures also vary. I witnessed an Evangelical Priest instructing religious teaching to an immigrant from India who was fresh-from-the-boat. She was a young Hindu woman who found herself in an arranged marriage with a Christian fellow countryman. This man (a real nice chap by the way) brought her along to his priest, who felt the need to tell this young woman how to kneel, how to hold her hands, what to say when praying, etc., as if she did not have culture shock to deal with already. I can still hear this priest speaking out loud: "now that you have found Christ my dear child, all your problems will be solved. You have a new family now, the family of Christ." But I had the impression that the woman did not even know what this man, dressed in black, was talking about. The reason I decided to recount this story is that I want to make clear that it is not the words or form we use that gives prayer its power: it is the intention in our hearts. Praying requires sincerity of intention so we can use whatever position, words, or place we choose. For Christians the mystery of God is brought to them through Jesus Christ, other religions have their own means to get close to the Ultimate

Divine. There are many forms and many levels of prayer. Some people find one form more helpful than another, and we should never criticise another person simply because his or her needs and ways of satisfying them are different from our own.

For the impatient people among us who want their request being answered not today but yesterday (I belong to these devotees): it is beyond us to know how or why prayers are granted. So when you hear fundamentalist believers proclaim: 'you must have been lacking faith' when your prayers did not come to an affirmative result, do not take their word for it. How ignorant to make such a statement. There are so many factors involved (timing, God's plan for us, grace, the degree of personal effort) that we cannot even begin to understand the process. There may be other reasons why our prayers are not answered. We may have to work out some lessons that we have to learn first. When we pray for a miraculous cure, we may not see the factors that caused the illness. Some people receive cures while others do not. If the lessons of the illness have not been learned, would it not be cruel to relieve the illness, knowing that it may have to be repeated? But if the lessons have been learned then a cure could strengthen faith and determination, we become wiser and can put our trust in God.

## **VID) Meditation**

"Be still and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10): I strongly believe that if the time that I have been reading books about spiritual truth were spent in meditation, I would have, by now, greatly advanced mentally and spiritually, although I do not want to underestimate the spiritual impact these books have had on my life. The stillness of deep meditation opens totally different doors. When troubled or discouraged I noticed that in deep silence, while connecting to the Supreme Being, all these emotions subside and are replaced with a divine peace and consciousness I otherwise would not have reached. "This inner consciousness is without

boundary, and, by rising to a higher level of consciousness, we become aware of that which lies far beyond our immediate knowledge”<sup>75</sup>.

It is my personal experience that the answer to every problem will come to me straight from the Infinite; the higher or ultimate consciousness that lies dormant within my own self. But in order for me to ‘connect’ I need to concentrate. Concentration is essential for spiritual progress but it needs practice. I found that persistence helped me to ‘meet’ God. The basic method of meditation is to rise above thought in order to reach the source of thought. To do so we need to purify our consciousness, to free it from all distractions, like sound for example. I remember a time that I constantly had the radio blaring. Today I seldom listen to the radio or CD player. I crave silence. I crave time to be alone, of “a period of the opening of the soul.”<sup>76</sup>. Alone with my maker, my divine provider, who teaches me divine wisdom and understanding, who shows me which way to turn, where to go, what to do or expect next. “I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you.” (Psalm 32, 8). “For the Lord gives wisdom, and from his mouth comes knowledge and understanding.” (Proverbs 2:8).

With time, meditation has given me self-understanding, leading to transformation of myself and my perspective of the world. I came to see myself and the creation as manifestations of God’s will. “The illusion of separateness disappears when all is experienced as One.”<sup>77</sup>. This works for me, but everybody has to experience God in his or her own way. “God cannot be understood by means of rational explanation or argument, but by experiential knowledge

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<sup>75</sup> Goldsmith, Joel. *The Art of Meditation*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1956, p. 25.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, p. 22.

<sup>77</sup> Roof, Jonathan L. *Pathways to God: a Study Guide to the Teachings of Sathya Sai Baba*. Faber, Virginia: Leela Press Inc., 1991, p. 83.



alone.”<sup>78</sup>. In principle, meditation is a function of the inner person and if we do not have the conviction to act on our inner direction, we waste our time in listening for God’s voice.

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid. p. 83.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

### **COMING TO TERMS WITH DEATH**

#### **I) Living in a Death-Denying Society**

*“Until we know what life is, how can we know what death is?”—Confucius:*

Augustine grieves over two very different experiences of the death of loved ones in *Confessions*. The first one involves the exploration of a year-long depression subsequent to the death of a close male friend we would call, in today's terms, a “soul mate”. The second such grieving experience was over the passing away of his mother. Both deaths were devastating and tear-provoking for him. In the examination which Augustine makes of these two experiences, he shows us the common human process about grieving. This process can often be slow and time-consuming, a struggle to overcome (for Augustine even at times taking him to the brink of his sanity) and revealing that ultimately one has to gain acceptance about death in order finally let go.

