DESPAIR AND DEPRESSION

AS FACTORS IN RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

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SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS

Most theology, like most fiction, is essentially autobiographical. Aquinas, Calvin, Barth, Tillich, worked out their systems in their own ways and lived them in their lives. And if you press them far enough, even at their most cerebral and forbidding, you will find an experience of flesh and blood, a human face smiling or frowning or weeping or covering its eyes before something that happened once - maybe no more than a child falling sick, a thunderstorm, a dream, and yet it made a difference which no theology can ever convey or entirely conceal. (1)

This work arises from an event in my own personal history. It is a part of an ongoing process in which I am attempting to understand that event, to set it into its context not only within my own life but also within our wider, collective human experience. Because this personal experience lies behind all that follows, and because it is important for the reader to bear in mind that I write out of the context of experience and not from the vacuum of scientific detachment, I feel it essential to present a summary account of what happened to me.

Eight years ago, when I was in my mid-thirties, a profound disaster occurred in my personal life, a disaster which had repercussions in every area of my life. At first I responded frantically, striving to put things right, to overcome the bad consequences, to restore equilibrium. Gradually, as it became clearer that I was helpless to mend the situation, a deepening depression overcame me. As weeks turned into months I became more and more ill - if this kind of state can properly be described as an illness. I was having what is rather vaguely called a "nervous breakdown". I isolated myself from all but a few very close friends. I developed the physical and functional symptoms of acute depression - sleeplessness, loss of appetite and weight, haggard appearance, inability to concentrate or even think coherently. Alongside all the inner feelings and self-

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1 "The Alphabet of Grace" Frederick Buechner. Seaburg Press NY 1970

remorse, etc. My doctor offered me medication, which for reasons I still am not clear about I refused.

Some six months after its initiation this process came to a kind of climax. By this time I felt myself to be reduced to virtually nothing. I was doing nothing and thinking nothing, existing day by day with an awful sense of emptiness and utter worthlessness. One day the inner pain became acute, unbearable, and I physically collapsed. It was while I lay in a state of crumpled, total dejection that there came suddenly, spontaneously and seemingly from nowhere a complete transformation. Perhaps I might quote from an article I wrote a few months later:

.....as I lay on the floor, utterly limp, inert and broken, it happened. I felt as though a great, warm, dark, gentle and oh-so-tender hand was softly gathering my broken body into its loving grasp which warmed and soothed and brought life again. I was being thawed into being again by a caress which I cannot begin to describe. For the first time in my life I knew love. And I knew it when I knew that I didn't deserve it. I was so broken as not to deserve it. For love is simply given. And there on the floor of my study, I knew love.

Don't ask me where it came from. Certainly not from me. And certainly not from any other human being. It came from within me and yet was all around me. I went to bed and slept for almost twenty-four hours. When I awoke I was still me but I felt utterly different..... (2)

Unfortunately we do not have a single word to describe the new condition in which I found myself, as words such as "depression" or "breakdown" or "despair" serve for the previous state. It was a condition compounded partly of feelings and partly of knowledge, though this latter was not in terms of any new information as such, but rather of new understandings and interpretations of what had long been known. Things suddenly made sense, or if they did not make sense, I was no longer concerned about my inability to understand.

there was an element of humility, and awareness of humanity, a relaxed sense of trust; a heightened perception of the beauty and worth of things; a loss of striving after self-imposed ideals and standards; and, above all, the sense of being loved, valued, of worth, though by or to whom remained shadowy.

Some will doubtless wish to criticise such language as being woolly, sentimental, unobjective. It is not; it is a by-no-means-inaccurate attempt to describe the inner states accompanying the experience, to say subjectively what went on. In those few hours I realised that I was "better" in the sense of being cured of the breakdown and depression. This "cure" may fruitfully be compared with the normal processes of "cure" of such conditions. But there was a wider and deeper aspect to the "cure". Not only was I better than I had been in the depression; Iwas also better than I had been before the depression, before the event which set the described events into action. I knew with complete certainty that I had been deeply and irrevocably changed for the better.

Since those months in 1976 I have been engaged in a long task of trying to understand what had happened, and as mentioned earlier this present work is a part of that task. My primary datum was the experience; secondary data the undoubted changes which had occurred to me. I say "undoubted", but in fact for some time I wondered whether it had all been a dream or hallucination. Then I would recall that the despair and pain had been real enough, and their sudden ending a fact. Also, my sense of being deeply altered was confirmed by close friends of many years standing who detected a profound though subtle change in me.

But whence had come the cure, the sudden and dramatic healing, restoration and even improvement? I had used no medication, so the use or ceasing to use drugs could not be responsible. There had been no change whatsoever in my circumstances. There had been no alleviation of my depressed feeling state, no change within myself of attitude or of exterior circumstance.

despair had been transformed into a sort of bliss.

Having accepted that the experience was real enough, I then wondered whether I was highly unusual, maybe unique. This was resolved when in the course of the following eighteen months, two members of the congregation to which I minister underwent similar experiences of acute anxiety and depressions which were suddenly and spontaneously relieved. In neither case was the despair as acute as in my case; in neither case was the reversal quite so sudden, nor did it have the same measure of dramatic effect. But I believe that a similar kind of process was happening, enough to reassure me that this kind of experience is by no means unique to myself.

I was intrigued to know more about the experience. What are its dynamics? What is the source of the sudden reversal? There is undoubtedly a large store of "received wisdom" circulating which maintains that suffering is in some way ultimately for our benefit; that he who endures suffering will eventually be enhanced in stature, maturity, wisdom; and that suffering is a pathway to revelation. Such opinions find many expressions:

"Knowledge by suffering entereth;" (3)

or

If God is anything, he is understanding ..... Understanding is acquired by means of suffering or distress or experience. Will, desire, love, pain, envy, etc., are all natural. But understanding is acquired. (4)

Yet there must be acknowledged a strain of sentimentalism in such opinions. Suffering in whatever form can be and often - perhaps usually - is destructive, and I feel that the two previous quotations must be offset by a third:

For instance, there is a widespread idea that suffering is in some way a remedial experience. Yet I do not believe that suffering necessarily makes a man more

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3 Elizabeth Barrett Browning "A Vision of Poets"
4 William Blake "Proverbs of Hell"

a voyage round the ...
interesting. Many travellers are first-class bores! (5)

However, even when as in my case the suffering was ultimately enhancing, the "received wisdom" is curiously vague on how the process works. I was left with questions about its nature, its frequency, its significance in people's lives. How is it to be interpreted and understood? What are the religious and psychological causes and effects involved? These and other questions cluster around the singular nature of the experience; the attempt to answer them requires an assessment of just what kind of experience this is. For our assumptions about the nature and category of the experience will determine the area in which we seek our answers. In particular, are we here dealing with the worlds of psychology or religion? Or perhaps - if possible - both?

Obviously the experienc e such as I have described comes within the purview of the psychological disciplines. But we must beware of simply accepting conventional appropiations. Nowadays depression is widely regarded as a psychological complaint, an illness, with symptoms both mental and affective. Its relief is regarded as a cure. To some extent its resolution, even sudden resolution as in my case, is amenable to psychological interpretation.

But is the psychological interpretation the only one? And is it adequate to cover all the features of an experience such as mine? Does not the experience have features which are more readily to be associated with the world of religion? For a number of reasons, one of which is the straightforward one that I am a minister of religion and therefore seek religious interpretations of all manner of events, I believe that such experiences do have religious aspects of great significance. The actual content of the experience and

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5 John Allen "The Problem of Suffering" P. 17
BBC Publications 1962

love, fulfilment, etc., show the immediate [illegible] religious experience and language. There is, too, the sense of "otherness"; of being at the receiving end, able only to receive, and being thereby subject to an inexorable process. That I, a minister, should have such categories of interpretation and the appropriate vocabulary available is understandable. But what if others with no vested religious commitment or even interest were to have similar experiences and feel compelled to describe and interpret them in religious terms? This would indicate a religious dimension to the experience which demands to be recognised.

A feature which theology and psychology have in common is a lack of specificity in the disciplines. Each has "elastic" boundaries which can be stretched to incorporate all manner of data. Theologians recognise that all experience, all reality, can be interpreted as issuing from the Divine. Similarly, in-as-much-as all experience is experienced by the psyche, so all can come within the scope of psychological interpretation. There is, perhaps, a tendency today to reduce religious experience to the psychological; to stretch the boundaries of psychology until they engulf all religious experience, leaving only the realm of metaphysics to the theologian. Perhaps to reduce either to the other is a mistake. Perhaps the psychological and religious worlds are complementary, each able to enhance the understanding offered by the other. It is within terms of such complementarity that I seek to work.

To summarise: because of such an experience happening to me, I wish to examine the phenomenon of conditions of despair being resolved seemingly spontaneously and resulting in a change in the experiencer for the better, a change which is long-term if not permenant. I wish to approach the matter from a variety of angles. Firstly, to determine whether the experience happens with any significant frequency.

Secondly, to see whether it has any scriptural support as a religious experience of significance. Thirdly, to consider some psychological interpretations of the phenomenon. And, lastly, to view it from the religious angle, particularly in terms of our consciousness of sin and being forgiven.

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The Phenomena of Religious Experience

In this chapter I wish to review some contemporary research on religious experience; to consider some of the features of religious experience revealed by that research; to reflect upon how we should approach and interpret such data; and to determine whether or not distress plays a significant part in association.

In 1965 two American sociologists with a special interest in the sociology of religion distributed a questionnaire to a sample of nearly 3,000 people. One of the questions asked whether the respondents had ever had "a feeling you were somehow in the presence of God?" The researchers, Glock and Stark, were more than a little surprised at the response to this question. Remember that the mid-sixties was the era of the Death of God, of Secular Theology, of theologians asserting that man had come of age and had no further need of religious faith. Yet to this question 45% of those claiming to be Protestants and 43% of those claiming to be Roman Catholics were sure that they had felt the presence of God. In addition, a further 28% of the Protestants and 23% of the Roman Catholics thought that they had, but were not sure. Glock and Stark felt that this was a significantly high proportion, and was quite unexpected by them. They comment:

> There are few cues in the culture which would lead an observer to predict so high a rate of supernaturalism in what seems to be an increasingly modern, scientific and secularised society. (6)

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6 C.Y. Glock and R. Stark "Religion and Society in Tension" Rand McNally: Chicago 1965

the first authenticated recognition of a significant amount of religious experience in modern Western society. It is important in showing the scale of that experience. It also serves a cautionary function in that it alerts us to the precariousness of some of our assumptions about what is currently the case in people's lives. Glock and Stark, and I suspect many others, were and still are tempted to assume that religious experience hardly exists today because they likewise assume the widely-projected image of our age as being scientifically rational and secular. It should also alert us to be on our guard against the temptation to refuse people their own experiences. Because of scientific (or quasi-scientific) assumptions and dogmas we assume that such few religious experiences as may happen can be reduced to and understood in terms of, eg. brain chemistry or shifts in hormone balance. By so assuming we abrogate the person's experience, unjustifiably so. We need to listen more and assume less. There is a gulf of difference between a religious experience and the experience of a person having a religious experience. If we would learn more of the former we need to be able to accept what people are able to tell us. Of prime importance are:

.....the accounts which by introspection each individual can give us of the pattern taking shape within himself. (7)

In the late 1960's in Great Britain, Sir Alister Hardy, eminent marine biologist and theorist of evolution, was becoming increasingly interested in the phenomena in peoples lives which they interpreted as carrying religious significance. His initial concern was to wonder whether such phenomena carry any evolutionary function. Although he was familiar with much of the work done on the physiology of trance and meditational states, the analysis of their

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7 Robinson, E "Tolerating the Paradoxical" Religious Experience Research Unit Oxford 1978

that such work missed out the essential sense for the individual of what the experience felt like and what regulative significance it had for him. With financial backing from a number of trusts and in accommodation supplied by Manchester College, Oxford, he set up a unit (the Religious Experience Research Unit, hereafter referred to as RERU) to study the phenomena of claimed religious experience. The inception was 1969.

Because he felt that it was the subjective accounts and interpretations which were of the highest importance, Sir Alister simply asked people to send him accounts in their own words of experiences which they deemed to be "religious". The delineation of the experiences he deliberately left rather vague. His first requests were publicised through theological periodicals and the response was disappointingly small. However, the national press showed interest in his scheme and published his request, together with some interviews and information about the aims of the project. In response to the publicity in the Guardian, The Observer, The Times and the Daily Mail there came a much greater response. By 1984 the RERU had on its files some 4,000 accounts of experiences which the correspondents felt to be religiously significant for them. Of these, some 3,000 came within months of the initial press appeals, the remainder trickling in during the intervening years in response to further publicity, books and papers published by the Unit, lectures, etc.

In addition, the RERU has co-sponsored a more carefully monitored research sample of people's religious experiences conducted during the 1970's by David Hay and Ann Morrisey from Nottingham University. Their work is based partly on a student questionnaire, partly on "bought space" in a National Opinion Poll survey and partly on personally-conducted interviews of a cross section of Midlands people. Their findings confirm and augment the RERU observations, but provide a more authentically random sample as a data base and a more precise statistical profile.

is of prime importance; I certainly believe that it is very useful, although there are areas of the investigation to which statistical precision is irrelevant. (See below) It is useful, for instance, in indicating how widespread is the conviction among contemporary folk that they do have religious experience. For example, in the interview sample (which Hay and Morrisey believe to be more representative as the personal element involved enabled people to overcome a seemingly-widespread reluctance to talk about such things) 62% of those interviewed believed that they had, had an experience or experiences which were religious in content. This figure compares strikingly with the finding from Glock and Stark's work in America some fifteen years earlier. These two pieces of research would indicate that in an age widely assumed to be irreligious, among a population widely assumed to have no place for God in their lives, a high proportion of that population believe in a supernatural dimension to their lives <u>on the basis of personal experience</u>.

The RERU accounts do not have this statistical precision. They were volunteered by people who happened to read Sir Alister's requests and felt moved to respond. Of those who did respond, the majority are women and there is a preponderance of people in the 50-60 age range. However, the age of the correspondents is no indication of the age at which the experiences happened, as often they explain that the events they describe happened some time ago. There is some evidence to suggest that the conventional kinds of religious conversion (8) and also "nature mysticism" experiences tend to happen most frequently to those in their adolescent or immediately post adolescent years. (9) Therefore the distribution of age and sex in the RERU correspondents may not accurately reflect the actual occurrence of the experiences

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8 vide: Spinks GS "Psychology and Religion" Methuen 1963
Allport G "The Individual and His Religion" Constable 19
Thouless, Robert H "An Introduction to the Psychology of Religion" Cambridge UP 1971

9 Paffard Michael "Inglorious Wordsworths" Hodder and Staughton 1973

although women tend to have such experiences more than men, the disproportion between the sexes of the RERU correspondents may be exaggerated. In the interviews conducted by Hay and Morrisey the proportion of those acknowledging religious experiences was 41% women and 31% men from the total sample.

Sir Alister Hardy has come under criticism for the "casual" way in which he collected his data. Certainly, not enough accurate sampling has been done in this area to satisfy those who believe that such accurate sampling is important. Sociologists and psychologists in particular are accustomed to collecting data in such accurate ways, believing that a crisply-defined profile is important, and that without this no conclusions can be considered "scientific". But this is to confuse objects of study. There is the quite valid aim of studying the people who have religious experiences; for this statistical data is important. However, in the attempt to study the nature of the experience itself, statistics are perhaps useful, but not necessary. We must be careful to distinguish the experience from the experiencer as the objects of our attention, even though they cannot be separated within the operation of experiencing. Of the two, the experience, is far more elusive. David Bakan pinpoints this elusiveness when speaking of the experience of pain:

> The problem inheres in the fact that pain is 'private'. If one insists that the data of psychology shall be 'public' then pain has to be ruled out as being beyond the enclosing limit. (10)

I am not at all sure that the assumptions which lie behind the disciplines of statistical psychology and sociology can be or need to be imported into our attempts to study religious experience per se. Such

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10 Bakan, D. "Disease, Pain and Sacrifice" U of Chicago 1968 P. 60

beings as experiencers to be quantified and measured, the essentially conscious and self-conscious dimensions of the experience disappear. We are thus examining the experiencer, rather than attempting to stand alongside him and share and thus understand his experience. (10a)

It is possible that a concentration on gathering precise and quantifiable statistical data will lead us to miss the greater challenge of seeking to understand the nature of the experience itself. As Karl Jaspers has observed, what matters in the researching of human experiences is

> ..... the extent of the inner exploration, its depth, rather than the number of cases consulted. In phenomenological method, the analysis aims at uncovering comprehensible, rational relationships between the elements in a patient's account of his experience. (11)

That the techniques of precise statistical analysis may be not only inappropriate but positively harmful in that they detract from the main thrust of inquiry is suggested by Edward Robinson:

> However hard it may be to persuade the academic world that a study of mankind that is not supported by a battery of figures and statistics can claim to be scientific, it may well be positively unscientific to bring to the study of man a method or a technique that may be enlightening when applied to a quite different object, but when used on human beings achieves clarity and precision only at the expense of something else: the 'total living situation'. (12)

The collection of numbers of examples may be reassuring for the people who have the experience; it indicates that they are not alone. Religious experience can be both frightening and disturbing in itself, and also in its present-day implications that the experiencer may be going mad. But the reassurance that he is not alone does not provide him with any real clue or insight into the meaning of what has happened to him, and this is the heart of the matter. Statistics may draw our

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10a See also: Smail, David "Illusion and Reality: the meaning of anxiety" JM Dent & Sons London p. 127-128
11 Jaspers, Karl. "General Psychopathology" Collins 1961
12 Robinson, E. "Tolerating the Paradoxical" RERU Oxford 1978

may be salient, but they cannot offer interpretation or understanding.

For these reasons, together with the practical matter of the time available, I did not concern myself to study all 4,000 autographs during my visit to the Religious Experience Research Unit. Fortunately, a massive reclassification of the original material is being undertaken, with data being selected for publication, so it was possible for me to be guided toward certain groups of material which were representative.

Although each account bore the stamp of the contributor's individuality, and no two therefore were alike, none the less broad patterns of similarity were apparent. However, one cannot but be struck by the wide diversity of experiences which people have reported and which they felt carried religious significance. There are accounts of being dissociated from one's body; of prayer having been answered; of striking changes of feeling or mood; of sudden feelings of being aware of deeper levels of reality, akin to alterations of perception; of being in harmony or at one with the world; of breathtaking beauty in ordinary things; of the sense of a benevolent purpose or power underlying all things. The task of classifying the contents of the reports goes on, although interim reports have been published. (13) However, certain features of "approach" to the experiences are noteworthy because they recur time and again. I will mention four which are of importance for my purposes and which are widespread and frequent in the accounts.

Firstly, significant religious experiences of this type almost always happen when one is alone. This feature itself suggests that the attempt to understand the experience sympathetically will be very different from attempts to analyse induced states of trance, group meditation, conversion, etc., all of which have a group context. The

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13 Hardy, A. "The Spiritual Nature of Man" London Press 1979
Beardsworth,T. "A sense of Presence" RERU 1977
Robinson, E. "Living the Questions" RERU 1978

in such situations cannot, therefore, be simply transferred to the solitary, spontaneous religious experience. The place where the experience occurs varies enormously - in open countryside, in church, in the bath, in the sitting room, and so on. It seems that there is no place which cannot provide the setting for a religious experience, and that the "holiness" of the surroundings is virtually irrelevant. But the solitariness is striking and important as a recurring feature. When a person is not physically alone, he is usually in the situation of being emotionally "alone in acrowd", wrapped in his own subjective feelings - for example, at a symphony concert. (14) There are exceptions to this rule, though they are comparatively few. Some accounts describe religious experiences happening on communal occasions, eg. in church, or with one other person, eg. making love. But on the whole, religious experience can be considered a solitary happening, an interesting contemporary confirmation of the ancient recognition of the need of the holy person to be alone from time to time.

Secondly, such experiences are very difficult to describe. Time after time people comment on how difficult if not impossible it is adequately to convey in words the quality, power and content of the experience. In the ultimate analysis all personal experience is private, incommunicable; but we can identify common areas of shared feeling and perception and we can communicate from one to another these shared areas with a measure of confidence that we make ourselves understood. However, there seems to be an awareness that religious experiences do not come into this category. Partly this is because it is often assumed that such experiences, far from being shared as common knowledge, are in fact very rare, and that to speak of them will strike no corresponding chord in the listener from the latter's own experience. But

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14 See also: Allen,W. "The Timeless Moment" Faber & Faber

is considered to be very odd, requiring for its descriptions combinations of words which are unusual, perhaps paradoxical. In addition, the religious experience is often an extreme experience with extreme powers of feeling, such as will make a word like "happy" seem entirely inadequate. There is a disparity between the feelings conventionally described by such words and the feelings pertaining to the religious experience. It is as though the words "run out", their meanings have to be stretched to and beyond breaking point.

Many times, even after quite long, intricate and articulate attempts at description, a RERU correspondent will add apologetically, "But that is so inadequate to convey the feeling" or words to that intent. It is as though the content of the experience was "in that direction" but much further, much fuller. Here again, of course, there are striking similarities between these contemporary accounts and the classical accounts of religious experience. An emphasis on the ultimate ineffability of religious experience, is a universal feature of the world's religious literature. Indeed, one Oriental classic, the "Tao Te Ching", begins by declaring the hopelessness of the task it is setting out to achieve - "The way that can be spoken of is not the true Way."

Thirdly, religious experiences carry a high level of self-authentication. They are powerfully"arresting" events in people's lives. One of the more puzzling and thought-provoking features of such experiences is the way in which the single and highly unusual experience becomes the touchstone of all else. The experience is not understood in terms of conventional experience and understanding, but vice versa. Conventional experience is interpreted, or - perhaps better - re-interpreted, in the light of the religious experience. If it is possible to speak of a scale of credibility or authority covering different kinds of experience and knowledge, then religious experience comes very high on that scale.

into two broad types. One is the interpretation in a new way of everyday data of experience. For instance, many folk in distress will turn to prayer with some kind of desperate hope to impel them. The RERU accounts contain a number which describe the moment when it is realised that such prayer has been effective, even though that which is being prayed for has not been acheived. This seemingly-parodoxical situation occurs when the praying person becomes able to accept the circumstances which have precipitated the crisis; what alters in many cases is the person's attitude toward the circumstances. This moment of change has a profound heuristic quality, binding together into a harmonious whole a disparate gallery of circumstances. It provides an experience of deep understanding and acceptance which affords relief, joy, tears of happiness, etc. The prayer is answered, though not in the childish way originally hoped for. Such an assertion as "My prayer was answered" is, of course, impossible to check because there are no possibilities of any control process. It can be argued that the change in attitude would have arrived anyway. Some of the RERU correspondents are quite aware of this, and on occasions are moved to apologise for what they recognise as the logical or scientific weakness of their position. Nonetheless, they assert that the practice of prayer was an important element of the change.

The second kind of self-authentication is that offered by the nature of the experience itself. In the previous variety just described the experience <u>is</u> the understanding, a completely new kind of understanding which is of itself, in its newness, impressive. In this second variety the experience may bring the very opposite of understanding; it may in itself constitute a profound and disturbing puzzle.

For instance, a number of correspondents report occasions when they felt their conscious, perceiving selves to be detached from their bodies, able to look down upon and observe their physical selves and watch

different perspective. Usually such dissociations occur in times of great stress or danger, and the alteration in self-perception is accompanied by a corresponding alteration in feeling state, eg. from fear and distress to calmness, acceptance, resignation. All this is simply a datum of experience. It may be - indeed, it most certainly is! - a very peculiar and unusual datum requiring investigation, but this does not invalidate its claim upon the experiencer. The experiencer knows it happens or happened because he is/was involved subjectively in the event. He may be as puzzled as anyone else about how to understand it, but its occurrence is authentic for him.

We who hear or read his report have to decide upon the extent to which we deem him a trustworthy witness to his own perceptions. We may ask whether he is lying, or hallucinating, or whatever. But it is the very oddness of the experience which usually leads the experiencer into a long spell of asking himself the same questions. Was I dreaming? Was I ill? These are questions which arise in the wake of such experiences. The experiencer casts large doubt upon his own credibility to witness to himself. Ultimately it is the very strangeness and incomprehensibility of the experience which endows it with exceptional authenticity. It is <u>very important</u> for the experiencer, for the sake of his own peace of mind, to establish whether the event happened, and usually much mental effort is expended in distinguishing between religious experiences and ordinary sleeping dreams, for example, a number of RERU correspondents mention an initial urge to classify the experience as a dream, but eventually conclude that it could not have been. It is salutary that they prefer to live with the awkwardness of the experience and all its disturbing after-effects, rather than feel an element of self-deception by consigning it to the world of more conventional experience.

such experiences in authenticating themselves is the fact revealed by repeated assertion that although the event may have been fleeting, and unique in a person's life, it carries great significance for him and is never forgotten. Sometimes it sets off a lifelong process of reflection upon its significance.

> A person who begins to feel something never experienced before will try to interpret the feeling, and the interpretation my be fantastic. But the cause of the experience will, in due course, proclaim its true meaning. (15)

The experience can also initiate profound changes within the experiencer. An example is No. 3122 from the RERU files. After a sudden reversal of feeling which ended a long period of deep and serious depression with an overwhelming experience of love, the correspondent adds, "This was the end of the depression; and such depression has never returned, even in the face of dire adversity." He adds that other people close to him detected in him a new "lightness, cheeriness, a kind of radiance".

It is as though the experiences bring reassurance of a different kind of reality which exists alongside the humdrum and everyday, a reality which the experiencers have been priveleged to catch some glimpse of. Several acknowledge the support and encouragement this knowledge gave to them when their lives were beset by grief and difficulties. It is as though they have a fundamentally more optimistic and constructive attitude toward life because they have seen through to a more real or abiding reality.

Following on from this last point is the fourth feature of religious experience which I wish to mention; namely, that the tone, content or implication of the experience is almost invariably benevolent. The experience makes the person feel good and aware of goodness. It is

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15 Telfer, W. "The Forgiveness of Sins" SCM 1959 p.20

iments, but the figure was less than 4.5% in the first 3,000 accounts analysed. (This may be because the request was for religious experiences, and this may have implied that such experiences must only be good.) The smallness of the proportion reporting evil as the main characteristic of their experience is reflected in the work of Hay and Morrisey, although they do not offer statistics. Suffice it to say that, within the limits of the sampling techniques, the great majority report that the experience acquainted them with a power or means for good, and that the feeling tone following the experience was itself highly optimistic.

Thus analysis of the RERU accounts, with supportive data from the Nottingham research, indicate these four salient characteristics of contemporary religious experiences. They happen when the person is alone; they are difficult to describe; they carry a high degree of authority and authenticity; they are benevolent.

Just as there seems little specific with regard to the place in which the experiences occur, so there seems to be no particular set of circumstances which can trigger them off. This is in contradiction to the suggestions of Marghanita Laski, who believed that there are certain kinds of "triggers" for such experiences. (16) It is worth noting that she was particularly concerned with group experiences and with self-induced states of trance and ecstasy. I believe that there are important differences between such events and the experiences reported by the RERU correspondents, not the least being the matter of volition. A shaman, for instance, will deliberately set out to induce a trance state within himself in order to acheive a specific ritual process. He uses techniques which he has learned and adapted during a long apprenticeship, Such techniques may include physical activity to the point of exhaustion - particularly frantic dancing - or the alteration of balance by steady

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16 Laski, M. "Ecstasy" Cresset Press 1961

a whole range of different types of drugs. This contrasts with the great majority of the RERU accounts in which the experience came unbidden, spontaneously, catching the experiencer unawares. It should also be noted that more recent work among Siberian shamans suggests that their methods and techniques do not always succeed in triggering off the desired effect; in such circumstances the shamans sham! (17)

Sir Alister Hardy points out that there seems to be no area of human activity which cannot give rise to or trigger off an experience with religious significance for the experiencer. (18) However, analysis of the accounts indicates certain clusters of events or circumstances which occur with particular frequency as precursors to such experiences. They include the contemplation of the natural world; prayer and meditation; music; visual arts and architecture. The first of these, the contemplation of nature, is a source of religious inspiration at least as old as our sacred literature. Paffard notes that within this category "nature" (unspecified), music hills and mountains, sunsets and sunrise are the most commonly-mentioned associates of nature-mysticism experiences. The inclusion of music in this list is somewhat thought-provoking! (19)

Of particular concern to me was to discover whether distress, depression, despair and kindred feeling-states played any significant role in association with religious experiences. I found that they did. Hardy acknowledges that

..... the number of people who have come to find a greater spiritual awareness through states of depression forms indeed a relatively large proportion. (20)

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17 Holm, Nils G. "Religious Ecstasy" Almquist & Wiksell International Paper 6 by Anna-Leena Siikala.

18 Hardy, A. "The Spiritual Nature of Man" Clarendon Press 1979

19 Paffard, M. "Inglorious Wordsworths" Hodder & Staughton 1973

20 Hardy, A. Ibid

despair can (the word "can" needs to be noted; it does not always follow) be important in widening and deepening our religious insight seems to be borne out by observations based on the RERU material.

In the Nottingham work Hay refines the link between distress and religious experience. He is unhappy about calling distress a "trigger" in the sense that it sets off the experience. When asked specifically what if anything had seemed to cause their experience, very few of his interviewees mentioned any particular phenomenon. A few mentioned prayer, or a particular situation, or some sort of stress. But the majority (73%) could think of nothing with which they would link their experience casually. However, when the question was revised so that the interviewees were requested merely to describe their state of mind at the time, without making causal inference, distress proved to be a very significant feature. To the question, "What was your state of mind before you had the experience?" the response was:

Distressed or ill at ease	50%
Confused	6%
Curious or Searching	5%
Praying or Concentrating	5%
Nothing Special	34%

When one reflects that prayer, searching for solutions, concentrated preoccupation, etc., are all associated features of states of distress and depression, the above becomes highly significant.