I have not experienced the death of anyone dear to me; although I did experience the death of the father of a friend of mine, and it was this experience that made me aware that all men are mortal and that I too must die one day. The closest I have ever got to experience the emotions relating to death is grief of having to let go of love relationships. These experiences of letting go, I think, are only a foretaste of the possible pain that death brings to the living. Death would not be so bitter were it not that love makes life so sweet. Death cuts us off from those whom we love and who love us. Love creates communion and produces joy, but death can throw us in to desolation and despair. No wonder that we fear and dread the sting that death brings upon us. Who wants to go through the pain of letting go? On the other hand, for those who have been suffering greatly death could come as a relief, as a release of pain and for those in God communion death comes as a new beginning perhaps even with the joy of a new identity.

Although the expectation of death is somehow integrated into our understanding of life why is it that we still do everything to avoid our own death? Perhaps it is because death is so unfamiliar to us. In spite of the facts that death happens all the time, how often are we personally confronted with it? When a person dies in a hospital he/she is quickly whisked away; a magical disappearing act does away with the evidence before it can upset anyone. "In the American funeral home, the parlour in which the body rests is furnished as if it were a living room in anyone's home. The dead body is beatified; the face is made hardly recognisable with cosmetics that cover up death's pallor in order to leave the impression of life."<sup>79</sup> The effects of this denial of death on our perceptions and expectations are sometimes quite bizarre. Today we even have 'drive in' funeral homes, so one can see the deceased in a glass casket lying there like a movie star, mannequin or actor on display.

## **II) Medical Treatment of the Dying**

In Sherwin B. Nuland's best-seller *How We Die* the banishment of death is being described (we are talking about real death not the Hollywood variety) as demeaning and the devaluation of life itself. He sharply criticises the medical profession for having become an accomplice in this denial of death. In *Life's Living toward Dying*, Guroian, is in total agreement with Nuland; he notes that 80% of American deaths happen in the hospital, moving death out of the field of vision of most Americans, moving behind the curtains and the banks of medical equipment. Nuland contends that people who die in this way, isolated from most aspects of their life prior to illness and hospitalisation and adrift in the unfamiliar environment of modern medical treatment, will have a more difficult time finding meaning in the experience of dying. He also recognises the fact that much of what goes on in medicine today demonstrates how much

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<sup>79</sup> Guroian, Vigen. *Life's Living toward Dying*. Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996, p. 7.

we have been stripped of traditional religious and moral resources for facing death without loss of hope or meaning. But how can we remain in a state of hope? Our elaborate technologies often separate people from those whose love they need most of all when they are dying, and it is not only the dying who are deprived by this mechanisation of medicine and institutionalisation of death, we all suffer because of it. When I volunteered my time at the Royal Victoria Hospital in the palliative care unit it was obvious to me that dying nowadays is more gruesome in many ways. It is lonely, mechanical, and dehumanised. Even determining technically when the time of death has occurred is difficult. "In many cases, the art of caring for the dying has given way to an art of saving life at all cost."<sup>80</sup> And the agony of not being able to die in peace is dreadful. Nurses and doctors are busy fiddling with technical equipment while the patient is simply lying there in the bed, his emotional and spiritual needs simply forgotten, his hand not even held. The patient "may cry for rest, peace, and dignity, but he will get infusions, transfusions, a heart machine, or tracheotomy if necessary."<sup>81</sup> The medical staff is more concerned with saving 'time' than the patient's soul. The point that I am trying to get across is that it is of utmost importance to help the dying by helping them to live rather than letting them vegetate in an inhuman manner. But with our young medical students being part of the death-defying generation we have to consider another factor: these young people are not ready to face 'cold' reality. They have not been taught interpersonal contact and feel at a loss when having to actually deal with emotions, fears and questions concerning the meaning of life and /or death. They are a product of the ever-growing depersonalised system we have created, i.e. the ever-growing numbers of students in our Universities; the trend is away from teacher-student contact. The emphasis in our society is on numbers and masses rather than on the individual. So what do we expect from this new generation? One would think that our great emancipation, our knowledge of science and of man,

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid, p. 14.

<sup>81</sup> Kübler-Ross, Elizabeth. *On Death and Dying*. New York: Simon & Schuster Inc., 1997, p. 22.

has given us better ways and means to prepare our families and ourselves for this inevitable happening. Instead the days are gone when a man was allowed to die in dignity in his own home. Elizabeth Kübler-Ross in her book *On Death and Dying* is questioning this advancement in science; it seems to her that the more advancements science is making, the more people seem to fear and deny the reality of death.