Although there is no attempt on the part of either Hardy or Hay to suggest any possible mechanisms to account for the link between distress and religious experience, they do emphasise the associative link between the two as a phenomenological fact of striking frequency. A person in distress is potentially the recipient of an experience which will widen his religious sensibility. What kind of proportion of distressed people do in fact receive such experiences is unknown. Therefore, it is impossible to estimate the extent to which the potential for religious experience is increased by distress.

in full a fairly typical report from the RERU material:

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My experience was of a typical mystical kind, yet I think stronger and more lasting than is usually reported. All of a sudden, when I was walking in the country near my home (not taking a walk, just going to the mail-box) everything came alive around about me, and seemed to glow and breathe with animation - even the sticks and stones at my feet, and the mountains across the valley; the trees particularly I remember. It was a very beautiful and profoundly disturbing and frightening experience. I know now that this is the kind of vision people have after taking mescalin. The effect did not fade for a long time; at night the stars came alive, and for a week or two, day and night, I saw things this way. I did not tell anyone about it, and gradually the effect faded, though for many weeks I could reproduce it at will. I was filled at the same time with a feeling of one-ness with the world, and of the unity of all things. I was filled also with many other strange feelings which I could not understand or express; later I formulated these as the union of opposites, the transcendence of good and evil and things of that kind. I was frightened and puzzled and I was under great strain, particularly as I had to keep my feelings to myself. I was afraid for my sanity. I had never heard of anything like this before and I began to read avidly, trying to understand what had happened to me. I really had not the faintest idea where to begin, and it took a long, long time - months, I think - before I found Freda Fordham's "Jung" and I cried when I read it, because I knew that Jung understood what it meant for people to have experiences like mine. I was deeply grateful and felt I could safely say I was not insane. It took several years of battle within myself, however, before I felt I could say I was really sane - a battle between my consciousness and unconsciousness went on all that time; I could see there was value in both, and I was determined not to lose either, though I felt all the time as though I was being torn apart. All that time I was trying, and I am still trying, to explain the experience. I think I understand it now, but it is very hard to put into words.

I had been under great emotional strain for many years before the event, and this had become extreme in the immediately preceding months. I believe I had been forced back and back into myself until I reached the very depths of my nature and could go no farther; when this happened I think there was an equally extreme reaction; I think the vision I had was a projection of what was in myself. Perhaps thepotentiality for such a vision lies deep in the impersonal unconscious of everyone, way below the places of the personal unconscious emphasised by Freud, in places much better understood by Jung.

nearly twenty years. I have never lost the general effect of the experience. Since then I have been a religious person, because, it seems to me, I have a religious nature. I belong to no church. I do not believe in a personal God, I have no knowledge of everlasting life. If I have to describe myself I can only say I am a pantheist.

This experience comes into the category of religious experience which Ninian Smart classifies as "nature mysticism", ie. a modified, enhanced and in some way unifying and harmonious perception of the natural world, sometimes with the sense also of a power arranging that world inorder. The quoted experience is unusual in that it seems to have lasted longer than is usually the case, and the author inhis first sentence indicates his awareness of this. He is obviously familiar with the literature on the subject, but this familiarity seems to have come after the event.

The quoted account is useful in exemplifying many features found in other accounts, including the four salient characteristics which I have expanded upon. The experience comes spontaneously, unbidden, while he is alone. It is ineffable, "very hard to put into words". It carried great authority, as he has spent many years reflecting upon it. Although one does not get an immediate sense of the experience as being benevolent, he does describe it as being "beautiful" and it is obviously very precious to him.

At the same time, it has a threatening or dangerous aspect. In the same sentence in which he calls it "beautiful" he also says it was a "profoundly disturbing and frightening experience". Later he adds that it left him "puzzled" as well as frightened, and placed him under strain because he felt unable to share the experience. He wondered whether or not he might be going mad.

He describes well his attempts to interpret and understand the experience. It is clear that, before it happened, he had no knowledge of mystical or psychodynamic

considerable casting around before he was able to begin to make sense of it. Eventually, he comes to use Carl Jung's psychodynamic theories to provide some kind of model to aid his understanding. But perhaps more important, in Jung he found the reassurance that someone understood, that he was not alone, that others had experienced similar things and explored similar paths. This use of Jung's theories is by no means unique among those who have such experiences. And Jung himself is unusual in being a major psychological theorist who takes very seriously the things of religion, and their importance for the development of the whole person. (21)

The correspondent specifically describes his state of mind at the time of the experience, and his later concern for his sanity. He tells us that he had been "under great emotional strain for many years before the event, and this had become extreme in the immediately preceding months". He also mentions his sense of there having been a struggle between different parts of himself, parts which seem to have had an almost independent self and anxious to be preserved.

In this case there is more than simply an observed association between the experience and his state of mind. He endeavours to work out a causal connection between his distressed state and the inner processes which resulted in the experience. This he does, by blending some of the assumptions of depth psychology with what seems to be a fairly straight-forward model from Newtonian physics, one of action and reaction. It is as though "he" - presumably that part of himself defined by self-conscious boundaries - is some kind of solid and elastic body falling through space until he hits the bottom and bounces back up again. His visionary experience is then understood as a projection of what was going on within himself. I must confess that I find it difficult to accept this; I can see no reason why this projection should occur. In addition, I do not think he is accurate in calling his experience a "vision"; it was a state of heightened perception of what was around

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21 See WS Stewart "The Divided Self"(George Allen & Unwin:1964) for an extended account of religious experiences as a threat to sanity and the help obtained from Jung's theories.

to understand or make sense of the disturbing event, and find important his emphasis on the direct link between his state of distress and the occurrence.

It is not easy to estimate what proportion of the total RERU material associates religious experience, not its precursors. Also, many correspondents do not mention this factor in their accounts. But in some categories one can hazard some guess. For instance, in the experiences featuring dissociated consciousness (that is, feelings of being quite conscious and yet detached from one's body) 28% of the experiences were specifically mentioned as being associated with times of difficulty and stress. For example, Correspondent No. 3190 describes herself as extremely depressed: "deep, gnawing, crumbling despair.... so disruptive that I finally gave up my classwork." She describes how she lay in her room, sobbing and calling to God. Suddenly she felt herself floating near the ceiling! She felt ".... very warm, very calm, and very expansive....I felt no fear at all, only warmth, ecstatic joy and at-one-ness with something so powerful that I could not then, and cannot now, describe it. The entire experience could not have lasted more than a few seconds. But in those few seconds I became whole in a way I had never been whole before."

In the category of prayer being answered, we may assume virtually a 100% distress factor, presuming that supplicatory or petitioning prayer is usually associated with some form of distess, In fact, of the experiences which centre around a belief that prayer has been answered, some 64% specifically mention that they were in a domestic crisis of some kind, 40 % acknowledge their prayer as arising from severe unhappiness, agony of mind, fear or a sense of meaninglessness, and 3% describe a crisis of guilt or consciousness of sin. Again, what are we to make of experiences which bring a sense of relief to those in terminal illness, or what was thought to be terminal illness? Here again is a sample in which one

of the circumstances.

For the reasons set out earlier, I confess that I am not too concerned about the precise proportions. It is enough for me that both the RERU andthe Nottingham samples would seem to indicate that between a third and a half of those who report having had experiences of a religious significance should also report that the experience was associated with a period of depression or distress.

Before drawing this chapter to a close by considering the general implications of the foregoing, I think it would be useful to set out some guidelines on what I believe to be the correct approach to such accounts and such experiences. I suggest that fundamental to our attitude should be the qualities of humility and respect; we are in the presence of something which carries the most profound importance for the folk who have such experiences. And we must always remember that the best authority on what and how a person feels and thinks is that person himself. It is both a mistake and an affront to tell another person what he is "really feeling", to tell him that he "doesn't really think that".

It is a considerable presumption to claim to interpret another person's experience better than he can himself. (22)

Alas, such considerable presumption is not uncommon!

We must bear in mind that the experience is the subject's datum, not ours. We only come to it through him; his often struggling attempt to describe it and reveal its significance for him is our datum. These two data are very different, and we as observers have only a limited access to the first via the second. Because of this inherent limit we do well to err on the side of caution in our assertions.

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22 Robinson, E. "Tolerating the Paradoxical" RERU Oxford 1978

is done with sensitivity, any attempt to offer an explanation is usually gratefully received. Folk who suddenly have a very different kind of experience bursting into their conventional consciousness find it disturbing, alien and anxiety-making. If we can enable such folk to realise that they are not alone, it can be a source of much reassurance and comfort. The task of understanding the experience, no matter how inadequately, is one way of taking control of an event which initially seemed to take control of us, of familiarising ourselves with it and gradually absorbing it into the more conventional categories of understanding. If we can assista person in his task of understanding by offering words, concepts, models to try out and see which, if any, fit, then again such an offer is gratefully received.

We must, though, be very careful to avoid any tendency to "explain away". This belittles the experience and insults the experiencer. There is, alas, a tendency to reduce the experience to a number of component factors and then limit the understanding to a selected one or two such factors. An anecdote may illustrate what I mean. An acquaintance underwent a somewhat similar kind of experience to those under consideration , and discussed the matter with a friend who was a doctor. The doctor, probably only half-seriously, suggested thatit wasprobably to do with his body chemistry. To which my acquaintance commented that if his experience was the consequence of bad digestion, there was an awful lot wrong with good digestion! The "chemical reduction" is common, though. Because certain trance and ecstatic states are accompanied by changes in human physiology and body chemistry, this does not necessarily mean that such changes cause religious experience, and most certainly does not mean that religious experiences are of the nature of changes in body chemistry.

The assessment of religious experiences is, perhaps, as much an aesthetic as a scientific matter. The struggle

sensations and perceptions, is akin to the artist's task perhaps more than any other. We who observe must be alert to the patterns of events, to the relationships and significances of nuances, as well as searching out the quantifiable data which can be compared and statistically evaluated. This is why the RERU material makes good its deficiencies in terms of statistical profiles by having people describe their experiences in their own way, reflecting their own emphases, recalling what was important and what was not according to their own evaluation of what has happened to them. As already stressed, we must be cautious to resist the temptation to stress that an event we consider is important is in fact important if it is not registered as such by the experiencer. That, I submit, is not for us to say.

With these provisos in mind, I believe that we can confidently assert that such mental/emotional states variously described as depression, distress, anxiety, stress, etc., have a statistically significant association with religious experiences of various kinds, and that from the subjective viewpoint of the experiencer such states appear to be important within the total breadth of the experience; they are recognised as being, insome way usually not defined, significant as precursors, At the moment we can only say that they are "associated" with religious experiences; it is a mistake to think of them as "triggers" in the way that Laski uses the term.

We cannot say that depressive states trigger off religious experiences for two reasons. Firstly, because we have insufficient knowledge of what is going on in the total experience to point out chains of connection, saying that such-and-such causes or triggers off such-and-such, Secondly, because even the speculation about such causal chains brings us up against a logical hiatus which is quite striking. The sudden development of a state of bliss from a state of depression involves a gross incongruity. In our usual analysis of states of being we do

the contrary. But in these special experiences, they do seem closely associated, and it is this incongruity which often lends an additional claim for attention to the experience.

To summarise the conclusions of this chapter:

1. Contrary to what might be the general expectation, many people have experiences which they interpret as being in some way "religious".
2. The experiences vary greatly but have certain common elements, particularly: solitariness, ineffability, authority and authenticity, benevolence, enduring impact in memory and /or in lifestyle.
3. In a significant proportion of cases a bad or negative state of mind and/or emotion - expressed as despair, anxiety, depression, etc. - is associated with the experience as it s precursor or ambience.
4. We who observe such experiences through the descriptions of those who have the experiences must respect the subjective integrity of the experience for the experiencer.

I am grateful to the staff of the Religious Experience Research Unit for their help, and for permission to use and quote from their material.

Some Biblical Considerations: Part 1 - Jacob

The Bible's acceptance as canon is evidence that it has been judged as not being unique to its authors. (1)

The large-scale collection of examples of human experience and behaviour, together with the statistical evaluation of such information, is a 20th Century phenomenon. Work such as that undertaken by the Religious Experience Research Unit in Oxford, by Hay and Morisy in Nottingham, together with the innumerable sociological, psychological, ethnographic, etc. etc., surveys conducted nowadays, is regarded as part of the scientific establishment. Such work rests on two foundations; our contemporary ability to collect, store and retrieve vast amounts of information, and the theoretical development of probability and statistical analysis as the tool for evaluating it all. Modern man seeks both the confirmation of his experience (ie. that it is acceptable) and its significance (ie. what it means) by comparing it with that of his fellows on a large scale. Attention and thought can then be directed at what is statistically probable and widespread and what rare and unusual, and each examined as such. Such highly-sophisticated abstracts are then often claimed to be "objective".

Until comparatively recently these methods were unobtainable. We had different ways of evaluating our experience. Of these the most ancient is that of the hero/exampler - the man or woman whose life story is known and retold, orally or literally, and who becomes a paradigm for certain kinds of human life and experience. As a method it is almost diametrically opposite to contemporary techniques. Whereas today we collect thousands of examples of ordinary foks' experiences and actions, aggregate the salient features and reassemble them as the "typical person", in the past one "typical

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1. Bakan, David "Disease, Pain and Sacrifice" U. of Chicago 1968 p.98

of ordinary folk. They would "recognise" features of themselves in the hero, just as today we recognise features of ourselves in the abstracts from opinion polls. I would dare to suggest, however, that the hero figure remains a far more powerful and illuminating source of self-understanding than do opinion poll abstracts!

The stories of humankind's heros and examplers have certain qualities in common, regardless of their provenance. They have to be memorable and attention-demanding, and therefore are invariably interesting and often exciting. They have to be plausible, no matter how much certain features or episodes are exaggerated; such stories are never fantasy. Above all, they have to be "true"; that is, they must reflect in an undistorted even though magnified way, the experiences shared by humanity, and must offer coherent and acceptable interpretations of those experiences. Such stories are thus always presented in the guise of history, usually the history of an individual within the wider history of his community. Thus the story offers to its hearers an interpretation and understanding of both individual and collective experiences. The fact that such stories are required to appear in the guise of history or that they are fiction.

If the story of a particular hero/examplar is particularly fitted for its task, it becomes paradigmatic. Because it offers some true and insightful observations about being a human, it is accorded authority as a means of revelation and understanding. The deeper, truer and more widely applicable its observations, the more accurately and effectively it says them, the higher will be its value to the community and the higher the corresponding respect in which it is held. This is one of the ways (note: <u>one</u> of the ways) in which a story or a tradition acquires canonical status.

No story can say all things to all people. But within a collection of such stories it is possible that

of authoritative and illuminating interpretation for his own life. In some such way are accumulated the collections of stories, legends, traditions, etc., which form the basis of any collective and coherent culturally-bounded community. A trustworthy means for diagnosing the culture to which any given community belongs is to look at the stories told within that community, for that will show which wider cultural heritage it shares. (2)

The repository of a culture's legend-base can take different forms; it may be the gathering of elders or a priestly caste, who know the stories by rote; it may be a unique collection of paintings or documents; it may be a book. Whatever it may be, it will be regarded as having peculiar authority and be accorded marked respect.

In time, because of the authority and respect in which it is held, the legend-base will acquire a reciprocal relationship with its community. Not only will it be regarded as a resource for helping people to understand their lives; it will come to be regarded as a source of paradigms for how life ought to be lived. Thus it will mould peoples lives into the patterns of interpretations it offers, and each then offers an enhanced confirmation of the other; that is, because it offers such an accurate understanding it has authority, because it is so authoritative people live lives according to its precepts, which it then interprets ever more accurately.

I believe that the hero-sagas of the Old Testament conform roughly to this pattern. They fulfil the dual function of both conforming and confirming human experience. In the lives of the heroes are found the materials which enable us to understand what it is to be human and also the chosen of God, and which encourage us in our understandings to go on and be these things. This is so whether the materials are in the form of sagas which have been shaped by retelling over generations, such as the hero-stories of the Pentateuch, Judges, Samuel and Kings, or whether

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2 See, for an example of this method, the four volumes of Claude Levi-Strauss' "Introduction to a Science of Mythology" Jonathan Cape 1970-81

formed with this end in view, eg. Job, Jonah, Daniel.

If the foregoing assumptions are correct, we should expect to find in the Old Testament (as in any other collected and sacred tradition) stories of individuals which reflect human experience as it is widely shared, and which offer religious understanding of such experience. A close and accurate study of the hero/examplar will illumine our contemporary experience. The fact that such stories have been regarded as authoritative for so many generations is an indication of their ability to offer meaningful and trustworthy interpretations. A story which failed to do this would not be useful and, no matter how temporarily interesting or entertaining, would drop out of use. In stories such as these, accuracy of insight is the prime survival factor.

I therefore approached the Old Testament to see whether there are in it stories which in any way seem to reflect, in their narrative details, the kind of experiences which are my concern. Are there stories in which are developed the hero's sense of despair, anxiety, depression, etc., and which state is terminated suddenly in a highly significant and revelatory way? In fact, there are a number of such stories which fit the mould well, in addition to the recurrence of this theme in the Psalter. Perhaps the clearest example is that of Elijah. I have chosen, however, to consider two stories where the parallels are not quite so well-drawn. One is the story of Jacob, from the collectively-created saga-opus of the Book of Genesis. The second is the literary creation of the Book of Job.

Jacob

During the past century, Pentateuchal criticism has been dominated by the scholarship of source analysis. It is now widely accepted that the Pentateuch comprises at least four major literary traditions which have been combined and edited into one more-or-less smooth and coherent whole. The criteria for disentangling the various strands of

here.

In the past couple of decades or so, a reaction has set in against the more extreme forms of source analysis. Some scholars, while accepting as proven the broad outlines of source criticism's conclusions, are concerning themselves with the fact that from seemingly-disparate sources a narrative of sophisticated integrity and skill has resulted. It is as though, after many years of concern with the parts there is a reawakened interest in the whole. Such scholars include Nahum Sarna and JP Fokkelman, and I find myself broadly in sympathy with their approach and many of their conclusions. The more I consider the Jacob saga, the more I am impressed by its integrity as an account of a person's life and also by its curiously contemporary quality. With certain circumstantial details brought up-to-date, it could read very much like a case history presented as a court report by a modern social worker or psychiatrist. True, the references to God would have to be deleted from a court report, as He plays very little part in the world-view of the modern caring professional. But - as has been pointed out by more than one commentator - God is very much in the background in the Jacob story, anyway.

This curious, contemporary quality is evidence of the true stature of the saga. It has a timeless and universal quality, being able to transcend its historical milieu.

I shall therefore treat the story of the life of Jacob as an integrated account of the life of an historical or pseudo-historical character, an account which has heuristic and exemplary qualities for the reader in both his individual and communal perspectives. I shall begin by considering the observations of Sarna and Fokkelman.

Sarna (1) lays emphasis on the moral dimension in Jacob's life. This is a well-chosen theme. Later in this work I shall consider the role of conscience and awareness of the self as sinning as being powerful movers in the

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1 Sarna, Nahum M "Understanding Genesis" Schocken Books 1970

commentators other than Sarna have called attention to it - that throughout the Jacob story there runs a thread of behaviour which is, to say the least, ethically dubious It is certainly dubious from a twentieth-century perspective; though much of Jacob's activity has to do with "business" - property, wealth, status, etc. - and there is much in contemporary business practice which is equally dubious, evidence of the narrative's uncannily contemporary quality. Sarna maintains that even by the standards of some 4,000 years ago it was dubious. He finds in this a crucial feature of Jacob's pre-Jabbok character, anticipated even by the rivalry in the womb between Jacob and Esau and finding its first expression in the coerced sale of the birthright.

Sarna maintains that the moral aspect "is of vital importance to understand the unfolding narrative." He shows that running alongside Jacob's dubious behaviour is the paradoxical perception that this unscrupulous character is simultaneously the chosen of God, and that his election should be disengaged from his improper conduct. For my part I am not too sure about the disengagement. There is a sense in which Jacob's weakness and lack of insight is revealed by his striving to achieve what, in some senses, he already is. The wickedness of his behaviour throws into relief his tuer nature, and adds a somewhat pathetic aspect to an otherwise unsympathetic character.

Be that as it may, Sarna rightly points out the contradictory nature of Jacob as unscrupulous and yet divinely ordained. He believes that this is established even before birth (as is also Jacob's contending, striving personality) by the oracle which reveals that "the older shall serve the younger." (Gen. 25:23) Thus the narrative rather calmly observes Jacob's trickery but, though the oracle and other hints, makes clear that Jacob's claims and achievements depend not on Jacob's efforts but God's decision. There is thus both a nice irony and a profound psychological insight - we strive to attain what we already are, to gain what we already have.

of Esau out of his birthright and blessing is revealed through comparison with the Nuzi texts. These indicate a strong likelihood that such endowments were not, as has usually been though, sacrosanct to the older son. They possibly were transferrable at the will of the father. It is possible that Jacob resorted to trickery not in order to outmanoeuvre the conventions but to outwit Isaac's pronounced favouritism.

Sarna develops the motif of moral interplay by drawing out certain parallels between Jacob's actions vis-a-vis Esau and what later befalls him. Just as he plays a trick on his father by reason of the latter's blindness and so obtains the blessing, so Laban plays a trick on Jacob, taking advantage of his effective blindness at night, by substituting Leah. And the hand of God is indicated in this, as it is Leah who bears Levi and David, the forebears of the Mosaic/priestly and the Davidic/Messianic lines respectively.

A similar parallel to Jacob's relationship with Esau is suggested by the later dissensions which arose between Jacob and Laban's family. Sarna suggests that initially Laban had only daughters, and that as his son-in-law Jacob would stand to inherit. The sons mentioned in 31:1 were born later and caused the tension between Laban and Jacob over the matter of inheritance, a tension pre-figured in Jacob's earlier rivalry with Esau for the inheritance from Isaac. If Sarna's observations are correct, they would indicate a high level of narrative sophistication, far removed from the "just growed" theories of the origin of the saga.

For Sarna, the human character of Jacob is resolved by the eventual integration within his personality of the elements of human will and divine destiny, elements which for much of his early life were separate and in contention. Eventually his own moral direction is reconciled to the moral imperatives of God. Sarna believes that this final integration of personality, the merging of what Jacob wants of himself and what God demands of him, is achieved in the

A new era was about to open in the career of Jacob ....
.. Two incidents, each mysterious, mark the transition.(2)

The first such incident is the very truncated one of 32:1-2, when Jacob meets the angels. Sarna tentatively suggests that this second reference to angels - the first being the ladder dream - may mark the closing of a framework opened by the dream. In other words, an indication within the narrative structure that the whole Laban episode occurs within the context of divine control, as symbolised by the presence of the angels which begin and end it.

As for the Jabbok incident, Sarna considers it "thoroughly bewildering" and "unparalleled in Biblical literature". He regards it as comprising two elements; a tale of a river crossing and a tale of an encounter with a supernatural agency or demon. He reckons that a tale perhaps current in folk-lore has been applied to Jacob, and that the change of name - as was the case with Abraham and Sarah - betokens a change of intent, a break with the past and a fresh destiny. In Jacob's case it is perhaps more accurate to see it as betokening not so much a fresh destiny, but a new understanding and self-realisation of a destiny which has been hinted at from the womb. At the Jabbok, Jacob became reconciled to himself and to God.

The struggle with the angel may therefore imply the final purging of those unsavoury qualities of character that marked his past career. (3)

I find Sarna's analysis helpful as it highlights the moral factors in the story of Jacob, and brings out - without attempting to explain - that element in the character of Jacob which led him initially to strive with God/destiny and to attain of himself that which was his already as the elect of God. His willfulness leads to a split, a

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2 Sarna; op cit p.202
3 Sarna; op cit p.204

necessary for him and what, unbeknown, he already is. This struggle within his nature "peaks" at the incident by Jabbok, when his striving nature is accepted, overcome and yet, somewhat paradoxically, blessed. Sarna recognises the great potency of this episode, even though bewildered by it.

Fokkelman also is one of the comparatively few commentators who pay particular attention to the Jabbok incident and regard it as having a high significance. He considers it

> is indeed an interlude, but one in which a new protagonist brings a decisive depth to the narrative ..... (It) is by no means a breathing space, by no means an uncommitted dissociation from the current situation, but .... very opposite. (4)

The Jacob narrative seems to abound in parallels and internal echoings. I have already mentioned two to which Sarna draws attention. Fokkelman draws parallels between the Jabbok incident and the events which led up to Jacob's obtaining the birthright in Gen. 25:29-34. Each is "a perfectly rounded kernel" and they share an underlying structure: preliminaries, conflict, conversation, Jacob's evaluation and departure. The striking difference, though, is that the second resolves the split between Jacob and his destiny which has been inaugurated by the first. Fokkelman interprets the Jabbok incident in terms of Jacob's increasing displacement in his world and the perceived failure of his plans.

Fokkelman argues that not until

> ...we can give an "objective" outline of the "exterior" are we justified in and capable of gauging the "interior". (5)

By this he means that a sensitive understanding of the narrative action of an episode will offer us clues to the inner state of the actors involved. Accordingly, he spends

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4 Fokkelman, J.P. "Narrative Art in Genesis" Van Gorcum, Assen 1975 p. 208

5 Fokkelman, J. P. "Narrative Art in Genesis" Van Gorcum, Assen 1975 p. 209

He draws attention to Jacob's inability to sleep, and to his increasingly feverish attempts to defuse the potentially explosive encounter with Esau by means of presents and envoys, attempts which seem to bring no peace of mind and which, on the next day, he recognises as being futile. He also makes the observation that God only reveals himself to Jacob when the latter is alone, and at night. But in such encounters prior to the Jabbok incident

> (Jacob) does not see himself yet, does not recognise his new identity which can save him, the renewed integrity which is born in the recognition and confession of one's guilt. (6)

At the Jabbok we find according to Fokkelman a representation and encapsulation of the major theme of Jacob's career to that point. His life had been a striving after blessing and birthright, first with Esau, then with Isaac, then with Laban. At the Jabbok we again have the strife, followed by the wresting of the blessing from his opponent. Fokkelman observes that it is typical of what we have by this time come to expect of the man that he is too self-willed and proud to let the blessing simply be given to him; he has to feel that he has obtained it by his own efforts. It is this same life-long, grim, proud determination to define his own destiny (and which therefore requires resistance to God's destiny for him) which culminates at the Jabbok. There it is paradoxically both countenanced and destroyed.

An interesting word in this context, countenanced! Fokkelman questions the extent to which other commentators have read into this incident the sense of taboo at seeing the face of God which is explicit in the Mosaic narratives in Exodus. He observes, I believe correctly, that the narrative in Genesis contains no sense of there being anything dangerous or forbidden in seeing God's face. Perhaps the interpretation of 32:30b is expressed not by

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6 Fokkelman op cit p. 213

life is preserved" but "I have seen the face of God and therefore my life (threatened by Esau) is preserved". In other words, this is the moment when he realises that his prayer in 32:11 has been answered, he has been delivered.

Even from such a cursory review as I have offered here, it is apparent that there are major differences between the approach of scholars such as Martin Noth (7) and those such as Sarna and Fokkelman. Such differences arise at least in part from their differing concerns with what they believe the text is about. For Noth, it represents these communal and cultic concerns from which it grew and which it authenticates. Such scholarship seems to miss what is immediately apparent, namely that the Jacob saga is unself-consciously a human narrative of outstanding depth and accuracy of perception into some of the ways in which people can relate to God, and vice versa. It is the meaning of the story as it unfolds the development of Jacob's spiritual nature which is the concern of such as Sarna and Fokkelman. And it is in this way that the story is of concern to me.

However, it is necessary to be cautious. Jacob is not some preliterary equivalent of mediaeval, Christian Everyman. Yet even while acknowledging this, I believe one can discern beneath the details and circumstances which derive from his 'sitz in leben' a number of the powerful and mysterious themes which are perennial and universal. Dissociation and re-integration; alienation and reconcil iation; guilt, repentance and redemption; wilful pride and humble acceptance. Just as there are parallels within the narrative between the seemingly-different episodes, pointing to an underlying unity which has been developed with skill, so these different thematic lie as parallel strands within the ongoing flow of the story.

It is my contention that when the narrative is approached in this way - as a highly perceptive and illuminating document on some fundamental aspects of what

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7 vide Noth's comments on the Jacob narratives in his "A History of Pentateuchal Traditions" Prentice-Hall 1948

an awkward embarrassment, bewildering in its seeming lack of sense or meaning. Instead it is seen as an account of one of the mysterious, ineffable crux occasions when there is a prodigious upheaval and re-arrangement within the total personality of a man. It is the point where the disparate and ultimately self-defeating impulses in Jacob's character, impelled by guilt, conscience and futility, reach a cathartic climax and resolution. Let me consider one or two of these major motifs in more detail.

Fundamental to the Jacob saga is the matter of what today would be called "sibling rivalry"; that is, a relationship between siblings based on jealousy, envy, a need to assert oneself above the other, etc. Such sibling rivalry is a very important theme in Israelite history, particularly the early history. It runs from Cain and Abel, through Jacob and Joseph, to the tribal rivalries alluded to in Judges and the eventual division of the Kingdom into Israel and Judah. In the case of Jacob andEsau such rivalry has an immediate and practical justification; inheritance and property depend on the brothers' places in the family. But a wealth of modern research on the relationship between siblings in our society, in which property is not so immediately tied to one's place in a family, shows that rivalry is widespread and powerful. Brothers and sisters compete for parental love, for affection, for status, for approval and so on. If favouritism is shown by either or both parents, this gives added intensity to the feelings siblings have toward each other.

If such rivalry within the family is markedly strong, it has a lasting effect on the children. As we grow we interpret, understand and approach the world as we have learned to within our family. We respond to the significant other people in our lives as we learned to relate to members of our family as children. If what we have learned as children is a sense of rivalry, contention, mistrust, we shall become to a greater or lesser extent adults who are contentious, mistrusting, etc. Consititution probably plays some part in this; a person may be naturally contentious

be emphasised by the conditioning it both produces and receives during upbringing.

Although modern casework and research may serve to give some objective, scientific status to observations on the rivalry between siblings, such rivalry is nothing new, nor is knowledge about it new. Its recurrence as a theme in the oldest parts of the Old Testament is sufficient to confirm this. And the rivalry between Jacob and his brother Esau is crucial both to the narrative and to the development of an understanding of the character of Jacob.

So deep-seated is the rivalry that we are told it begins even in the womb. And although Jacob is born second, there is divine authority for the reversal of the usual order of sibling precedence; in this case it is divinely decreed that "the elder shall serve the younger". The etiological implications of this are spelled out in 25;23; the interpersonal implications of it form the underlying substance of the whole Jacob Narrative.

The tensions within the family are even further heightened by the fact that the parents openly take sides, thus doubling the intensity of the rivalry between the brothers. One wonders whether parents are using the twins in order to enact elements of their own relationship. Indeed, one wonders about all manner of features to do with the family interrelationships and the psychological implications thereof which are hinted at by the text, but such speculation is probably neither justifiable nor, in the long run, fruitful. Sufficient to accept the fact that Jacob's early years and development are integral to the character of the man; that the tensions within his family confirm a basic disposition toward contention and striving.

It is within the context of family tensions and rivalries that the matter of the birthright and blessing becomes symptomatic. They are the signs, the symbols of approval, status, and superiority. Although the text with

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unsavoury incident set up by Rebekah and willingly connived by Jacob. The result is an open breach between the brothers a situation which Jacob resolves by flight. (Here again the text is not straightforward; the journey of Jacob to Laban seems to have been authorised by Isaac. One can suggest that Isaac, despite his favouritism for Esau, would draw the line at fratricide among his sons.)

Thus the story of Jacob's career begins within a context of intense rivalry. Contention is basic to his disposition, and is augmented by parental attitudes. During his sojourn East of the Jordan the rivalry fades into the background, but is reinvoked by the rivalry which develops between Jacob and Laban's sons, and as the direct consequence of the rivalry his original relationship with his brother is resurrected as he is forced to return home for the confrontation. It is his overriding consideration as he approaches the Jabbok after quitting Laban's territory.

The split between Jacob and his brother is reflected in a more intimate dissociation within Jacob himself. His aim to supplant, that is, to establish himself as a successful man over and above all others and in particular his brother, seems to be achieved. He is what today would be called a "high achiever".

Jacob's contrivances to rob Esau are described in almost paradigmatic form as a shrewdly successful program for getting on and getting ahead. Swindling and cleverness of this sort was admired by our moral ancestors. The name of the game was - get ahead if you can but avoid theft. Match thy wits against thy fellow-creatures and gain as much advantage over them as thou canst..... (8)

By cunning, guile and hard work Jacob acheives and obtains what he wants. He obtains the birthright; he obtains the blessing; he becomes a man of wealth and property; he

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8 Menninger, Karl "Whatever became of Sin?" Hawthorne Books Inc. N.Y. 1973 p.146

each success is obtained only at the cost of family and social implications of destructive force, and also at the cost of his own conscience.

Although there seems to be no immediate consequence in terms of wrath or retribution to the coerced sale of the birthright, may its effect on Esau have been cumulative? So that, when also tricked out of the blessing, he responds murderously to this younger brother who is always outwitting him. The cost to Jacob of obtaining these two symbolic family benefits is paid in family dissociations - a total breach with his brother and exile from his home. In this, Jacob is responding in the accepted way of the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, one of the most frequently-mentioned ways of coping with danger or pain is to run away! There are few hero stories which depict their characters deliberately confronting danger; examples would be Samson or the boy David. But there are many examples of heroes who have their times as refugees, eg. Moses, David, Elijah, Jotham, Jonah, and of course, Jacob.

> In the Old Testament, flight from suffering or danger is not in principle injurious to honour; it is a normal, recognised reaction to danger. (9)

Jacob's amorous affairs do not progress smoothly. In part this is because he is himself outwitted by Laban in the matter of the marriage to Leah. In part this is because his wives cannot agree together. And also in part because his masculinity seems to be put under threat.(30:1)

In material terms, he is a success. "And the man increased exceedingly, and had much cattle, and maidservants, and menservants, and camels and asses." (30:43) But he is not allowed to enjoy his material success in tranquillity. The reasons for the growing tension between Jacob and Laban's family are complex and not altogether clear. I have already mentioned the possibility that the growing

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9 Gerstenberger & Schrage "Suffering" Abingdon (Nashville) 1980 p.117

because of the latters' anxieties about the inheritance. There may also have been queries about the means whereby Jacob obtained such largeflocks. The Biblical reader is made aware that the affair with the peeled rods was divinely decreed, but without that decree it would look very much like sorcery, and doubtless could seem so to Laban's dispossessed family. In the background but equally plausible is the possibility that Jacob fell victim to the universal resentment felt by indigenous folk against the stranger who proves himself more successful than they are. For these and perhaps other reasons, there comes about a change in Laban's attitude toward Jacob, a change which the latter notices and he deems it prudent to depart. The parting is on fairly amicable terms, but its very amicability stems from its irrevocability.

It is possible that if Jacob had been allowed to enjoy his material success in a settled and peaceful manner he might have lived out his life in equanimity toward his severed relationship with his family, with a smothered conscience and the ability to endure the friction within his marriages; that is, his material success would have compensated for his disadvantages. However, in the wake of the rift with Laban, Jacob becomes once again a refugee, albeit a wealthy one. He thus approaches the Jabbok as a man of great substance, but dispossessed.

Running through the descriptions of family rivalries and breaches and the setbacks consequent upon his material success is the thread of the moral dimension to Jacob's career. This is the feature rightly emphasised by Nahum Sarna. In a sense, we are completely at a loss to know what effect his somewhat dubious activity had upon Jacob's conscience. But there are reliable clues. Esau's justifiable anger, and Jacob's flight from that anger, indicate the serious breach of honour involved in the trickery over the blessing. The lengthy self-justification of 31:4-13 amounts to a self-defence based partly on divine ordination of the events leading to the gaining of the flocks by use of the peeled rods, and partly on a tit-for-tat argument because Laban owed him wages anyway.

we can see that all these elements - the rivalry with Esau, the trickery which has resulted in his wealth, the moral tension - serve both to provide the background information illuminating the character of Jacob and also to heighten the dramatic tension to a level at which something has to break. This crux point is, I believe, the mysterious incident at the Jabbok. As Jacob approaches the Jabbok he is in what contemporary jargon would describe as a "double-bind". Whatever he does is fraught with danger. Consider the options. He cannot return to Laban's territory; that option is closed. He could have travelled into completely alien country; this would have meant almost certain permenant dispossession, homelessness and acute danger from marauders drawn by his wealth. His final option, the road back to his homeland, is dominated by the threatening and vengeance-bent figure of his aggrieved brother.

It is possible that Jacob himself hesitated between the last two options, but the situation is forced by the news that Esau is not waiting upon his arrival but has come out with a small army, looking for him and obviously bent on revenge. In other words, the choice is taken out of Jacob's hands; a particular confrontation is being set up, the last option is being forced upon him. It is just this dangerous, conscience-invoking course which is gradually being revealed as the will of God for Jacob. God is leading him into the situation, a situation which he cannot escape and which he cannot worm his way out of nor manipulate to his advantage. Not surprisingly, Jacob is filled with dread. 32:7

His response to the situation into which hefeels himself being inexorably driven is to take a series of precautions which he hopes will allay or avert the possible disaster. The first is the division of his property, on the assumption that at least half his possessions may thus escape. However, this strategy does not seem to have satisfied him, perhaps partly because he felt it would not work and because the resultant loss would be too great, anyway. His next ruse is to send a number of his servants,

brother and thereby currying his favour. But, again, this seems to have been insufficient to allay his fears, and we are told that finally he sends on ahead the remainder of his possessions, together with his close family - his two wives, his concubines and their sons. What his strategy was on this occasion we are not told; probably it represents an intensification of the previous one, having larger gifts and more worthy emissaries.

The text is vague on the time-scale of all this activity. There is a suggestion that it all happened in one night, but this would seem impossible. Perhaps it makes more sense to assume that the nights mentioned in 32:13 and 22 were consecutive nights. This would mean that the division of the property occurred on day 1; the sending of the servants and the gifts occurred on day 2; the sending of the family early on the second night. The close association of the preparation of the gifts with the first night would seem to bear out Fokkelman's point that this was a time of sleeplessness for Jacob.

In the light of the foregoing I believe we can make some justifiable conjectures about Jacob's state of mind. He was exhausted both in the sense of being physically utterly weary, and also emptied of ideas. He was also in a state of profound and unsettling anxiety. Perhaps for the very first time in his life, Jacob is ina situation which is threatening him and which he cannot handle from his own personal abilities. When he compares his predicament with the scale of his success but a short while before, the current crisis is thrown into deeper relief. There are five elements in Jacob's behaviour which are evidence for this conjecture.

Firstly, the nature of his activity and the decisions which it reflects. Anxiety arises when we are in a position of needing to take decisive and effective action, but the appropriate action is unknown to us or else we believe that there is none. The resultant pattern of behaviour in the acutely anxious person is symptomatic. It usually consists of a series of decisions; no sooner has one been

and it is modified or substituted by another course of action. The result is that decision follows decision, action follows action until, eventually, there is a complete disintegration of decision-making activity and an inert helplessness sets in. This is often associated with reveries - the wish to turn the clock back, to undo what was done, the growth of guilt/remorse and the onset of despair. I believe that the sequence of actions adopted by Jacob in Chapter 32 adequately fit this pattern. He is being portrayed as a highly anxious person, casting around for a non-existent solution.

Secondly, a major component of anxiety is fear. We know enough of Jacob's circumstances to surmise him to be frightened, but are specifically told this is so in 32:7.

Thirdly, an important symptom associated with high levels of anxiety is an inability to sleep. In 32:13 there is a strong suggestion that Jacob was so afflicted, plus the quite definite description of the night without sleep by the Jabbok, and it is my suggestion that these were two separate nights.

Fourthly, Jacob's approach to Esau is one of appeasement for the wrong he has done him. 32:20. This is the clearest indication we have of Jacob having a guilty conscience; he is aware that the initial fault is his, and that he has no case to plead before his brother. All he can seek to do is to atone. Guilt feelings are often aroused by anxiety-inducing circumstances as introspection is forced upon the anxious person in examination of his predicament. That anxiety states can often shade into states of despair and depression may also be attributable to the rising of guilt feelings, as it is widely acknowledged in psychodynamic theories that guilt is a most important underlying feature of depressive states. (10)

Fifthly, but by no means lastly, it is in association with the Jabbok incident that Jacob for the first time turns to God in prayer: Man under stress is a praying animal. (11)

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10 see, for example, the paper of the same title in Melanie Klein's "Love, Guilt and Reparation; and other works." Hogarth Press 1975

11 Allport, Gordon W "The Individual and His Religion" Constable 1951 p. 56

portrayals of suffering generally ..... are to be found in the context of worship in the Old Testament. Loss and pain, threat and uncertainty, demand to be considered in prayer. (12)

Until this period in his career, Jacob has not been a praying animal! And until this period the narrator has subdued the divine element in the story into the background. Although we are left in no doubt that Jacob is living within a great and divinely-ordained destiny, the divine presence is kept very much in reserve. It is clear that until the crisis Jacob has considered himself to be getting on very nicely without God's help. But in Chapter 32 he turns to the God he has ignored - and there is a hint (although I appreciate that it may be no more than the conventional self-abasement before God) that he is aware of how little he deserves God's favour.

Yet the self-assertiveness of Jacob's nature has to be set alongside the prayer. His frantic contingency plans indicate that he still cannot trust God, and believes that any relief will be up to him to arrange, ie. he does not trust God nor God's power nor even, perhaps, God's wish to save him. There still survives in Jacob a strong streak of "God helps those who help themselves", for Jacob until this point had helped himself in both meanings of the expression.

(There is a problem with the text as it stands in regard to this matter of prayer, as the prayer seems to be associated with a Jordan, notJabbok, context. 32:10 contains specific mention of "this Jordan". However, the wider setting is the build-up to the Jabbok encounter, and we may perhaps surmise a textual error. Though this may not actually be necessary, as the Jabbok was a tributary of the Jordan. Alternatively, the word Jordan can be used generically to mean "river", as the word Avon was once so used in this country.)

Thus we have a picture of Jacob on the banks of the Jabbok on that fateful night; exhausted both physically

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12 Gerstenberger and Schrage op cit p.28

anxious, vacillating, guilty, apprehensive, fearful, unable to be rescued or solaced by the very things of his life upon which he has expended so much of himself. Is this a possible surmise for his mental and emotional state? Might we also conjecture an element of self-doubt, self-doubt of a gnawing and self-destroying nature?

Before I come to an examination of the Jabbok incident in detail, it is as well to look ahead to its consequences. The outcome which had been imagined by Jacob, which filled him with anxiety and dread, and which he believed inexorable, did not in fact happen. And not only did those events over which he had no control not develop as he had expected; his own behaviour was not as he could have predicted. Whereas on the previous day he had arranged all that he possessed and held dear into a series of buffers between himself and Esau, on the following day he leads the way. Moreover, he leads the way in deep humility, relying not upon his ability to impress or buy off his brother, but only on Esau's willingness and ability to forgive. Somehow, from somewhere, Jacob had discovered the power and the reality of forgiveness, not as a theoretical religious exercise involving the appropriate forms of penance but as a living experience of being forgiven. This gives added weight to Fokkelman's suggestion that his exclamation "I have seen the face of God, and my life is preserved" is evidence of an awareness that at the Jabbok Jacob knew the outcome of the future on the basis of what had just happened to him. Whatever we may conjecture, there is a complete change of strategy on Jacob's part; if strategy is the right word for behaviour which was unplanned. Indeed, not only was Jacob's action unplanned, it seems totally at variance with the Jacob we have come to know in his development before the Jabbok incident. Being humble and submitting himself to the mercy of another man was not his style at all!

He emerged from it a changed man. It is merely a matter of conjecture, but I wonder whether we can consider Esau's response to his brother when eventually they meet as being determined by an immediate perception of the altered character of his brother. Although it had been many years since their last meeting, he would recall him as a scheming, devious, manipulative person. Perhaps, with that ability or faculty for immediate character assessment which most of us have and which defies description, Esau saw at once that the Jacob he was meeting was a very different kind of man from the hated brother whom he had last seen. Esau's changed attitude to Jacob - at variance both with what he had intended and what Jacob had expected - can thus be considered a reflection of the magnitude of the change which had occurred in the latter.

I therefore consider that the events by the Jabbok, far from being a meaningless and irrelevant interpolation as would be maintained by some, constitute the turning point in both Jacob's career and his character. "The moment marks a great spiritual turning point for Jacob." (GR Driver) If this is accepted, and if we compare the Jabbok incident with other accounts of such critical turning points, it will come as no surprise to us that this ancient text is difficult, puzzling and obscure. Even contemporary accounts, with much more refined vocabularies and categories of thought to draw on, find us a t a loss adequately to describe what is going on. Because of such difficulties and obscurity there are those today who query whether such things actually occur, despite the evidence for them.

The myth of cure infects our thinking ..... and as one consequence we have an altogether superficial and unsympathetic view of personal change; we overlook the difficulty of change and the pain it demands, as well as the impossibility of eradicating experience ..... It is ironic that some research investigators of psychotherapy feel that improvements in patients due to "significant life events" outside the therapeutic situation should be carefully

therapeutic technique. (13)

While we must take seriously the suggestion of several commentators that the Jabbok incident is based around some folk-tale of an encounter with a river spirit, I cannot accept that this is all it is. (14) The notion of river crossings being guarded by protective, jealous and dangerous spirits who take their toll of those who would cross is widespread from Scandanavia through to Africa. But to acknowledge this is to point to the mystery rather than explain it. It raises interesting questions. Why are tales of the crossing of water threatened by malignant forces so widespread? What is the symbolic power such a format exercises? Why are changes of role or character so often associated with rites of passage requiring the crossing of water, or rituals involving myths of such crossings? Why is death frequently symbolised as a crossing of water? From the tale of the Billy Goats Gruff and the story of St. Christopher through to the rites of baptism and the prospect of "the grim ferryman, Death", we seem here to be involved in a whole galaxy of myth, folk-lore, symbol and rites of passage. And almost invariably the crossing involves some loss, some pain or grief, some effort, and results in a deep change in the character who crosses.

If the Jabbok incident was originally a floating, anonymous story, we are justified in asking why it came to be attached to Jacob? What happened to Jacob, at the Jabbok or elsewhere, which rendered him apt for having such a disturbing story associated with him? If, that is, the events described at the Jabbok were not originally peculiar to him. I would suggest that Jacob and the events of his career fit him into the category of myth and legend, symbol and ritual alluded to above. The crossing of the water indicated a radical change in Jacob, a change not achieved without a tremendous, night-long struggle. Thus, no matter

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13 Smail, David "Illusion and Reality; the Meaning of Anxiety" Dent 1984 p. 91-2

14 See, for example, Skinner in the International Critical Commentary on Genesis; McKenzie, John "Jacob at Peniel" in Catholic Bib Quart. 1963

to Jacob is no accident. Rather, it is highly indicative. And we must bear in mind that the story may have had its origin in the the story of Jacob; it may be original to him.

I think that the fact that the story is to be located within the wider context of stories of river crossings with wider, symbolic overtones is emphasised by the deep and complex layer of symbolic associations, associations which can be confirmed from many other sources. Indeed, the words used have metaphorical overtones. Night is a time of ignorance and fear, when super-human forces are let loose. Whether these forces have their origin in a super-natural realm of reality (ie. have objective existence as ghosts and demons) or arise from the depths of the human subconscious, and imagination is a point which can be debated, depending on one's willingness to accept the existence of a supernatural realm or, indeed, the existence of the human subconscious. I would opt for the latter - the nighttime being the time when our repression of the undesired parts of ourselves is weakened, and that which we would rather not face can break through with terrifying power.

To this day we speak of "wrestling with conscience"; that is, a struggle with some more righteous and judgemental aspect of self that cannot be denied and eventually lays its claim upon us.

The "voices" and hallucinations of psychotics frequently make sense when they are understood in terms of the guilt conflicts which they represent. (15)

Crippling as an hysterical displacement symptom is well-known in the annals of psychology and psychotherapy of all kinds. The precise nature of such displacements is a matter for discussion in the medical world, but there is ample evidence that on occasions mental or emotional disabilities which are too painful to be confronted and lived with become displaced into physical symptoms; mental blocks become physical blocks. It might be in some such

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15 Stein, Edward V "Guilt: Theory and Therapy" Allen and Unwin 1969 p.114

mentally and emotionally freed from its effects, but its inhibiting nature results in the displacement into a physical disability - he is left crippled.

The last of the symbolic overtones to be mentioned here is the change of name. This, of course, reflects a precedent set with Abraham and Sarah. But it also reflects a change in the character and nature, as also the destiny, of Jacob. In the times of the patriarchal sagas, as among many primitives today, the name of a man is far more than a mere label. The name both determines and reflects the being of the person. A change of name was a highly significant symbolic act, only undertaken in rare and decisive occasions.

In the graphic and dramatic form of an encounter with a strange "man" who has superhuman strength, Jacob's inner struggle and the eventual resolution of his spiritual turmoil are depicted. It is important to remember, when we approach the story as narrative, that symbols do not need to be understood in the sense of being fully explicable in abstract terms in order that they can be effective as means of communication. Indeed I suspect that the less they are understood, the more effective they are as communicators; the less abstract theorising clusters around them, the more effectively they make their point. (16) Although we today seek to unravel the spiritual, mental and emotional processes signified in such symbolic ways, let us not assume that we therefore "understand" the story better than those who first heard it. I suggest that those who originally told and heard the story would be sensitive both to its dramatic impact as narrative and also to its deeper implications. The story speaks powerfully to us, even today, not merely because it is a striking narrative but because it evokes powerful resonances in people's own experience.

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16 For a fuller treatment of the matter of thepower of symbols to be effective see Bruno Bettleheim's "The Uses of Enchantment" Penguin Books 1978

wrestling with a foe whose might is greater than his own, yet who cannot escape from Jacob even though Jacob cannot shake himself free of his assailant. Somehow they seem bound together, at least until the light dawns. Jacob is confronting something which is a part of himself(and therefore cannot be shaken off) and yet is not subject to his wil ful control (and therefore seems alien, not himself, and formidable). It is at the Jabbok that this unacknowledged aspect of himself confronts Jacob in its fullest power. His conscience has been evoked by the precarious situation in which he finds himself, a situation he would not have been in had he attended to his conscience earlier. Thus his conscience challenges and condemns him, and he has no escape from its overwhelming power.

Clearly God had used restraint until now, letting Jacob exert himself to the utmost, so that when he was defeated he would know that all his shrewdness, his trickery, his underhandedness and his strength were not enough. (17)

Fretheim suggests that in the wrestling match we find encapsulated the whole nature and previous career of Jacob. Just as his abilities were unable ultimately to save him, and had led him to the impasse between Laban and Esau, so now at the Jabbok his conscience presents him with the impasse between bad conscience and accepting the will of God. Jacob is in both a circumstantial and a moral double-bind.

If he yields, this implies the diminishment of all his prior achievements. And yet his achievements are already in question, and are part of the total situation which is forcing him to yield. He cannot use his achievements to bolster his crumbling self-esteem, for his self-esteem is based on those very achievements which are themselves turning to dust.

The seeming-ambiguity of the contest, in which Jacob seems paradoxically both vanquished and victor, both

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17 Fretheim, Terence E. "The Jacob Traditions" Interpretations 1972

is resolved if it is accepted that the story, whilst seeming to speak of two protagonists, is speaking about opposing forces within Jacob. There is thus both polarity and unity depending upon whether one is considering Jacob divided against himself or that unity which encloses the disparate elements of his personality. Even the very rare, multiple personality forms of schizophreia arise from what is undoubtedly one person!

The protagonists are, on the one hand the conscience as the expression of thewill of God, on the other the man Jacob has created as the expression of the will of Jacob at the expense of the former. This latter is an ego-construct need some sense of victory otherwise the outcome could be disastrous for Jacob. Hence the story depicts both Jacob (ego-construct) and the "man" (conscience/God) as prevailing. But we are left in no doubt that the latter is in fact the stronger, and it is the former's desparation which leads to the blessing of the ego-construct by the conscience.

It is the new, wholesome Jacob who renames himself, recognising that his character is such as has led him to strive both with God and men. The change of name reflects the change of character which arises from his acknowledge-ment of his nature and the negative aspects of it which have led him to his parlous situation.

C G Jund uses this story of the Jabbok incident on several occasions to illustrate the encounter with what he calls the "shadow" - that is, the repressed, unacknow-ledged, dark and hidden part of the total self which must be recognised, accepted and incorporated before we can become whole. Hence the ambiguity and confusion in the story as to who this mysterious assailant is. Jacob cannot know his name, although he knows Jacob. And yet, in the fact that the strength of this self-which-is-not-self is greater than his own, he is forcibly brought to acknowledge that a part of him is responsible to a power which immeasurably transcends what he thought was himself;

is in the hand of God. He realises, suddenly and with intuitive insight, that his mysterious opponent is none other than God. And the light dawns - literally and figuratively.

In summary, then, the Jabbok incident is a dramatic account in symbolic form of a man being brought face to face withhidden, repressed, ignored or denied parts of himself. The agentof this confrontation is his conscience, activated by circumstances of extreme stress and desparation, with whom he has a tremendous battle before yielding to its truth. But in yielding he recognises thathis opponent is essentially benevolent, a part of himself hitherto unacknowledged. Hence the confusion of names, the ambiguity of identities and theultimate change in designation. By the end of the struggle Jacob is found to be reconciled to the newly-discovered or revealed part of himself; he recognises it as being God-centred, divine. The total experience has been one of God, although it did not seem so until the very end. There is the implication that all that has gone before, enfolded within God's destiny for him, has led to this painful yet exhilarating moment of revelation. A new day dawns for the striver with God and men.

The Jabbok incident is one man's version of the odd, perplexing and highly important incidents in human lives which carry significant religious meaning and the power to affect andchange us. It arose in time of crisis and appeared in the course of deep inner turmoil. It resolved his turmoil by rearranging his personal values and motives. The pattern of development seems to have been: life of striving for success - setbacks - crisis- anxiety and turmoil - disintegration/reintegration of self-resumption in modified form.

Although I realise that it is difficult to make comparisons across the centuries and across so vast a culture gap, some of the features highlighted in Chapter 1 as being salient features of contemporary religious experience may be detected in the Jabbok story. In Ch. 1

authority/authenticity, benevolence, association with crisis and distress. In the Jabbok narative we are told that Jacob was left alone. The obscurity and ambiguity of the narrative is perhaps a consequence of the ineffability of the experience. It left Jacob with the conviction that he had encountered God, and it had long-term effects both for him as an individual and for the nation he founded. Its effect on Jacob was for the good. In its wake he was spared by Esau, and although remaining a shrewd man he no longer is depicted as being deceitful. Lastly, the incident arose during a time of profound personal crisis which I have interpreted in terms of anxiety and guilt.

Thus the story in Gen. 32:22-32 tells the reader that it was out of the impasse of his circumstances and the inner crisis that this engendered that Jacob came to recognise and accept God's will for him. Our times of failure, therefore, while they may seem to be created by us, are set within God's destiny for us; and from the pain of inner turmoil and despair can come enlightenment and new beginnings, even to the reshaping of our personalities so that we become new men. The story acts as a paradigm enabling the reader to approach his own despair with at least the hope of a positive and creative outcome. It enables the reader to recognise and accept that theophanic occurrences canbe extremely odd and disturbing. It tells us that we may strive with God, and even not recognise him when we are in face-to-face encounter with him. That this is the way it was with no less a hero than Jacob, and we should not hope for more. And that after the dark night of strife, the new day dawns and we are blessed.

Some Biblical Considerations: Part 2 - Job

I am aware that the foregoing study of Jacob, centring on the incident at the Jabbok, contains a very large measure of conjecture. But conjecture is unavoidable in any attempt to understand such narratives; it is virtually forced upon us by the character of the narrative and this, as I shall shortly argue, is one of the greatest features of such texts. The patriarchal sagas are whata modern publisher's blurb might describe as "action-packed adventure". We hurry from one event to the next, and the reflective content is virtually nil. Ocassionally we are granted a one-word summary of the main character's feelings or motives - Jacob, we are tersely told, was "afraid", Esau "hated" - and from the actions described we can understand why he feels this way. But for the most part of the inner states of the various characters are left undescribed. If we are interested in such things (as I am) we must resort to conjecture.

I believe that the attempt to fill the emotional and mental vacuum left by a narrative such as that of Jacob is both justified and necessary. The meaning of a religious drama cannot reside solely in the descriptionof events; the attempt to understand the events and elicit their meaning must involve an attempt to understand how it felt to be involved in those events. If this is not achieved the narratives remain locked into their own contemporary situation. The reader cannot recreate the events; as events they cannot transfer into his own time.

.....an historical event can only take place once. From the historical point of view the battle of Waterloo is a single, unique event which can never be repeated. But the essential truth of the myth lies in the fact that it embodies a situation of profound emotional significance, a situation, moreover, which is in its nature recurrent. (1)

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1 Hooke S.H. "The Labarynth" Introduction

historical and mythological criteria. They have the "this really happened and needs to be taken seriously" aspect of history, plus the recurrent and transferable features of myth. Although the reader cannot transfer the events to his own time. th e motives, emotions and significances lying behind the events can be so transferred. Because he makes the effort to get beneath the events, to understand how it was to be Jacob, and why Jacob felt and acted as he did, a dimension of being human and a part of the relationship between human and divine is opened tohim. Through understanding what it meant to be Jacob he is able the more fully to understand what it means to be himself. He is enabled to appreciate and interpret similar events in his own life, and see how the involvement of God in the affairs of Jacob may or may not mirror the involvement of God in his own life and times. Thus the "action-packed adventures" of the patriarchs transcend their historical situation. It is their very lack of reflective material which lifts them out of their historical context, enabling succeeding generations to flesh out the bones of the events with appropriate interpretations.

The patriarchal narratives, therefore, demand conjecture, demand the attempt to penetrate behind the superficial (in a non-perjorative sense) account of events. This is what it means to "understand" them. If (and I recognise the weight of this "if") human feelings and motives remain similar despite the change of circumstances from one generation to the next, if hate, envy, despair, ambition, love, lust, etc. are the common lot of succeeding generations, then the hypothesis of a common bond linking times past with times present at the spiritual and emotional level is valid. Those inner motives, feelings and moral imperatives which we project from our own time (whenever that time may be) into the past can be assumed to carry a measure of authenticity. We can sympathise with Jacob.

(It should be born in mind that this projection of understanding, the attempt on the basis of my experience

open to question, whether we make the attempt over three millenia or with contemporaries. We can never really be confident that we understand just how another person is feeling, what he is experiencing.

> .....most people cannot accept the fact that others experience the world in a way radically different from themselves. On the whole, people know very little about other experiential worlds. Many experiences are difficult to put into words, and some people are not as articulate as others, so most people do not guess how very different the experiences of others may be. (2)

I suggest that this very real difficulty is not appropriate in the present context. A gulf between our understanding of Jacob and his own self-understanding and experience is irrelevant. The aim is not to achieve an understanding of Jacob but rather, through reflection on him, to understand ourselves. Thus <u>any</u> conjecture about and understanding of Jacob will in this sense be accurate. One of the features of the timelessness of such sagas is that by virtue of their skeletal, event-formed nature, they are open to receive any number of conjectural projections. The religious strength of such a narrative is that it contains so little explicit religious form!