### **III) Fear of Death**

Kübler-Ross points out that in our society the focus is indeed on the masses rather than the individual; this has a dramatic effect on many areas of human interaction. She explains how people in the old days would deal with disputes; “in the old days a man was able to face his enemy eye to eye.”<sup>82</sup> He had a fair chance in a personal encounter with a visible enemy. Today we<sup>3</sup> can anticipate weapons of mass destruction which offer no one a reasonable chance, often not even an awareness of their approach. Bombs simply bring destruction of a wider range, it may come in the form of gasses or other means of chemical warfare – invisible, crippling, killing. “It is no longer the man who fights for his rights, his convictions, or the safety or honour of his family, it is the nation including its women and children who are in the war, affected directly or indirectly without a chance of survival. This is how science and technology have contributed to an ever increasing fear of destruction and therefore fear of death.”<sup>83</sup> Since the discovery and the destructive uses of thermonuclear energy, we know that men are in possession of a frightful instrument of collective suicide that could destroy mankind at any moment. We have succeeded in unleashing forces that we cannot totally master. Thus the fear of collective death is far more justified than ever before. It is obvious that death is getting closer and closer to our own beds, then why is it that we still stay in denial and are only able to imagine our neighbours’ death but

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid, p. 26.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, p. 26.

not our own? Insofar as we consider the possibility of our own death at all, it is an event that is as remote as the end of time, and so we unconsciously tend to repress the fear and the fact of our ultimate doom, or we consciously forget it. We often see death as something that comes from outside; it impinges on what would otherwise be an immortal existence. The notion that death does not originate within ourselves, but comes from outside, continues to influence our attitudes toward death. Death seems somehow foreign, not really part of how we experience ourselves. Even when we understand the biological processes of disease or deterioration, there is often a sense that, if only this defect could be repaired or the deterioration reversed, we would live forever.

#### **IV) Mortal Men**

The fear of suffering and the fear of death are not easily overcome. Even our greatest thinkers such as Sigmund Freud<sup>84</sup> were baffled by the conundrum of death. It is perhaps the chief reason why men have turned to the study of theology, philosophy, psychology, and medicine. Ignace Lepp in his book *Death and its Mysteries* questions how it would be if man was immortal. He uses an example from one of Simone de Beauvoir's novels: *All Men are Mortal*. In this novel, Raymond Fosca was terrified of growing old and dying. The time of man on earth seemed to him too tragically short for realising anything truly great for the glory of his city. He drinks an elixir of immortality and youth. The story goes on to tell us that in the course of centuries he loved, married and begot children. His wives and children grew old and died, while he remained. But lo and behold, he accomplished no more in centuries than he could have in a reign of a few years. His people lived as they pleased and refused to accept his leadership. Instead of expressing admiration and love, they feared him and wanted to be rid of him. He could no longer believe in

the future or in progress and became terribly bored. Women at first believed that they were exceptionally lucky to be loved by someone immortal, who would always remember them. But they were soon undeceived and driven to madness when they realised that their immortal lover was incapable of giving himself, either in life or in death. In Lepp's eyes, all the deepest emotions of Fosca were short-lived. Lepp describes how Fosca himself came to realise this; that only those who must die are capable of truly loving life, undertaking great works, running risks and believing in the future. Fosca knew too many spring times, too many roses, too many loves, to appreciate any of them. If we believed that we were immortal we would no longer question the meaning of our lives; it would be little more than a boring routine. Death poses the question of the meaning of life in all of its breadth and depth, for the end of an activity always reveals its meaning.

Gordon in his book *Overcoming the Fear of Death* also discusses immortality. If immortality existed, according to Gordon, man, looking forward to an indefinite life span, would continually think and plan ahead rather than live in the moment. The moment is simply a transition point to the future, a future that may never arrive. Gordon believes that people therefore would live in a state of constant tension, conflict, and confusion due to the fact that they were living a constant lie. He encourages people to live life as it actually is, with full knowledge of its transitory nature and their vulnerability. If man could do this he might relax and be more spontaneous. He could silence that small nagging voice within him that constantly reminds him that he is mortal. If man accepted his boundaries he would be more focused and concentrated in his actions and in doing so become one with himself – not doing one thing while thinking of another. "If he lived each moment as though it would be his last, he could hopefully become one with the moment, the person he was with, the situation he was confronting, the

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<sup>34</sup> Freud insistently linked the ability to confront the total annihilation of self with maturity, offering no pacifiers to, as he saw it, this stark reality." (Mary Lou Randour, *Women's Psyche, Women's Spirit*, p. 21).

world, and most importantly, one with himself.”<sup>85</sup> If we were constantly living with the fear of death, rather than just the awareness of death, we would lose sight of the joy of life. In my opinion these dark feelings have been especially enhanced by religious teachings. The Christian religion in particular uses the premise that it is the life hereafter that really counts, giving us the impression that our earthly life is important only as a gateway. Man is constantly reminded to be on guard and avoid jeopardising an eternal life of bliss for a passing moment of satisfaction, on what is, after all, only a way station en route to eternity. This perspective of the Church obliges men to live in constant fear of natural human behaviour. The Christian Church claims to know some answers to the nagging question of what happens to us after we die. It offers the consolation of a continued life be it heaven or hell. Personally I struggle with that notion; I think there is more to life, death and God’s creation than we will ever know. “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.” – Isaiah 55:8-9.