If we bear in mind the origins of the patriarchal sagas in oral tradition, we should not be surprised that they are largely "action-packed adventure". Such is the story-teller's material; ruminations on the state of the hero's soul or conscience have no place in the context within which such stories originated and became established in form. But in other parts of the Old Testament, much later in their origins than the sagas, there are explicit attempts to convey to the reader the inner and intimate realities which coincide with the processes of outward events and circumstances. Such attempts almost certainly required the development of writing skills of a fairly

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2 Essay: Laing's Models of Madness by M. Siegler, H. Osmond & H. Mann. in "R.D. Laing and Anti-Psychiatry" Ed Boyes & Orrill Octagon Books NY 1974

as in the literature of other cultures and languages - the material can be initially designateddepending on whether it is expressed in prose or poetry.

On the whole, in Old Testament literature prose is used for narrative, be it historical, mythological or whatever, and also for liturgical, legal and didactic writing. Poetry is used to describe how feels to be caught up in the tide of events depicted by the prose. Prose is used to say what happens when a person or nation is being religious; poetry is used to describe how it is to be that person or nation. A very clear example of this dichotomy is to be found in the Book of Jonah when, in the midst of an adventure described in prose, the hero cries to God in anguish using (largely plagiarised) verse. What happens to Jonah is described in prose. How it felt to be Jonah is described in verse. Thus the division between prose and poetry reflects the division between the objective and subjective data of religion.

Chief among the Old Testament literature which deals with the subjective side of religion are some of the prophetic books, the Book of Psalms, and some of the Wisdom literature. Of these, perhaps the greatest is the Book of Job. Here again, as in the Book of Jonah but on a much grander scale, a man's anguish is poetically expressed within a prose structure depicting the circumstances which create that anguish.

The unknown author of the Book of Job has a greatness which transcends Biblical confines. The measure and expression of human anguish depicted in Job are equalled in, say, Second Isaiah or the Book of Jeremiah. Where the author of Job excels is in the power and quality and accuracy of his writing. His poetic genius sets him in that select company of genius which transcends religious, cultural and national boundaries. He speaks for the universal human spirit in its anguished relationship with God. He is to be measured alongside the likes of Homer, Shakespeare, Dante and Goethe. Significantly, this last uses the prologue to

Part 1. These two works, widely regarded as being supreme, deal with the same theme. The author of Job therefore belongs to a company of multi-faceted genius, who combine religious wisdom, human compassion and insight, philosophical acumen and literary skill.

Although the author is anonymous, we can speculate with some measure of assurance on what kind of man he was. He was probably widely travelled, and therefore probably wealthy. His concern with the Biblical category of Wisdom reinforces thepossibility of his being wealthy, as Wisdom tended to be the domain of the wealthy and successful. He was sophisticated, well-read, educated and highly intelligent. Robert Gordis suggests that he may have been, or been very interested in the skills of a physician. (3)

This is to say who the author may have been in social terms. In more intimate terms, he was a man of the greatest insight into the way that human beings are. The way in which Job is depicted as being very much the same after his ordeal as he was before it, particularly in material terms, and yet not exactly the same, and the indefinable nature of the difference, tell of a most sensitive ability on the part of the author to observe the nuances of human life, behaviour and change. I have a strong suspicion that he himself had endured personally the kind of anguish which he describes so well through the mouth of Job, for in the relationship between Job and the Comforters he shows a painfully accurate awareness of the gulf which exists between those who suffer and those who talk about suffering. As Albert Cook expresses it:

> This question (Why do I suffer?) does not come about in such a way that a man thinking about his suffering makes it into an object ... it is not a discussion but a contending conversation. (4)

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3 Gordis, Robert "The Book of God and Man" U of Chicago 1965 p. 57

4 Cook, Albert "The Root of the Thing" Indiana University Press 1968 p.25

speculation on theodicy as a portrayal and a polemic.

Last by by no means least of the author's characteristics is his poetic genius. He undoubtedly deserves his place among exalted company mentioned earlier. His poetry is very rich. It is structurally highly sophisticated, abounding in assonance and dissonance, filled with parallels and tensions. He expands it with hints of hymns, myths, riddles, aphorisms, legends of the age and wide-ranging metaphors. From his pen, language becomes almost equal to the impossibility of the task he set himself!

He stacks up parallels within parallels, creating poetry in the Hebrew idiom of immense and subtle complexity. Consider,

> He leadeth counsellors away spoiled,
> And judges maketh he fools.
> He loseth the bond of kings,
> And bindeth their loins with a girdle.
> He leadeth priests away spoiled,
> And overthroweth the mighty.
> He removeth the speech of the trusty,
> And taketh away the understanding of the elders.
> He poureth contempt upon princes,
> And loseth the belt of the strong. 12:17-21

Note that there are not only the immediate parallels we would expect between the halves of each couplet. The counsellors, who are trusted to offer advice, are picked up again six lines later; the binding up of the loins is both reflected and refracted in the loosening of the belt, again six lines later. If one maintains this six-lines repetition, then there is a link between fools and elders in the poetic structure of this short extract which reflects the link between the elder status of the Comforters and the increasing depiction in the work as a whole of their counsel as sheer foolishness. The word "genius" is not inappropriate!

The Book of Job is unique within the Old Testament in a variety of ways, one of which is the breadth of vocabulary the author has available for his use. This is of the highest importance when we seek to understand the comparative success he achieved in his difficult task. The attempt to express our deepest levels of feeling and understanding is extremely

gories of abstraction, people are concerned that words fail adequately to express how they feel. In the time of the composition of Job, even the crude abstractions were rare.

However, it has been observed frequently that the words we use to describe mental and emotional states are linked to our physical perceptions. The very word "feelings" to describe areas of experience which we do not, in fact, feel in the usual sense of that word is an indication of this. Moreover, there has always been a strong link between inner states of mind and emotion and our bodily functions. Conditions of stress or anguish, for instance, are accompanied by such physical symptoms as sleeplessness, loss of appetite, irregular bowel functioning, loss of muscle tone, etc. There is a link between how we feel emotionally and how we feel physically. And where the categories of emotional expression are inadequate, physical description can substitute. The finest example I know of the physical being used to express the emotional and mental is the author's terse depiction of extreme apprehension "My bowels boil, and rest not". 31:27

The author combines the words which he does have at his disposal to describe inner states and categorical abstractions with words of powerful physical imagery repeated time and time again, creating a wholly convincing and communicating picture of what it is to be Job. For instance, the use time and time again of the words for belly and womb emphasise the viscerality of despair. The longing for death is eloquent of the value Job places upon his life. A modern existentialist scholar expands upon Job's desire for death at the beginning of his troubles -

> The desire for death, normally the first reaction of one who has awakened to reality, is a confession of failure to find meaning in life. (5)

Quite so! The author circumvents the shortage of such abstract categories by assembling physically descriptive

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5 Cox, Dermot "The Triumph of Impotence; Job and the Tradition of the Absurd" Gregorian University 1978 p.50

Book of Job, we have a very good idea of what Job felt like.

Thus the picture we obtain of the author is of a sophisticated, leisured, highly educated and intelligent, and experienced poet of genius and insight. Although there have been suggestions that he was not Hebrew but Chaldeean or Egyptian, I think it sensible to consider him a widely-travelled Hebrew. Certainly, the book is thoroughly Hebrew in style, content and thematic issues, despite some Aramaisms.

The book is not easy to date. It is tied to no historical event and its style and vocabulary are in some ways unique, making semantic comparisons difficult. Basing an estimate largely on knowledge of the development of religious ideas within Hebrew culture and the ways in which such ideas find expression in the book, the suggestion of a date somewhere between 500 and 300 BC seems most widely accepted. However, as our knowledge of the development of Hebrew religious thinking depends to a considerable extent on data from the Book of Job, using such a development then to date the book seems a rather circular process!

I do not think that the dating of the book is a matter of vital importance. The limits mentioned above will suffice. No view of history depends on putting Job into historical context; in some ways, the book transcends time.

However, an understanding of the contemporary religious ideology is most useful in efforts to understand the book. Job suffers anguish at two levels. First is the circumstance of his suffering - the loss of his property and family, his loss of status within the community, his own miserable affliction. But arising from this is the second and deeper level of anguish - his conviction that the suffering is undeserved and his anguished attempts to understand, to make sense of his circumstances, to justify himself. I would suggest that the mental suffering which is occasioned by the seemingly unjust, inexplicable nature of physical suffering may be the more torturing and acute, and have the more profound effects in the long run. The very basics of a person's life are being shaken

man to grow proud of himself: andif it were to be laid down that the self-approval of a good conscience is never, even in the best men, untainted by worthless pride, I do not suppose the assertion could be seriously refuted, If we are ever to be in a right - that is, a wholly filial - relationship to God, this self-satisfaction must be torn out by the roots. We must come with empty hands. (6)

It is this"tearing out by the roots" - a process as painful as the metaphor implies - which is the major substance of the Book of Job. Job's inability to understand and accept his situation is crucial; his bewilderment arises from his assumption that he did understand and, more over,. did not need simply to accept because he was in control of his destiny. We therefore need to consider the kind of understanding and supposed-control which his suffering so brutally abrogates.

It is the conventional understandings offered by Hebrew Wisdom which are under assault in the Book of Job. Initially, Job himself was the apotheosis of such understanding; the Comforters remain so, with perhaps one slight modification.

For the bulk of Hebrew Wisdom literature such adjectives as practical, common sense, down-to-earth come to mind. It is a corpus devoted to the immediate tasks of everyday life. Robert Gordis goes so far as to describe it as "everyday advice on how to be a success in life". (7) For the Wisdom writers, being a success in life entailed being being a successful devotee of Jahweh, for religion was a central part of life. Yet while being a successful devotee was a part of the overall pattern of success, it was simultaneously much more. For the success one acheived in other parts of life - as a member of the community, family man and householder, man of property, man of health and wealth, etc. - depended very much on receiving the blessing of God which ensued from successful devotion. Wisdom offered advice on how to secure that blessing: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of Wisdom.." (Prov. 1:7)

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6 Mackintosh, H R "The Christian Experience of Forgiveness" Fontana Books 1961 p.199

7 Gordis, R op. cit. p. 24

of things, meant a proper respect for and relationship with God, both in terms of following ritual precepts and obeying moral commandments. The man of Wisdom, then, is first and foremost a man who is virtuous and righteous, an observer of cultic and ethical requirements, upright and honourable. All this is summed up in the Hebrew word "tam" is precisely what the Job of the prologue is.

The drawback to all the sound advice of the wisdom schools, and to the theoretical constructs based on following such advice, was that practical experience showed it didn't always work! It worked sufficiently often tobe accepted as a general rule; that this should be so is more easily understood when it is recalled that Wisdom was chiefly the preoccupation of the wealthier classes, who therefore had a head start in the matter of smooth, prosperous lives. But even for them, it didn't always work. And it was the analysis of the breakdown which led to a higher form of Wisdom literature, a Wisdom literature which reflected critically upon the conventional Wisdom and the processes which it took for granted. This higher form is sometimes referred to as "meta-Wisdom".

Meta-Wisdom is a rational, exploratory, analytical commentary on the conventional meanings and values of its time. Its chief representatives are the Book of the Preacher and the Book of Job. Of the two, the Book of Job is the more exalted. Whereas the Book of the Preacher says that Wisdom comes to naught and it matters very much indeed. (Though perhaps Job eventually comes to the same conclusion as the Preacher, only from the position of humility rather than cynicism.) It is because it matters to him that Job enters so deeply into his tragedy and suffers so intensely. It is through his analysis of what it is to suffer and to agonise about that experience of suffering - as distinct from merely talking about suffering with a concentration of attention on how to avert it, which is the substance of conventional Wisdom - that

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that eluded him. (8)

The Book of Job, then, makes a response to the observed failings in practical terms of the answers and theories of conventional religious Wisdom. These failings must be seen in their context of the wider shifts in Hebrew religion. If the dating of 6-4 centuries BC is accepted, then the book was written at a time when the traditional Hebrew notions of retributive justice were in a state of flux. The nation as a whole had had the experience of the Exile to cope with, live through and come to terms with; this received its fullest response in Deutero-Isiah. Simultaneously, the question of retributive justice for the individual within the national collective was brought into question. The book of Job addresses itself to this latter question, in a particularly penetrating way. Indeed, so devastatingly penetrating was its analysis that David Bakan maintains that the doubts which have always been raised against the book in terms of its historical authenticity and place in the canon have served as a form of defence against the accuracy of its insight, the devestating effect of its penetration upon conventional views. (9)

In the Pentateuchal view, the suffering of the individual - the undeserved suffering, that is - was subsumed within the logic of normal retribution applied collectively. The individual may suffer unjustly, but the tribe or nation prospers. But the time when the Book of Job was written was the time when these collective notions were beginning to be calledseriously into question. (10) At this time the notion of an afterlife had not been fully developed, let alone accepted. Such notion of the after-life as there was consisted of a uniform, shadowy existence to which all, good and evil alike, were consigned. It had not developed that degree of colour in which the good and evil of this present life could be reflected in the hereafter, and problems of retributive justice thereby

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8 Kahn, Jack "Job's Illness; Loss, Grief and Integration" Pergamon Press 1975 p.100

9 Bakan, David "Disease, Pain & Sacrifice" U of Chicago 1968 p.101

10 Tsevat, Matitiahu "The meaning of the Book of Job and other Biblical Studies" Ins. for Jewish Studies Dallas NY 1980 p.32

the future, thus obviating the need for resolution here and now.

Job, it is true, does toy with the idea of afterlife which might carry the consequences of present moral decisions, but he rejects it. In this he rejects what - so Dermot Cox maintains - would have been a subtle form of suicide. He rejects actual suicide in his brusque response to his wife. Cox considers that for Job the acceptance of a retributive afterlife would have constituted moral and intellectual suicide. I think this is to over-state the case, but certainly the idea is not appealing for the author. (11)

The Interior dilemma of the Book of Job, then, which poises its hero between his conventional assumptions about what should be the case and his inescapable experience of what is the case, reflects the ethical dilemma within which the whole Jewish faith was poised at that time. It was a crucial point in the history of religious development. For Job individually and the nation collectively, the older meaning-structures of existence were being called into question and found seriously wanting. The experience of the destruction of that which we cherish causes grief and pain; the effect of this in destroying assumptions about meaning causes anguish and despair; and the struggle toward a new understanding is the heroic dimension exemplified in both Job and nation.

The Book of Job presents two well-known textual puzzles on the larger scale, which I feel I must refer to. The first is the matter of the relationship of the poetry to the prose prologue and epilogue of the work. Matitiahu Tsevat presents the issue succinctly:

i. The author used and perhaps adapted a prose story as the framework for his poetry.
ii. The author invented and wrote the prose.
iii. An editor later provided the prose introduction and conclusion to round off the original poetic account. (12)

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11 Cox, Dermot op. cit. p.32
12 Tsevat, M. op. cit. Extensive footnote on page 1.

tend to favour either the first or the second, on two grounds. Firstly, the quality of the prose writing is commensurately high with the poetry, indicating a common source. Secondly, although it is remotely possible that the poetic section could exist on its own account, most would agree that it needs both an introduction and a conclusion; otherwise its start and finish would be too abrupt. It is highly unlikely that a stylist of the stature of the author would have been satisfied with such abruptness. We can therefore assume that the poem needs a framework, and has done so from its composition. The third of the above possibilities would require that the original framework had been lost, and the present one provided by an editor. This seems tobe a case of "multiplying causes" and is to be discouraged on that account. Tsevat himself rejects the last possibility, and says of the first two:

> A choice between them is of little consequence for the issue at hand ... in either case the resulting book is his creation, and our object of concern is this book. (13)

I agree with Tsevat's conclusion. Furthermore, I cannot share that sense of incongruity or dislocation which some critics detect between the prose and poetic sections. The two different styles merely reflect the criteria which I mentioned earlier; the prose sections describe the circumstances and events which led up to, caused and ensued from Job's anguish, whereas the poetic section tells us of Job's inner state. This seems entirely in accordance with wider Biblical usage. Moreover, the prose sections are more than just a framework; they contain some highly-significant details which are a considerable help in interpreting the more perplexing poetical part of the book.

The second major textual issue (an issue which is more pertinent to my theme) is provided by the status of the Elihu speeches. Here again, scholarly opinion is divided, and although I haven't actually done a head-count

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13 Tsevat, M. Op. Cit. Extensive foot note on page 1.

that the majority reject these speeches as not being authentic to the original text. However, I feel a word more has to be said about this rejection, and the grounds on which it is made.

There is a tendency among scholars to make rather free with the text of the Book of Job, shifting verses and even whole sections from here to there, or eliminating them entirely. This is partly occasioned, no doubt, by the complexity of the poetry and the large and difficult vocabulary employed, and some of the emendations can be justified on semantic or textual grounds. But the more drastic revisions are based on more than this. The best example is the wholesale elimination of the Elihu speeches; perhaps thenext best is the urge to unite (they would say re-unite) Job's two answers to Jahweh into one concluding speech. (14) These alterations are made because the commentator feels that the text makes more sense in the form to which he has altered it; he can understand it better. But consider, this means that the commentator is saying that the work means such-and-such, and the fact that it does not is of small account because if we re-arrange the text we shall find that it does. In other words, the data are abandoned for the sake of the interpretive hypothesis.

But is this not to fail to meet the challenge of the book? The purpose of the Book of Job is not to provide us with a textual puzzle - the Book - but with a human puzzle - Job's and hence our predicament in the face of unjustified suffering. The extent to which we respond to this challenge to our self-understanding by emasculating the challenge is the extent of our failure to respond.

This, I contend, is the case with the rejection of the Elihu speeches. They are rejected, it is asserted, because they say nothing new and Job makes no response to them. I donot regard either of these as sufficient reason

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14 For a good example of this (and a rather crass piece of exegesis) see "On Job's Response to Jahweh" by John Briggs Curtis in the Journal of Biblical Literature 98: 497-511 1979

would maintain, moreover, that not only are they insufficient reasons, they are not accurate. The first observation is quite straightforwardly wrong. As I shall show later, the Elihu speeches do introduce a new element. Moreover, it is both appropriate and important that Job receives them in silence. Far from these considerations indicating the incongruity of the Elihu speeches within the work, they indicate that they are in fact authentic to the original, an integral part of the development of the whole work.

My interpretation of the Book of Job is therefore made on the basis of the extent text, while acknowledging that one or two minor modifications are probably justifiable. To requote Tsevat, "... our object of concern is this book." All of it.

The totality of the Book consists not just in the ideas which it explores in a philosophical way, but also in the way in which it presents an accurate and moving description of what it is like to be in deep anguish and despair. Albert Cook's main argument is that the Book is a complicated literary exposition of what it is to be Job, the poetry corresponding to his mental and emotional turmoil. (15) The very physical nature of many of the descriptive passages tell of the deep, interior reality of suffering, and imply the recognition that without knowledge of this reality one is not qualified to discuss the matter. The constant going over the same ground reveals and reflects that exhausting wheel of anxiety known to those who are in despair as they go over their circumcstances time and time again, desperately trying to make sense of what is happening to them and confronting failure, time after time after time, until eventually the whole process grinds down into a painful, exhausted silence. It is no coincidence, still less a sign of textual interference, that Job is silent during the speeches of Elihu, he has nothing more to say, he has reached the end limit of his attempts to understand and failed. At last he is ready to stop talking and start listening, especially if it is to something new and pertinent to his predicament.

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15 Cook, Albert op. cit.

assumption about the relationship between God and man - namely, that the circumstances of life with which we are blessed or cursed depend on our relationship with God. It is assumed that if that relationship is right in the sense of being pleasing to God, then we shall be blessed by God in worldly circumstances. On the other hand, if we ignore the demands of God, live wickedly and irresponsibly, then God will send punishment in the form of suffering or ill-fortune. In other words, there is a straight forward, almost casual, correlation between virtuous and righteous living and material and emotional benefit. It is this assumed correlation which is so flatly denied by Job's circumstances, and which is examined in the various reflections of the characters of the Book.

Possible means of resolving the dilemma of the sufferings of the righteous are variously examined and rejected. As already briefly mentioned, the notion of an afterlife is found an unacceptable solution. Sheol is the final resting place of all, and itis not a state to be desired. (vide 10:21,22 and 17:13-16) Job found it desirable in his initial extremis, when it is conjured as a place of oblivion which would relieve him of his physical suffering and pain. (vide: 3:17-22) However, it cannot offer any resolution of the question of why he, the righteous man, should have to suffer. In the context of his time, Job cannot find solace in the view that even if virtue goes unrewarded in this life it will be rewarded in the next.

Another, and much older, means of resolving the discrepancies in the observed fate of so many of the righteous is the ancient view that the sins of the fathers are visited upon the children. There is a distinct tension in the text with regard to this belief. Nowhere is it offered as a possible explanation of Job's own suffering; nowhere is it suggested that he is suffering for the iniquities of his ancestors. Hebrew theology had moved on by the time of Job's author, incorporating the insistence of the canonical prophets that a man suffers for his own sins. Yet in the prologue we are told that

Job seeks to expiate the sins or supposed sins of his own children by performing the required ritual sacrifices. This would seem to imply that we can in some ways bear responsibility for the sins of others; only, in this case, it is the sins of the children which are to be expiated by the father. This is not straightforward. There is no suggestion that his children's sins would be "visited upon" Job; he would not suffer because of them. Presumably his children would suffer for their own sins. However, Job can bear the responsibility of relieving them of their suffering, and we are told that he does so. Or attempts to do so because, of course, they are among the first to suffer. It is an interesting question, but it is not developed at all in the text as having any bearing upon Job's own predicament. My own belief is that the description of Job making the necessary cultic observances on behalf of his children is more to do with creating the "psychological portrait" of the man than with any theloogical implications.

The role of the Comforters is to uphold and defend the received dogma.

> The pedagogy of Wisdom literature tells that .... personal suffering is as a rule a consequence of deviation from the right way, which is indicated by morality and belief. (16)

It is this pedagogy that the Comforters embody. They insist that because Job is suffering, he must have sinned. He may be hiding the fact from them, he may be hiding the fact from himself, it may be a sin of his youth which he has completely forgotten, but somewhere, sometime he has sinned. If Job cannot or will not accept any of these then he must at least acknowledge that the sufferings of the righteous are not as grievous as the sufferings of the wicked! All these arguments and protestations Job receives with contempt.

As the Book develops, the gulf between Job and the Comforters widens and, in these characters, the gulf between the theory and the practice of suffering is made clear.

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16 Gerstenberger & Schrage "Suffering" Abingdon (Nashville) 1980 p.121

> it from a distance and to bear the suffering in one's own body are two quite different things. The best theories about misfortune can fail in the crucial moment and leave the believing thinker as a moaning heap of misery. Conversely, it has often happened that in the midst of the most extreme distress, ideas have proved valid that the sufferer only a little while earlier would have rejected. (17)

We are left in no doubt that Job originally was very much akin to his Comforters; he was one of their kind and, if roles had been reversed, he would have spoken as one of them. It is the fact of his suffering which changes him, but does not change them.

Most commentators seem to assume that the Comforters gradually entrench themselves more and more firmly into their positions, reiterating their supposed arguments with the confidence that repetition will produce persuasion if not truth. Tsevat (18) points out that the repetition of the arguments of the Comforters also serves as a poetic device to indicate their emptiness. The conceptual grasp of the Comforters is exhausted by their confrontation with Job.

While I would agree that for the most part the speeches of the Comforters consist of the same ineffective arguments repeated, I believe that in the final short speech of Bildad in Ch. 25 we find the hint of something new - a more profound understanding of the human condition. It is almost a move toward a recognition of original sin, that is, of man's nature being irredeemably flawed by virtue of who he is, not what he does. No matter how a man may exert himself to be righteous, he cannot alter the fundamentally flawed, alienated nature of himself vis-a-vis God.

> Ho then can a man be just before God?
> Or how can he be clean that is born of woman?
> Behold, even the moon hath no brightness,
> And the stars are not pure in His sight.
> How much less man, that is a worm!
> And the son of man, which is a worm! 25:4-6

By his inclusion of the moon and stars in the comparison, the author seems to be suggesting that there is an essential

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17 Gerstenberger & Schrage op. cit. p.116
18 Tsevat, M. op. cit. p.2

entirely different order of being from God. It is not so much a matter of the distance between the natures of the two in terms of scale or grandeur, as that the difference is one of essential being. If I am correct in reading this into Chapter 25, then we have here a most important and profound shift in our self-understanding; certainly, it is novel in the Book of Job. It entails a shift in the concept of sin, and therefore of righteousness. Our sinfulness is not a consequence of what we do, bot of who we are. Thus the righteousness of our actions, our deeds, our endeavours, cannot effect this fundamental alienation from the Creator, an alienation inherent in our creatureliness.

Job sidesteps this speech by Bildad. He is unable to accept it; perhaps unable even to hear it properly. His integrity is based on the righteousness of his deeds, and he fervently believes - indeed, he has staked his whole existence on the assumption that - such righteousness will transcend the gulf between himself and God. The constant comparison which Job makes in his self-justification is between what he has done for God, and what God has done for him. Job's only response to the new element introduced by Bildad is to repeat his modus vivendi and to entrench himself firmly and finally in his own sense of integrity. It is not only the Comforters who do not advance much in their arguments. Job ends the cycles of discussion by offering a long self-justification, bewailing the unfairness of his lot and thus the unfairness of God, and collapsing into silence. There is nothing more for him to say.

That Job has nothing more to say does not mean that there is nothing more to be said. It is said by Elihu, who brings a number of new features to the debate. The first novel element he provides is simply himself - and thereby a different perspective, after Job and the Comforters have trodden and retrodden the ground. The advent of a new point of view from a new character should not be underestimated. Its benefit in aiding those who suffer any form of mental anguish is widely known. Patterns of thought tend to go round and round, but make no progress,

a new perspective. Jack Kahn, who writes from the viewpoint of a practioner of group psychotherapy, lays great emphasis on the arrival of Elihu - anew member of the group who has listened and observed, but until now not participated in the discussion. (19)

There is further significance in the fact that Elihu is not only a new character, but a young character. He sets himself up - apologetically but confidently - against the received wisdom of his elders, the Comforters, which has been so inadequate to help Job. In the cultural context of the time, for a young man to put himself forward under such circumstances would have been considered most shocking, for the young were expected to remain silent before the wisdom of their elders. This is the author's way of emphasising that what Elihu is about to say is both new and shocking. In short, the advent of Elihu represents a shift in the logic of the poem.

Elihu does not adopt the role of Comforter with something new to provide; rather, he comse as a 'discomforter'. As Margaret Susman points out in a very insightful contribution, Elihu plunges Job further into his suffering; he intensifies Job's anguish and incomprehension. He is "uncharitable", having realised that Job must go to the bitter end of his path of suffering in order to understand. (20) Jack Kahn makes the same kind of point, using medical models. In mental and emotional illness, one cannot begin to be helped until one realises that one is ill. In the speeches of Elihu, Job's attention is turned away from all that is wrong with God, and made to consider just what kind of man he is. (21)

I think that Elihu brings two very important and and novel insights to the debate, each of which is revolutionary within the context of conventional Wisdom. The first is to set Job free from his assumption of a

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19 Kahn, Jack op. cit. p.112 ff
20 Susman, Margaret "God the Creator" in "The Dimensions of Job" ed. Glatzer, Nahum N. Schocker Books, NY1969 p.97
21 Kahn, Jack op. cit. p.91

itself both painful and demeaning.

Conventional Wisdom posits almost a man-to-man relationship with God. Transactions can be made with God, almost as though between equals. This, observes Elihu, is absurd. Sarcastically, he says:

> Look unto the heavens and see;
> And behold the skies, which are higher than thou.
> If thou hast sinned, what doest thou against Him?
> And if thy transgressions be multiplied, what doest thou unto Him?
> If thou be righteous, what givest thou Him?
> Or what receiveth He of thine hand? 35:5-7

In other words, Job is being asked to consider seriously his importance to God, and therewith the nature of the transaction between himself and God. Hitherto he has assumed that there is some kind of bargain between himself and God, and that his calamities and suffering indicate that God has not kept His side of the bargain. Such an attitude is, of course, the consequence of a deep-seated pride of the kind which is called "hubris"; it assumes some measure of parity between man and God. It is essentially more self-affirming to hold onto the principle of such a transaction, even though God is found to fail in his side of the bargain when the righteous suffer, than to abandon the principle entirely. This latter would be to confirm the gulf between self and God.

Therefore Job has laboured under the delusion tha t his righteousness matters within the divine economy. This, Elihu suggests, is totally unrealistic. He returns to the theme again in 37:14-24, and it is also a substantial feature of the Jahweh speeches. What Job has to learn - at enormous and painful cost to his sense of self - is that he has got the nature of the relationship between himself and God fundamentally wrong, ie. that God is mighty and therefore can, if He so chooses, ignore Job's offering of his virtue. If this were the case, Job's complaint would be valid. As it is, however, Job has utterly misunderstood the very nature of the relationship

Job's pride and sense of self while all is going well and the assumed relationship seems to hold good; so, when all collapses around him, it is not just the theological principles and assumptions which are under threat of destruction, but also Job's pride and sense of self which rested upon them. This is why the theological strain results in such intense and real personal agony.

In the Elihu speeches we are introduced to the innovative idea that virtuous action is, of itsef, secondary. It may indicate a right relationship with God and a correct estimate of self, but it may also indicate that they are wrong. Indeed, strenuous virtue may well indicate a deeper and more permanent sense that all is not well with self. Paul Weiss (21a) points out that theologically there is a difference between sin (violating a pre-rational principle) and evil (violating a known ethical principle) and observes acutely that a man may be ethically virtuous and good not despite but because of his sinfulness. While I do not agree that sin is only a violation of principle, rational or pre-rational, (for sin is essential, not active), I would concur with the main drift of his observations. Under no circumstances must it be entertained that virtuous action puts any constraint upon God. Margaret Susman's observation that Elihu plunges Job deeper into his misery is borne out in this; he is telling Job that all he is so proud of, all which he believes justifies himself before God, all on which he has based his life and his being, is in fact irrelevant. Job does not believein God - Job believes only in Job!

It is not surprising that Job remains silent before Elihu. His observations are new, profound, accurate and painful. Job is being made alert to the fact that

> Divine and human justice are not congruent; they are, in truth, not mutually intelligible. (22)

It is no easy or pleasant experience to be told that

21a Weiss, Paul "God, Job and Evil" in Glatzner op cit p.185
22 Susman, Margaret op cit p.89

nothing. Job has sought to manipulate God by his righteousness, and it is the mistaken pride lying behind this which Elihu is dissecting out. Normally, Job would have easily resisted such insights into himself, but having been reduced by his suffering to helplessness, he is at last open to the profounder self-understanding that lies with the pain of their acceptance.

This dissociation in essence between God and man which is emphasised by Elihu reflects that hinted at between Creator and creature in Bildad's speech in Ch. 25. It Is later picked up and defined at length in the Jahweh speeches. Indeed, in these last Job is distinguished not only from God but, because of his mistaken pride, from the remainder of the creation, too.

The second major feature which Elihu brings to the debate is a new insight into the nature of suffering. Hitherto, suffering has been thought of as consequential. Elihu suggests that it is functional, purposive.

> He keepeth back his soul from the pit,
> And his life from perishing by the sword.
> He is chastened also with pain upon his bed,
> And with continual strife within his bones:
> So that his life abhorreth bread,
> And his soul dainty meat.
> His flesh is consumed away, that it cannot be seen;
> And his bones that were not seen stick out.
> Yea, his soul draweth near the pit,
> And his life to the destroyers. 33:18-22

This is an accurate picture of some of the characteristics of extreme despair, and is an accurate summary of the state to which Job has been reduced. Yet Elihu goes on to observe that this state is not visited upon a man as a punishment, but as a means to an end. It is not punitive but purposive. It is suffering, and only suffering, received and perceived aright, which can change a man to the fundamentals of his nature, elevating him into both a new and more exalted understanding both of God and himself:

Twice, yea thrice, with a man,
To bring his soul back from the pit,
That he may be enlightened with the light of the living.
33:29,30

Elihu seems to be saying that a man will be led into suffering by God as often as is necessary for him to be enlightened. And there are none as unenlightened, and in more need of enlightenment, than those who believe themselves without sin. It is in this lack of awareness of sin that Job is without a proper "fear" of God.

Fear (in which is Wisdom) ..... succeeds at centering itself in the speaker's integrity. Thereby he combines perception and piety, religious vision and the religious actof accepting the limits of vision. Elihu points out that in his approach Job lacks not perception so much as a fully rounded emotional bearing, a "fear" ..... (23)

The suffering of those who lack such "fear" must be all the greater in that they have the greater change to experience before they can understand. The depth and intensity of Job's suffering are both consequent upon his assumed perfection.

Above all, Job knows himself innocent ..... Still, not for a moment does he doubt that his suffering is a punishment ordained by God's justice .... Finally, when the ceaseless search brings to light the hidden guilt of his own existence, it turns out that he cannot be blamed for this guilt <u>which is not his own</u>, but the guilt implicit in being a man, which finds expression in Job's question, "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?" 14:4 (24)

Yet, deep though his suffering is, he is "brought back from the pit" (ie. physical death) in order that he may come to and then live with a new understanding. Thus, God uses suffering in order that men may learn; the abrogation of Wisdom which leads to wisdom is a painful process. Elihu brings two complementary understandings to Job; firstly, that righteousness is not necessarily all it seems to be and, secondly, that suffering is not what he assumes it to be.

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23 Cook, Albert op cit p. 67-68
24 Susman, Margaret op cit p. 88

despair to the brink of a new understanding, a new understanding which dawns not as the consequence of theological and philosophical speculation, but in the light of revelation. This dawning of revelation is presented by the author in what I believe to be the most subtle of the skills he brings to the Book of Job; it is presented in the very structure and logic (some might say "lack of logic") of the work as a whole.

The Book of Job is, in effect, a problem within a problem. The inner problem is the ostensible subject of the book - the matter of the suffering of the innocent. Why do the innocent suffer and the wicked prosper? Although widely referred to as the Problem of Evil its technical title - Theodicy - is more accurate and appropriate. The problem lies in the righteousness and justice (or lack thereof) of God. The subject is a proper question to ask, and has been asked perennially. From the Book of Job onwards I suppose that it has been recognised that there is no satisfactory solution. Certainly, the Book of Job itself provides no answer inthe terms within which the problem is posed. It comes to no satisfactory conclusion. Concerning the inner problem, then, the Book asserts that there is no answer to the question.

The outer problem, though, is that despite the lack of answer to the inner problem, the Book concludes as though an answer has been found! There is a stark disjunction between the implications of the main burden of the argument, and the implications of the conclusion. Although we are not told why the righteous are led into suffering, the Book implies that eventually Job understands and is brought thereby into a new and more intimate relationship with God. It is most odd!

If the Book were to state outright that there is no answer; or that the very construction of the problem is in-valid, built upon false premises; then a least we would have an honest and straightforward non-conclusion. And there are those who, by means of strained exegesis, textual manipulation, or a combination of the two, maintain

both should be and is. (25) Such, however, is a shallow reading, and says more about the critic's presuppositions than about the Book itself.

The disconcerting fact is that eventually we are told that Job avers that he has at last seen God face to face 42:5. The Comforters, we are told, have not spoken rightly "as my servant Job hath" 42:7. And Job is finally restored and blessed. But we are not told directly what ultimate reality Job has seen in God's face, nor are we told directly in what way Job has spoken rightly whereas the Comforters have not. Nor is it made clear why Job's long villification of God should lead ultimately to his restoration.

It might be argued (and sometimes is) that this seemingly-inappropriate conclusion is no more than the remnant of the folk-tale which the author used as his framework. It is conjectured that the folk-tale is onein which Job is tempted to curse God, does not do so and is rewarded by God for his restraint and patience. But such a reconstruction is to visit upon the author a sudden obtuseness if not stupidity, which is totally belied by other indications about him. If he had the wit to write 3:1-42:7, he would have had the wit to adapt the folk-tale to a far more pessimistic, God-denying form if that was what he had intended to say. I believe that we must conclude that he was alert to the incongruity and that the incongruity was important to his purpose. If this is accepted, then we must set ourselves to the task of pursuing that hidden link between the main body of the text and the seemingly-incongruous conclusion.

It does seem to me that the prologue and epilogue are both in accord with the main thrust of the larger part of the work. As well as defining the outward circumstances which have occasioned the subjective description of the poetic section, the prologue gives some telling hints as to the kind of person Job originally was,

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25 See for examples, JB Curtis: op cit, or CG Jungs "Answer to Job" for examples.

outwardly much the same, yet in other ways subtly altered. In other words, the Jobs of prologue and epilogue are not quite the same character. While reluctant to read into the differences the full-blown clinical diagnosis offered by Jack Kahn (26), I think they are highly suggestive. A change has been worked in Job through his agnony and suffering; the epilogue does not describe merely the return to the original status quo.

The Job of the prologue is perfect, more, he is a perfectionist. The telling feature is his concern for his children, the offering of sacrifice on their behalf just in case they might have sinned. His concern is possessive, apprehensive, pessimistic, and obsessive. It is met and alleviated by ritual enactments. His later recitations of his virtue are made in terms of his obedience to the precepts of the Law. He has little or no confidence in his worth before God by virtue of who he is; he seems unable to place any trust in God's love or concern for him. Indeed, this last possibility never seems to enter his head. Instead, he has to create what he feels to be an appropriate worth which will commend him to God's mercy and blessing by the strenuous practice of virtue, as conventionally defined.

A character such as that of Job is by no means unfamiliar in either the literature or the experience and practice of pastoral concern. It is an obsession with scrupulosity in religious matters, a need to be perfect and to be absolutely sure one is perfect, resulting in a form of obsessive/compulsive neurosis.

One sees the apotheosized in religious refinements of the law, the "commentaries on the commentaries". It is also seen in the traditional law-grace controversy, where the whole question raised is whether man can live in a provisionality accepted by God, or must guarantee a perfect performance to survive. (27)

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26 Kahn, Jack op cit

27 Stein, Edward V "Guilt; Theory and Therapy" G. Allen and Unwin 1969 p.133

the angry God. It is what Pfister refers to as a synthetic (as opposed to analytic) solution of guilt. It is irrationally ritualistic, and it reveals the thinly-veiled conviction that God's love is not a reliable given in life but something extorted or manipulated - that His true nature is wrath and that he needs to be cajoled if we are to escape his cruelty. (28)

Although such personalities are usually interpreted in terms of an over-riding fear of the anger of God, there is also an element of pride present. Although the relationship being created is with none less than God, the control of the relationship remains within the hands of the man.

It is because of his misplaced confidence in the solidity of the relationship which he has created with God by virtue of his righteousness, and his faith that he is the creator of that relationship and is pulling all the strings, that there is no sign of fear of God in Job. Bewilderment, despair and anger are the emotions which are dominant in his response to his calamity. But fear of God appears only in his final response to Jahweh as he becomes aware of the enormity of what he has presumed to do - namely, control the relationship between himself and his Creator. The quality which above all marks the beginnings of Wisdom is the one quality singularly lacking in Job.

It is possible to look at fear or its apparent lack in a person with a deeper insight. The need to take and maintain control of a relationship may of itself be a symptom of a pathological fear of the object of that relationship. It may be that Job does not fear God in an appropriate and theologically realistic way, but is so utterly terrified of Him that he sets up his life and invests utterly in a way of understanding himself which will not only serve to lessen the risks he runs from God's power, but will serve also to enable him to avoid acknowledging and living with his terror. Yet that deeper

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28 Stein, Edward V "Guilt; Theory and Therapy" G. Allen and Unwin 1969 p.165

immediate response to calamity, a person will expose insights about himself which normally are kept hidden, and as soon as the calamitous situation is under some measure of control (even if that only means becoming accustomed to it) the insights are re-buried. This may be the process which lies behind Job's exclamation towards the start of the poetic section:

> For the thing which I fear is come upon me,
> And that which I am afraid of cometh unto me. 3:25

The long process of suffering is necessary for that hidden dread, with all its implications, to be faced.

On the other had, the same passage may be interpreted as revealing the very untheological nature of Job's fear. Seton Pollock (29) argues that the thing which Job fears is not God but loss and disgrace. It is this human fear which is realised and shattered, casting Job out onto an unchartered spiritual ocean. I believe that the two kinds of fear are far from being self-contradictory. They may be mutually complementary, even.

To some extent the pre-catastrophe character of Job is something of a happy hunting ground for those inclined toward speculation of a psychological character-assessment variety. There is, however, a fair measure of consensus among such speculators, once one allows for their individual bias toward the various schools of psychological speculation. Here, for instance, is a Jungian viewpoint:

> It may happen that sincere but misguided efforts to utilise the resources of religion to deal with unconscious compexes will, by strengthening the ego-defences, increase rather than mitigate the disorder. The Biblical story of Job presents us with such a case. The immensely devout but anxiety-ridden Job intensifies his religious piety, offers sacrifice continually and reiterates his protestations of trust in God, but until healed by the final vision, he succeeds only in aggravating its unconscious opposite - the blaspheming "shadow" which he had projected onto his children - and suffers a complete breakdown. The pattern is distressingly familiar to those who have been

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20 Pollock, Seton "God and a Heretic" Glatzer op cit p. 270

disturbances, and especially the anxiety-neuroses, which sometimes are to be found among the devout. (30)

The overall conclusion seems to be that Job's devotion is a complex matter arising not from simple adoration, love and worship. It has its springs in Job's anxious fear of God and dread-filled concern for the consequences of his own and even his children's deeds and misdeeds.

In the epilogue, Job is not concerned about, nor is he required to be concerned about, the fate of his children. Instead, he is charged to pray for his friends. There is a considerable shift here. In the prologue, Job's concern is enacted in ritual deeds; in the epilogue, it is the Comforters, presumably still trapped in their mistaken ideas derived from the superficialities of conventional Wisdom, who æe called upon to redeem themselves through their ritual deeds and sacrifices. But their redemption will be effective not by virtue of those deeds, but by virtue of Job's prayers offered on their behalf. In the prologue, Job failed to save his children by his deeds. In the epilogue, the Comforters will fail by like methods. But they will be saved - as perhaps the children might have been saved - by Job's prayers because he now is in an authentic and truly redemptive relationship with God. The pleading of the humble, God-trusting soul will avail where the arrogant manipulation of the proud will fail. Job can intercede with God on the behalf of others because of who he is in the eyes of God, not because of what he does.

Job's ordeal changes him. The change is subtle and interior. In the epilogue we are told that his worldly circumstances are restored, he again becomes a man of wealth and property. Outwardly, nothing has altered. Within, he is transformed.

Once one has confirmed the absurd one reaches a measure of what can be called renunciation, when a man realises that he is intellectually incapable of finding a meaningful pattern in the world he renounces the effort of imposing one, and explores the possibility of transformation. (31)

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30 White, Victor OP "Soul and Psyche" Collins & Harvill 1960 p.190

31 Cox, Dermot op cit p. 156

with all its pain and self-abasement - is of itself a trans-fromation.

That the Jobs of the start and end of the Book are very largely the same is one more indication of the depth of insight which the author possesses, and leads me to surmise that he himself knew from personal experience what happens to those who are dragged through the pit of despair having - so it seems for a time - lost all. The change wrought by grace is one of attitude, of warmth, of trust, of openness, of ease where before there had been only dis-ease.

> But this means that while as far as personal identity goes the man is still continuous with his old being, in a yet profounder sense what he was has ceased to be. (32)

But the outer problem of the Book remains. How this change works, how it is brought into effect, we are not told. That it can and does happen, of this there is no doubt. Those who see the "happy ending" as a sign of tampering with the text indicate their own unfamiliarity with a major feature of the basic phenomenology of religion. Changes such as that described in the Book of Job, brought about by calamity and despair, are not unique to that Book. That it happens, how it feels to be totally at the mercy of thehappening, are described faultlessly. But what the process of such change, what its "mechanism" may be - of this we are given hardly the slightest hint. It may be that the author did not have available to him the categories of theological and psychological abstraction which would have enabled him so to do. (As I hope to show, even with our vastly more sophisticated categories of abstraction concerning human behaviour, the task is still beyond us today.) It may also have been because he knew personally the ineffable mystery which lies at the heart of such change, and with the instinct of poetic genius he knew that this was far better conveyed by a mysterious silence.

32 Mackintosh, HR op cit p.211

ultimately inadequate attempts to describe the process of such change. Thus the outer problem - why does Job have the characteristics of a man whose doubtsand questions have been met despite the fact that they have not? - is not really a problem but a theological definition.

Indeed, the two problems of the Book - the inner problem of ths suffering of the righteous and the outer problem of the rssolution without explicit explanation - become as one when we realise that in fact neither is the real and substantial problem. The problem of the Book is essentially the problem of Job himself. What does it mean to be Job? And, in as much as I may identify aspects of myself with Job, what does it mean to be me? How can a deep-rooted, false understanding of the relationship between man and God be rectified? Especially if the rectification entails ego-loss; Is suffering the only way? If so, then is it necessary that the righteous (or the righteous in terms of some forms of righteousness) shall suffer?

False understanding depends on the status quo which both derives from and maintains that false understanding. Alter that status quo and the understanding will be put under strain. Destroy the status quo - as happened in Job's case - and the false understanding will disintegrate. Thus spiritual suffering is occasioned by material suffering, in order that all shall be well.

The Book of Job, then, is about the change brought about in a man by suffering, and how suffering is simultaneously cause and symptom of that change. The suffering which has power to change us must be construed at least initially as undeserved suffering. If I feel that I deserve my suffering, to that extent I understand it. If I can detect reasons and causes for my suffering within the worldview which I already hold, the suffering will occasion no shift at all in my understanding. If I can explain my suffering it remains my suffering and I am in control. Only when suffering challenges me am I forced to alter in order somehow to accommodate.

the right method to tell him to stop doubting. It is rather the right method to tell him to go on doubting .... until at last, by some strange enlightenment, he may begin to doubt himself. (33)

Nothing initiates or intensifies doubt as fiercely as undeserved suffering. Deserved suffering presents the suffering of the body only, and raises the question "O God, why cannot I die?" in order to escape the suffering. This was Job's initial response. But the meaninglessness of suffering which is perceived as undeserved, incomprehensible, transfers it from the realm of bodily to the realm of mental and spiritual anguish and raises the deeper and more ultimate question "O God, why am I alive?" This happened later with Job.

To attempt to find the nature of pain, to seek to find its meaning, is already to respond to an imperative of pain itself. No experience demands and insists upon interpretation in the same way. Pain forces the question of its meaning and especially of its cause, insofar as cause is an important part of its meaning. In those instances in which pain is intense and intractable and in which its causes are obscure, its demand for interpretation is most naked, manifested in the sufferer asking "Why?" (34)

I think that the above observation is particularly true when the causes which are obscure are the theological and philosophical constructs which we bring to our understanding of pain.

I believe that the Book of Job depicts with accuracy what is involved in a shift from a less to a more authentic understanding of the relationship between man and God, with all that this implies for the man's self-understanding. We see how, because of and through his pain and suffering, bodily, mental, emotional and ultimately spiritual, Job comes to a more accurate awareness of his own nature and the reality of God. He becomes aware of the unbridgeable gulf between us and Him; that he is part of the created order

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33 Chesterton, GK "Man is most comforted by paradoxes" in Glatzer op cit p.234

34 Bakan, David op cit p.57

God can bridge the gulf from his side by his love. Thus man's true response to God is humbly to adore. Job is divested of his sense of a "special relationship" with God, which was the root of his brittle pride. He is overwhelmed by an appreciation of what is, rather than what he thinks ought to be when viewed from his own minute perspective.

Job moves himself from the centre of affairs. The catalyst of the move is his suffering and despair, for it is because he confronts the reality of his suffering, with its imperative demands, that his previous assumptions are painfully demolished and he accepts the humiliating fact that the whole creation is not ordered for his benefit, nor can he make it so, nor can he any longer maintain the reassuring pretence that it is so.

.....it(suffering) forces man into the only possible authentic position, the recognition of reality. It is better to see that there is no answer than to build one's life on a false answer. (35)

Better still to realise that life is not a question!

In an oblique way, the problems of the Book are brought to a resolution together. The innocent can and do suffer, and God enables it to be so. Because suffering is not punitive; it is purposive. Job suffered in order that he might become perfect as a man, not perfect as a God-substitute.

All I know myself is that I suffer. And if I suffer it is because at the origin of myself there is a mutilation, a separation. I am separated. What I am separated from, I cannot name it. Formerly is was called God. Today it no longer has any name. (36)

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35 Cox, Dermot op cit p. 153
36 Adamou, A. "L'Aveu" Paris, 1964

Despair to Enlightenment: Part 1 - A Psychodynamic Approach

In the previous three chapters I have sought to present a case for considering the enlightenement which arises out of despair as a serious object for study and concern. My concern has been threefold: to discover whether or not the process happens to any significant extent, to try to gauge the measure of importance it carries in the lives of those to whom ithappens, and to see what degree of religious content it is understood to have. I have therefore examined the process as an objective phenomenon.

In Chapter 1 I reviewed some of the contemporary study of religious experience being conducted in this country. It would seem that an unexpectedly high proportion of the population have experiences which they understand as having religious significance. Although a great variety of events and experiences are gathered under the head of "religious experience", it seems possible to abstract certain features which, while not necessarily common to all, are to be detected within large sub-groups in the classification of such experiences. I mentioned such features as the fact that the majority of experiences occur when the experiencer is alone; that the experience carries a high level of self-authentication. Two features which I wish to emphasise at the start of this chapter are the "oddity" or "incongruity" of many such experiences, especially when associated with the second feature, the factor of the distress/despair/depression of the person who has the experience.

By "incongruity" I mean that hiatus or gap in cause or logic which is detected between the content of the experience and the preceeding or ambient circumstances of the experiencer. Part of the striking, attention-demanding nature of religious experiences is found in the way the experiences seem to stand out more or less starkly against the background of their circumstances. They seem

as to their origin and source. Only on reflection is it discerned that the fact that they seem to come from nowhere means only that they do not come from the immediately-observable somewhere. In time, a source or origin is located. But the incongruity which is felt at the time, the disjunction between experience and circumstance, serves to enhance the "givenness" of the experience. Usually, straightforward causal links cannot be drawn between the immediately-preceding events and the experience itself. Indeed, sometimes the contents of the experience are so utterly odd that it is not possible to say what kind of events may have produced it; but more usually, we could surmise what events would produce the experience, but they did not obtain at the time. Indeed, often their very opposite obtained.

For example, out of a long depressive phase, marked by the usual inner feelings of utter lack of worth, hopelessness, lovelessness, there may suddenly, unexpectedly come its complete opposite - the kind of bliss, associated with being deeply in love, sometimes a bliss even beyond that. The incongruity is striking. There has been no change of circumstance, just a complete change of feeling. We are struck by the fact that the experiencer has feelings which should, ordinarily, be occasioned by the very opposite of his circumstances. He is left, quite understandably, wondering what has happened, where it has come from.

Another example might be found in the case of a person whose perception is suddenly and consistently altered for a while, so that he sees and appreciates all around him as having a different "tone" - usually an enhanced awareness of benevolence and harmony and all being well. Such feelings can be induced by certain psychotropic drugs; only, in his case there has been no use of such drugs. One can hypothesise a sudden and causative change in brain chemistry, but hypothesis is all it is. And one leads to the further and difficult area of the relationship between feeling states and perceptions and the brain's chemistry. This "chicken and egg" problem is one which I do not wish to pursue.

experiences such as those in which the experiencer feels his sensible, perceiving self to be dissociated from his body, floating away and looking back at himself. In such cases it is not that the circumstances which produce such occurrences are totally lacking; rather, such experiences are outside our conventional understandings of human processes - there are no appropriate circumstances. This is a "total incongruity". To dismiss such an experience as "hallucination" will not do. There are differences between "normal" hallucinations and an experience such as that mentioned on page 24. In any case, hallucinations seems more like sticking a large label onto the question mark, rather than answering the question.

The second feature from Chapter 1 which I would re-emphasise here is that distress of one kind or another seems to play a significant part in the background to such experience. In the experiencers' own accounts it is often associated in a non-causal way; they happened to be depressed when the experience happened. In some, such as that quoted at length on pages 20-1, the distress is specifically mentioned as having a contributive, perhaps causal, function within the experience as a whole. But in all such cases, an experience interpreted as being religious in content and having features of integration, understanding, bliss, the feeling of being in contact with a higher order of benevolent existence, arises against a background which is marked by the very opposite of these feelings and intuitions.

Thus despair, however it is described, seems to have an associative significance in contemporary religious experience, and the nature of the experience which arises from it emphasises the incongruity of the experience.

It seemed to me that if the experience of a sudden shift from distress to peace or bliss is a significant part of contemporary religious experience, then either present circumstances are totally without precedent (which I consider highly unlikely) or that we should find some reference to the process in accounts of religious

Moreover, that if the process is a significant one in terms of the frequency with which it occurs within the total spectrum of religious experience, we should find reference to and descriptions of it in the corpus of material which is regardes as religiously authoratative. With this last in mind, I chose to consider the Old Testament.

I am aware that this choice can be criticised because of the gulf in terms of time, culture and conceptuality between our era and Old Testament times. It might be accused that we cannot interpret Old Testament events in terms of contemporary understandings; that we can only endeavour to "think ourselves back" into their context. I do not think this criticism is valid, and I am not alone in rejecting it.

> We shall note significant differences between our reality and that of the Old Testament, but we shall not over-emphasize these differences. The person who is subjected to suffering and is tested by suffering remains the same in the various cultural systems and historical epochs. (1)

To begin with , if the Old Testament is totally alien to modern people, its valus as a religious text vanishes. It becomes the source for archaic sholarship, and no more. The fact that it is widely used in Judaeo-Christian culture as a religious source indicated that this is not the case.

But this is a negative argument. Identity of meaning, purpose and understanding can be found between Old Testament times and our own.

> .....I, as a psychologist, have found myself looking with renewed interest and respect at some of the great cultural and historical documents of the past; and I have found nothing more illuminating than that remarkable collection of writings known as the Old Testament. (2)

As justification for my assertion, consider briefly the two examples I chose to examine at length in Chapters 2 and 3 - Jacob and Job. The immediate problem presented

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1 Gerstenberger & Schrage "Suffering" FP Leiden 1977p.14
2 Mowrer, O Hobart "The Crisis in Psychiatry and Religion" D Van Nostrand Colne 1961 p.28

lack, is a concern among folk in Great Britain today which is alive and well and close to the surface. As a minister, I am struck by the number of people I meet in personal work who, facing a personal calamity or crisis, will express first of all the question "What have I done to deserve this?" Sometimes they will offer confession of some long-concealed misdemeanour as a sufficient explanation of their current misfortune. The problem with which the Book of Job initially wrestles is based on a view widely held two-and-a-half millenia later - namely, that somehow we earn or deserve the good or ill fortune we receive. Similarly, there is identity between Job's sense of grievance and the feelings of being ill-used,ill-requited among people today who cannot find due cause (according to their understanding of things) for their suffering. In other words, there is an immediate community of concern between our day and that of the author of the Book of Job.

Similarly, the major thematic issues of the Jacob saga - parental preferences, sibling rivalry, manipulation of people and circumstances, the striving after material gain, the survival power of the conscience - are matters which immediately confront us today in our concern for others and ourselves.

In short, once one gets beneath the outward circumstances and cultural sets of such characters as Jacob and Job, one's response is not so much how archaic they are, but how modern! Thus, the attempt to find parallels for contemporary human experience in a corpus of tradition which, while archaic, is still regarded as carrying religious insight and authority is, I believe, entirely justified.

Furthermore, just as there is a link between these two characters and modern men and women, so there are links between the career of Jacob and that of Job; this despite their coming from very different temporal and cultural backgrounds and being written about with great differances of style and emphasis. Each character is

with a reversal in that self-defined success. Each enters a period of bewilderment and despair. Each is brought, in the middle of that distress, into a struggle which results in their seeing the very face of God. Each returns from this experience to a resumption of his previous character and a restoration of the wealth andposition he thought he had lost, but there are slight, subtle yet significant changes in "deportment". In each case the turning of the despair is narrated in a way which indicates that this event is odd and mysterious. In Jacob's case, the process of transformation is marked as ineffable by not even being described; instead, we see the outcome in term's of Job's transformation from rebellious, ignorant pride to humble enlightenment without any account of the actual transformation.

Although Jacob and Job serve as paradigms for this strange process whereby from despair comes enlightenment, an enlightenment which is regarded as God-given, they are not the only examples to be found in the Old Testament. The career of Elijah, for example, shows the same progression of success, setback, bewilderment (literally, for he is mentally, emotionally and physically "in the wilderness"), suicidal despair, transformation which comes through a still, small voice though what it says is not recorded, return to the world. Psalm 22 and others encapsulate in poetic form the same process.

Moreover, the Old Testament examples show parallels with some of the features frequently found among the contemporary reports of religious experience. There is the background of despair or distress. Jacob and Elijah were alone at the time of the experience; although Job was not alone physically, he was alienated from those about him, locked within his own misery. The turning-point is acknowledged as being most odd by the very way in which it is or is not described. Each finds it highly authorative; it is an experience of the reality of God. Each is both restored and transformed by the experience. Compare this

I hope that by now I have done enough to justify my contention that people in despair are sometimes suddenly lifted out of that despair in ways explicable and not of their own doing, and that this experience is a significant part of the wider canvas of mankinds religious consciousness. I would maintain that we have evidence that this kind of experience has provided men and women with a most important datum of religion from the earliest records of religion to the present day.

However, while asserting a community of identity underlying the phenomena of long-ago and today, I have to acknowledge that there must be a considerable difference of approach and response to the circumstances that initiate it. If the two characters from the Old Testament were alive today, Jacob possibly and Job almost certainly would have been referred to a doctor. Occurrences which disturb the homeostasis of the individual are nowadays all to be regarded as illness, and these include the disturbances which while having physical symptoms are largely mental and emotional inorigin. Thus states of bewilderment, anxiety, despair, grief, depression, etc. which interfere with the normal functioning of a person are regarded as illnesses in need of cure.

The development of this atitude toward abnormal mental and emotional states need not concern us here, except to mention two features of it. The first - which I shall develop more fully later - has been to alter our perception of guilt. Illness is something for which the ill person cannot be held totally responsible; sometimes he is not responsible at all. The definition of mental and emotional abnormalities from personality problems through to acute schizophrenia as "illnesses" serves to lessen the feelings of shame and guilt associated with them. However, it is widely found that guilt plays a significant part in many such abnormalities, either close to the surface or more deeply repressed. Those who adopt the medical model of such states as illness, have therefore to

in a condition over which the person involved ought not, in theory, to have guilt. The adoption of the medical model therefore involves some sleight-of-hand with the phenomenon of guilt, regarding it as at once real yet inappropriate. The suffering individual is regarded as feeling guilty for things which he should not feel guilty about; and much therapy requires that the attempt be made to enable him to see his pseudo-guilt realistically, and thus be released from it when he discovers its insubstantially. This point will becpme more important as I develop my theme.

The second point to be made here is that the understanding of mental/emotional abnormality as "illness" is by no means universally accepted. Its medical classification can be shown to be an historical accident to some extent, reflecting the professional backgrounds and circumstances of pioneers in the field. Failings in the coherent application of the model have been raised by critics centring round the names of R D Laing in Great Britain and Thomas Szasz in the USA. Much present-day psychiatric practice pays homage to the notion of mental illness more out of expediency and economics than as a sound reflection of practice. Modern psychiatric and psychotherapeutic practice constitutes an extremely wide and varied professional field, and many of its practitioners are in fact very undogmatic and eclectic in their choice and use of methods. I feel it necessary to make this point in order to emphasise that there is nothing untoward, let alone revolutionary, in examining and seeking to go beyond the assumptions of the "illness models" of mental/emotional abnormalities.