## **V) Immortality of the Soul**

I do not think that faith in the survival of the soul is an absurd illusion, a simple projection of a vain desire not to return to nothingness. In this chapter I will not try to prove that man’s soul is immortal, many philosophers have tried to do so. Personally I am inclined to think that it is impossible to prove the immortality of the soul scientifically. Science operates within the framework of space and time, which is obviously not the realm of the spirit. But belief in the survival of the soul gives meaning to my life and hopefully to others. When I look at my own existence I know for certain that I am more than just a biological entity, my intuition tells me that

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<sup>85</sup> Gordon. David Cole. *Overcoming the Fear of Death*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1970. p. 18.



within me resides a spirit, a soul. My intuition is a basic instinct. And my instinct does not contradict my reason; rather it operates in a domain inaccessible to reason. It grasps reality in its totality, integrating reason. It is a normal function of my psyche and is always operative unless impeded by obstacles.

“Man’s consciousness of being more-than-a-body is the locus of thought and love, of all that constitutes the specificity of the human person. We call it soul or spirit.”<sup>86</sup> Of course we have those that will dispute the existence of a spirit within us; it is not a matter of scientific knowledge but it is a matter of belief, of faith, and my faith is purely intuitive, it is what I feel. To bring feelings into language is at times an impossibility, especially when it comes to ‘proving and scrutinising my feelings under scientific methods and techniques. I therefore come to the conclusion that the immortality of the soul is a matter of faith rather than science. Where will my soul go after it has departed from this earth? I have not the slightest idea. As long as it is not the image of heaven taught to me as a child in catechisms; I would be bored to death.

Lepp tries to make the point for immortality of the soul from naturalism; he believes that the person is not annihilated by death: “When the life of the body ceases, the spirit is re-energised and capable of attaining a new level of evolution. It disintegrates; the matter that composed it continues to exist in other forms, whether animate or inanimate.”<sup>87</sup> Lepp argues that since the matter which constitutes man’s body can change into animal and vegetable forms of life: the same can be true of the soul.

Love and knowledge have never bored me. Those who have experienced authentic love and intellectual achievement know well that they can never reach a saturation point. My spiritual enrichment, love, and knowledge during my temporal existence have become extremely important to me because they are destined to be an integral part of my eternity. Therefore the

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<sup>86</sup> Lepp, Ignace. *Death and its Mysteries*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1968, p. 158

<sup>87</sup> Ibid. p. 168.

idea of progress stimulates me to conceive eternal life as eternal growth, with learning as the essence of my life. It goes without saying that theology, in common with other sciences such as philosophy and psychology, can have no direct access to what lies beyond death. All they can do is try to help understand life better and thus try to get a better idea about the meaning of death, accepting it as the unavoidable part of life that it is, a transition to whatever one believes.

## **VI) Different Beliefs of Death**

*“The unexamined life is not worth living”–Socrates.*

Exploring our beliefs about immortality may not result in an easier acceptance of death but it can provide a more coherent philosophy of life and death, making possible a balance between hopes and perceptions. The response to the question: “How, then, should one live?” reflects a person’s values and beliefs about human experience and the nature of reality. Our philosophy of life influences our philosophy of death. Conversely, how we perceive death and what meaning we give it affect the way we live. Therefore, once again, there is a need for self-investigation.

The Christian tradition is fear oriented when it comes to the after life. The books of the Bible do not provide a systematic theology of death or of the afterlife. In the biblical story of Job’s encounter with adversity and death, the human situation is described quite bleakly:

“There is always hope for a tree: when felled, it can start its life again; its shoots continue to sprout. Its roots may be decayed in the earth, Its stump withering in the soil. but let it scent the water, and it buds, and puts out branches like a plant new set. But man? He dies, and lifeless he remains; Man breathes his last, and then where is he? The waters of the sea may disappear, All the rivers may run dry or drain away; But man, once in his resting place, will never rise again. The heavens will wear away before he wakes, Before he rises from his sleep.” Job 14:7-12