However, if we accept for the interim the use of the notion of illness, then Job, for instance, might be diagnosed as having acute grief and severe reactive depression. Today his "illness" would bring a response of "treatment" fromsuitably-qualified persons, which would eventually lead to a satisfactory "cure". The exact nature of the treatment would depend largely on the persons administering it; it could be exclusively chemo-therapy,

to discover and administer the appropriate drugs. On the other hand, it may be exclusively "talk-therapy" from one of the various schools of practice. Most probably, it would be a mixture of both, with maybe group therapy added for good measure. As before mentioned, most psychiatric practitioners are eclectic using (if truth be acknowledged) what seems to work best in the particular case.

The course of a typical case of reactive depression may go like this:

1. Initially there is a state of normal or satisfactory living, which undergoes some crisis or setback. This leads to

2. A state of anxiety arising from the effort to restore the above state of satisfactory living, but which is frustrated and fails. This leads to

3. A state of anxious searching for an understanding of the above calamity and the failure to restore normality, the search being conducted in terms of the meaning-systems appropriate to 1. This fails, and leads to

4. The disintegration of assumed meanings and values; bewilderment; hostility towards self and environs, including the rest of the whole Universe and God; the collapse of the sense of self; feelings of failure; etc. At the same time, there will have been a gradual deterioration of the physical self. This is

5 The state of chronic depression, with its attendant physical, emotional and mental symptoms. This is regarded as the "illness". It is treated by

6 The combination of some form of therapy with constitutional vitality, and the support which attention and concern give. This leads to

7 A modified attitude toward self and environs, a distancing of self from the disasters in 1-3 and the ability to blank off their implications which caused such pain, a focussing of attention on other, positive areas of life. If sufficiently supported, this leads to

8. On the positive side, a redirection of self toward new areas of success; on the negative side a reconciliation with the failure implicit in 1-3, often summed up as a "learning from experience". In time, this may bring

9. The restoration of personality and lifestyle much akin to the state in 1.

This process may take months or even years. A person may be able to stave off the deepest effects of a catastrophe

when set in, may take a similar number of weeks. Intensive therapy of whatever kind may take further weeks, and the ensuing supportive work to establish the effects of the therapy may take months or even years. Some depressives are never cured. Many return to a more-or-less normal and satisfactory life, but always have the feeling of being somewhat diminished by the experience. Others feel that in the long run they have gained in understanding, wisdom and patience with the failings of both themselves and others.

By now it will be clear that the "career" of an illness such as reactive depression is very different from the careers of physical illnesses. It is far more open to variation and carries more imponderables.

Of particular interest to me is that variation which is so immense that it seems to abrogate the attempt to include it into the above pattern at all. The process is shared with normal sorts of reactive depression until we arrive at the fifth stage, when the symptoms of the illness are established and identifiable. What happens next, however, cannot be said to follow on through the usual understandings of causality, nor through the application of successful therapy. If we take up the career at point 5, it may be summarised thus:

5. The state of chronic depression, with its attendant physical, emotional and mental symptoms. This may be regarded as an illness. It is suddenly transformed into

6. A state of bliss, or peace, or harmony with attendant perceptual, noetic and affective attributes, which may last a variable length of time from individual to individual. It leads to

7. An awareness that the illnessis over. A completely new response and assessment of both the crisis and the state of satisfactory living of phase 1. This is tested, and leads to

8. A state of normal and satisfactory living, usually being a modified form of phase 1, but with a different and markedly improved appreciation of that life.

This obviously is very different from the first pattern. The former seems more like a process of re-assembly, painstakingly conducted; the latter seems like an explosion in which the pieces all fall back into not just the right

an indeterminable number of cases, the process is regarded as having profound religious significance.

The question of what we make of such a process is to some extent predetermined by where we decide to look in order to do so. It is a mixed phenomenon. It begins with what today is widely regarded as a form of mental and emotional illness and is resolved in a manner which is understood in religious terms. If we try to interpret the whole experience in the categories of either psychology or theology, this will entail the reduction of one or other part of the total experience. Either we say that the first part presents itself to us as an illness but is, in fact, a spiritual crisis; or we say that the second part seems to the experiencer to be religious in content but is, in fact, an extension of the psychological processes. And if we do, what criteria can we apply to adjudge between the alternatives?

This matter of interpretation is made all the more difficult by the fact that the two broad categories of interpretation which are available to us are both so all-encompassing. The psychologist may argue that all that happens to a person - including religious experiences and religious sentiments - are part of the psychological processes of that person and therefore amenable to interpretation according to psychological categories. On the other hand, the theologian may argue that all that happens to a person - including all the processes which are the data of the psychological disciplines - are subsumed within the individuals relationship with God. The argument then shifts into the realm of metaphysics where, I suspect, it will remain essentially inconclusive.

We might however, be mistaken in applying an either/or approach to the matter. By analogy, we may apply the Complementarity Principle of modern physics to the dilemma, and argue that it is possible to hold more than one understanding of a single entity, each understanding of necessity seeming to exclude all others. The exclusion is accepted as the necessary price for the insight offered by that particular interpretation, but such exclusion is

is to be understood as logical, not essential. So, just as light may be understood as at times behaving as a particle, at other times as a wave, but essentially being both; so a phenomenon in human experience can be understood at times as being psychological, at other times as theological, but in fact being both. The problem thus lies not in the fact of the experience but in the nature of the mind seeking to interpret it. (3)

It may also be the case that we assume a far sharper division between the fields of psychology and religion than in fact is so. Although it seems widely assumed that modern psychology has reduced the bulk of religious experience to psychological data, in the process psychology incorporates into its interpretive structure many hidden assumptions borrowed from the world of religion. A therapist .....

.....applies himself in a way which suggests a set of convictions, a powerful mood, a moral stance, a <u>faith</u>. To call this exercise an outcome of faith is, I believe, well warranted for it has many of the characteristics of human experience and behaviour with which we associate the notion of faith. (4)

Paul Halmos develops at length the extent to which psychologists of various schools, in their theoretical writings and in their case notes, incorporate such elements of faith as the triumph of love over hatred, the inadequacy of psychology as an applied science, the creative presence of the therapist himself, the power of compassion, etc. He maintains that the dichotomy between religious and psychological interpretations is more apparent than real.

However, the fact remains that in today's climate of opinion the process I am interested in moves between two areas of experience and interpretations of experience which are regarded as, at best, uneasy bedfellows, at worst totally incongruous- namely, the medical and the religious. Of the two modes of interpreting the depression-to-sudden-enlightenment syndrome, it is the illness mode which will

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3 See Barber, Ian G: "Issues in Science and Religion" SCM 1966 pp 290-4

4 Halmos, Paul "The Faith of the Counsellors" Constable 1965 p.7

and available. A person experiencing it is more likely to consult a doctor than a priest. Many clergy feel - perhaps justifiably - that the medical professions have stolen their clothes.

I therefore feel that it is necessary to attempt some consideration of the phenomenon from the viewpoint of some modern attitudes towards mental illness. To begin with we must notice that in many quarters of the world of psychological theory there seems to be a background assumption that suffering andpain can lead to or resolve into ways which enhance human life. They impart understanding, depth, insight, etc. Such assumptions mirror those from the wider world which I mentioned in the Introduction (page 4). For instance:

> The confronting of genuine tragedy is a highly cathartic experience physically, as Aristotle and others through history have reminded us. Tragedy is inseparably connected with man's dignity and grandeur and is the accompaniment, as illustrated in such dramas as Oedipus and Orestes, of the human being's moments of great insight. (5)

This background assumption of the worth and value of suffering, indeed its necessity for the enhancement of existence and the introduction of a heroic dimension into human life, is widespread. However, I fear that often it is asserted as a kind of romantic principle, without any substantial effort to understand why suffering can produce such enhancement.

It is reassuring to note that a number of psychological theorists emphasise that suffering and tragedy can be appallingly destructive. At times it is possible to suffer with no reprieve and with no beneficial outcome. In discussing what he calls "frustrational crisis" Anton Boisen observes that such crises can spell either blessing or disaster. (6) Although some folk come through them with enhanced spiritual insight and greater feelings of individual personal security, many come through eventually being marginally diminished. And many come through being seriously damaged. Some take

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5 May, Rollo "Existential Psychology" Random House NY 1969 p. 82

6 Boisen, Anton "Crises in Personality Development" in "personality and Religion" Ed. William A. Sadler SCM 1970 p. 192ff

literally go mad, or enter serious physical decline. Some adopt subconscious avoidance techniques in the forms, for example, of conversion hysteria in which physical symptoms appear and are used to "explain" the person's involvement in the crisis and also to attract the sympathy and attention he seeks.

This corrective to the romantic view is healthy. Yet it is without doubt widely observed that despite the dangers and despite the seeming contradictions which are involved, some people do emerge from their suffering enhanced and enlightened. Abraham Maslow comments:

> I (and others) have been increasingly impressed by the fact that tragedy can sometimes be therapeutic, and that therapy often seems to work best when people are driven to it by pain. It is when shallow life doesn't work that it is questioned and there occurs a call to fundamentals. (7)

Or Boisen again:

> .....certain forms of mental illness are themselves manifestations of healing power .... when fate hangs in the balance and destiny is in measure determined. (8)

The sense that "fate hangs in the balance and destiny is in measure determined" when we meet and respond to crisis implies that matters of profound religious concern are evident and perhaps sometimes even paramount in times of certain forms of mental illness, and this despite a previous lack of religious concern in many patients' histories. A sense that the crisis has something to do with God's will for the person, or that suffering is the consequence of sin, is quite common. In our culture the crisis is sometimes interpreted by an immediate identification with the suffering of Christ.

I once spent three years in a close pastoral relationship with a woman in a long depressive phase. On two occasions, in paroxysms of tension, she clenched and unclenched her fists time and time again, driving her long, scarlet-painted fingernails into the palms of her hands.

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7 Maslow, Abraham "Toward a Psychology of Being" D van Nostrand Co. Inc. NY 1962 p.13

8 Boisen, Anton op cit p.192

arms, opened her hands to show me the bloody marks of the nails, and told me she was being crucified. She herself did not link the nail-marks and her feelings of being crucified; but to the observer each reinforced the other. She was not a conventionally religious woman.

Boisen suggests that the identification of the sufferer with the agonies of Christ's Passion also serves to identify the sufferer with the hope implicit in the Passion. There will be a resurrection. He concludes that disturbances of this kind are not necessarily to be seen as evils to be avoided but

.....as problem-solving experiences of a desparate and dramatic variety. (9)

However, it must be recognised that the crisis carries both great pain and great risk. If the circumstances which precipitate the crisis can be more or less resolved, the patient will return to his former, normal condition, sometimes slightly changed for the better, sometimes slightly damaged in self-esteem. Sometimes there is no reconstruction, only the gradual fragmentation of the person into withdrawal and madness. But sometimes the personality is rebuilt on ideas and insights which seem to arise from within the experience, data which other people often find difficult to identify and accept. This is the course of tragedy and suffering identified in the romantic notions referred to earlier.

That the initiating crisis has such a potential for both suffering and destruction is implicit in the fact that it puts in jeopardy certain features of the person's selfhood which are of great importance to him, may indeed be considered actually to be essential parts of himself. He runs the risk of psychological amputation. It is to defend himself against this destruction that he begins the increasingly desperate search - symptomised by high-intensity anxiety - somehow to defend or restore the areas of self under assault. If the defence or restoration cannot be made effective, there may occur a second line of defence

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9 Boisen, A op cit p.200

that whole area of his selfhood which has been threatened. The torpor, indifference, withdrawal and emotional numbness which are so characteristic ofdeveloped depressive phases are symptomatic of this.

Some theorists maintain that the destructive implications about the self which are carried by the initiating crisisare usually if not invariably positive in the long run, and of benefit to the patient when they are ultimately accepted. The crisis threatens a self-image and self-understanding which are most precious, but not entirely accurate. It is the fact that they are precious which causes the pain when they are under threat; it is thefact that they are not accurate which is responsible for the eventual self-enhancement when they are abandoned in order that new insights offered by the crisis can be taken up. The kind of "faith" mentioned by Paul Halmos is seen clearly here. "Truth" about self, however unflattering, is to be preferred to fantasy, however comforting. This is seen clearly in Abraham Maslow's assertion:

> By the very fact that a person defends himself against the insight, it is therefore by definition painful to accept. Its breaking through into consciousness is sometimes crushing to the person. And yet, in spite of this, it is universally reported to be worthwhile, desirable and wanted in the long run. Seeing is better than being blind, even when seeing hurts. (10)

I am not sure that his confident "it is universally reported" actually is the case! Boisen suggests that the ancient Hebrew question, Can a man see the face of God and live? may well indicate that men have long recognised the danger inherent in the processes which bring us deep insight.

We must not lose sight of the fact that most theory of the function of mental and emotional suffering in people's lives comes from the casework of practising therapists, and thus is concerned with the more usual progress of depressive states. That a person who has undergone a damaging crisis, reacted to it defensively and with anxiety, and then with patient help from a therapist been led to a new self-

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10 Maslow, A op cit p.74-5

and their implications, and is thus advanced and enhanced in self-understanding, I can readily accept. But both the process and the outcome differ from the phenomenon which is my chief interest.

The very sudden and dramatic reversal of conditions of despair is a phenomenon not unknown to psychologists. The majority seems to regard it as a very welcome and yet incomprehensible blessing in the course of more conventional treatment; a sudden and radically complete cure which they do not understand in either it's suddenness or its origins but which they gratefully accept. One or two, however, have been sufficiently puzzled by the phenomenon to consider it a seperate phenomenon, worthy of being distinguished from the usual process of recovery from depression.

The most distinguished figure to afford this recognition is Carl Jung, who in the rather obscurantist way which is typical of him - gives it a name derived from Heraclitoan philosophy. He calls any sudden and total reversal of feeling states "enantiodromia".

Enantiodromia means a 'running counter to'. In the philosophy of Heraclitus it is used to designate the play of opposites in the course of events - the view that everything that exists turns into its opposite. .... (Heraclitus) himself says:

> It is the opposite which is good for us.
> Men do not know how what is at variance agrees with itself. It is an attunement of opposite tensions, like that of the bow and the lyre.
> The bow is called life, but its work is death.
> Mortals are immortals, and immortals are mortals, the one living the other's death and dying the other's life.
> For souls it is death to become water, for water death to become earth. But from earth comes water, and from water, soul.
> All things are an exchange for fire, and fire for all things, like goods for gold and gold for goods.
> The way up and the way down are the same.
>
> (Heraclitus: Fragments 46,45,66, 67,68,22,69)

I use the term enantiodromia for the emergence of the unconscious opposite in the course of time. This characteristic phenomenon practically always occurs when an extreme, one-sided tendency dominates conscious life; in time an equally powerful counterposition is built up,

uently breaks through the conscious control. Good examples of enantiodromia are: the conversion of St. Paul and of Raymond Lully, the self-identification of the sick Nietzsche with Christ and his deification and subsequent hatred of Wagner, the transformation of Swedenborg from an erudite scholar to a seer, and so on. (11)

Jung is suggesting that the dramatic reversal of states of feeling and understanding demonstrate a fundamental psychological process which he even refers to as a "law" of the psyche. He suggests that there should be an equilibrium in psychic forces and energies which, if too grossly disturbed, initiates a self-regulating process so that the balance is restored.

Heraclitus was indeed a very great sage, discovering the most marvellous of all psychological laws; theregulative function of the opposite. He called it enantiodromia, a running contrariwise, by which he means that sooner or later everything runs into its opposite .... I said just now that there seems to be something, a kind of superior power, in the human psyche, and that if this is not the idea of God, then it is the "belly". I want to express the fact that one or other basic instinct, or complex of ideas, will invariably concentrate upon itself the greatest sum of psychic energy and thus force the ego into its service. As a rule the ego is drawn into this focus of energy so powerfully that it identifies with it and thinks that it deserves and needs nothing further. In this way a craze develops, a monomania or possession, an acute onesidedness which seriously emperils the psychic equilibrium. (12)

We see here a model of psychic governance which is based on a fairly simple illustration derived from the world of physics. It is as though too much material is piled onto the scale pan of one side of the balance, and this is rectified and balance restored by some unspecified source pouring a sudden rush of material onto the opposite pan. Jung is noticeably vague about the actual origin of the sudden energy acquired by the alternate side of the psyche's equilibrium. (It is possible that his is the source of interpretation offered by the person quoted on

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11 Jung, CG Collected Works Volume VI RKP 1971 paragraphs 708-9 "Psychological Types" p. 425-6

12 Jung, CG Collected Works Volume 7 RKP 1953 "Two Essays on Analytical Psychology" paragraphs 111-113

model for understanding the sudden reversal which his feelings underwent.)

Jung's appropriation of the term enantiodromia from the thought of Heraclitus seems justified by our understanding of what Heraclitus was about. Heraclitus was not a physicist; his choice of fire as the abiding principle of the cosmos was not an attempt to offer a more appropriate theory of the workings of the physical Universe. His aim was not to improve the newly-fledged Milesian natural science but to reinterpret its total meaning by offering a radical shift in perspective.

> I believe....the central insight of Heraclitus (is) in this identity of structure between the inner, personal world of the psyche and the larger, natural order of the Universe. The doctrines of fire, cosmic order and elemental transformation serve as more than illustrations; but they are significant only insofar as they reveal a general truth about the unity of opposites, a truth whose primary application for human beings lies in a deeper understanding of their own experience. (13)

The characteristics of and relationships between the elements reflect the physical flux of human experience. By meditating upon them, and particularly upon fire, one can perceive

> the hidden harmony that unifies opposing principles not only within the cosmic order but also in the destiny of the human psyche. (Heraclitus') real subject is not the physical world but the human condition, the condition of mortality. By its participation in the eternal life-cycle of nature and also by its capacity to master this pattern in cogitation, the structure of the psyche is unlimited .... The opposites are one; and this deathless structure of life and death is deity itself. (14)

The use of fire as symbol of deity is, of course, ancient and universal. That human beings experience their own condition in terms of fire is less usual, but not unknown.

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13 Kahn, Charles H "The Art and Thought of Heraclitus" Cambridge UP 1979 p.21

14 Kahn, Charles H op cit p.23

Love is the unfamiliar name
Behind the hands which wove
The intolerable shirt of flame
Which human power cannot remove.
We only live, only suspire,
Consumed by either fire, or fire. (15)

Thus in both Heraclitan philosophy and Jungian psychological theory, enantiodromia represents a sudden change in the direction of a flux of consciousness, a change occurring at the bidding of some higher, perhaps divine, regulative principle whose goal is an equilibrium aimed at but never achieved. No process is carried to such an excess as to swamp consciousness and permanently exclude other significant features of the total gamut of consciousness. These other features will make their presence felt, and the more they are repressed, the greater the vigour with which they will eventually reappear. Jung felt that this adequately accounted for sudden reversals and changes in mood and character. I am far from sure that it does. Such sudden reversals are far more the exception than the rule, and to elevate their occurrence into a "psychological law" is absurd; laws apply to events which almost invariably occur. In addition, it does not seem to me that Jung is saying anything more than observing that such things do occasionally happen. He offers no real explanation of the relationships and processes within the psyche which will effect the transformation. Of his assumption of some kind of self-regulative function within the psyche I shall have more to say later.

The second theorist whose work I wish to mention is Henry Ellenberger. He has observed that at times the strain and preoccupation required in the attempt to solve a difficult problem may lead to symptoms which can be classified as a form of mental illness, and that the resolution of the problem relieves the symptoms and produces many of the aftereffects which may be associated with

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15 Eliot, T.S. "Little Gidding" Four Quartets Faber & Faber

religious experience. He writes:

This compels us to define creative illness and give it its main features. It occurs in various settings and is tobe found among Shamans, among the mystics of various religions, in certain philosophers and creative writers. A creative illness succeeds a period of intense pre-occupation with an idea and search for a certain truth. It is a polymorphous condition that can take the shape of depression, neurosis, psychosomatic ailments or even psychosis. Whatever the symptoms, they are felt as painful, if not agonising, by the subject, with alternating periods of alleviation or worsening. Throughout the illness the subject never loses the thread of his dominating preoccupation. It is often compatible with normal professional activity and family life. But even if he keeps to his social activities, he is almost entirely absorbed with himself. He suffers from feelings of utter isolation, even when he has a mentor who guides him through the ordeal. The termination is often rapid and marked by a phase of exhilaration. The subject emerges from his ordeal with a permanent transformation in his personality and the conviction that he has discovered a great truth or a new spiritual world. (16)

Ellenberger's name for this condition - "creative illness" - is a good one. The adjective "creative" makes us modify our attitude toward the notion of this particular illness and its cure. We realise that the teleology (in the philosophical as distinct from the technical medical sense of that word) of the illness is upset. In most ilnesses, the cure and its application are determined by the nature of the illness; in this case the illness is determined by the "cure". In order that what seems to be the cure shall be achieved, the illness must be undergone. But under such circumstances, of course, the cure is not a cure as conventionally understood; it is the goal of the whole experience. Ellenberger suggests that the illness is a necessary part of the total process of coming to a radically new, creative understanding.

This rare condition begins after a long period of intellectual work and preoccupation. The main symptoms are depression, exhaustion, irritability, sleeplessness and headaches. In short, it presents the picture of a severe neurosis, sometimes of psychosis. There can be oscillations

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16 Ellenberger, Henri F "The Discovery of the Unconscious" Allen Lane The Penguin Press 1970 p.447/8

remains obsessed by a prevailing idea or the pursuit of some difficult aim. He lives in utter spiritual isolation and feels that nobody can help him, hence his attempts at self-healing. But usually he will feel that these attempts intensify his sufferings. The illness may last three or more years. The recovery occurs spontaneously and rapidly, is marked by feelings of euphoria, andis followed by a transformation of the personality. The subject is convinced that he has gained access to a new spiritual world, or that he has attained a new spiritual truth.....(17)

I believe that there are strong parallels between the subject of Ellenberger's concern and the phenomena I have been considering.

A difference (which may be more apparent than real) is Ellenberger's consideration of the illness as arising from intellectual preoccupation. The object of his study is the development of dynamic psychology during the past century, and he maintains that the authority and importance of the systems of Freud and Jung in this field are attributable to the fact that each of these men went through the kind of illness described. Each spoke with the authority the process endows on those who undergo it. Janet, Adler and others lack this authority because their theories are based on clinical observations rather than personal experience. Ellenberger is alert to the philosophical problems raised by the authority of deep but private personal experience. He sees it as being contained within the wider field of the whole difficult area of the truth content of all inner, psycho-dynamic processes. It is perhaps worthy of notice that for both Freud and Jung, religion came to have a crucial role within their developed theories, although there were great differences in their understandings. For Freud, religion is a widespread and necessary neurosis; for Jung it is the deepest and most significant level of man's spiritual and psychological organisation and direction.

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17 Ellenberger, Henri F op cit p.889

Whether, in fact, Ellenberger is correct in interpreting Freud and Jung's creative illness as the result of no more than intellectual preoccupation is, I think, a moot point. Each faced himself, his whole and emotional and mental organisation and meaning. Whether one can ever confront one's own self simply as a "problem" for intellectual assessment is, I suggest, most unlikely. (18) The whole of ones being is most deeply and powerfully involved; the task has implications for one's emotional, religious, social and intellectual reality. That the experience eventually resulted in a body of theory which is intellectual in presentation does not mean that the experience itself is restricted to the intellectual plane.

There are obvious and striking similarities between the phenomenon which Ellenberger calls the Creative Illness and the despair-to-enlightenment experience which is my concern. The similarities are to be found in

> The nature of the symptoms, eg. sleeplessness, irritability, withdrawal, headaches, loss of appetite.
>
> The mental effort involved in seeking to resolve the problem of the crisis.
>
> The fluctuating levels of pain, exhaustion; alternating periods when it is felt that some progress is being made, some hope is afforded, and then the onset of further despair.
>
> The sudden and very rapid resolution, for reasons which are not clearly discernable.
>
> The ensuing elation.
>
> The feeling of having attained a new and important spiritual understanding; and a long-term or perhaps permanent alteration in character and deportment as a consequence.

The first three similarities mentioned are held in common with most forms of depression, no matter what their resolution may be.

There are two differences between Ellenberger's presentation of the process and my understanding of it. The first is that he seems to want to ascribe a semi-

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18 See the relevant sections of CG Jung's autobiography "Memories, Dreams, Reflections" RKP 1963

volitional motive to the whole affair. This may be because, as already mentioned, he places great emphasis on the intellectual aspects of the experience. The illness arises, he believes, because the person in question is obsessed with a problem with which he is wrestling intellectually. To this, I would make two observations. Firstly, I would repeat that he may not have fully understood the total involvement of the person with the problem; there is an emotional aspect, in that the problem being faced grows out of one's own experience and is therefore a problem within and to do with self. It is "important", and , its resolution carries profound implications not only in the world of ideas but in the understanding of self. A further observation, perhaps arising out of the above, is that Ellenberger fails to explain the power which the obsessive idea has. Why is the person so totally immersed in it? Here again, I would suggest that this is because the problem does not exist purely on the plane of intellectual fascination, but has a significance which stretches through the person's whole existence. If the problem is not resolved, then not only will the world of ideas be the poorer; the person's whole life will be damaged. Again, I would draw evidence from Jung's own accounts of his Creative Illness; his "problem" is his whole self.

The second difference between Ellenberger's presentation and my own is subsidiary to the above. He seems to imply (he is not wholly clear on the issue) that the suddenness of the resolution, and its completeness, are to do with the fact that the outcome is in terms of intellectual resolution. Suddenly, as it were, "the light dawns" and a solution appears as though out of nowhere. The source of obsession and illness vanish in understanding. The understanding is accompanied by an emotional content which is largely one of relief and relaxation. Although an important part of religious experience is to do with new levels of understanding, it would seem to me that the emotional content of experiences such as those mentioned in Chapter 1 are far more positive

and overwhelming than the feelings of relief at the solution of a long-term obsession.

However, it is possible that we are mistaken in seeking to draw lines too clearly between the different elements of the total experience, or between different levels of intensity in the experience. I make this point on the basis of two interviews, I had while collecting material for Chapter 1. The interviews were with an American whose training and profession were in economics. At the age of about forty he became obsessed with what he believed was an anomaly in current economic theory, and spent three years undergoing a Creative Illness similar in most ways to that defined by Ellenberger. Eventually, "the light dawned". But in his accounts of the resolution of the problem, my informant was at pains to emphasise that the dawning of the light was no mere metaphor;

.....It came in light. My head was filled with light. A piercing, blue light. I buried my face in my hands, but it wouldn't go away. I couldn't bear to look at it, but - oddly - it wasn't painful ..... (19)

Although he had found the answer to the problem in economics which had obsessed him, and although he subsequently wrote a book around this answer which made him enough money to retire comfortably, the experience of the answer he interpreted as being religious. He argues the intellectual obsession can lead to an understanding which is far wider than the immediate concern of the obsession.

As I have previously hinted, if Ellenberger's observations concerning the Creative Illness are correct, then he is using the word "illness" in a unique way. The "illness" is the necessary process to be gone through in order that its outcome - the "cure" - may be attained. In other words, the "illness" is the price to be paid, the effort to be expended, in order that the benefits of understanding which are its outcome can be arrived at.

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19 Private Interview. Oxford, February, 1984

concept of enantiodromia seems to work. In order that the self-regulating functions of the organism may come into effect, the person has to be plunged more deeply into whatever extreme of feeling is possessing him. We seem here to be skirting close to that understanding of suffering which I have called "romantic", namely, that suffering has to be gone through in order that a person can in some way be improved, enlightened, matured. There is thus a subtle alteration in the etiology of illness; a subtle shift in our understanding of the processes involved in illness and cure.

Theorists of both physical and psychological forms of medicine assume within a patient a basic impetus or disposition which moves the patient toward health and wholeness. It has long been recognised in the realm of physical medicine, almost on a rule of thumb basis, that the doctor must co-operate with the patient's "will to get well", and that without this impetus to be well the most careful doctoring may fail. On the other hand, a patient determined to live may recover whenall medical prognosis seems without hope. That this "will to get well" entails a link between the patient's physical and psychological states is increasingly widely recognised and accepted.

> There is accumulating evidence that the duration of an illness is associated with psychological indicants, that the more favourable the indicants with regard to the mental health of the individual, the shorter the duration of the illness. There is evidence also that the psychological condition of patients is a good prognosticator of the effectiveness of medical treatment. (20)

Such assumptions depict illness of whatever kind as an interruption of a state of well-being (or simply being well) - usually referred to as homeostasis. This last term suggests a stable state of the orgnaism. Once the stable state is disturbed by the illness, the organism's own self-regulative activity will begin self-healing, a

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20 Bakan, David "Disease, Pain and Sacrifice" U of Chicago 1968 p.5

process which can be aided by the doctor. How stable this homeostasis really is in the physical organism is open to question. But the notion that a stable state can be said to apply to the psychological condition of the individual is not seriously tenable.

A great number of theorists have depicted the psychic life of the individual morein terms of "process" than "state". In Jungian theory the process is called "individuation". Jung defines it:

(Individuation is) the process of forming and specialising the individual nature .... as a differentiated being from the general collective psychology. (21)

This process is unique to each individual. When seeking to assist a patient cope with mental as distinct from physical illness, a therapist must be very sensitive to the direction and force of the individuation.