The New Testament on the other hand emphasises the ultimate hope of resurrection of the body as a promise of God that will be realised at the end of time. This idea of resurrection that had been developing for some time in the Judaic tradition became radically transformed in the minds of early Christians. "The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus becomes the new model of reality for believers, heralding the possibility of eternal life for everyone."<sup>88</sup> This eternal life was, so to speak, expected just around the corner. Since that did not happen the Early Church Fathers were at a loss and started to develop greater concern about the potential consequences of an individual's conduct during life; purgatory was invented. "Religion itself was thought to contribute to the education of children and the maintenance of the social order because its teaching contained terrible threats of punishment for the 'wicked'."<sup>89</sup> Today, the notion of resurrection of the body and the notion of the soul's immortality each have support. For some, the distinction is vital, others give little thought to either the distinction or the necessary logic that follows from each of these concepts. Until recently most people would find adequate answers to the enigma of death by relying on the teachings of the Christian creeds.

The Christian approach is that life is opposed to death, death is the enemy of life; life represents affirmation, death negation. Death is 'evil', life is 'good'. Western experiences tend to be dualistic, an either/or approach. But in today's modern world our understanding is rapidly and radically altering. Death has been secularised, divorced from its religious connotations. "The underpinnings for the traditional beliefs no longer carry the same weight in a culture that emphasises the need for empirical verification."<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> DeSpelder, Lynne & Strickland. *The Last Dance: Encountering Death and Dying*. California: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1983, p. 385.

<sup>89</sup> Lepp, p. 53.

<sup>90</sup> DeSpelder, Lynne & Strickland, p. 388.

Looking towards the East, we find totally different phenomena. The East emphasises the integrity of the whole, seeking unity, including distinction within a holistic “both/and” approach. Dualism, in this train of thought, is merely an illusory aspect of an essentially undivided reality. Death and life are not seen as mutually exclusive opposites, but rather as complementary facets of an underlying process, the process of rebirth, a pattern of constant arising and passing away: reincarnation. “Reincarnation is the progress of a soul through many lives on the earth plane, as through so many grades in a school, before it ‘graduates’ to the immortal perfection of oneness with God.”<sup>91</sup> Sathya Sai Baba has the following to say about reincarnation: “Man is a pilgrim set on a long journey: he has started from the stone, moved on to the vegetable and animal, and has now come to the human stage. He has still a long way to go to reach the divine, and so he should not tarry. Every moment is precious; every step must take further and nearer.”<sup>92</sup> Over the course of many births, it is the Eastern belief that each of us also has opportunities to fulfill our desires and thus transcend them. We develop talents and abilities beyond what we could accomplish in one lifetime. (I’d like to remind the reader that it would be an error to think that faith in whatever religious orientation delivers us from the fear of death or that the latter is the origin of religious faith. It is rather love of life that delivers us from the fear of death, and this love is found in believers and unbelievers alike.)

We also have those that take a naturalistic approach in trying to give some meaning to death: Nuland states:

“A realistic expectation also demands our acceptance that one’s allotted time on earth must be limited to an allowance consistent with the continuity of the existence of our species. Mankind, for all its unique gifts, is just as much a part of the ecosystem as any other zoologic or botanical form, and nature does not distinguish. We die so that the world may continue. We have been given the

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<sup>91</sup> Yogananda, Paramahansa. *Man’s Eternal Quest*. New Delhi, India: Baba Barkha nath Printers, 1975, p. 216.

<sup>92</sup> Roof, Jonathan L. *Pathways to God: a Study Guide to the Teachings of Sathya Sai Baba*. Faber, Virginia: Leela Press Inc., 1991, p. 113.

miracle of life because trillions upon trillions of living things have prepared the way for us and then have died – in a sense, for us. We die, in turn, so that others may live. The tragedy of a single individual becomes, in the balance of natural things, the triumph of ongoing life.” (p.267).

I readily agree that death in general is absolutely necessary in a universe that is as yet in a state of unfulfillment. But I see my own death or the death of anyone close to me still as fearful. Nuland’s rational consideration does not abolish this fear.

## **VII) Death: An Integral Part of Our Lives**

Whatever we want to believe the fact of the matter is that death is an integral part of life that gives meaning to human existence. Too many times we allow life to just pass us by. In her work *Death: the Final Stage of Growth* Elizabeth Kübler-Ross challenges us on this matter: “If you can begin to see death as an invisible, but friendly, companion on your life’s journey – gently reminding you not to wait till tomorrow to do what you mean to do – then you can learn to live your life rather than simply passing through it”. What she really is challenging us for is to live each day as if it is the only one we have. And she is right, for it is those who have not really lived- who have left issues unsettled, dreams unfulfilled, hopes shattered, and who have let the real things in life (love and being loved as an example) pass them by- who are most reluctant to die. Ignace Lepp confirms this observation; he observed that those whose lives were full and exciting faced death calmly and courageously (p. 38). The paradox is that those in love with life are less afraid of death than those who live superficially. He further states that those whose lives have no meaning cannot give meaning to their death. Such men, when faced with difficult circumstances, have a tendency to find someone to blame, either their parents or even God. Of course we can repress the fear of death, but it is common knowledge that repressed fears continue to act nonetheless, only now they are beyond the pale of rational control and,

consequently, much more destructive. But the authentically alive can readily see that death is not the end but the fulfilment of life.

It is never too late to start living and growing. A long process of individualisation is necessary in order for us to integrate death as part of our daily living. At any time we can change the road that we are on. It is a matter of making that choice, believing in that choice and putting it into action. "Many men and women complain of having missed their vocation and being as a consequence definitively condemned to mediocrity. In the final analysis, each man's vocation and the meaning of his life depends on his own free will."<sup>93</sup> Whatever it is that makes our lives more filled with personal meaning we had better do something about it NOW, because tomorrow when we get the final notice we may not have the energy nor the time. Instead of thinking of death as the end of life, I propose that we see it as the last act, the last lesson to be learned, the fulfilment of temporal existence. It would then follow that if we succeed in giving meaning to our lives, death, although not exempt from its anxiety, would be by the same token meaningful.

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<sup>93</sup> Lepp. p. 138.

## **CHAPTER NINE**

### **CONCLUSION: HAPPINESS IN GOD**

#### **I) The Meaning of Peace in One's Life**

Augustine started off living a life filled with 'pleasures of the world' and not finding happiness therein. He was restless and could not find peace. His life on earth seemed to be trial without intermission but his deep rooted desire to find happiness, to be set free from his addictive nature made him persevere in searching for God: "For where I found truth, there I found my God. You, who are Truth, reside everywhere to answer all who ask council of You. And you answer clearly, but all do not hear clearly." (*Confessions* X: 6, p. 235). Augustine inspires us to have faith that God will take care of us. Faith is the very key to freedom of the spirit, although rationally faith is the most illogical thing in the world because it asks us to trust life with all its tribulations. However, faith can never be real unless we give ourselves completely to God and accept His promises. "Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the Lord" Psalm 31:24.

Sathya Sai Baba in his writings compares peace to a well-channelled river. It is not static; rather, it harmoniously adapts to change. "Although a river constantly flows, it maintains an equilibrium with the shore, from obscure mountain origins it plunges to the plains, assuming a name, and then it merges namelessly in the vast ocean. Peace also flows and grows; it is the sign of God's creation working in harmony."<sup>94</sup> "For I have learned in whatsoever state I am, to be content therewith. I know both how to abound and how to suffer need." (*Confessions* X: 31, p.240). I understand from these sayings that peace is in accepting 'the flow of my river' and in going with that flow. I need to discipline my mind so I can peacefully contend with the present without dwelling on the

past or worrying about the future. In chapter Seven on Prayer, I am reminded to control these endless thoughts, it is only then that the divine can work through me. This divine Self is able to radiate peace and joy in all circumstances, in spite of the storms that disturb the water of my river that enters the depths of the sea where it is calm, where there is peace. "He (God) calms the storm so that its waves are still." (Psalm 107:29). When connected to my divinity, I cease to be upset by circumstances. Faith in God restored my self-image because it helped me to have faith in myself. This vision resulted from analysing my thoughts and (re)actions. When I realised the painful consequences of my desire for fleeting pleasures, using them to cover up my real problems, I learned to search for more lasting values. "Be still, and know that I am God." (Psalm 46: 10).

My worldly thoughts are diminishing, making space for increasing wonder and awe of God the Creator. And with this a feeling of being content with whatever may happen is flowing within me. Everything has a reason; from everything a lesson can be learned. Learning is the essence of life. And the answer to every problem I encounter comes to me straight from within, from the Infinite. "God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of Love and of a sound mind." (II Timothy 1:7). "Happiness does not depend on external events, it belongs to the very nature of the individual and remains unaffected by suffering. It persists through both joy and sorrow, being a spiritual undertone which results from the positive and whole-hearted acceptance of life in all its aspects."<sup>95</sup> With other words we need "Returning to the Source of our being " (*Confessions* XI: 8, p. 267). The problem is finding and remaining in this centre of relaxed balance and poise in our individual life. My experiences have taught me that many times I am my own enemy, I stand in my own way .

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<sup>94</sup> Roof. p. 181.

<sup>95</sup> Watts, Alan.W. *The Meaning of Happiness: The Quest for Freedom of the Spirit in Modern Psychology and the Wisdom of the East*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1968, introduction xviii.