.....in psychotherapy it seems to be positively advisable for the doctor not to have too fixed an aim. He can hardly know better than the nature and will to live of the patient ....Each of us carries his own life form within him - an irrational form which no other can outbid. We must follow nature as a guide, and what the doctor then does is less a question of treatment than of developing the creative possibilities latent in the patient himself. (22)

Like Jung, Stephen Spinks sees mental health more in terms of a process than a static state. He lays emphasis on what he calls the "completion" of the individual, suggesting that in all forms of illness, but particularly in mental illness, we see in the individual an urge to move or develop toward "completeness". (23) Drawing on ideas first presented by JA Hadfield, who argued that "the urge to completeness is the most compelling motive of life", he finds parallels between this and Jung's notions of individuation. He observes that all human activity,

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21 Jung, CG "Psychological Types" 1936 edition p.261
22 Jung, CG Collected Works Vol 16 p. 40
23 Spinks, G Stephen "Psychology and Religion" Methuen 1963

including dreams, phantasy and even psychopathology, [illegible] some urge to reach a goal. Thus the whole of human existence is teleological within its own terms, and he accepts with approval Jung's definition of religion as "the fruit and culmination of the completeness of life."

Abraham Maslow (24) emphasises the distinction between static and progressive assumptions of the human condition. While acknowledging the necessary vagueness of such terms as libido or elan vital, he nevertheless feels compelled from clinical observation to postulate a motivational force in the individual alongside and in addition to those static concepts of healthy equilibrium which we define as "being well". The organism does have self-regulative and self-restoring abilities which enable it to repair any damage which befalls it; yet it would appear that even in the midst of these seemingly-static conditions there is an urge to express and achieve a growth toward self-perfection. Maslow maintains that this is the assumed motivational force behind all therapy, and that without it health in whatever form could never be either achieved or restored.

It must be acknowledged that there is a vagueness about the above notions of individuation, completeness and life force. Psychologists themselves agree that they are seeking to define some motive principle which exists beneath and supports not only their clinical data but their actual task of healing and therapy. It is in this area that psychology's attempts at being an empirical science falter; the theory "runs out" and meets an indefinable factor in the total psychological dynamic which is too elusive to grasp and yet without which neither theory nor therapy could function.

It is an area which may psychologists endeavour to avoid, because it entails a bold (some would say "foolhardy"!) step from the empirical and verifiable into the ideological. It posits some goal of individual selfhood which the individual in some way seeks to attain, which when thwarted or disturbed creates pathology of some kind,

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24 Maslow, Abraham op cit p.21 ff

and without which no cure could be possible...
introduce into the discussion such notions as purpose, value, good, right, etc., the material of personal meaning and personal morality.

A useful insight which unites psychotherapy is that we cannot offer or foist onto another person - even a suffering person - our own understanding or ideal of how that person should live, what his self-perfection should be like. It is a goal, to be striven for and perhaps achieved in terms of the individual's own self-definition, self-understanding with which the person is most fully to be identified, the reaching of which both in process and achievement endows his life with its most real perspective. One calls to mind the saying about having not only life, but having the life which is "abundant". (25) Any attempt to identify this goal, this abundance, or to objectify it immediately diminishes it, perhaps to the point of being useless. Its extreme idiosyncracy means that it can never be clinically defined in terms of actions, achievements or overt moral qualities; it has to be defined in terms of self-fulfilment.

The individual is thus understood to be striving to realise and express his completeness outwardly, and receiving support for that expression from outside sources, but his completeness and his motive toward completeness are essentially inward in both authority and generation. It is this force, however it may be organised within the internal, dynamic economy of the inidividual, which is posited as the motive for healing during any phase of illness.

However, I should like to offer for consideration the suggestion that there may be an exception to the overall validity of this model of illness and healing. I would suggest that it may be possible, under certain circumstances which are comparatively rare when set alongside the full gamut of illness, for this elan vital or motive toward completeness to <u>create</u>, rather than cure,

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25 John Ch. 10 v 10

illness. Under certain circumstances
completeness initiates in the person a resistance to its force, and that the resistance has many of the symptoms of certain other forms of mental or emotional illness and thus is usually straightforwardly identified with them. In fact, however, it is very different; different in its origin, its substance and in its cure.

It is almost diametrically opposite to the normal course of the development of an illness. Whereas most illness can be considered to be a change (for the worse) in a static state of well-being, in this comparatively rare case the illness is the maintenance of a state of supposed well-being in resistance to a process of change assumed to be for the worse. The dynamic power of the movement toward completeness is vigorously resisted. The individual seeks to deny and impede his own development. For whatever reasons, he seeks to cling on to the status quo, rather than face the implications of change. It is the exertion of the blocking procedures which produce the symptoms of illness.

We may perhaps assume that in the normal course of the life of a person, the motive toward completeness (I shall use Spinks' term) shows in the maturity which can come with the passing of years and the accumulation of life-experience. We change, learn, grow, develop in understanding and acceptance. Although the process can bring times of stress, as we readjust to a wider perspective, an altering understanding, the stress is coped with undramatically and the change takes place. However, in certain kinds of individuals under certain circumstances there may come occasions when change is forced upon us in very threatening painful or self-destructive ways. A crisis of almost any kind may do just this, be it a crisis of circumstance or a crisis of understanding and ideas. What matters is that the crisis should have profound implications for our sense of self, our understanding of who we are, our estimate of our value. If a crisis occurs "outside" us, we may produce strenuous efforts to rectify

rectification may well include the acceptance of change. Only if the crisis either arises from or profoundly affects our inner selfhood, perhaps indicating that in truth we are not who we think we are and who we want others to think we are, will it prove difficult to accept the change. Then we shall resist the implications, and at times even the fact, of the crisis.

It must be understood that the crisis and the move toward completeness are essentially working to the same end. The move to completeness entails the recognition and acceptance of the self as it really is. In as much as a crisis presents us with information which tells us more accurately what kind of person we may be, it can thus be interpreted as a stimulus toward completeness. If, for whatever reason, that more accurate assessment is unacceptable, both crisis and change ensuing will be resisted.

Hence the usual course of events in response to a crisis of this kind. The initial recognition of the threat to self which it presents results in panic. Often there is an initial period (usually very short) of total recognition of the implications of the crisis; this is usually then blocked out. The person becomes emotionally and mentally "numb", in much the same way that a thumb, accidentally hit with a hammer, will cause a moment or two of great pain, followed by the whole thumb going numb. Pain is not felt; but this responsive anaesthesia is at the cost of all feeling. The hurt thumb can no longer feel anything at all. Similarly, we have theability to go mentally or emotionally numb, totally incapable of feeling anything at all. Those who spend much time with the bereaved will be very familiar with this phenomenon. It can last for a long time. In some aberrant forms of grief it can last for the rest of the bereaved person's life. Once the system can cope with the pain, the numbness begins to wear off, the full weight of the catastrophe bears in, and increasingly high levels of anxiety and activity ensue in order to restore the status quo or else compensate the

damage created by the crisis. All this is done in order to nullify the crisis, to make it "unreal" and therefore to dissipate its implications. Sometimes this can be done, though always with a powerful element of fragile precariousness. A person who, at the breaking of a long-term and profoundly important love affair, enters immediately into another affair which is much shallower but which he invests with great significance, is nullifying the original crisis and thus eliminating its implications of lovelessness, worthlessness, rejection, etc. A useful indicant that such second, "rebound" relationships are fragile is found inthe statistics for the breakup of second marriages.

If the efforts to nullify either the crisis or its implications fail, gradually the truth is accepted. Usually this is regarded as the truth concerning an inferior kind of self; we accept that we are what the crisis tells us that we are. It is the combination of subconscious realisation with subconsciously-motivated resistance to that realisation which causes the symptoms of despair. Typically, the despairing person loses character; he becomes a non-person. Unable to be with conviction the person he formally was, he yet refuses to accept the (as he sees it) grossly diminished person the crisis tells him he is. He withdraws; becomes solitary; obsessive; "dull"; unresponsive; loses care and concern for physical matters; cannot concentrate, etc. In other words, he presents a case of acute depression and despair.

The "illness" therefore, is symptomatice of an epic, inward struggle to resist and nullify the impetus toward a more accurate and complete sense of self implied by the circumstances and details of the initiating crisis. In this case, the constitution of the illness is the complete opposite of the individual's usual, constitutional response to illness. Usually, the motive to completeness resists and fights against the source of illness on behalf of the well-being of the person. But in this case, it is the illness which resists and fights against the motive

the person.

Yet if the motive to completeness is as fundamental as is hypothesised, then it has priority; the resistance can never ultimately overcome it, and the maintenance of resistance is an ongoing and exhausting struggle. In as much as the individual is able to maintain the resistance, he is also maintaining his own illness. In other words, we arrive at the observation which distinguishes this particular "illness" from all others; in order to be "cured" of the "illness" the individual must <u>lose</u> the struggle. Only when the resistance breaks down, when the person yields to the full and dreaded implications about himself contained in the crisis, can the motive to completeness come into unhindered effect and he move toward a more realistic selfhood. Although that more authentic selfhood may seem diminished in comparison with his previous notions of self (ego-construct), this is obviated by the benefits of a realistic self-assessment and self-acceptance.

I would suggest that this is precisely what we see in the ancient and paradoxical account of Jacob's struggle at the Jabbok. Many commentators are struck and perplexed by the nature and outcome of the fight. Who is the winner? Jacob simultaneously both isn't and yet is! Jacob is in battle with a power which is mysterious, to be resisted, and seems more powerful than himself. Despite all his efforts, he cannot prevail. Suddenly, seemingly easily, his opponent becomes his supreme benefactor. The outcome of losing the contest is that Jacob is blessed; the light dawns, and he is a new man, with a new name and new destiny. His old self is crippled, diminished, and yet he has seen the face of God and his life is preserved.

It seems to me that this ancient source recognises that there are certain circumstances when great benefit - indeed, blessing - arise from being vanquished in a struggle to maintain what one believes to be oneself.

reversed kind of illness are not as rare as I have suggested. There can be no doubt that the treatment of depression within the medical professions on the lines of a normal illness is a treatment which meets with little real success. By encouraging the patient's sense of self, trying to restore that which is under threat, the usual course of treatment encourages the very resistance which is the illness. David Bakan characterises

> .....emotional defense responses with disease as manifestations of a person's being in a situation where he is protecting himself from "being done in". (26)

He suggests that in such cases where the defence is the disease, the patient must be encouraged to bring to bear the "mechanisms of surrender", that he may possibly turn the tide of the disease by encouraging the body not to defend itself. This is interesting advice from the realm of physical medicine, recognising that on occasions the defence mechanisms are more harmful than that which they are defending the body against.

However, the usual course of cure for depression is to encourage and support the patient in his resistance to the destructive implications of the crisis, because it is assumed that they are nothing more than destructive. Thus the usual course of treatment for depression may on occasions ramify the illness, and the patient achieves a measure of restoration almost despite rather than because of the therapy. He is encouraged to endeavour to reconstruct his shattered ego-construct or else to create a new and modified one from the wreckage of the old. In either case, he is enabled to continue to resist the implications of the initiating crisis and thus thwart his own motive toward completeness.

Why the motive toward completeness should be seen to be so threatening and potentially destructive, and therefore resisted to the point of illness, is the concern of my final chapter. Let me try to summarise the main features of this chapter.

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26 Bakan, David op cit p.30

The world of psychology, both in terms of clinical practice and theory, confirms that at times states of acute despair suddenly resolve into their opposite. The theorists largely refrain from trying to explain this; those one or two who make the attempt fail to do so convincingly. This may be because their illness is not a condition which that word normally represents. This condition may indicate a particular relationship of resistance to a subrational or supernational force within the individual which, while widely acknowledged as existing, of necessity remains ill-defined. The sudden reversal occurs when the posture of resistance is, for whatever reason, abandoned.

Despair to Enlightenment: Part 2 - A Theological Approach

As mentioned in previous chapters, the boundaries which contain the disciplines of psychology and theology are not precisely drawn. In many places they are blurred, and in many places they overlap, sometimes to lesser but occasionally to a greater extent. The same phenomenon of human experience can be considered sometimes from the viewpoint of one discipline, sometimes from the other. And although it is very difficult if not indeed impossible to consider the phenomenon from both simultaneously, it may at times happen that the insights of the one can aid and clarify the other. Therefore, although I have used two chapters to consider the phenomenon of my concern from the two respective points of view, it is my intention to import some psychological categories into this chapter, in order to make clearer some of the psychological processes which a person undergoes while involved in an experience which is being consdiered ultimately from a religious point of view. Yet, simultaneously, I hope that theological categories of understanding of the human condition will be introduced in order to fill out and make more consistent and coherent some of the shortcomings which were revealed when the experience is considered only from the point of view of psychological illness.

This mingling of the two disciplines is, I believe, forced upon us if we are to respect the experiencer's own accounts of the experience. What starts out in the realm widely accepted today as that of mental illness becomes eventually an experience which finishes in the realm of the religious. Depressive illness transforms into mystical experience. How? It is my suggestion that the initial phase of despair, reaction to crisis, onset of depression, do have in them already the seeds of experience which belong not only to the world of psychological illness but also to the world of religious understandings. In other words,

mystical experience, but that thephenomenon which is usually regarded as nothingmore than an illness does in fact already contain the religious precursors of the mystical outcome of the total experience. I believe that a careful examination of the present-day experiences of despair and depression, especially if the examiner removes the blinkers which would restrict him to seeing the object of his study only interms of the models of psychological illness, will reveal the theological implications of those experiences to the people who undergo them. In particular, I think it is possible to draw striking parallels between the experience of depression and the experience of the consciousness of sin.

In an intriguingly - and very aptly - titled book, the American psychotherapist and theorist Karl Menninger considers the way in which the once-universally recognised and pre-eminent strand of human nature called "sin" has virtually disappeared from both the vocabulary and the self-understanding of contemporary Western people. (1) He summarises the gradual transformation of the understanding of man's sinfulness into such categories of self-understanding as sickness, or ignorance, or criminality. Thus "sin" became a shorthand term for failures, lapses, weaknesses or inadequacies for which the sinner could hardly be held responsible and which present us with far less damage to our self estimation. "Sin" as a theological category of understanding, with serious implications for our sense of self has virtually disappeared during the past century.

> There remained, of course, sin in the sense of alienating oneself from God; for believers this was, and is, and will continue to be <u>the</u> sin. But articulate believers seemed to be fewer in number; their voices were drowned out by the cheers of the psychologists. (2)

Menninger argues that the word and the concept of sin

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1 Menninger, Karl "Whatever Became of Sin?" Hawthorn Books Inc. NY 1973

2 Menninger, Karl op cit p.46

can only be dismissed --
or superfluous; not only replaced, but adequately replaced by other categories of understanding. If, however, what has replaced it does not seem adequate, and if our diminished understanding seems to be missing just those features of experience which were entailed in the concept of sin, then the disappearance of sin as an interpretive category of human experience is premature and unjustified. Menninger argues that this is the case; that there are whole areas of human experience for which psychological theory provides inadequate understanding. He mentions in particular that the human experiences of guilt and depression need the larger concept of sin if we are to understand and respond to them properly. (3)

Meninger quotes with approval a number of observations made by Paul Tillich, to the effect that the concept of sin cannot be either superseded or avoided.

> There is a mysterious fact about the great words of our religious tradition; they cannot be replaced. All attempts to make substitutes - including those I have tried myself - have failed; they have led to shallow and impotent talk. There are no substitutes for words like "sin" and "grace". But there is a way of rediscovering their meaning. (4)

The implication of the above is that we do away with the category of sin to our great loss.

He also quotes Tillich to call to mind the true theological meaning and depth within the concept of sin.

> Have the men of our time lost a feeling for the meaning of sin? Do they realise that sin does not mean an immoral act, that "sin" should never be used in the plural, and that not our sins but rather our <u>sin</u> is the great, all-pervading problem of our life? To be in the state of sin is to be in the state of separation. Separation may be from one's fellowmen, from one's true self, or from God. (5)

However, I think it fair to say that Menninger himself does not always use the word "sin" in this deep way, but sometimes talks of sin in the sense of immoral acts, not making clear

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3 Menninger, Karl op cit p. 178
4 & 5 Quoted from Paul Tillich's "We are Accepted" in Menninger op cit p. 47 & p. 189

However, although we must bear in mind that sins, in the common usage of immoral acts or evil deeds, are different from the deeper theological understanding of the human condition implied in the technical use of the word sin, nonetheless there is a continuum of identity between them. Our wickedness and immorality arise out of our sinful state. Our response to our wickedness and immorality, in such feelings as guilt or shame, locate the wickedness or immorality in the deeper awareness of ourselves as being not what we ought to be. Thus our evil deeds are, as it were, the outgrowth of our sinfulness. Tillich, in the previous quotation, rightly indicates the unity of identity which underlies our wide ranging understanding of sin. He points out that the separation entailed in sin may be a separation from fellowmen, from oneself or from God; and although each seems distinct, in truth they are all of a piece. The sinner may, however, be more immediately and acutely aware of one or two of the three. But each is an indicant of the others. Compare this with the less insightful assertion of John MacKenzie:

> Sin and guilt as used even in common conversation does not connote anything in man's relation to God, but rather an inner experience of emotional conflict which may or may not be referred to a breach of failure to reach some personal standard or cultural standard of morality. Seldom is such a breach felt as falling short of the glory of God. (6)

It is true that sins are rarely felt to be a falling short of the glory of God. Yet it is that larger and deeper failure in the human condition of which they are symptomatic, and in as much as we feel we fail then we do fall short of God's intention for us. Although our perceptions may be of superficial shortcomings, they nonetheless set up echoes and reverberations in our deeper and more inclusive self-consciousness. Failure, immorality, wickedness are on a continuum with sin; and perception or apprehension of the one may be the chink in our self-awareness which lets in a beam of darkness, from the other.

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6 MacKenzie, John G "Guilt; Its Meaning and Significance" G Allen and Unwin 1962 p.127

Before moving on from these preliminary remarks concerning the nature of theological sin and the meaning of the word as I shall be using it, I think it is important to remember also that sin, so commonly associated with evil, does not at its deepest level entail human wickedness to any large extent. Far more significant features of sin at the deep level are the sense of being cast out from God, and therefore from all that is true, beautiful, positive. There is the feeling of being utterly alone; utterly without worth; utterly without love; and utterly without hope. Some would suggest that our propensity to do evil is, in a peculiar and negative way, an attempt to bring something positive in terms of action and affect and bodily satisfaction into lives which are spiritually empty.

However, it is our response to our own wickedness and immorality which, by reflecting our misdeeds back into our own awareness of ourselves, forces us to take stock and assess with misgiving what kind of creatures we really are. It is these responses, arising out of "sins", which point us in the direction of "sin". Of these responses I have chosen to consider four: the sense of guilt, the sense of shame, and urge to secrecy, the sense of worthlessness and lovelessness, and the sense of alienation and isolation. It is my contention that all these, which are the marks of sin, are to be found developed to differing degrees in the self-awareness of depressed people. And that depressed people, far from suffering merely from an illness, are confronting - ortrying to avoid confrontation with - very real and unacceptable aspects of themselves. It is for this reason that I suggest that depression may be far more than just an illness; it may of itself be a religious experience, though of a negative and fearful kind.

The first and perhaps most fundamental feature which links depression as an illness with the theology of sin is the sense of guilt. From the very infancy of psychology as a corpus of material and theory seeking to understand mental and emotional aberrancy in terms of both conscious and unconscious dynamics, the sense of guilt has been

recognised as being crucial to a number of conditions and complexes. But especially it has been seen as fundamental to depressive conditions.

And yet the attitude of psychology both in theory and practice toward guilt has been ambivalent. It has recognised- as it had to, if it was to avoid being totally unrealistic - the reality and crucial importance of the patient's sense of guilt within his own psychodynamic. It is guilt which has the power to disturb and warp the patient's psychic equilibrium and leads to inappropriate, neurotic, behaviour and reactions. In particular, it can lead to depression.

The task, then, facing the therapist in the cure of depression entails handling in some way the guilt felt by the patient. It is at this point that the ambivalence arises, in that the overall response of psychological theory is to attempt to cut away the fundamental reality of the patient's sense of guilt. It wants to convince the patient that, although he feels his sense of guilt tobe very real - indeed, perhaps the only reality of which he is really aware - nonetheless, the guilt is in some way fictitious, inappropriate, unreal. The task of therapy, therefore, is to alter the patient's attitude toward his own guilt, in order that the power of his guilt may be diminished.

The first stage of this process is remarkably similar to the Christian church's traditional method of helping folk cope with guilt. It consists of encouraging the person to recognise, make clear to himself, confront both the source and presence of his guilt feelings. However, the course of action which follows the initial confession (for such it is) differs markedly between church and therapist. The therapist then leads the patient into what is hoped to be a fuller understanding of his guilt, in order to diminish its actuality or its effect. This can be done in a number of ways. One is, for instance, to reassure the patient that both the source and the feelings of guilt are quite normal; everyone does something like this, and therefore he need not feel so acutely guilty about it. (Interesting to notethat this attempt to

establishing a community of identity betweenthe patient and his fellows, a community which he feels he has lost through his guilt. If he can be convinced that the effect of his guilt, as he sees it, in terms of isolation, is an illusion - ie. he is really like everyone else - then it is hoped that the source of the effect will likewise be understood to be illusory). Another way of removing the power of guilt is to try to demonstrate that the patient's guilt feelings arose through his involvement in a situation over which, interms of both involvement and circumstances he had no control. His actions were therefore determined for him, and it is thus inappropriate for him to feel guilty about matters in which he had no responsibility. It was not his fault. This is the interpretation frequently offered to dissipate guilt feelings arising over issues occurring in infancy.

There are probably as many minor variations on the ways to dissipate guilt as there are therapists working on the assumption that their patients' guilt-feelings are fundamentally unreal, and that the task of therapy is to offer the patient the insight also to realise this. Whether insight ever succeeds in effectively eliminating feelings is a matter which has been argued for decades. Whether therapy succeeds in its aim of cure by removal of inappropriateguilt, or merely enables the patient to live with and accept the fact of his guilt, and in some measure forgive himself for it, is a moot point. That the argument exists and continues indicates to me both the lack of clear-cut success in such treatment of depression and the dubious theoretical assessment of the origins and nature of guilt.

This same debate, together with observations from their own clinical experience, has led a number of psychological theorists themselves to question the accepted attitudes toward guilt and its source in conscience. The names of Stekel, Boisen, Mowrer, Frankl come to mind. Such thinkers maintain that guilt is very real, and is not simply to be explained away or learned to be lived with.

person which has profound and negative implications for the person's self-understanding. The source of guilt may be repressed from conscious memory, but it remains in the sense of ill-defined guilt to warp and imbalance the person's psychic equilibrium. The person thus encapsulates within his life-history the source of his guilt, something of which he is ashamed, and which is the origin of a continuing feeling of self-condemnation and grief about the self. Such feelings may exist in very subdued form, the person being able to live and functionadequately despite them. However, if the person undergoes circumstances - such as may happen in crisis - which refocus attention upon the repressed source of the guilt, crisis and underlying feelings of guilt may combine and support each other, thus plunging a person from an acceptable level of guilt to an unacceptable and intolerable level, with the consequence of depression. This goes to explain why the depressive response to crisis often seems so much more than the crisis warrants; the person is in fact responding to more than the crisis - he is responding to himself. It is the extra dimension to depressive grief which is one of the keys to understanding the Book of Job; Job is responding not only to what he has lost but to who he is.

This school of thought argues that guilt is real. Guilt represents an accurate and appropriate response to the person's estimate of himself. It is traceable to actual occurrences in his life, and has its origins in a most real and suitably outraged conscience - outraged, that is, at the self.

It must be recalled that such real guilt does not necessarily require a "real", indictable act as its source. Such actual behaviour does not by any means always reveal itself in patients' past lives. However, guilt may have its source in the often-overlooked yet very powerful and important part played by fantasy in our mental and emotional life. The substance of fantasy is, of course, unreal, fictitious, indeed fantastic. But the act of fantasising is very real, and an integral part of most

of which the fantasist feels ashamed; indeed, for many their fantasy world is the ultimate private experience, to be shared with none other. One can discern these features when one considers the guilt and shame so often associated with masturbation.

Although infantile masturbation usually earns parental condemnation, and there must therefore be an element of conditioned guilty response in the onanist's attitude to himself, this is of itself insufficient to explain the deep guilt, shame and anxiety he can feel towards himself and his activity. The extreme self-condemnation which sometimes arises is largely accounted for by the nature of his fantasies with which the act of masturbation is invariably accompanied - fantasies which may include involvement in acts of lurid sexuality and aggression and for which the onanist severely condemns himself. The result is that a feature of his life which, as an activity, is essentially solitary and quite harmless and innocuous, can come to be associated with extraordinarily powerful feelings of guilt. Looked at from the outside, the guilt associated with masturbation is "unrealistic", inappropriate to the act; to the onanist the guilt is real, important and can, at times, reach an intensity which mars his life by subjecting him to perpetual self-condemnation.

Whatever its source, guilt is handled within our psychic economy by a number of processes which enable us to live with it. Consciousness of its source may be repressed, leaving us with an unspecified feeling of unease, of something being amiss. It may be converted into totally unconnected, neurotic behaviour. (Compare Job's diligent sacrificing on behalf of his children for sins which they might or might not have committed.) It may, however, give rise to feelings of despair with self and overall moods of depression. When this happens, the depressive is coming close to making an appropriate response to a source of guilt which is not far from conscious appraisal. Yet depression is still also a way of avoiding contact with the ultimate reality of the guilt.

simultaneously avoid the substance of guilt can be evidenced when depression arises from guilt created in response to some present activity, the said activity being "ignored" as a circumstance relevant to the depression. CAH Watts cites an example of this, the case of a young commercial traveller who consulted him concerning a state of depression which centred around his belief that he had a "bad heart". (A significant sourceof the complaint, when "heart" is taken in its metaphorical meaning.) After exploration, it came to light that the young man, who had been married only a few months, had been unfaithful to his new bride during the course of a business trip to Scotland. Yet he had managed to obscure this memory quite successfully. He had been "drunk" and "wasn't quite sure, he may have seduced the girl." His unfaithfulness, which would have earned, so he (probably rightly) felt, his wife's condemnation and carried serious implications for his marriage, he transformed into a "bad heart" which gained him her sympathy and concern.

> Then the picture became clear. He obviously had been unfaithful to his wife, and had done his best to repress the memory of the act. However, forgetting his misdemeanour did not remove his sense of guilt, which had emerged as a fear of heart disease. (7)

The bad heart thus became the adequate, though unrealistic, cause of his symptoms of depression, and enabled him to avoid his guilt.

In many other cases of depression, the source of guilt may be seemingly-effectively buried, either because it happened long ago in the patient's history or because of highly effective repression or both. Such a person may have become entirely adjusted to living with the guilt, but he carries with him a constant sense that all is not well, even though he cannot specify the source of his unease. He may show symptoms of both the guilt andhis need to keep it hidden by insisting on privacy or cleanliness or whatever,

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7 Watts, CAH "Depression" Hodder & Stoughton 1973 p.13

becoming irrationally angry if, for instance, another person turns out his pockets or opens the drawers of his desk. In such ways the guilt remains to disturb the personal equilibrium.

> The mounting internal stress of unrelieved conscience disturbs the equilibrium and organisation of the personality. The organism protects the painful andthreatening treatment it is receiving (from part of itself) and attempts to escape. (8)

Only when the escape routes are cut off - as may well happen in consequence of serious crisis - will despair and ensuing depression set in. The person succumbs to the "painful and threatening treatment" he receives as the guilt carried by the "unrelieved conscience" exerts itself. Thus Hobart Mowrer identifies many functional neuroses as attempts to escape the threat of conscience's condemnation:

> .....many functional neuroses are indications of a hidden (but not forgotten) history of serious misconduct, which had not been adequately acknowledged, atoned for, propitiated or otherwise "cancelled out". (9)

Guilt arising from such hidden sources leads to two basic responses - obsessive or depressive. There are those who live as though they were always about to commit a misdemeanour; their behaviour is often obsessive in order to avert this. Others, however, live as though they have already committed the misdemeanour (which in truth they may) and they live as though some judgemental figure were for ever pursuing them. It is these latter who seem particularly prone notonly to anxiety but also to depression.

> Those who feelthey have already committed a crime suffer depression as well as guilt and anxiety. Indeed, patients with severe depressive illnesses which require their admission to hospital to reduce the risk of suicide, often assert that they have committed some crime. Sometimes this delusional idea is expressed in a more or less plausible form and they will claim that the recent death of some

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8 Menninger, Karl op cit p.180
9 Mowrer, O Hobart "The Crisis in Psychiatry and Religion" Princeton, NJ: von Nostrand 1961 p.49

but often it is couched in bizarre or nebulous terms: they have committed the sin against the Holy Ghost or were responsible for some recent natural disaster. (10)

Rycroft's mention of the depressives who believe that they have committed th sin against the Holy Ghost is of interest. It is met with comparatively frequently. It indicates that the depressive himself is willing to introduce a religious dimension into the assessment of his condition. It is a "dramatic" belief, because of course this is the sin which cannot be forgiven; the depressive feels himself to be beyond even the mercy of God. But the theological understanding of the nature of the sin against the Holy Ghost brings an important insight into the understanding of depression. The sin against the Holy Ghost is not beyond forgiveness because it is a sin too heinous even for God to forgive; rather, the sin against the Holy Ghost is to be in the state in which God's forgiveness will not be accepted. This unique sin is not a comment on the the limit of God's willingness or ability to forgive, but upon the sinner's inability to accept that forgiveness. It reflects the theological insight that our state of sin is a reflection of our own thrusting of God aside.

This is a particularly good example to illustrate my contention that the illness known as depression and the religious condition of sin as known to theologians share common features. The experiential phenomenon of guilt is of central importance in both; and the response of the sinner to his guilt - the despair, the sadness, the hopelessness, etc. which he exhibits - parallel the way in which the depressive responds to his guilt.

Let me turn now from the sense of guilt which is common to both the consciousness of sin and states of depression to a second feature frequently shared by them. Both sin and depression can contain the factor of shame, and the urge to secrecy which is its consequence.