“For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am!”  
(Romans 7: 18-24)

In the middle of this wretched existence I fall many times, painful in all its aspects but what choice do I have but to pick up myself by my bootstraps and go on. “It is in the process of dying and beginning anew.”(*Confessions* XI: 7, p.266).

## **II) Union with the Divine Self**

Watts in his book *The Meaning of Happiness* maintains that the most profound happiness is to be found in a union or harmony between the conscious of the individual and the unconscious, inner universe. “For the unconscious is not, as some imagine, a mental refuse-pit: it is simply unfettered nature, demonic and divine, painful and pleasant. hideous and lovely, cruel and compassionate, destructive and creative. It is the source of heroism, life and inspiration as well as of fear, hatred, and crime. Indeed, it is as if we carried inside of us an exact duplicate of the world we see around us, for the world is a mirror of the soul, and the soul a mirror of the world.”<sup>96</sup> (See also chapter Three, the Hope for healing Human Evil).

Although we tend to perceive this state as unusually complicated, Watts thinks it actually is unusually simple: “its solution lies so close to us and is so self-evident that we have the greatest difficulty in seeing it. For there are certain truths which have to be stood

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid, p. 107.

on their heads before they can be noticed at all; in the ordinary way they are so simple that we fail to perceive them.”<sup>97</sup> Watts calls us to unite ourselves with life while we on the other hand think the opposite, that we are separated from it instead. He urges us to become what we are now. He argues that the human intellect cannot grasp the nature of eternity unless it is spread out along a measuring rod of time. But what is time? “Time is simply a series of thoughts related to, and based upon, other thoughts, and founded upon notions that do not accord with the way things are. Both the past and the future draw our attention away from the experience of that which is, the eternal here-and- now.”<sup>98</sup> “Thus it seems to me that time is certainly extendedness – but I do not know what it is extendedness off: probably of the mind itself.” (*Confessions* XI: 26, p. 281).

Watts further elaborates on the view of life in which man is an isolated being without any sense of union or positive relationship between himself and the rest of the universe as it exists both externally and within the soul. “Spiritual freedom is not apparent in this state because man as an isolated unit has no meaning, just as the finger is meaningless without the hand, and the hand without the whole body.”<sup>99</sup> As discussed in Chapter Seven, a life without meaning is not a happy life. Watts continues to explain that in order for man to be free he must see himself and life as a whole, not as active power and passive instrument but as two aspects of a single activity. Man’s experience becomes whole when he realises that there is no difference between his own thoughts and actions and the nature of the universe. “For when you accept what you are now you become free to be what you are now, and this is why the fool becomes a sage when he lets himself be

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid. introduction xxiii.

<sup>98</sup> Gordon, David Cole. *Overcoming the Fear of Death*. New York: the Macmillan Company, 1970, p. 38.

<sup>99</sup> Watts, p. 179.

free to be a fool.”<sup>100</sup> Indeed, we are always free to be what we are now but often false pride keeps us from it.

Acceptance is active as well as passive; as passivity it is accepting ourselves, our desires and fears as movements of life, nature and the unconscious; as activity it is letting ourselves be free to be ourselves and to have our desires and fears. This feeling of wholeness occurs not in rare moments of insight only but in everyday living. “This comes just as soon as we realise that all our activities are just as much activities of nature and the universe as are the circling of planets, the running of water, the roaring of thunder, and the blowing of the wind.”<sup>101</sup>

Yogananda proclaims in *Man's Eternal Quest*: “The greatest factor in achieving spiritual success is willingness”<sup>102</sup> Keeping this in mind we can move forward as freely and uninterruptedly as the wind. Yogananda asks us to accept the totality of our experience: ourselves as we are, our circumstances as they are, and the relationship between them as is. Then we can see that wholeness is holiness, and that holiness is another word for acceptance. I accept that in each of these moments I am united with God and that, whether I am a saint or a sinner, the intensity of that union never changes. For God is the wholeness of life.

“Let Truth, the Light of my heart, speak to me not my own darkness! I fell away and my sight was darkened; but from that depth, even from that depth, I loved Thee. I wandered afar. but I remembered Thee. I heard Thy voice behind me calling me to return, but I could scarcely hear it for the tumult of my unquieted passions. And now behold I return to Thy fountain panting and with burning thirst. Let none bar my way: I shall drink of it and so I shall

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid, p. 180.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid, p. 180.

<sup>102</sup> Yogananda, p. 19

live. Let me not be my own life: of myself I lived evilly and to myself I was death. In Thee I live again. Do Thou speak to me, do Thou instruct me.”

(*Confessions* XII: 10, p. 294).