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10 Rycroft, Charles "Anxiety and Neurosis" Allen Lane The Penguin Press 1968 p. 45

Although guilt and shame have much in common, they are in fact different in origin and implication. Although both can and often do arise from similar sources of wickedness or immorality, it is possible for the one to exist without the other. A hardened criminal may feel guilt but no shame. It is possible to have a sense of guilt without specifically knowing the source of its origin; one cannot feel shame for that which is not specific. The guilty person may hide his misdeed in order to escape the consequences; the ashamed person will hide it because of the disgrace or belittlement it entails. Guilt implies culpability, a consequence which will have profound implications for who the guilty person is and how he lives; shame implies disgrace, diminishment in the eyes of others. Guilt will bring condemnation; shame may bring condemnation, but may just as easily bring mockery, or ostracism. Although guilt may have more profound and long-term implications, shame brings a pain which is more acute.

Some of the features of shame are well-illustrated in the example already provided by CAH Watts (p.143). The man involved felt guilty about his unfaithfulness, and aware of the implications it might have for himself and his marriage. He also felt ashamed of it, feeling that the circumstances disgraced and belittled himself. His reluctance to acknowledge it, even to himself, arose partly out of his desire to hide from others the low levels to which he could stoop.

It is extremely painful, both mentally and emotionally, to confront a shameful act. It is perhaps even more painful to be confronted by others as the doer of a shameful deed, or thinker of shameful thoughts. It is for this reason that shame is invariably accompanied by the impulse to hide its source. The impulse may take one of two broad paths, but each is potentially a causative factor in depression.

The first is the conscious hiding of the act. People will sometimes go to extraordinary lengths to cover up deeds of which they are ashamed. They will weave a "tangled

with other people's knowledge of the act. But this has two possible consequences. Firstly, there is generated a kind of internal "pressure" which can cause disequilibrium to a serious extent. There has to be a constant vigilance on the pretence and deception, a constant wariness to maintain consistency, a constant effort to keep the source of shame permanently hidden. This leads to a constant level of anxiety, associated with fear of exposure. In this way pressure builds up until it might almost seem better to face the shame than continue the effort. If, however, this exchange cannot be tolerated, the person finds himself trapped in a situation from which there can be no escape and in which he is locked with only his low self-esteem as a person capable of shameful acts. He is in prison with his bad self as cell-mate. This coupled with the guilt that probably will also be associated, can lead to a state of depression.

The second path is when the person seeks to hide the source of his shame not only from others but also from himself. The psychological processes whereby this can be done need not be expanded upon here. Suffice it to say that it is quite commonly met with, and results - as in the previous case - in the person becoming anxious and often depressed.

That shame as an act, and the need to hide the act from the gaze of others and oneself, are features of depression is widely recognised. Frequently the shame will compound itself. It is very common for the depressed person to feel ashamed of being depressed. Just as the depression may have its roots in a shameful act which is being hidden, the hiding of that act requires that its consequences - ie. the (the disguisedly) attributable depression - must also be hidden. Depressives will often make strenuous efforts to live as normal; hence a possible source of the fluctuating intensity of many depressive moods.

That shame and the urge to hide the source of shame are central to the theological understandings of sin is

of much religious understanding of sin. In the story of the Fall, the first response of Adam and Eve after eating og the Tree of Knowledge was to realise their nakedness and to hide from God. The link between sexuality and shame is one of mankind's oldest observations; the need to hide the source of shame is equally long observed.

Both psychotherapy and pastoral confessional practice alike recognise the obdurate resistance to revealing the source of shame. Each alike recognises the tremendous sense of relief which can arise if the source is revealed in a context in which the pain of the revelation is carefully handled and limited. That the impetus to hide and simultaneously the impulse to reveal exist side by side within the same person remind us that sin is both evil and shame at evil, is already a step toward the resolution of the predicament. The urge to hide the source of shame is also essentially the urge to reveal it. The more powerful the repression of the awareness, the more powerful the impulse toward it being brought into the open. This seeming paradox fits with observations already made about the nature of depression is of itself part of the process toward its own cure; that only by yielding to its inner pressures can it be relieved. In as much as depression seeks to avoid a source of shame, its success (at the avoidance) serves only to intensify the condition. Conversely, its failure brings its relief.

In all my efforts (as hospital chaplain and therapist) I rely upon a simple principle derived from my theological training which seems to me far too little understood. I refer to the view that the real evil in mental disorder is not to be found in the conflict but in the sense of isolation and estrangement. It is the fear and guilt which result from the presence in one's life of that of which one is ashamed and afraid to tell .... I would furthermore suggest that our findings indicate that the sense of guilt, the self-blame and the emotional disturbance which accompany it are not themselves evils but attempts at a cure.

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11 Boisen, Anton "The Exploration of the Inner World" Harper Bros NY 1936

struggle of Jacob, that the battle must be lost inorder that the struggling soul can be blessed. If depression serves to hide shame and its source, the depression must break under its own strain for the truth to be revealed.

The third area which I feel indicates a community of concern between consciousness of sin and depression is that complex of feelings which entails awareness of the lack of worth, love and meaning in the individual's life, and the fear that he himself is worthless and unloved. As will readily be recognised, this complex is not unrelated to the previous sentiments of guilt and shame, just as they themselves may be coincident. These factors do not exist in isolation from one another, but give rise to, support and modify each other. In a negative way, the feeling of guilt and shame which forms part of the core of both sin and depression

> .....begins in love, is impossible without love, and paradoxically is cured only by love. It is the most horrible and one of the most hopeful facts for man. It is the experience of antilife, anticommunity, antilove which as limit, as void of being, turns man to seek its opposite. It is "hell". It is life that is anxious for love .... It is life experiencing hatred, and the worst of all hatreds, the hatred of self.
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> Guilt is the special form of anxiety experienced by humans-in-society, the warring tensions of life principles violated, of conditions of human socialexistence transgressed, of sociospiritual reality ignored or affronted, of God alienated, of self being destroyed. (12)

It is this hatred of self which can lead the depressive to contemplate suicide. But equally valid as a description of the depressive's feelings about himself are such words as "contempt", "dismissive indifference" or simply "emptiness". The depressive feels himself to be beyond the love of others, and incapable of loving himself, because of the guilt which he knows - no matter howwell he believes he hides it from others - exists at the core of him. If

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12 Stein, Edward V "Guilt: Theory and Therapy" G Allen and Unwin 1969 p.14-15

he may well point out that those who loved him did not really know him as he is. The depression, and indeed the crisis which may have initiated it, are thus the accurate way of responding to his reality.

This state of being almost defies description. It is something which only those immersed in it can know. I have several times heard it described as hell, and the description is usually augmented by the depressed person adding that they are not using the word in any casual fashion, as we may say any bad experience is "like hell". The true depths of depression are "hell" in that there is cold, hopeless emptiness to them, a sense of degradation and despair more numbing than any physical pain. This interior suffering, of an intensity which is indescribable, on the part of a person who seems to have everything they could need in life is very baffling to outside observers and can lead to some rather unsympathetic treatment. Most depressives find it difficult to do full justice to the pain of their feelings of worthlessness, and find that when they make the effort they are rarely properly heard. On a personal note, I can recall how when myself in the depths of depression I told people that if the price for the depression being relieved was the amputation of both my legs, I would gladly pay. They received the information with blank incomprehension.

I also recall that when a very inexperienced minister I visited a man suffering from depression, and was interested to note that by his side was a Bible open at the Book of Psalms. I have since learned that poets - among whom are to be counted the authors of some of the Psalms and the Book of Job - can sometimes speak for others out of the depths of their own experiences of despair.

O Lord, rebuke me not in thy wrath:
Neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure.
For thine arrows stick fast in me,
And thy hand presseth me sore.

Neither is there any health in my bones because of my sin.
For mine iniquities are gone over my head;
As an heavy burden they are too heavy for me.
My wounds stink and are corrupt,
Because of my foolishness.
I am pained and bowed down greatly;
I go mourning all the day long. (13)

We are here, I believe, attempting to describe feelings which are ultimate, beyond resolution into component parts. The sense of being utterly without worth cannot be expanded upon; the "stink" and the "corruption" which arise from the wounded self merely express the repugnance which the person brought to this impasse feels toward himself.

A life felt to be without worth or love must therefore be without meaning. Victor Frankl is the theorist whose work is associated with the place of a sense of meaning, or its lack, in the teleology of mental illness. (14) He maintains that many people live a pretence that their lives have meaning and purpose by accepting and following conventionalities. He is not alone in the observation.

There æ just as many people who become neurotic because they are merely normal as there are people who are neurotic because they cannot become normal. (15)

Jung's "merely normal/ characterisss a condition in which the person obeys the conventionalities but lacks the inner sense of worth or loving reality. It is this lack of a deep sense of worth and meaning which engenders the threatening sense of void and despair. This is the condition of folk who

.....have accepted the opinion of the majority so completely that they have been spared the sharp pain of conflict which the neurotic goes through. While they are healthy from the standpoint of "adjustment", they are often more sick than the neurotic person from the standpoint of the realisation of their aims as human beings. (16)

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13 Psalm 38 vv1-6 See also, for instance, the first parts of Psalms 69 and 102

14 Frankl, Victor "Psychotherapy and Existentialism" Souvenir Press 1967 "The Doctor and the Soul" Souvenir Press 1955 and other works.

15 Jung, CG Collected Works, Vol 16 Routledge KP p.70

16 Fromm, Erich "Psychoanalysts and Religion" Harper Books 1950 p.83

It is just such a condition as this which is most vulnerable to the onslaught of reality concerning the self which can be precipitated by crisis. Despair is kept at bay by the maintenance of an outward sense of worth and status within the community, in counter to the essential emptiness and worthlessness. It is no coincidence that Jacob, Elijah and Job were all men who, before their respective crises, had created and maintained a strong outward display of worth and righteousness. Only when this exterior collapsed were they brought face to face with their own weakness, emptiness and guilt. Only when we are brought low do we confront our sinful reality.

A person may erect and maintain a style of life with which he seeks to convince himself and others that his life is positive, worthy, valuable, right and so on. He may, however, feel deeply and in a vague way that this is not in fact the case. If some crisis occurs in his life which indicates to him that he has got things wrong, has totally misunderstood circumstances, is un-valued by people to whom he thought he was valuable, is not loved by those he thought loved him, the carefully-erected life-style may well collapse and the deeper and disturbing feelings, formerly held in check andcompensated, come to the fore. He is therefore not depressed by the crisis; he is depressed by an evaluation of himself which the crisis makes inescapable.

Fourthly and lastly, I wish to consider the sense of alienation which is at the root of sin, and which is a common feature of the depressive experience. As already mentioned (17), sin is understood to be the fact of being separated from other people, from one's true self and ultimately from God; and these different separations are not to be thought of as unconnected, but rather to be of a piece with one another. Once again, the paradigm story of the Fall indicates that this sense of alienation has been recognised as essential to the human condition and the state of sin from the earliest times. The myth indicates

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17 See the quotation from Paul Tillich on p.136

the divorce from the remainder of the creation, and also the modification of that creation, consequent upon the Fall from grace. Originally created to be in harmony with the remainder of the creation of which he was innocently a part, fallen man is condemned to live by effort, his labour marked by pain and conflict. There is a hint that he is irredemably cut off from all that he might have been. David Bakan (18) observes that in the Old Testament, tobe "cut off" from the community and its world was perhaps the most disastrous event a person could suffer, and that such social alienation may have been symbolic of the deeper cutting off which occured at the Fall. Certainly, there is a profound sense of alienation in the crucial sections of the stories of such men as Jacob, Job and Elijah. And yet, as Bakan also remarks, assertions of the irredemable lostness and "cut-offness" of a person are very rare in the Old Testament. Alienation happens, but it is not irredeemable. The format of many of the Psalms - turning from destitution and alienation to acceptance and redemption - are indicative of the fundamental optimism to be found in the Old Testament.

The alienation which is the hallmark of the theological sense of sin is a fundamental feature of the experience of despair and depression. Crisis immediately alienates. If it deepens into a developed form of depression, the person usually experiences a two-fold sense of being cut off. In the first place, he feels cut off from his fellows. This is partly due to his sense of shame being highly activated. But often he also feels to be of a different order of being, really unfit for the company of other, normal people. Frequently he looks with envy at other people and their lives, and wonders why he cannot be as them. He willusually seek to withdraw from the world, retreat into himself, finds himself a safe place where he can contemplate his misfortune and his differentness. Job's retirement to his dungheap is a telling piece of

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18 Bakan, David "Disease, Pain & Sacrifice" U of Chicago 1968 p.4ff

of place which depressives choose, in that it reflects his sense of his own worth and is extremely unlikely to be frequented. I sometimes feel that his maligned comforters do not have it sufficiently counted to them for righteousness, that at least they did visit him in such an unsavoury spot!

That many of the religious experiences which seem to arise out of states of despair and depression also occur when the persons concerned are alone is no coincidence. Solitariness is the physical requirement and the physical expression of the "otherness", the "mis-placedness" that the depressive feels.

At the same time that the depressed person feels cut off from the rest of the world, he also feels alienated from himself. He may look back on the way he was, the way his life was, before the crisis or onset of depression, and feel a gulf away from aspects of himself which now seem foreign and irretrievable. He is aware of the multiple facets of an "I" he once thought was whole - even though that whole self may have had some alien elements.

This twofold sense of alienation is reflected within the nature of sin. The sinner feels himself cut off from the rest of the world, from the creation of which he is rightly a part but cannot feel himself to be so. In as much as the creation is the expression of the Creator, he is also thereby alienated from God. And yet this goes along with the sense of being in some strange way alienated within himself from himself.

Here we may only refer to Romans 7:14ff where man is portrayed in his inner division and discord. "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing that I hate." We may not understand this in terms of anthropological division, as though there are certain parts of man such as his will and his deed, or his body and his spirit stood in contradiction to each other. The subject of the willing and the doing is always the same "I". Man is in conflict with himself, in self-contradiction, and he suffers for this. Sin, which manifests itself in legalism as well as in antinomianism,

has so taken hold of him and seized control that he himself is, as it were, expelled from himself and is no longer identical with himself; thus the "I" disintegrate. (19)

The pain and bewilderment involved as the seemingly-homogeneous "I" disintegrates are known both to depressives and those confronted by sin. However, I do not favour Gerstenberger and Schrage's suggestion that sin is an agency which exerts a power over a person. Man is not seized or controlled by sin; rather, the condition which he recognises as his true nature is the condition of sin. And this true condition is one in which he is at variance with himself, within himself. However, it can <u>seem</u> like an alien force or power because it seems to operate in contradiction to his own desires.

Both the sinner and the depressive feel anxiety at the awareness that the self, the "I", is not integrated; and both the sinner and the depressive feel despair and sadness at the awareness that powerful and unavoidable parts of that facetted self are bad or worthless. And whether he expresses it in terms of being cured or of being redeemed, a man who has realised his condition will yearn for the reintegration of the self, and the reintegration in terms of the good. He wants to be good, and to feel good, and to feel at one with other good people and things. This basic urge to be "whole" is expressed well in Spinks' suggestion that the life-force is to be thought of in terms of a motive or urge toward being complete. (20) That such re-integration can only occur when the reality of the disunity is not only recognised but actually experienced in all its pain, is the substance of the religious insight that the work of redemption begins in repentance and confession. The sin has to be made real and horrible to the sinner. That there should be a fierce resistance to this is only to be expected; and it is in initiating the process of recognising what has been avoided

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19 Gerstenberger & Schrage "Suffering" Abingdon (Nashville) 1980 p.154-5

20 See page 125

that the precipitating [illegible]
of sin is so important. This is clearly seen in both the Jacob story, when he is confronted by the "stranger" who is wrestled with, clung onto, wounds and yet blesses; or in the Job story, when crisis initiates a long but gradually eroded resistance against the recognition of his true nature vis-a-vis God.

It seems to be a necessity of human change that we must first fully accept the nature of that which we are to be changed from. We must embrace that which we would escape.

> It is not so much that men have religion, as that religion has and claims them .... The believer, conscious of sin, is aware of the two voices "Depart from Me" and "Come unto Me". (21)

That the process of separation and re-union is one process, no matter how paradoxically disparate may seem its aims at different stages, achieves its ultimate expression in the light of our separation from God.

> Faith recognises eternal life in God and His Kingdom as the highest good and ultimately the only true good. Conversely, the greatest evil, ultimately the only real evil, is eternal death, ie. definitive separation from the living God .... In its temporal form it is known as "spiritual death", the absence of all that makes existence worth having, and consisting in exclusion from fellowship with God; an exclusion which reveals itself in inward dispeace and bitter self-dissatisfaction. (22)

"Spiritual death", "death in life", "hell" are all phrases readily accepted by the depressive to describe the terrible condition in which he finds himself. That Mackintosh, speaking of sin from the theological point of view, can so accurately speak for the depressed person almost by accident should give cause for thought.

At this point I end my comparative analysis of the state of depression and the consciousness of sin. I suspect

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21 Mackintosh, HR op cit p. 139
22 " " " " p. 149

a great deal more could and perhaps should be said. But I hope I have done enought to justify for consideration my suggestion that we find a great deal of common ground between the actual feelings and awarenesses entailed in depression and consciousness of sin; and also that there is some common ground between the psychodynamic and the theological understanding of the different elements which contribute to and mould the two experiences. Of course, the way in which we understand ourselves must lead to significant differences. The response of aman who believes himself ill will be different from that of the man who believes himself cast out from the presence of God. YetI would contend that this is not as formative a factor as may be imagined. A man may have a deep, real and utterly frightening sense of worthlessness, despite being assured and accepting the assurance that he is"merely ill".

I therefore suggest that states of severe depression, and the process leading to them, contain elements of ultimate concern to do with the self which are properly the province of religion. Depression is a state of faith, albeit bad and negative faith. That at times this negative faith can be transformed to a positive faith should come, therefore, as no surprise, From depression to enlightenment is not the inexplicable shole, coherent experience. It is throughout a religious experience, and I believe that we do depressed people a grave disservice by seeing and encouraging them to see their condition as no more than illness. Not only is this perspective inaccurate; it may well impede the resolution of the condition.

Sin provides a "bigger", more ultimate perspective. It pays more respect to the reality of the suffering person's feelings. Sin is not simply the old word for what we recognise now as a form of mental and emotional illness; rather, it is a word we can still use and perhaps should use if we wish to do full justice to deepest implications of conditions of despair.

It also carries implications for how we believe the condition may be ended. If one understands the condition

solely as an illness, then its ending will be brought about if one can restore the lost state of health. Thus the depressed person is subjected to a theraputic process whereby presently discordant elements are manipulated so that they are again brought into accord. The process may be reassuring and restorative ("Things are not as bad as they seem. You are essentially OK. Look, I can accept you as you are!); or it may be redirective ("If you can look at it from this viewpoint you will see it is all due to your over-sensitive imagination, with a measure of hormone imbalance!") The fundamental assumption of the illness model is that before the depressive phase the person was essentially well, healthy and right in both the medical and moral meanings of the word, and the theraputic task is to restore that pre-depression rightness.

It is this fundamental assumption about the pre-depressive rightness of the sufferer which is challenged if we shift our perspective to consider depression as the state of consciousness of sin. For then we assert that the depression arises as the sufferer perceives himself to be in discord, alienation and lovelessness, and that this perception is essentially accurate. This is the way he is in the roots of his being. The pre-depressive life was such as enabled him to avoid full recognition of this, but either crisis or just the pressure of the truth has forced him into the recognition formerly avoided. Thus, the sufferer does not want his pre-depressive self restored. At best, the restoration would be the maintenance of a pretence; and he would know it for a pretence. If depression be consciousness of sin, what the sufferer seeks is not to be restored but to be changed.

And yet the sufferer, aware of the need for change, is also aware that all attempts made by him to change himself are ultimately of no avail. They constitute only a refinement of pretence, and have no effect on the core of his selfhood which is so disturbing to him. He knows he cannot be "cured" by the manipulation of parts of the

self; there is no course of thought or action which will alter his fundamental badness.

> ....."salvation" and "health" are given, not earned.... the individual who has become hopelessly lost inself-condemnation, who feels alienated by a superego (conscience) which condemns him regardless of what he does (no matter how hard he tries, sacrifices, atones, purifies, compulsively works at acceptance or at righteousness through effort), such a person can only discover wholeness, peace, the capacity even to love, by experiencing the unqualified acceptance and affirmation of his being in all its self-hate. (23)

If the sufferer is to be changed and his sufferings brought to an end, the initiative must come from without himself. And that initiative must take the form of a radical acceptance of the sufferer.

The necessity for such acceptance and affirmation is recognised as fundamental in "deeper" forms of psychotherapy. It is accepted as being highly important even in the more directive and manipulative forms. It is a basic tenet of the"faith" of such work. Much emphasis is laid on a non-judgemental, accepting approach to the patient, on the creation of an empathetic warmth and regard for him no matter what he may reveal about himself. It is believed that such warm acceptance will demonstrate that the patient is not entirely rejected, and may lead to his own acceptance of those aspects of self which he had formerly rejected and condemned. Thus the patient's self-hate and guilt are modified, leading to a confidence within which he can re-examine his experience of rejection. His self-condemnation will then be revealed as having been based on experience which is conditional and partial.

I think that there is no doubt that such warm acceptance can bring effective results when used for some cases of anxiety and depression, particularly when these are locatable within a specific complex. I myself frequently use such acceptance almost as a technique within my own pastoral work. But whether such acceptance by another person is sufficient to move deep levels of guilt

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23 Stein, Edward V op cit p. 145-6

and depression is very debatable, and is widely debated within and between the different schools of theory and therapy. Each seems very ready to accuse others of lack of success, often being able to back up the accusations with clinical data. One wonders whether any school of theory or practice has any real success!

Psychological theory usually fights shy of asserting that the therapist sould "forgive" the patient, but forgiveness is of the essence of non-judgemental acceptance. Theology asserts that forgiveness is of the essence, and is not shy of the assertion. A theological understanding of the depressed state as consciousness of sin, consciousness of the self's state of evil and unworthiness and the guilt and alienation thus caused, recognises also that the only way in which this state can be ended and the sufferer changed is by his being encompassed - with his sin - in a reality broader and more ultimate than himself. Inasmuch as sin is a failing, a falling short, a partialness of being, then we are looking for the process affirmed by St. Paul - "That which is partial vanishes when wholeness comes." (24) But the sufferer, confronted with the reality of his sin, knows that neither himself nor another person has sufficient authority of being to encompasse his partiality. He recognises - and theology recognises - that we are strictly limited either as sufferer or helper in the process whereby the person convicted in his own sin can be changed.

> The inconceivable evil of sin, the infinite need for a higher interposition if is ever to be removed, is indicated by the fact that no one has ever gained the sense of pardon by thinking hard about it. The great religious biographies contain no record of men who argued themselves out of the consciousness of guilt .... The problem it exhibits cannot even be formulated, let alone resolved, by means of dialectic. (25)

Religion recognises that the despair which comes through the intense consciousness of sin cannot be removed by the power of man. Its resolution is the work of the grace of

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24 I Corinthians 13:10
25 Mackintosh, HR op cit p.141

God, particularly as shown by and felt in the loving forgiveness of God.

It is as well to remind ourselves at this point that such theological terms as grace, sin, redemption, etc., do not represent only notional categories of thought. They arise out of the actual experiences of faith. They do not signify an abstract commentary on the human condition, but grow out of the living experience of that condition and our reflection upon it. Theological categories may tell us that the despair of consciousness of sin can only be annihilated by a forgiveness which is ultimately authoritative and which is only to be found in the love of God. But this insight arises from the experience of such forgiveness, together with the bliss and enlightenment which accompany it, which constitute an event of unparalleled power and significance in a human life.

Theology, being the fruit of reflection upon such experience, recognises that the source of such experience is a "mysterium". It can be neither manufactured nor manipulated. It is characterised utterly by that very quality of giveness of which Edward Stein speaks.

However, it is recognised that the experience of God's forgiveness is typically accompanied or prece ded by certain features. It tends to come to those who "confess their sins". The confession of sin is to become conscious of one's sinful condition and filled with horror and despair at its implications; the confession of sin as a form of lip-service to the demands of faith is not enough. It also comes to those who, having confessed their sins, repent. Repentance is the sincere, inner sense of shame at sin, and if sufficiently aroused will lead increasingly to despair, perhaps even to the point of believing that the sinner is beyond the love and forgiveness of God. It is only when a person has been "brought low" in this way that he is open and vulnerable to the forgiveness of God.

Forgiveness is a marvel that baffles logic: God can only recognise those who feel they are utterly unworthy of recognition. (26)

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26 Mackintosh, HR op cit p.210

This "bringing low" is necessary because forgiveness is a "soft" attribute. Not even God can force his forgiveness upon a person who refuses to be forgiven. God may be offering forgiveness all the time, but the forgiveness even of Him can only be effective when we are willing to receive it. Hence the seeming-paradox that only when we believe we are so reduced as to feel beyond it, yet desperately yearn for it, will we open ourselves to receive it. Or, better, do we become open to receive it. God's forgiveness may be freely available to all who will receive it; the difficulty is that not all wish to receive it.

It must be remembered that although the coming of God into a person's life may seem a most desirable event, in practice it is widely resisted. This is so whether one is conscious of sin or not. Initially one resists because of the fear that self-control and self-realisation will have to be abandoned. But in consciousness of sin one resists fiercely because it is realised that the self is sinful, and sin cannot exist in the presence of God. The sin-conscious person hides from the presence of God, believing that His presence will annihilate himself.

Hence the experience of the presence of God is resisted and avoided. The sinner wrestles with God as with a mysterious stranger who threatens his very existence. This widespread feeling is given utterance in the ancient question as to whether a man can see God and live. Yet the sinful self, divorced from the reality of love, cannot know that God's love is able both to annihilate the sin in forgiveness and restore the person to a new and wider fullness of being.

The experiences which bring this about - the experiences of confession, repentance, penance, etc. - have over the centuries been hardened by the Church into formal activities for the obtaining of forgiveness of sin. To what extent these formal avenues of activity ever succeed in bringing actual experience of consciousness of sin or of God's forgiveness I cannot say. Ido suspect, however, that to the extent to which they become an attempt to manufacture

or manipulate what is essentially an act of grace arising in the mystery of God's love, then they will fail. They may bring a sense of ease, but they will not bring the shatteringly powerful experience of God's forgiveness.

On the other hand, I believe it can happen that the processes which lead to the experience of forgiveness can occur outside the formal avenues, even to people who would not give formal credence to them. .The experience which the theologian calls the consciousness of sin is not confirmed to believers. Anyone may be wrenched by circumstances into an awareness of self filled with condemnation, despair and self-hate. That such a state is nowadays usually seen as an illness called depression only adds the further burden of bewilderment to what is already a painful process. And just as one needs not be a formally religious person to grow conscious of sin, so one need not be a formally religious person to experience the forgiveness of the sinful condtion. But the coming of this latter into even the non-believer's life will be felt with such force and have such powerful consequences that it will be immediately perceived as an experience having profound religious implications.

Thus, under certain circumstances and with certain people, a state accepted as being depressive illness may suddenly and quite unaccountably end in a blissful experience which is recognised as being religious. Both the experience and its religious implications cause initial bewilderment and confusion.

However, if - as I suggest - there is a strong identity between depressive illness and consciousness of sin, both the experience and its religious implications are understood to be appropriate. The whole sequence of events, from pre-depressive self through crisis and depression to the religious experience and the new sense of self, is set within the religious dimension of life. And although theology does not assume to explain it fully, it does offer the recognition that such things have been known to happen throughout human history.

for. Its coming is sudden and total. It releases the sufferer from his burden of guilt and sense of worthlessness. His self-hate is transformed into self-love, and from his self-love he can respond lovingly to others. The world, which had formally seemed alien, pointless, cruel and ugly, suddenly is perceived as being harmonious and beautiful. He takes great delight in what formerly would have left him unmoved. He returns to this pre-depressive condition, but subtly changed. He is without the burden of sin which he bore even while strenuously avoiding its acknowledgement. It is perhaps above all this sense of having been changed, irrevocably and for the better, which is the experience's own best witness.

.....this means that while as far as personal identity goes the man is still continuous with his old being, in a yet profounder sense what he was has ceased to be. (27)

I submit that when today we find states of depression resolved by experiences described as blissful and enlightening, which produce change in the experiencer and which may kindle a lively interest in previously-ignored matters of religion, we are witnessing a total religious experience. I would also submit thatthe reception of the initial part of this total experience - the depressive phase - as an illness to be cured, is one more hindrance to the work of grace and is a source of serious confusion to those who are caught up in it.

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27 Mackintosh, HR op cit p. 211

Summary Conclusion

Those who claim to have undergone religious experience often remark on the presence of a state of despair or depression as a background to the experience. Sometimes, when such states are acute, they are suddenly resolved in a most striking way by the religious experience. One may hypothesise a link between the two conditions - depression and the ensuing state of bliss and enlightenment.

An examination of sacred literature - I chose to consider two incidents from the Old Testament - indicates that states of despair have long been recognised as having significance in the occurrence of important religious experiences. There is a suggestion that both the despair and its resolution have to do with the character and personality of the experiencer, particularly his own self-assessment.

Contemporary theories of psychology which treat depression as an illness seem baffled by the phenomenon of its sudden reversal. Many ignore it. Some merely recognise its occurrence. The few who take more notice of it seem hard put to account for it within the context of their theories. It does not accord with the usual progression of depression and its cure.

I suggest that it may be that, rather than a religious experience arising unaccountably from an illness, that which is usually considered an illness is itself a phenomenon of the religious life. Links can be traced between depression and the experience of the consciousness of sin. There are also links to be traced between the experience of its sudden resolution and the sense of God's forgiveness. I therefore suggest that sin provides an important insight into our understanding of depression. It offers a functional understanding of the sudden ending of depression in states of bliss. And it offers understanding of the after-effects of the experience in the life and sense of self of the experiencer.