Freedom exists through the knowledge that the union with God, life, nature can never be destroyed; life is expressing God in all that we think and do. In the freedom of the spirit I understand that whether I love life or loathe it, whether I am filled with compassion or hatred, wonder or lust, beauty or horror, wisdom or ignorance – each and all of these opposites are as acceptable as day and night, calm and storm, waking and sleeping. I can trust and live life because I have faith in God. “ I sought the Lord and He heard me and delivered me from all my fears.” (Psalm 34:4).

In learning to accept all possible states of my own soul, I learn that God accepts all possible types of beings. And though the physical universe visits me with both joy and pain, life and death, in the spiritual realm all these opposites are reconciled. Not only are they mutually necessary, life and death together constitute a more glorious life than life alone. In accepting this reality, this truth, life and death are expressions of love. Acceptance is a way of seeing that which already exists. If we can learn to love, to accord freedom to both the heights and depths of our own natures, we realise the very nature of the universe outside and inside ourselves. If I do not accept these many opposites, the universe has no meaning to me; it is senseless fate and chaos.

In a universe where freedom of the spirit offers such gigantic possibilities, sin is a waste of time. But moral living requires tremendous responsibility and discipline. Freedom in God inspires expression in ‘works of love’ by which I mean integrity. As a free woman I am trying to be moral because I choose to be so, not because I think that I ought to be so. “In goodness of will is our peace.” (*Confessions* XIII: 9, p.326) “When man thinks, speaks, and acts along virtuous lines, his conscience will be clean and he will

have inner peace. Knowledge is power, it is said; but virtue is peace.” Sathya Sai Baba.  
“The fruit of righteousness will be peace; the effect of righteousness will be quietness and confidence forever.” Isaiah 32:17

### **III) Illumination**

In the experience of everyday life, living wholly, we can find illumination if we take quiet time and attention to look inside where it shines. The whole power of the universe is at work in the least of things, the simplest of thoughts and the smallest of deeds. What still baffles me personally is that since I took my first steps on this path of inner healing towards wholeness, I realise that I am truly positively related to the universe and God’s loving power. Whatever I feel, think or do, I cannot cut myself off from the power that hurls the stars through space and causes their fire, that bellows in thunder and whispers in the wind, that produces a giant tree from the microscopic germ of a seed. and wears away mountains to thin clouds of dust. It is the same power that I use to lift my finger. In that moment of Illumination I realise that the universe is a mystery greater than I can ever hope to fathom, for the deepest perplexity of all is that such a creature as myself should be allowed to use the power that moves the stars in the littlest of my deeds. And my desire is to use this power to learn how to love all beings. “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.” John 13:34

“Thus we love our neighbor in bringing help to his bodily needs, for our soul bears in itself seed, by reason of the likeness [between our neighbor and ourselves], so that from our infirmity pity moves us to bring aid to the poverty of those in need, helping them as we would wish help given us if we were in the same great need.”(*Confessions* XIII: 17, p. 333)

To become a loving universe we need to be our whole Selves, and to become our Selves we need to look at and within us, exercise discipline, integrity, accepting our good as well as our darker parts, where we can let God's Light shine. Then we can realize peace and holiness. "He who is persistent will realize God."<sup>103</sup>

Seemingly contradictory though, in order to find this peaceful state of happiness I think we must be willing to suffer: "What is it to endure discomfort of the flesh and discipline of the mind to gain the eternal solace of Spirit?"<sup>104</sup> "O Lord have mercy on me and grant what I desire: for, as I think, my desire is not of earth, not of gold and silver, and gems or fine raiment or power and glory or the lusts of the flesh or the necessities of my body and of this our earthly pilgrimage: all these things shall be added unto us who seek the kingdom of God and Thy justice." (*Confessions* XI: 2, p. 263).

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid, p.166.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, p. 445.

**LOVE IS PATIENT,  
LOVE IS KIND.  
IT DOES NOT ENVY,  
IT DOES NOT BOAST,  
IT IS NOT PROUD.  
IT IS NOT RUDE,  
IT IS NOT SELF-SEEKING,  
IT IS NOT EASILY ANGERED,  
IT KEEPS NO RECORD OF WRONGS.  
LOVE DOES NOT DELIGHT IN EVIL BUT REJOICES WITH  
THE TRUTH.  
IT ALWAYS PROTECTS,  
ALWAYS TRUSTS,  
ALWAYS HOPES,  
ALWAYS PERSEVERES.  
LOVE NEVER FAILS.**

**1 Corinthians 13: 4-8**

God blesses us all in our search for inner healing, meaning in life, eternity and peace!

## **THE ROAD TO WISDOM**

The road to wisdom? — Well, it's plain  
and simple to express:

Err

and err

and err again

but less

and less

and less.

—***Piet Hein***, Grooks 1, General Publishing  
Company Limited, Don Mills, 1969, p.34



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